



July 20, 2026

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Environment and Public
Works

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural
Resources

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Ranking Member
House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Dear Ranking Members Whitehouse, Heinrich, Huffman, and Pallone,

As the Senate considers a bipartisan permitting deal, environmental justice and allied organizations call on you to hold the line against any permitting package that weakens community engagement, environmental and public health analysis, Tribal consultation, transparency, or judicial review. At the same time, we urge you to advance a proactive, long-term vision for modernizing federal permitting that strengthens public participation, agency capacity, scientific integrity, and coordination across government.

The question before Congress is not whether the United States should build infrastructure. It is whether we will build it through a transparent, accountable government that protects public health and earns public trust, or by weakening the democratic safeguards that communities rely on long after political administrations change. Roads, pipelines, transmission lines, data centers, refineries, and mines remain in communities for decades. The policies that govern those decisions matter just as much.

Good governance is not measured by how quickly permits are issued, but by whether government decisions are transparent, legally durable, scientifically sound, and responsive to the people who will live with their consequences.

We agree that there are serious challenges to building renewable energy infrastructure in this country. **Developers, communities, and governments all benefit from meaningful public participation.** Projects built without meaningful consultation often face litigation, community opposition, financing uncertainty, reputational risks, and costly redesigns. Durable infrastructure is built through public trust, not by eliminating opportunities for public participation. Yet today's federal permitting framework has real shortcomings that undermine both public confidence and efficient project delivery, including limited public engagement requirements, inadequate agency staffing and resources, and fragmented environmental and public health review. These gaps create uncertainty for communities and developers alike. **However, Congress cannot solve them through deregulation or a permitting package, especially under this administration. Instead of addressing these structural challenges, such**

proposals would weaken the very safeguards that make projects more durable, transparent, and accountable in the long run.

In fact, pushing forward a permitting reform package under the Trump Administration will have serious negative consequences to communities across the country who are overburdened by polluting infrastructure. President Trump has engaged in a ceaseless attack against existing environmental and public health safeguards like the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Clean Air Act (CAA), and Clean Water Act (CWA). Any permitting package that further deregulates these bedrock environmental laws and other safeguards, will gut the remaining tools our communities depend on to protect their health and livelihoods. Administrations change every four years; communities live with the consequences of these decisions for generations.

You have the opportunity to stand up for communities across the country who have long been sacrificed by industry and the federal government in the name of development—from low-income communities in Appalachia, to communities of color in Louisiana’s “Cancer Alley,” and Newark’s “Chemical Corridor,” to rural communities in the Midwest, to Tribal nations and Indigenous populations, and so many more. We ask you to hold the line and lead on preventing a permitting reform package from being passed under this administration that undermines the health, safety, and future of these communities.

The Trump Administration refuses to enforce environmental and public health regulations in good faith.

Since his first day in office, President Trump has flouted environmental and public health regulations that overburdened communities depend on.

President Trump’s executive order (EO), [“Declaring a National Energy Emergency,”](#) has empowered agencies to shortchange environmental review, with [Environmental Analysis taking just 14 days and Environmental Impact Statements taking just 28 days](#). For the Department of Interior (DOI), this applies to infrastructure that has major public health and environmental impacts, like crude oil, natural gas, refined petroleum products, uranium, biofuels and more. Notably, this fast tracking has not applied to renewable energy.

EO 14154, [“Unleashing American Energy”](#) directed CEQ to repeal its NEPA guidelines. Since, [DOI has rescinded 80% of its prior NEPA regulations](#). Agencies and departments have been left to develop their own requirements, creating a patchwork of agency-specific NEPA interpretations that reduce transparency and increase regulatory uncertainty.

