

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 15, 2021

President-elect Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Biden-Harris Transition
1401 Constitution Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear President-elect Biden:

We write respectfully to urge that your administration swiftly prioritize a return to science-based evaluation of the costs of climate pollution.

Our country's decisions should be guided by clear-eyed, rigorous analysis. Businesses cannot misjudge significant costs when they make important decisions, and neither should the government.

The costs of greenhouse gas emissions are real and our nation's policies must take them into account. Human-caused climate change is increasing temperatures, water stress, sea-level rise, ocean acidification, and other harmful trends.¹ These effects come with significant price tags. Families are losing homes or seeing their values dramatically diminished because of wildfires, floods, and other extreme weather events. Rising temperatures are exacerbating ozone pollution, increasing the incidence of asthma attacks and other health problems. Businesses must divert investments from more productive uses to rebuild and replace assets damaged by climate change. Uncertain and stressed water supplies are straining communities and local economies. Farms and fisheries are becoming less productive, threatening livelihoods and undermining our food supply. And these costs are disproportionately borne by the most vulnerable communities that are least able to withstand them.

Quantifying the costs of greenhouse gas emissions to inform policy and decision-making is just common sense and good government. By taking climate into account on the front end, we end up paying far less to address and adapt to its damaging consequences; we design policy to seize readily available solutions that help protect families, businesses, and communities—identifying smart opportunities that save money over the long-term. Properly accounting for the cost of greenhouse gas pollution is an important step in getting our country on track to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and avoid the worst impacts of climate change. But, in order to take these steps in a meaningful way, we must have an accurate idea of the cost of climate change and must properly apply that estimate in government decision-making.

¹ U.S. Global Change Research Program, Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II: Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States (2018), <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/>.

To ensure proper consideration of the cost of climate pollution, we urge that you promptly reinstate a rigorous interagency process to restore science-based application of the social cost of greenhouse gases and, in particular, to prepare updated values for consistent government-wide use. These steps are essential to correct the deeply flawed approach of the Trump administration, which disbanded the Interagency Working Group, made no effort to update estimates to reflect the latest science, and selectively developed estimates that yielded values “about 7 times lower” than the prior federal estimates, as a Government Accountability Office report concluded.²

Shortchanging the very real costs of climate change does not make the problem go away. Instead, it undermines our ability to make smart, strategic, informed policy decisions to respond to the climate crisis. As your administration begins, we ask that you immediately initiate a rigorous and transparent process to properly update and apply this key metric.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senator



A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress

² U.S. Government Accountability Office, Social Cost of Carbon: Identifying a Federal Entity to Address the National Academies’ Recommendations Could Strengthen Regulatory Analysis (2020), <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-20-254>.