

United States Senate

February 28, 2011

The Honorable Nancy Sutley
Chairman,
White House Council on Environmental Quality
730 Jackson Place, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Chairman Sutley:

I am contacting you regarding the recent report by the White House Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force entitled "Progress Report of the Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force: Recommended Actions in Support of a National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy." With regard to the report, I have a number of questions regarding the report's terminology, findings and proposed actions that can have a significant impact on jobs, energy security, and economic growth.

Please answer the following questions no later than March 31, 2011:

- 1) On page 6 the Task Force states "The scope, severity, and pace of future climate change impacts are difficult to predict." Please elaborate further why that is the case.
- 2) On page 7 the Task Force states that "Adaptation measures should focus on helping the most vulnerable people and places reduce their exposure and sensitivity to climate change and improve their capacity to predict, prepare for, and avoid adverse impacts." How will you help vulnerable people predict adverse impacts?
- 3) On page 7 the Task Force states "Vulnerability to climate change differs across countries, communities, and even households." Please elaborate as to how climate change affects households. What are some of the actions being considered by the Task Force to address the threat to households?
- 4) On page 7 the Task Force states that "Adapting to climate change involves actions by individuals, businesses, governments and others to build resilience and reduce vulnerability of human and natural systems to unavoidable climate impacts." When you refer to "others," please explain whom you are referring to? Is there any aspect of society that should not be involved in reducing the vulnerability of human and natural systems to unavoidable climate impacts? If so, what are they?
- 5) On page 8 the Task Force states "Effective adaption requires that stakeholders in affected regions coordinate their responses to climate impacts on shared infrastructure and resources." Please state specifically where are the "affected regions" to which you refer. Are there any areas that are not affected to some degree by climate change? Are small and large businesses, and the people they employ, considered "stakeholders"?

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- 6) On page 8 the Task Force states “At the core of the Federal Government’s role should be a commitment to promote and implement best practices for adaptation, build greater public awareness and understanding of the importance of adaptation, and maintain dialogue and partnerships with stakeholders and decision makers.” Would the federal government develop the “best practices” for adaptation? Do you envision such practices superseding or replacing current local zoning laws? Does the federal government reserve the right to “implement” best practices for adaptation to climate change at the local level without local approval? Do best practices consider economic factors?
- 7) On page 8 the Task Force states that “The Government should continue to enhance services that enable informed decisions based on the best available science, and to work with the international community to improve knowledge sharing and coordinate adaptation investments.” Please explain what you mean by “coordinate adaptation investments” with regard to working with the international community. Would organizations such as the United Nations, or foreign governments, help determine which communities of the United States should receive adaptation funding? Would foreign partners help determine how such funds would be spent at the local level?
- 8) On page 8 the Task Force states “certain policies may lead to increased development in the very areas that climate risks would suggest people avoid.” What specific areas of the country should people avoid?
- 9) On page 8 the Task Force states “The Government must exercise a leadership role to address climate change impacts on Federal infrastructure interests and on natural, cultural, and historic resources that it has statutory responsibilities to protect.” What areas of the country does the federal government not have a statutory responsibility to protect?
- 10) On page 8 the Task Force states “Importantly, the Federal Government must work in partnership with local, state, Tribal, and regional authorities as it develops and implements adaptation strategies, since most adaptation actions will occur at the local level.” With regard to each entity you refer to working in partnership with, which will have the final say in determining which adaptation actions will be implemented at the local level? Are all entities listed above equal or does one entity have the final say over deciding a course of action?
- 11) On page 9 the Task Force states “Achieving this vision will require innovative technology and ideas, as well as meaningful changes to policies, behavior, and institutions.” Whose behavior does the Task Force believe should be changed? What changes to that behavior is the Task Force recommending?
- 12) On page 10, under “Guiding Principles for Adaptation” the Task Force states “Adaptation should be incorporated into core policies, planning, practices, and programs whenever possible.” Please list the changes you believe you can make without Congressional authorization.