The Trump Administration has also pushed forth major rules that limit protections for clean water and air. In January of 2026, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of the Army Corps of Engineers, and Department of Defense proposed changing the definition of “waters of the United States” (WOTUS). This proposed rule would decrease federal oversight over water bodies that naturally are connected in visible and invisible ways, transferring jurisdiction that, for decades, has been anchored by the federal government, to states. For many states, this means incurring a duty that, in the face of sweeping cuts and threats to funding, they may be ill equipped and unprepared to handle.

This May, [EPA proposed changing the definition of “begin actual construction,”](#) allowing facilities to undertake construction activities at a new or modified source prior to getting pre-construction permits. Not only would this accelerate the buildout of harmful polluting facilities like power plants and data centers despite their massive impacts to our land, water, and air, it also threatens to outright exclude and prevent community input of those facilities.

This details only some of the regulations the Trump Administration has rolled back.

On top of weakening regulations, the Trump Administration has refused to adequately enforce remaining environmental and public health regulations. In an [analysis by Grist](#), “data from the Department of Justice (DOJ) and EPA found that the Trump administration has not filed any new cases against major polluters in its first three months. Similarly, the number of minor civil and criminal enforcement cases has also significantly declined since President Donald Trump took office on January 20.”

Overall, communities on the ground are seeing a three-pronged attack against their environmental and public health: the Trump Administration has weakened existing regulations while refusing to enforce what is remaining and stripping communities of their rights to defend themselves. Our people’s lives are on the line. The Institute for Policy Integrity reports [Trump’s environmental and public health deregulation is costing 3,299 lives and \\$156.6 billion in benefits annually](#).

Communities are asking for relief from rising utility bills, increasing medical expenses linked to pollution, unchecked data center expansion that strains local water and electric systems, continued oil and gas development in overburdened neighborhoods, and climate-fueled disasters that threaten their homes and livelihoods. Congress should focus on solving these real challenges rather than weakening public safeguards that help communities protect themselves.

It is clear that in this political environment, communities do not have an executive branch they can rely on to protect their health or the environment. Under these circumstances, what basis is there for Congress to assume that a new permitting package would be implemented faithfully or consistent with legislative intent?

Clean energy is under attack, but permitting reform will not fix this

We share your priority to usher in renewable energy development in pursuit of a just, clean energy transition. Climate change is impacting communities on the ground every day, from [extreme heat](#) to [supertyphoons](#) to dwindling [crop yields](#). We urgently need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to ensure a liveable future for people and the planet. However, a permitting reform package under this Administration will unfortunately not achieve renewable energy deployment, as President Trump has launched a full scale attack against renewable energy.

In July 2025, Secretary Burgum issued Secretarial Orders (SO) that required the Secretary and Deputy Secretary [to review any Department-related actions on wind and solar](#). This [stalled about twenty commercial scale solar projects](#) unnecessarily for eight months. Additional bureaucratic processes, like

DOI requiring agencies to consider [energy capacity density](#) in their review of projects and preventing wind and solar from using Fish and Wildlife Service's [Information for Planning and Consultation \(IPaC\) database](#) erected needless hurdles for renewable energy developers.

Even as many of these actions have been overturned by courts, President Trump has found ways to circumvent legal processes and buy out renewable energy developers in favor of oil and gas. This includes [four buy outs of offshore wind leases](#) with TotalEnergies, Duke Energy, Ocean Winds, and Invenenergy costing \$2.707 billion in reimbursements using public dollars.

The Administration's actions to oppose clean energy development demonstrate that GOP negotiations are not in good faith. Democrats cannot negotiate with those who will never honor the end goal of renewable energy deployment. Weakening environmental laws will not build a single additional renewable energy project if the Administration remains committed to blocking renewable deployment. Instead, it leaves future administrations and communities with fewer tools to guide responsible infrastructure development of any kind.

Republican “permitting reform” will just continue to cut people out of processes

Republican proposals for permitting reform, like the SPEED Act and PERMIT Act, shut communities out of engaging with government decisions that impact their daily lives.

