Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 4, 2008

The Honorable John M. Spratt, Jr.
Chairman, House Budget Committee
207 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Spratt:

As Democrats concerned with protecting our environment and human health, we thank you for your commitment in Fiscal Year 2008 to these issues and appreciate your efforts to ensure that, unlike in the previous several budget cycles, core environmental programs began to receive needed investments. We write you now urging your consideration of additional support for Function 300 in Fiscal Year 2009 budget, recognizing continued need to repair these programs after years of neglect under this Administration and previous Congresses.

While we certainly recognize that the nation faces a difficult budget situation, complicated by an economic downturn, the cost of the war in Iraq and tax cuts for the nation's wealthiest, we believe that we can no longer defer needed investment in our nation's core environment programs. In that regard, we are writing today to express our support for strong funding levels for budget function 300, which supports natural resources. The core programs within this function are important to the public health of our communities and landscape of our nation, and we hope that the House Budget Resolution will include at least $35 billion for this function for Fiscal Year 2009.

Under this Administration and previous Congressional leadership, core programs in Function 300 have been cut significantly. These funding cuts have resulted in significant and very real adverse impacts on our local communities. Examples of the funding problems facing several of these core problems include:

- The President's fiscal year 2009 budget requested only $555 million for the **Clean Water State Revolving Fund**. If enacted, this would be the lowest level of funding for the program in its history. In addition, the President's budget $842.2 million for the **Drinking Water State Revolving Fund** nears the lowest amount of purchasing power in the history of the program. At the same time the infrastructure needs for the states – which EPA estimated at $263 billion in its 2005 report – are growing.

- Despite the fact that States and Native American tribes are important partners and co-regulators with the EPA in implementation of environmental laws, the **State and Tribal Assistance Grants (STAG)** account budget took 94 percent and 100 percent of the cuts to EPA's budget in 2005 and 2006. The Fiscal Year 2009 budget recommends a $315 million cut from STAG account in total. If President Bush's proposed budget for the EPA is enacted, it would be the lowest budget for the EPA since fiscal year 1997.

- Underground storage tanks that leak petroleum or other hazardous substances can contaminate nearby soil and groundwater, which serves as the source of drinking water for nearly half of all Americans. Unlike other funds, the **Leaking Underground Storage Tanks** Trust Fund has a surplus of $3.2 billion which we believe should be spent to clean up the 108,766 outstanding

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cleanups. Unfortunately, the President's budget request is less than one-third of the annual revenues coming into the LUST Trust Fund, resulting in gasoline taxes paid by consumers not going to cleanup spills and releases which may be contaminating water supplies.

- Funding for preserving and maintaining our national forests, wildlife refuges, parks, monuments and other special places, and for protecting vulnerable plants and animals is at historic lows. Hundreds of staff positions at our natural resource management agencies have been lost. The President's budget funds the **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)** at 67 percent below FY 2008 and 94 percent below its authorized $900 million level. At a time when state and local governments are struggling to create parks and preserve open spaces to both protect health and environment, the President's budget again eliminates all LWCF stateside matching grants. Other important grant programs that protect open space, wildlife, and habitat are cut as well. **National parks** are in need of an increase to address operating shortfalls and decrease the maintenance backlog throughout the 391 units of the National Park System.

- The **Superfund** program is responsible for addressing public health and environmental threats from uncontrolled releases of hazardous substances. The President's budget recommends a $4.5 million reduction from the FY 2008 enacted level for Superfund remedial activities. The EPA only achieved 24 construction completions in Fiscal Year 2007, the lowest number in the past fifteen years, yet the President's budget recommends a $4.5 million reduction from FY 2008 enacted levels for remedial activities, the portion of the budget which funds actual construction and cleanup. In December, 2004, the EPA's top Superfund program official noted that if the EPA's budget remains flat for the foreseeable future construction funding could be delayed.

- The USDA's **farm bill conservation programs** provide producers with crucial technical and financial assistance to reduce erosion, protect wildlife habitat, and limit adverse impacts from agriculture on lands and waterways. Despite their popularity and their ability to address pressing environmental problems, these programs have been repeatedly funded at far below authorized levels, resulting in two out of three farmers being turned away in recent years. The President's budget once again guts funding for these critical wetlands, grasslands, and wildlife habitat conservation programs.

Despite Congressional efforts in Fiscal Year 2008, the President's budget would result in continued suffering by our communities are suffering as a result of its failure to prioritize core programs. State and local agencies may be forced to lay off staff, leave vacancies unfilled, shut down existing air monitors, or otherwise curtailing monitoring programs. The EPA cannot be sure that cleanups sufficiently reduce the risk to public health, and regional or contract personnel are making judgments about water systems despite lacking qualifications.

These core programs are just an example of those programs within Function 300 that are vital to the health and wellbeing of our communities and our environment, but which have been the target of continued cuts. Other such examples include environmental justice programs, which the Administration requested a 35 percent cut in. Support for the Brownfields program, which is critical for revitalizing blighted areas, has totaled less than 58 percent of the authorized level, resulting in the EPA only being able to fund 294 of 770 eligible project requests last year and more than 1,200 applicants over the past three years being turned away. Finally, the Administration has yet to fund or implement many of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative's recommendations that address the growing crisis facing our oceans and the need for significant and immediate action to reverse ocean decline.

We believe it is critical to ensure that available funds are being used in a responsible manner such that our environment and our health benefit. We strongly believe the path to achieve this is by focusing on adequately funding Function 300 and the core programs within it, which have born the brunt of a misguided Administration. We do not envy the difficult decisions you will have to make, but believe that a strong investment in Function 300 will help improve the health, environment, and security of our communities. We are eager to work with you to find ways to fund these core programs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

HILDA L. SOLIS
Member of Congress

EARL BLUMENAUER
Member of Congress

EDWARD J. MARKEY
Member of Congress

FRANK PALLONE, JR.
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JANICE D. SCHAKOWSKY
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