

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

January 24, 2019

The Honorable John Barrasso, Chairman
Committee on Environment & Public Works
Room 410, Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso,

As the Senate committee responsible for federal environmental policy, the Environment and Public Works Committee has a responsibility to tackle the difficult environmental problems we face. We also have a moral obligation as stewards over the environment and welfare of the American people. As we begin a new Congress, it is my sincere hope that our committee will make climate change, green jobs, and a sustainable economy a central part of our agenda.

Setting policies to eliminate carbon emissions and related pollutants can be a win-win for our environment and our economy if done right. We can foster innovation and investment in clean energy and energy efficiency, and transportation that will create good-paying, family-supporting jobs here in the United States. In order to do so, we first need to take the problem of climate change seriously and seek bold, innovative, and inclusive solutions.

The threats from climate change are an imminent crisis facing the American people and our economy. Over the past three months, new reports have been published by the United States Government and the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that continue to confirm the overwhelming scientific consensus that climate change is occurring due to human activities and time is running out for us to avoid the most serious and irreversible impacts.

In November, the U.S. Global Change Research Program, a federal interagency program established by Congress and President George H.W. Bush in 1990, released the *Fourth National Climate Assessment*. This report, which was written by scientists working across the federal government, describes the impacts of climate change we are already experiencing as well as what we can expect in the future. That report states the following:

- “Global average temperature has increased by about 1.8°F from 1901 to 2016, and observational evidence does not support any credible natural explanations for this amount of warming; instead, the evidence consistently points to human activities, especially emissions of greenhouse or heat-trapping gases, as the dominant cause.”

- “With significant reductions in emissions, global temperature increase could be limited to 3.6°F (2°C) or less compared to preindustrial temperatures. Without significant reductions, annual average global temperatures could increase by 9°F (5°C) or more by the end of this century compared to preindustrial temperatures.”¹

In October, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which is the international body for assessing climate science, released a special report, *Global Warming of 1.5°C*. That report finds that limiting global warming to 1.5°C above preindustrial temperatures will result in less damaging climate-related impacts to our communities. In order to prevent a global temperature increase above 1.5°C, global net carbon emissions must reach net-zero by around 2050. The report recommends “rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and industrial systems. These systems transitions are unprecedented in terms of scale, but not necessarily in terms of speed, and imply deep emissions reductions in all sectors, a wide portfolio of mitigation options and a significant upscaling of investments in those options”.²

Given the stakes, we do not have time to waste. We must seize the opportunity to work on an ambitious legislative agenda to move our country and our economy toward a more sustainable future. Our committee should be holding hearings and considering legislation designed de-carbonize our economy and get us to net-zero emissions by as close to 2050 as possible. This should include a mix of innovative solutions in transportation policy, climate-smart infrastructure and high-performance energy efficiency. This also means considering legislation that builds up resiliency across a range of infrastructure in low-income and frontline communities that will bear the worst of climate impacts.

This bold action is an opportunity to save our planet and transform our economy. The nation requires an ambitious agenda that offers quality jobs for hardworking Americans in every corner of our country. This means investing in the industries that support a green economy, including creating new manufacturing jobs producing renewable energy and new construction jobs upgrading public transit and energy efficiency in households and communities across the country. It means more workers restoring brownfields, forests, and wetlands, as well as replacing our aging water infrastructure to ensure safe drinking water for all. This also means prioritizing investments in workers and communities impacted by the decline of fossil fuel industries to honor their important role in powering our country and to harness their talent and commitment to building a new clean energy economy.

I hope we can work together in a bipartisan way to more aggressively and proactively reduce carbon emissions and foster the growth of the green economy. Thank you for your attention to this

¹ USGCRP, 2018: *Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II: Report-in-Brief* [Reidmiller, D.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, K.L.M. Lewis, T.K. Maycock, and B.C. Stewart (eds.)]. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA, 186 pp.

² IPCC, 2018: Summary for Policymakers. In: *Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty* [V. Masson-Delmotte, P. Zhai, H.O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J.B.R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M.I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, T. Waterfield (eds.)] World Meteorological Organization, Geneva, Switzerland, 32 pp.

matter, and I look forward to continuing to work with you as a member of the Environment and Public Works Committee in the 116th Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kirsten Gillibrand". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Tom Carper, Ranking Member