Specifically, the SPEED Act would 1) narrow the definition of major federal action so federal financial assistance no longer triggers NEPA review—meaning highways, water infrastructure, and transmission lines that have historically displaced Black and Brown communities would not be subject to environmental review; 2) weaken cumulative impacts analysis which is critical to safeguarding the health of already overburdened communities facing the brunt of pollution and climate change; and 3) cut judicial review timelines from six years to 150 days, restricting who can challenge a project, and restraining courts from challenging agencies' permitting decisions, gutting the limited legal recourse available to communities.

The PERMIT Act would 1) allow industrial polluters to discharge “forever chemicals” into waters without informing pollution control officials; 2) narrow state and Tribal authority under Section 401 of the CWA and 3) significantly limit review of impacts to water quality, among other rollbacks.

The only way Republicans know how to “cut red tape” is by cutting people out of the process and reducing the rigor of environmental impacts analysis. This is a part of a broader erosion of democratic accountability, transparency, and public participation in government decision-making. These permitting reform proposals shut people out of influencing government decisions that impact their daily lives.

Refusing to accurately report on the environmental impacts of infrastructure projects does not reduce their reality—the impacts and burdens will remain in polluted communities regardless. But the SPEED and PERMIT Act's efforts to obscure environmental and public health impacts reduce transparency for communities, similar to how the Trump Administration has censored an estimated [8,000 web pages](#) on environment, energy, climate, and public health initiatives. This censorship and lack of transparency

prevent people from fully participating in democracy. If communities do not have all the facts, they cannot make informed decisions or influence government actions.

These efforts are ineffective and do not address the actual cause of delays. [In a literature review of permitting delays for energy projects](#), WE ACT for Environmental Justice found the actual cause of delays include failures of developers and agencies to meaningfully incorporate community perspectives at the start of projects, federal agencies' lack of coordination with other levels of government, and a lack of staff funding and capacity to implement environmental laws. These issues cannot be solved with the GOPs deregulatory permitting proposals.

Frontline communities are already paying the price

We are already seeing the consequences of a deregulatory permitting framework, and they are real, irreversible, and felt first and worst by communities who are already overburdened by pollution.

In February of this year, [the Trump Administration fast tracked a uranium mine in Utah in just eleven days](#). This included an “accelerated” two week environmental review, in which Tribes had only seven days to reply. These communities have historically been impacted by copper and uranium mining, and the impacts remain today. Tribes including the Ute, Pueblo of Pojoaque, and Pueblo of San Felipe stand in strong opposition to the project.

Permitting deregulation has sacrificed irreplaceable historic and sacred sites in the name of polluting infrastructure. The public was given [just five days to comment on a Chaco Canyon Protection reversal](#) which would open the park to oil and gas drilling. In May 2026, an expansion of the southern border wall with Mexico funded under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act [disturbed the Las Playas Intaglio](#), a sacred cultural site thought to be at least 1,000 years old, after project developers failed to abide by applicable environmental and historic preservation requirements.

This does not have to be our future. Community engagement works to improve projects in the long run. [The Ten West project](#), a 125-mile transmission project across Arizona and California that delivers 3,000 megawatts of electricity, included a strong workshop and comment period that influenced the project's location so that it would not run through traditional Indigenous land or the Kofa National Wildlife refuge. This minimized construction time, costs, and environmental impacts. The [Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority Crenshaw/Los Angeles International Airport Transit Corridor](#), an 8.5 mile expansion of the light rail metro, engaged in more than sixty public meetings. Through community feedback, project developers identified a five mile stretch of the project that could use an existing freight rail line corridor to reduce disruption of local neighborhoods and businesses.

Communities on the ground have the solutions. When the federal government listens to them, it can achieve positive outcomes for people, developers, and the environment alike.

You can be a champion for both environmental justice AND effective permitting reform

Communities on the ground share many of your goals. We want clean, reliable, affordable renewable energy and a permitting process that respects community input and self-determination while deploying clean energy infrastructure fast enough to address the climate crisis.

