

September 10, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters we strongly urge you to bring clean energy innovation legislation to the House floor before the end of the 116th Congress on a path to enact the necessary initial investments in research, development, and deployment for addressing the climate crisis.

Climate scientists tell us we are running out of time to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, which is already devastating communities across the country. This devastation has severe human, economic, and environmental costs, which disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color. Achieving net-zero emissions across the economy by at least 2050, as science tells us is necessary, will require increased funding for clean energy, advanced grid improvements, clean transportation, industrial decarbonization, and energy efficiency research, development, and demonstration, alongside accelerated deployment of the technologies we already have today. Our existing public investments are far from enough to meet the climate challenge, both for incentives for clean energy on the ground now and for the longer-term advancements to fully decarbonize the economy.

Congress can start to reauthorize and revitalize Department of Energy (DOE) and other agencies' clean energy programs on a bipartisan basis this year by moving bills led by Science, Space, and Technology Committee Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson and Energy & Commerce Chairman Frank Pallone. While we all recognize that it is unlikely comprehensive climate legislation addressing economy-wide emissions will become law this year— we are hopeful that bipartisan support in this Congress can push across the finish line a package to update and modernize programs at DOE to ensure the agency is working to develop and bring to market the next set of breakthrough technologies we will require. DOE's innovation programs have already helped create a clean energy economy that employed 3.2 million Americans before the coronavirus pandemic and was one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy. Expansion of DOE programs to drive innovation in the wind, solar, energy storage, electric vehicles, advanced biofuels, grid modernization, and other sectors will grow the clean energy economy even further and create even more jobs in clean energy, low-carbon industry, and clean transportation. These programs are key to maintaining American leadership and competitiveness globally.

DOE investments can also help drive equitable clean energy growth by prioritizing clean projects that create high quality jobs and reduce pollution in communities of color, and low-income, frontline, and fossil fuel-dependent communities and supporting projects and business models that enable these communities to innovate to solve local problems and lead their local clean energy transitions. However, to properly do so, the agency needs new authorization to update its mission, create new grant and financing programs focused on equitable and just outcomes, and build the capacity to get innovative technologies to communities that are being left out of the clean energy transition. Additionally, DOE has the potential to become an agency central to economic recovery and a future comprehensive federal climate package. The agency will only meet these goals with updated authorization from Congress and new, expanded capacity to make bigger, more ambitious investments that match the scale of the crises we face. We encourage the House of Representatives to commit to including these necessary upgrades to DOE in future innovation packages.

Furthermore, we strongly believe, given the severe impact of the COVID crisis and the associated economic downturn on the clean energy sector, that Congress should act on immediate relief for that industry and the millions of Americans that work in it. Over half a million clean energy workers have lost their jobs in the past several months – likely with more to follow. By coupling authorizations aimed at the next set of clean energy technologies with support for businesses deploying today’s technologies, we can ensure that federal dollars are having the twice the impact, by keeping the businesses afloat in this moment of need so they can later commercialize technologies researched and demonstrated at DOE. Providing targeted relief now to clean energy sectors has bipartisan support in both chambers and would complement the longer-term investments in innovation.

Passing clean energy innovation and deployment legislation represents a great opportunity to take meaningful, bipartisan steps – this year - to develop the clean energy technologies needed to achieve a net zero economy on the rapid timeline science indicates is required. We stand ready to work with you to realize this goal.

Sincerely,

Natural Resources Defense Council

Environmental Defense Fund

National Wildlife Federation

League of Conservation Voters

Environmental Law and Policy Center