

March 22, 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, almost 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,

The Rev. Geoffrey A. Black
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ

Carol Blythe
President
Alliance of Baptists

Rev. Kim Bobo
Executive Director
Interfaith Worker Justice (IL)

Dr. Randy Brinson
Founder, Redeem the Vote
President, Christian Coalition of Alabama

Rev. Jennifer Butler
Executive Director
Faith in Public Life

Simone Campbell, SSS
Executive Director
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

The Rev. Canon Peg Chamberlin
Executive Director
Minnesota Council of Churches

Rev. Bob Edgar
President, Common Cause
United Methodist Pastor

Rev. Terence Ellen
Executive Director
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

Deborah Fikes
Executive Advisor to the UN
World Evangelical Alliance

Dr. David P. Gushee
Director
Center for Theology and Public Life

Rabbi Steve Gutow
President
Jewish Council of Public Affairs

Rev. Mitchell C. Hescox
President and CEO
The Evangelical Environmental Network

Dr. Joel C. Hunter
Senior Pastor
Northland- A Church Distributed

Nancy K. Kaufman
Chief Executive Officer
National Council of Jewish Women

Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Langston
Director
Disciples Justice Action Network

Sung-ok Lee
Assistant General Secretary, Christian Social Action
United Methodist Women, United Methodist Church

The Rev. Peter Morales
President
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

Peter Vander Meulen
Director, Office of Social Justice
Christian Reformed Church in North America (MI)

Sr. Ann Oestreich, IHM
Congregation Justice Coordinator
Sisters of the Holy Cross

Jean Stokan
Director, Institute Justice Team
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Rabbi David Saperstein
Director and Counsel
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Rev. Jim Wallis
CEO and President
Sojourners

Bishop John F. White
Ecumenical and Urban Affairs Officer
African Methodist Episcopal Church

Rev. Mari Castellano,
United Church of Christ
Justice and Witness Ministries

Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo
Executive Minister of Justice & Witness Ministries
United Church of Christ

Irene Keim
Co-Chair
Unitarian Universalist Ministry for the Earth

Nancy King Smith
Co-Chair
Unitarian Universalist Ministry for the Earth

Chris LaTondresse
Founder & CEO
Recovering Evangelical

Rev. Paula Clayton Dempsey
Minister for Partnership Relations
Alliance of Baptists

Dianne Aid, TSSF
President
The Episcopal Network for Economic Justice

Rev. Douglas Anders
Conference Minister
South Central Conference of the United Church of
Christ (TX)

Rev. Aqueelah As-salaam
Pastor
First Church of North Miami Congregational, UCC

Rev. Stan Bain
Retired Pastor United Methodist Church (HI)

Rev. Dr. Bonnie Bardot
United Church of Christ (CT)

Rabbi Uri Barnea
Temple B'nai Israel (MS)

Rabbi Lewis M. Barth
Hebrew Union College (CA)

Rev. Jonathan Barton
General Minister
Virginia Council of Churches

Sr. Janine Beniger, CSJ
Sisters of St. Joseph (LA)

Rabbi Alexis Berk
Touro Synagogue (LA)

Robert Blanton
CEO
Lutheran Episcopal Services in Mississippi

Rabbi Barry H. D. Block
Temple Beth-El (TX)

Nell Bolton
Executive Director
Episcopal Community Services of Louisiana

Quo Vadis G. Breaux
Director
Center for Ethical Living and Social Justice Renewal

Rev. Grace Pritchard Burson
Grace Episcopal Church (NH)

Alexis Chase
Executive Director
Georgia Interfaith Power & Light

Johnell M. Colbert
Director, JEDC Housing Division
First Pilgrims Baptist Church (LA)

Sr. Marianne Comfort, CSJ
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas (MD)

Rev. Anne Conroy
First Chinese Presbyterian Church in New York-
PCUSA

Rev. Stephen Copley
United Methodist Pastor (AR)

Tom Costanza

Director, Office of Peace and Justice
Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans, LA

Rev. Cheryl Q. W. Cramer

United Church of Christ (LA)

Rev. Polk Culpepper (IN)**Rev. Jack C. Dawson**

Pastor
United Congregational Christian Church (CA)

Rev. John DeForest (TX)**Rev. Peter Degree**

Pastor
Union Congregational Church of Oakville (CT)

Scott Douglas

Executive Director
Greater Birmingham Ministries (AL)

Dr. Timothy C. Downs

Conference Minister
Southeast Conference United Church of Christ (GA)

Rabbi David Dunn Bauer

Director, Bay Area Programming
Nehirim (CA)

Rev. Tyronne Edwards

Executive Director and Founder
Zion Travelers Cooperative Center (LA)

Rev. Dawn Flowers

Pastor
Union United Methodist Church (MS)

Rev. James B. Flowers

Rector
All Saints Episcopal Church, AL

Rev. Susan C. Gaffney

UCC Minister (HI)

Rev. Prince Howard Garrett

Pastor
Prince Garrett Ministries Inc. & Triumph Whole
Gospel Ministries (MS)

Pastor Phil Garrison

St. Andrew United Church of Christ (FL)

Sharon Gauthe

Executive Director
Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing (LA)

Pastor Kenneth Glasgow

Founder
The Ordinary People Society
Prodigal Child Project

Maggid Andrew Gold

Congregation Kol HaLev (NM)

Rabbi Mark N. Goldman

Temple Bet Yam (FL)

Robert D. Gorman

Director
Catholic Charities Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux (LA)

Rev. Alice Graham, PhD

Executive Director
Mississippi Coast Interfaith Disaster Task Force (MS)

Rev. P. Joshua Griffin

St. David of Wales Episcopal Church (OR)