However, for these goals to be achieved, the Democratic Party cannot compromise on a permitting reform package right now. The Trump Administration has proven itself incapable of enforcing environmental and public health standards. The GOP has proven it does not share our goals to protect communities, deploy renewable energy, or address the climate crisis. This means any permitting package passed now will prop up polluting infrastructure at the expense of public and environmental health.

The best way forward is to spend the next two years working together to build a permitting agenda that centers communities and addresses the real roadblocks to responsible infrastructure development, not the needs of industry. We call on your leadership to reject false choices between clean energy and community protections and instead advance the building blocks of durable permitting reform:

- Restoring agency staffing and technical capacity;
- Improving and strengthening early community engagement;
- Strengthening Tribal consultation;
- Modernizing interagency coordination;
- Investing in state and local implementation;
- Protecting judicial review;
- Preserving rigorous environmental and public health analysis.

These reforms would improve project delivery without sacrificing the democratic safeguards that protect communities and strengthen public confidence in government.

We hope to be your partners in developing these solutions and stand ready to engage with you on a permitting framework that is faster, fairer, and more durable without sacrificing communities' right to self determination. To achieve that goal, we ask you to hold the line against any permitting deal that weakens democratic safeguards and to lead in building a long-term vision for accountable, community-centered infrastructure governance.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We appreciate your leadership in protecting the environmental, public health, and democratic safeguards that communities across the country depend on during this pivotal moment.

In solidarity,

Original signatories

Climate Justice Alliance

Earthworks

Ironbound Community Corporation

Food & Water Watch

WE ACT for Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice Organizations

350Hawaii

7 Directions of Service

Alternatives Community & Environment (ACE)

Bayou City Waterkeeper
Center for Earth Energy & Democracy (CEED)
CLEO Institute
Duwamish River Community Coalition
Environmental Transformation Movement of
Flint
Farmworker Association of Florida
Great Lakes Wildlife Alliance
GreenLatinos
Hip Hop Caucus
Impact Fund
Long Beach Alliance for Clean Energy
Micronesia Climate Change Alliance
MoveOn.org HobokenRESIST!
Nature for All
Next 100 Coalition
North American Climate, Conservation and
Environment (NACCE)
Pelea Movement
People's Justice Council
Protect Our Water, Heritage, Rights
Sowing Justice
Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services
The Alliance for Appalachia
The Clean Air Coalition of Western New York
The Raices Collab Project
West End Revitalization Association
Youth Vs Apocalypse

Allied Organizations

198 methods
350 Bay Area Action
350 Colorado
350 Conejo / San Fernando Valley
Amigos Bravos

Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc.
ARTivism Virginia
Between the Waters
Center for Biological Diversity
Climate Hawks Vote
Coming Clean
Dayenu: Jewish Call to Climate Action
Endangered Habitats League
Endangered Species Coalition
Friendly City Indivisible
Friends of the Inyo
Gallatin Wildlife Association
Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives
(GAIA)
Great Basin Water Network
Healthy Ocean Coalition
Los Padres ForestWatch
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
Milwaukee Riverkeeper
Montana Environmental Information Center
New Mexico Voices for Children
New York Progressive Action Network
Nia Impact Capital
NORTHEAST ORGANIC FARMING
ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY NOFA NJ
NTS Group, CEA, EOF,
Nuclear Information and Resource Service ("for
a nuclear-free, carbon-free world")
Ocean Defense Initiative
Oil and Gas Action Network
Oil Change International
Peace, Justice, Sustainability NOW
Physicians for Social Responsibility

Port Arthur Community Action Network
(PACAN)

Progressives for Climate

Protect PT (Penn-Trafford)

Southeast Alaska Conservation Council

Southern Environmental Law Center

Sunflower Alliance

The Last Plastic Straw

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

Waterspirit

Western Environmental Law Center