Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 24, 2013

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Congratulations on your recent reelection. We applaud that you recognized in your second inaugural address that the failure to respond to the threat of climate change would be a betrayal of our children and future generations. We stand with you in this important fight.

To that end, we announced today the formation of a bicameral task force on climate change. We believe, as you do, that climate change is a profound threat to our nation, that our window for preventing irreversible harm is rapidly closing, and that leaders have a moral obligation to act. Our goals are to raise awareness of the dangers of climate change in Congress, to provide a forum for the development of effective policies, and to achieve enactment of measures that reduce heat-trapping emissions, spur new technologies, and enhance resiliency to climatic disruption.

The challenges we face need decisive presidential leadership. We ask that you expand on your vision for tackling climate change in your State of the Union address and develop a comprehensive climate change plan as expeditiously as possible. We would urge that such a plan seek to accomplish three objectives through executive action:

1. Lay out specific steps federal agencies will take to ensure that U.S. emissions of heat-trapping gases are reduced by at least 17% below 2005 levels by 2020, the goal you set for the nation during the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference, and put us on a path toward the significantly greater reductions needed in future years;

2. Accelerate federal investments in innovative clean-energy technology by marshalling the resources of our leading scientific institutions; and

3. Develop a strategy for protecting the many vulnerable regions of the nation from the worst effects of climate change.

During your first term, you took key – and often overlooked – steps forward. The investments you made in solar and wind energy and energy efficiency under the American

Recovery and Reinvestment Act reinvigorated U.S. production of clean, renewable energy and helped return Americans to work. The new tailpipe standards you negotiated for automobiles will double fuel economy and produce major reductions in carbon emissions from passenger vehicles. Your Environmental Protection Agency has proposed new standards for power plants. Unfortunately, these measures are likely to get us only half way toward the 2020 goal. A much more aggressive plan of action is needed.

The implacable scientific reality is that climate change is not waiting until we are ready to deal with it. According to the draft National Climate Assessment released earlier this month:

> Climate change is already affecting the American people. Certain types of weather events have become more frequent and/or intense, including heat waves, heavy downpours, and, in some regions, floods and droughts. Sea level is rising, oceans are becoming more acidic, and glaciers and arctic sea ice are melting. These changes are part of the pattern of global climate change, which is primarily driven by human activity.

The window to deal effectively with a warming planet and to mitigate long-term risks is quickly closing. Meanwhile, oil and coal industries continue to spend hundreds of millions of dollars denying the science, exaggerating the costs, and confusing the public. As a result, too few Americans fully appreciate the magnitude of the problem or the urgency of the threat we are confronting. Our best hope to change course is to forge together a national consensus that insists on addressing climate change. And our best hope for forging that consensus is the presidential leadership that we know you can give to this issue.

The Administration has broad authorities to lower heat-trapping emissions, to spur research and development in clean energy, and to develop adaptation strategies. The Environmental Protection Agency can set emission standards. The Department of Energy can set tighter energy efficiency standards. Many federal agencies could act in concert to reduce short-lived pollution such as methane and black carbon, producing immediate climate benefits. We hope you will consider all of them.

We in Congress need your leadership most of all. Virtually all Republicans in Congress opposed comprehensive climate legislation in the 111th Congress, and they voted to strip EPA of regulatory authority in the last one. Progress in Congress may be so difficult or protracted that you should not hesitate to act. Congress will benefit from knowing what actions you will take administratively to meet your climate pledge and protect our nation. And we will benefit even more from a concerted effort between your administration and your allies in Congress to marshal the latent public support into a political force.

Lord Acton warned of "the undying penalty which history has the power to inflict on wrong." As you eloquently recognized in your inaugural address, history's penalty on inaction will be severe. We will do everything in our power to help you and Congress meet the moral imperative of protecting our nation from extreme climate change.

Sincerely,

Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Co-Chair
Bicameral Climate Change Task Force
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse
Co-Chair
Bicameral Climate Change Task Force
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight,
Senate Committee Environment and Public Works

Rep. Edward J. Markey
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources