



National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
Co-Chair
Bicameral Task Force on Climate Change
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight
Committee on Environment and Public
Works

The Honorable Henry Waxman
Co-Chair
Bicameral Task Force on Climate Change
Ranking Member
Committee Energy and Commerce

February 25, 2013

Dear Senator Whitehouse and Representative Waxman:

The National Council of Churches (NCC), on behalf of its 37 Christian denominations, is grateful for your leadership on the issue of global climate change and the opportunity to provide input regarding potential actions and legislation that can respond to the global climate crisis. We are appreciative of your continued commitment to bring this issue to the forefront for both houses of Congress.

The NCC, through its Eco-Justice Program, has, for more than 30 years, sought to address the issue of global climate change with a focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions to prevent the worst impacts of climate change, ensuring economic protections for those living in poverty as we shift to a low-carbon future, and preparing communities at home and abroad for those climate impacts that we can no longer prevent. In 2006, the NCC along with an interfaith coalition developed its Faith Principles on Global Warming. This document lifts up justice, stewardship, sustainability and sufficiency as guiding tenets for our work and ministry on climate change and has informed the following recommendations.

A central component of the NCC's efforts is focused on minimizing our contribution to global climate change by reducing heat-trapping pollutants both in our congregations and at the national level. This is critical if we are to achieve climate justice and prevent the worst impacts of climate change.

In order to effectively address climate change, the United States must incorporate the principles of mitigation and adaptation at every level and in every branch of government. We currently have a number of administrative options available to us through federal agencies that should be used to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Currently there are a variety of policies that could be both adopted and enforced by federal agencies would limit greenhouse gas emissions. First, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) should use its authority under the Clean Air Act to address methane released from energy extraction processes such as mountaintop removal coal mining and hydraulic fracturing. Both processes release significant amounts of methane, a gas often found in fossil



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fuel deposits. With the expansion of hydraulic fracturing and the world's continued dependence on coal, both of these processes are alive and well throughout the United States and release methane into the atmosphere only increasing greenhouse gas emissions. The EPA has the authority under the CAA to require that the methane is regulated and/or captured, and should use this authority to limit methane emissions.

Next, the EPA should use their authority under the Clean Air Act (CAA) to address some of the larger sources of greenhouse gas emissions including carbon emissions from new and existing power plants. Power plants are the largest greenhouse gas emitters in the United States, responsible for more than thirty percent of our yearly emissions. For too long we have allowed electricity companies emit air pollutants with no repercussions for their long-term impact on community health. It is time to set clear standards for new and existing power plants that improves community well-being and ensures a healthy future for the next generation. . The CAA permits regulation of harmful air pollutants and should be used to protect the health and well-being of communities in the US and abroad as well as God's creation.

In addition to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, it is our responsibility to prepare communities both in the United States and around the world for the impacts of climate change that we can no longer prevent. Communities must adapt to the new reality of climate change and make themselves more resilient. We can no longer mitigate our way out of climate change, we must prepare, adapt and increase our resilience to the storms, droughts, floods, and challenges that we know are coming but cannot fully predict.

From the extreme droughts that have plagued the majority of the United States to Hurricane Sandy, the impact that climate change is having and will continue to have on the US is all too apparent.

While agencies have begun to incorporate the five areas listed in the Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force 2011 report (integrating adaptation into federal planning and activities, building resilience in communities, improving accessibility of science for decision making, developing strategies to safeguard natural resources, and improving efforts to lead on international adaptation) into their daily work, it is important that climate change be factored into every decision made by federal agencies. This should include Department of Agriculture investments in drought resistant rice, EPA efforts to provide clean water for all even in the face of sea level rise, and Department of the Interior engagement with local communities to prepare homeowners for forest fires. In order to move climate change from a secondary concern to a primary influencer within each and every agency, we urge President Obama to issue an executive order requiring climate change and climate resilience to be a central factor in the decision making process for every appropriate agency.



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There are a number of ways that Congress can further support federal agencies in their effort to address climate change. First and foremost, Congress should ensure that any actions taken by federal agencies do not disproportionately impact low-income families and other vulnerable populations. In our efforts to the shift to a low carbon future, we must guarantee that our actions and policies do not push families and individuals further into poverty. Congress should also pursue the following policies:

- An increase in funding for climate adaptation programs for communities in the United States and the world's most vulnerable developing nations
- Tax reform that would permit the Internal Revenue Service to incentivize personal and business investments in energy efficient and renewable energy technologies
- An shift from fossil fuel subsidies to expanded renewable energy subsidies and research and development programs for emerging renewable energy sources
- Required state climate resilience plans from any states who receive federal funding for transportation or infrastructure projects

While this list is certainly not “all inclusive,” we feel that these congressional and administrative actions put us on a path to reducing greenhouse gas emission in a meaningful and effective way while helping communities prepare for and adapt to the realities of today's climate. These policies allow us to live into our call as Christians to ensure justice, stewardship, sustainability, and sufficiency for our communities and God's creation both now and in the future.

We look forward to working with you and the administration to address global climate change in the coming months.

Blessings,

Cassandra Carmichael
Director, Washington Office
National Council of Churches