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LABOR COUNCIL FOR LATIN AMERICAN ADVANCEMENT

THE HOUSE OF LATINO LABOR

“Empowering the Latino Workforce: Strengthening our Communities with Unions”

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June 5, 2017

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), home of the Latino labor movement, we write to strongly oppose any and all attacks on the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA provides our communities a voice in some of the most consequential government decisions, impacting where we work, how we work, and even the rights and safeguards we have on the job. As Latino workers, we play a major role in building and maintaining our nation’s transportation and energy infrastructure, the same infrastructure that allows our country to prosper. In many instances, Latino workers and working families bear the brunt of federal projects, making our communities most vulnerable to rushed or ill-planned decisions. An attack on NEPA is an attack on Latino priorities and our voice, in particular.

We represent the interests of over 2 million labor unionists, with 50 chapters across the United States. Our members include some of the most prominent unions in the country, including the United Automobile Workers (UAW), the United Steel Workers (USW), the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) amongst many others. We recognize that our country is in dire need of job-creating infrastructure investment but that investment must be used in ways that serve and respond to the needs of the American public. This can only happen through a strong and well thought out NEPA process.

NEPA provides an important voice for Latino workers and working families as we tend to be among the most impacted by federal projects. Latino workers account for over 43% of ground, maintenance and construction workers and up to 75% of agricultural laborers. Our families live, breathe, learn and play in communities next to federally funded highways, incinerators, power plants, pipelines, and toxic waste sites. How these projects are built and how they are run dictate the quality of our health and safety as workers within those facilities as well as the health of our families who live near them. We need a say in how these projects are developed and NEPA provides it.

We consistently use NEPA’s public disclosure mandate to learn about how projects are developed and how they will impact our families. We use NEPA’s public comment opportunities to fight against worker exploitation and for safer and healthier work places. We also use it to improve the projects with our trade and local expertise. Overall, we use NEPA to make projects better; to make jobs better and to keep our communities safe.

Although NEPA has historically been used to address environmental priorities, it is also a tool we use to address related but independent issues that impact labor, immigrant, and human rights. For example, when a power plant is being developed, we use the NEPA process to address workers’ safety; when an immigration detention center is planned, we use it to address the lack of healthcare for immigrant detainees; and when the administration wants to militarize the border with a wall, we use it to show how pointless and hateful the idea is. NEPA is an environmental protection statute but it is also a civic engagement one that we cannot afford to lose.



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We are concerned by the increasing volume of attacks on this critical law. In each of the last three Congresses, we have seen over 160 bills that undermine NEPA by shortening public comment periods and statutes of limitation, establishing arbitrary deadlines for environmental review, limiting the consideration of better alternatives or waiving the law altogether. All in all, these harmful measures give industry a green light to recklessly build projects without addressing or even considering how Latino workers, their families, and countless communities of color will be impacted or disenfranchised in the process. We ask that you protect and recognize our right to meaningfully participate in the national infrastructure development process by defending NEPA and all the safeguards it guarantees.

Therefore, as the home of the Latino labor movement, we urge you to oppose any efforts that threaten to undermine our voice in government decisions. We, the workers who contribute so much everyday to building and maintaining our national infrastructure urge you to protect our voice in government. Protect NEPA!

Sincerely,

Hector Sanchez
Executive Director
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Eddie Rosario
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