- 13) On page 10 under “Guiding Principles for Adaptation” the Task Force states “Adaptation planning should incorporate risk-management methods and tools to help identify, assess, and prioritize options to reduce vulnerability to potential environmental, social, and economic implications of climate change.” Please explain what you mean by “risk-management methods and tools.” Also, please explain what you mean by the “social” implications of climate change.
- 14) On page 10 under “Guiding Principles for Adaptation” the Task Force states “Adaptation should, where relevant, take into account strategies to increase ecosystem resilience and protect critical ecosystem services on which humans depend to reduce vulnerability of human and natural systems to climate change.” Please explain the difference between “human” and “natural” systems?
- 15) On page 10 under “Guiding Principles for Adaptation” the Task Force states “Adaptation plans should include measureable goals and performance metrics to continuously assess whether adaptive actions are achieving desired outcomes.” Will maintaining or increasing employment in a particular community where an adaptation plan is being implemented be considered a metric in determining desired outcomes?
- 16) On page 10 the report states “These policy goals are intended to reinforce existing adaptation efforts, harness a range of capabilities and resources across the Federal Government, and build strong partnerships with local, state, regional, Tribal and international stakeholders to advance a common adaptation agenda.” In what instances will the Administration seek Congressional authorization before harnessing the resources of the Federal Government to address climate change?
- 17) On page 11 the report states “Climate change will challenge the mission, operations, and programs of nearly every Federal agency.” Can the Administration change “the mission, operations, and programs of nearly every Federal agency” without Congressional approval? If so, please list the statutes that provide such authority. In addition, please briefly explain what specific challenges will impact the mission of each specific agency under the Executive Branch.
- 18) On page 11 the Task Force states the federal government needs to “Improve water-use efficiency to reduce climate change impacts” and “develop a national action plan to strengthen climate change adaptation for freshwater resources.” How would this impact existing federal water compacts and laws between States, Tribes, farmers and other stakeholders? Would the Administration seek Congressional authorization before implementing such a plan? If so, what statute do you believe authorizes such an action? Would communities that depend on water for their economic livelihoods lose water resources to protect species habitat under such a plan?

- 19) On page 11 the Task Force states that the Federal Government needs to “Enhance the ability of Federal decision makers to incorporate health considerations into adaptation planning.” Please provide details on what you mean by this statement.
- 20) On page 11 the Task Force states that the Federal Government needs to “promote resilience of individuals and communities to climate-related health risks.” Please explain how the Federal Government can “promote resilience of individuals” to climate-related health risks. Can the Federal Government adopt such policies without Congressional authorization? If so, please list what statutes authorize such action.
- 21) On page 12 the Task Force states that the Federal Government needs to “facilitate the incorporation of climate change risks into insurance mechanisms.” Please explain if health insurers will be mandated by the federal government to expand covered services related to climate change risk factors. Additionally, please share the projected cost estimates such mandated benefits will have on premium costs for individuals, families, and government programs.
- 22) On page 12 the Task Force states “Agencies will initiate a formal adaptation planning process with the support of the Office of the Federal Environmental Executive (OFEE).” Which agencies are you referring to? Please list all that apply.
- 23) On page 14 the Task Force states “Climate change affects nearly every aspect of society, from our ecosystems and infrastructure, to our public health and our economic and national security.” Please explain what aspects of society are not impacted by climate change.
- 24) On page 15 the Task Force states “the climate impacts we are observing today will continue to increase, at least in the short-term, regardless of the degree to which greenhouse gas emissions are managed.” Please explain this statement in more detail.
- 25) On page 16 the Task Force states that “The scope, severity, and the pace of future climate change are difficult to predict with precision; however, observations and long term trends indicate that the potential impacts of a changing climate on society and the environment will be significant.” Why is the “scope, severity, and the pace of future climate change” “difficult to predict with precision”?
- 26) On page 17 the Task Force states “Social and economic factors (e.g., economic status, race, ethnicity, age, gender, and health) can significantly affect people’s exposure and sensitivity to climate change, as well as their ability to recover.” Please explain this statement in more detail. What ethnic, gender and age groups are the most vulnerable? Would federal funding be more focused to help these groups?
- 27) On page 17 the Task Force states “ecosystems that are degraded or depleted due to non-climatic stressors (e.g. habitat destruction, overharvesting, pollution) have lower

resilience to climate change. Does this mean that cities, rather than rural areas, are more susceptible to climate change?