Rev. Leah A. Grundset

Associate Pastor for Congregational Life
Calvary Baptist Church (DC)

Suzie Harvey

Director of Camp Victor Ministries
Lutheran Episcopal Services of Mississippi (MS)

Rev. Daniel L. Hatch (CA)

Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., Ph.D.
New York Theological Seminary (NY)

Sharon Hanshaw
Executive Director
Coastal Women for Change (MS)

Rev. Dr. George Hunsinger
Princeton Theological Seminary (NJ)

Rabbi Steve B. Jacobs
Founder
Progressive Faith Foundation (CA)

Jack Jezreel
Executive Director
JustFaith Ministries (KY)

Mark C. Johnson, Ph.D
Executive Director
Fellowship of Reconciliation (NY)

Rev. Kathy Jorgensen
United Methodist Church (AL)

Dr. Catherine Keller
Professor of Theology
Drew University (NJ)

Rev. Richard L. Krajewski
Wetlands Theological Education Project (LA)

Rabbi Douglas E. Krantz
Congregation B'nai Yisrael (NY)

Rabbi Donald M. Kunstadt
Springhill Avenue Temple (AL)

Alexander Levering Kern
Protestant Chaplain
Brandeis University (MA)

Sarah Landry
Executive Director
Mercy Housing & Human Development (MS)

Rabbi Robert H. Loewy
Congregation Gates of Prayer (LA)

Rev. Dr. Theodore W. Loder
UMC Pastor (PA)

Rev. Kyle Ann Lovett
Church of the Crossroads UCC (HI)

Rev. Dr. Arvin R. Luchs
United Methodist Church (OR)

Rabbi Paula Marcus (CA)

Rev. Gail E. Mengel
Community of Christ (MO)

Rev. George N. Miller
Emmanuel United Church of Christ (FL)

Rev. Delbert K. Miller
Epiphany United Church of Christ (MO)

Rev. Eugene M. Mitchell
Pastor
First Pilgrims Baptist Church (LA)

Rev. Dr. Randle R. Mixon
Pastor
First Baptist Church (CA)

Bob Miyake-Stoner
Pastor
Trinity United Methodist Church (HI)

Rabbi Jack Moline
Agudas Achim Congregation Alexandria, VA

Rev. Dr. Lance Moore
The United Methodist Church (AL)

Rev. James Moos
Executive Minister, Wider Church Ministries
United Church of Christ (OH)

Rev. Melanie Morel-Ensmiger
First Unitarian Universalist Church of New Orleans

Rev. Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock
Director
Faith Voices for the Common Good (CA)

Pamela Nath

Mennonite Central Committee (LA)

Phyllis Nitzkin

President
National Council of Jewish Women, Greater New Orleans Section (LA)

Diem Nguyen

Executive Director
Mary Queen of Viet Nam CDC (LA)

Rev. Catherine M. O'Connell

Naples United Church of Christ (FL)

Dr. Lavette R. Paige

Pastor
Martin Luther King Baptist Church (PA)

Minister Ronald M. Patterson

Naples United Church of Christ (FL)

Jeffery W. Perkins

Executive Director
Friends Fiduciary Corporation (PA)

Glenda Perryman

Executive Director
Immaculate Heart CDC (MS)

Rev. Kristina J. Peterson

Pastor
Bayou Blue Presbyterian Church (LA)

Rev. Linn Possell

Hope Unites UCC (FL)

Rev. Sharon Prestemon

Executive Director
Back Bay Mission (MS)

Rev. Jim Rapp

Church of the Isles (FL)

Jim Reilly

Deltona United Church of Christ (FL)

Sister Jane F. Remson

Executive Director
Bread for the World New Orleans

Rev. Barbara Grace Ripple

UMC (HI)

Rev. Pat Ritchie

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church (TX)

Rev. Walter H. Schenck

New York Annual Conference, UMC (MA)

Rev. Terry Schmitt

United Church of Christ (CT)

Minister Kent J. Siladi

United Church of Christ (FL)

Rev. Jean M. Simpson

Gulf Coast Regional Conference Minister
United Church of Christ (FL)

Rev. Cory Sparks

Chair, Commission Stewardship of the Environment
Louisiana Interchurch Conference

Rabbi Samuel M. Stahl

Emeritus, Temple Beth-El (TX)

Sister Judith Smits, CSA

Executive Director
The Quest for Social Justice (AL)

Bill Stallworth

Executive Director
Hope Community Development Agency (MS)

Laurie Sweigard

Pastor
Central Baptist Church (PA)

Rev. Darryl Tate

Director, Disaster Preparedness and Response
Louisiana Annual Conference of the UMC

Carolyn Thompson

Executive Director

Tri-Coastal Community Outreach, Inc. (AL)

Rev. Kathryn Threadgill

Government Street Presbyterian Church (AL)

Jessica Vermilyea

Chair, LA Interfaith Disaster Recovery Network

State Director, Lutheran Social Services Disaster Response

Rev. Roger A. Vonland

First Orlando, United Church of Christ (FL)

Thao Vu

Coordinator

Mississippi Coalition for Vietnamese-American Fisherfolks and Families

Rabbi Brian Walt

Temple Tikkun v'Or (MA)

Bill Wealand

Disaster Ministry Coordinator

Florida Conference United Church of Christ

Rev. James A. White

Aiea UMC (HI)

Rev. Brooke Wickliffe Fisher

United Church of Christ (FL)

Rev. Joyce M. Wilkinson (TX)

Rev. Carol Winn Crawford

Pastor

Rayne Memorial United Methodist Church (LA)

Rev. Dr. J. Philip Wogaman

Pastor, Retired

Foundry UMC Church (NE)