

SMARTERSAFER.ORG
Americans for Smart Natural Catastrophe Policy

April 15, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable James Clyburn
Majority Whip
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman
House Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chairman
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Hoyer, Whip Clyburn, Chairman Pallone, and Chairman DeFazio:

The SmarterSafer Coalition (SmarterSafer) writes to express our views on the House Democrats' framework for infrastructure programs and investments as part of a future COVID-19 response package following the targeted relief bill currently being constructed in Congress. We greatly appreciate your interest in infrastructure that is "smarter, safer, and made to last." SmarterSafer is a diverse coalition of conservation and environmental groups, taxpayer-focused organizations, insurance and reinsurance interests, and housing advocates. The nexus between infrastructure funding and disaster preparedness should not be diminished or overlooked, and our coalition remains united in our support for fiscally sound, environmentally responsible approaches to natural catastrophe and infrastructure policy.

One such policy is the advancement of pre-disaster mitigation efforts, including through the development of sustainable and natural infrastructure. The federal government currently spends much more on post-disaster cleanup and reconstruction than on pre-disaster mitigation. That equation must change if we want to better protect our communities from future natural catastrophes. Pre-disaster mitigation efforts protect individuals and protect taxpayer dollars. Every \$1 spent on mitigation is estimated to save \$7 on post-disaster spending. These investments are particularly appropriate as many communities across the country anticipate another year of devastating flood events, which will increase their vulnerability at the same time they are grappling with the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis.

When making investments in infrastructure, Congress should prioritize fiscally sound and proven mitigation strategies for those areas most at-risk for future disasters. Infrastructure funding for mitigation should include multiple options for intervention, such as strengthening natural features that help buffer storms. Coastal natural infrastructure such as reefs, marshes, wetlands, and dunes not only create habitat but also mitigate flood risk and will assist in restoring tourism dollars in the wake of COVID-19. Additionally, SmarterSafer has consistently supported and

will continue to ask Congress to consider buyouts, preservation of green space, and the elevation of structures above base-flood levels.

In addition to pre-disaster spending, Congress should consider stronger requirements for communities and states receiving infrastructure funding. Federal infrastructure funds should prioritize projects that promote resiliency – on building *smarter* and *safer* – and not on construction that cannot withstand disasters. Furthermore, absent a federal flood protection standard, America’s public infrastructure remains threatened by more frequent and severe flooding. The inclusion of a new flood protection standard for federally funded infrastructure projects will be an important step in protecting American people, property, and taxpayer investments.

We also encourage you to consider our nation’s research infrastructure especially as it pertains to climate risk, ocean science, disaster resilient engineering, and green infrastructure. COVID-19 further demonstrates the need for more resilient, comprehensive, and efficient research infrastructure, and is revealing unmet needs that are hampering the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. Congress should consider new investments in research infrastructure that are important to enhancing our nation’s overall capabilities and competitiveness for years to come, including American-organized or staffed not-for-profits conducting vital research abroad, whether at sea, in biodiverse habitats or other in situ locations important to furthering U.S. research objectives.

Thoughtful infrastructure spending can and should simultaneously provide economic growth, security for communities, and long-term savings for taxpayers. We greatly appreciate your efforts and consideration of the aforementioned suggestions that promote fiscally and environmentally responsible infrastructure. Members of our coalition stand ready to be a resource to you and your colleagues as legislation to forward your infrastructure platform takes shape.

Sincerely,

The SmarterSafer Coalition

MEMBERS

Environmental Organizations

American Rivers
Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (C2ES)
ConservAmerica
Defenders of Wildlife
National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
Surfrider Foundation

Consumer and Taxpayer Advocates

Coalition to Reduce Spending
National Taxpayers Union
R Street Institute
Taxpayers for Common Sense
Taxpayers Protection Alliance

Insurer Interests

Association of Bermuda Insurers and Reinsurers
The Chubb Corporation
Liberty Mutual Group
National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies (NAMIC)
National Flood Determination Association
Reinsurance Association of America
SwissRe
USAA

Mitigation Interests

Natural Hazard Mitigation Association

Housing

Habitat for Humanity
National Housing Conference
National Leased Housing Association

ALLIED ORGANIZATIONS

Allianz of America
American Consumer Institute
American Property Casualty Insurance Association
Center for Clean Air Policy
Friends of the Earth
Institute for Liberty
Zurich