- 28) On page 18 the Task Force states “Adaptation includes a wide range of activities to build resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change, such as: a farmer growing a different crop variety better suited to warmer or drier conditions; a company relocating key facilities away from coastal areas vulnerable to sea level rise and hurricanes; a community updating its ordinances to protect wetland habitat that provides critical ecosystem services; a city developing early warning systems for severe storms; and a county increasing its water-use efficiency to prepare for more frequent droughts.” Could the federal government withhold funding and permits to farmers, companies, cities and communities if they refuse to adopt resilience activities that the federal government recommends?
- 29) On page 19 the Task Force states “The Federal Government should promote best practices for adaptation to build greater public awareness and understanding of the importance of adaptation, and maintain critical dialogue and partnerships with stakeholders and decision makers.” Please define “best practices” in this context.
- 30) On page 19 the Task Force states “Adaptation requires careful planning to incorporate appropriate strategies in [federal] agency missions and operations to ensure that Federal resources are invested wisely and that agency services and operations remain effective. The Federal Government must coordinate its adaptation strategies with local, state and Tribal partners, as the majority of effective adaptation strategies are implemented at the local to regional scale.” Would projects that incorporate adaptation policies adopted by the Task Force get higher priority than projects that do not? If so, does the Task Force believe that requires Congressional authorization before adopting such a policy? If not, please explain what statute you believe authorizes such an action.
- 31) On page 19 the Task Force states “Virtually every aspect of the Federal Government will be impacted by climate change in some way.” Please list what parts of the government will not be impacted by climate change.
- 32) On page 19 the Task Force states “Agencies should work individually, collaboratively, and with the Task Force to ensure that resources are allocated to maximize their impact and avoid unnecessary duplication” and “agencies should implement the recommendations in this report with the understanding that activities will be funded within current overall budget amounts and guidance.” Can agencies reallocate existing federal funding to address the recommendations by the Task Force without Congressional approval? Please explain your statutory authorization for these recommended actions.
- 33) On page 21 the Task Force states “Issues of inequality and environmental justice associated with climate change impacts and adaptation should be addressed.” Please explain what you mean by “issues of inequality.”

- 34) On page 22 the Task Force states “These principles are not new” and that “They are being applied in cities around the world. . .” Please list the cities that you are referring to and explain how successful these principles have been in averting the impact of climate change today. What metrics are you using to determine whether these principles are successful in adapting communities to climate change impacts today?
- 35) On page 33 the Task Force states “Rather than continuing the science-led approach to providing climate information, the Federal Government should translate science in a collaborative and multi-directional way.” Please explain in more detail why the federal government should not continue “the science-led approach to providing climate information.”
- 36) On page 33 the Task Force states “To effectively integrate and implement adaptation responses, the Federal Government should recruit, develop, and retain technically capable staff that have the proper expertise to understand decision maker needs, and to communicate effectively climate change impacts.” Please define what you mean by “proper expertise.” What academic and/or professional background would such qualified individuals have to fill this role? Would an economic or business background be considered “proper expertise”?
- 37) On page 38 the Task Force states “Individual resilience to climate change health impacts may be improved by promoting healthier behaviors, such as increasing physical activity and improving nutrition to respond appropriately to extreme heat and weather events and reducing risks of climate sensitive chronic diseases.” Please explain in more detail what the Task Force means by “promoting healthier behaviors” and “improving nutrition among Americans.”
- 38) On page 41 the Task Force states “Private insurers investing in climate-vulnerable industries are already experiencing greater losses.” Please elaborate on this statement further and provide specific examples.
- 39) On page 45 the Task Force states “The Administration has placed renewed emphasis on climate change in its foreign assistance programs, and is working to integrate climate adaptation planning into a range of relevant development activities.” Please list all the “relevant development activities.”
- 40) On page 48 the Task Force states “Specifically, there are significant opportunities to work with the financial services sector to spur further innovation and development of international adaptation financing and risk management strategies, including micro-insurance products.” Please elaborate further what the Task Force means by the “significant opportunities” to work with the “financial services sector”?

Your prompt response to these questions will be greatly appreciated. Should your staff have any questions, please have them contact Brian Clifford at 202-224-6441.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Barrasso". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "B".

SEN. JOHN BARRASSO, M.D.
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Safety
Senate Environment and
Public Works Committee