

April 16, 2012

The Honorable John Boehner
United States House of Representatives
1011 Longworth H.O. B.
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
United States House of Representatives
235 Cannon H.O.B.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker and Madam Minority Leader:

As faith leaders, nearly two years after the largest oil spill in our nation's history, we continue to lament lost jobs and food security, and the on-going physical and mental health challenges facing so many of our brothers and sisters across America's Gulf Coast. God's creation groans from the oil and chemical contaminants that still permeate the beaches, wetlands and waters upon which so many rely for survival. Now more than ever, we need the leadership of the U.S. House of Representatives and the entire Congress to ensure that Gulf Coast communities, economies and God's creation do not undertake this recovery unaided.

We are requesting your support for legislation which passed the U.S. Senate on a vote of 76-22 as an amendment to the surface transportation bill, the RESTORE the Gulf Coast States Act. The parties responsible for the oil spill will be liable for up to \$21 billion in fines under the Clean Water Act, but those fines will not go back to the most impacted ecosystems and local economies in the Gulf region unless Congress passes the RESTORE Act. The U.S. House, led by Rep. Steve Scalise, has already overwhelmingly voted to support this concept of setting aside the fines to restore the Gulf Coast, but now we have a chance to ensure these funds actually reach the communities that need them most. This is a nonpartisan response to the oil spill which we believe is rooted in the values of peace, economic fairness, and stewardship of creation. The RESTORE Act would bring back eighty percent of these fines to restore Gulf States economies, communities and God's creation.

Faith-based organizations have worked tirelessly to support those most impacted by the oil spill – living out the words of Deuteronomy 15 that demand: "If there is a needy person among you...do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your kin. Rather, you must open your hand and lend whatever is sufficient." Yet, our efforts alone will not be enough to meet these needs and most especially will not be enough to restore a region that has suffered from decades of degradation with the BP disaster serving as the most recent and dramatic example. We need legislation like the RESTORE the Gulf Coast States Act to build a better future for the Gulf along with the collaboration of local communities, state and federal governments to move this effort forward.

Restoration projects that would be funded under this bill can help to protect communities, restore ecosystems, revive the tourism and fishing industries, and create tens of thousands of jobs as residents rebuild and diversify their economy. This bill encourages policies to help Gulf Coast workers and businesses compete for economic opportunities and funds training programs which could help families impacted by the spill to find good paying livelihood opportunities in ecosystem restoration, helping families maintain economic self-sufficiency, while protecting our precious resources and environment for all Americans.

Responding to this disaster is not a partisan issue but an issue of protecting Creation and pursuing economic fairness for those coastal communities facing the greatest impacts. While many issues of concern remain, especially the need for those most impacted to have a voice in the future of the Gulf, this legislation represents a significant, bi-partisan and achievable step toward justice for Gulf Coast communities and ecosystems.

We urge you to do what is best for the Gulf Coast – and for all Americans - by working to guarantee that the RESTORE the Gulf Coast Act is signed into law by the President, ensuring a response to the oil spill which is effective, and just, meets the needs of those suffering today while laying a foundation for long-term restoration and renewal.

Sincerely,

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