

February 15, 2012

The Honorable Harry Reid  
United States Senate  
522 Hart Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Reid and McConnell,

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. Congress to ensure that Gulf Coast communities, economies and God's creation do not undertake this recovery unaided. We are writing in support of the legislation before the U.S. Senate, the RESTORE Act, S. 1400, a bipartisan response which we believe is rooted in the values of peace, economic fairness, and stewardship of creation.

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 communities in the Gulf region unless Congress acts. 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 oil spill response effort is comprehensive, effective, and just, meeting the needs of those suffering today while laying a foundation for long-term restoration and renewal.

Sincerely,

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