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TOURISM CAUCUS
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0517

August 3, 2012

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Secretary Leon Panetta
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Secretary Kenneth Salazar
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Secretary Janet Napolitano
Department of Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security U.S.
Washington, D.C. 20528

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Administrator Lisa Jackson
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Ariel Rios Building
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Secretaries Panetta, Vilsack, Salazar, Napolitano and Administrator Jackson,

As representatives of coastal districts along the West Coast and Pacific Islands we would like to bring your attention to and express our support for the enclosed letter. This letter was written to President Obama and endorsed by all seven governors to be impacted by debris from the Japanese tsunami that occurred in March of last year.

Following in the wake of the tragedy in Japan, a second disaster is about to wash up on our coasts. One of the first pieces of debris -- a 66-ft dock that washed ashore in Oregon -- was found to be teeming with over 90 non-native species -- including Asian brown seaweed and the Asian shore crab. Asian brown seaweed is one of Oregon's "100 worst invasive species" and the Asian shore crab competes with other shellfish populations on the East Coast. Invasive species carry the potential to harm native fish through predation, hybridization, parasitism, competition for resources, and altered community and ecological processes¹. And as we have learned from the Mediterranean fruit fly, just one invasive species could drastically impact the largest agricultural economy in the world.

In this letter, our governors call for:

- 1) A comprehensive Federal response plan;
- 2) Interagency collaboration; and

- 3) Adequate funding to ensure states' ability to properly dispose of the debris, including the removal of invasive species.

Already, NOAA's Marine Debris Program is contributing existing funds to support states' efforts to respond to and remove marine debris. Similar prioritization and greater collaboration across agencies and in some cases supplementing existing budget levels through Continuing Resolutions may be necessary to fully address this issue. We encourage you to read the enclosed letter and look forward to working with you to support a comprehensive approach to this issue moving forward.

Sincerely,



SAM FARR
Member of Congress



NORM DICKS
Member of Congress



MIKE HONDA
Member of Congress



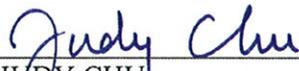
GEORGE MILLER
Member of Congress



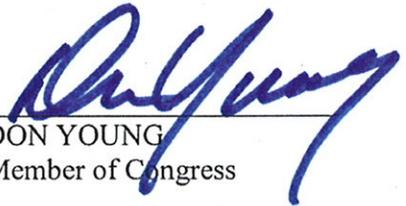
GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN
Member of Congress



JACKIE SPEIER
Member of Congress



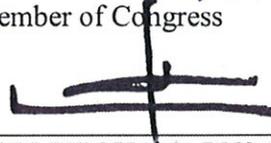
JUDY CHU
Member of Congress



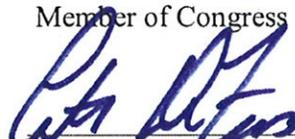
DON YOUNG
Member of Congress



LOIS CAPPS
Member of Congress



COLLEEN HANABUSA
Member of Congress



PETER DEFAZIO
Member of Congress



SUZANNE BONAMICI
Member of Congress



MADELEINE BORDALLO
Member of Congress



MAZIE K. HIRONO
Member of Congress


KURT SCHRADER
Member of Congress

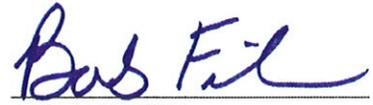

HENRY WAXMAN
Member of Congress

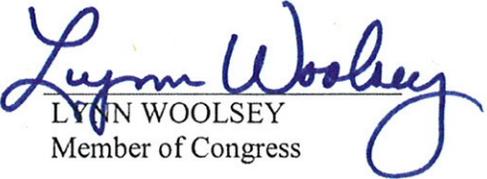

MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress


JOHN GARAMENDI
Member of Congress


BRIAN BILBRAY
Member of Congress


JIM McDERMOTT
Member of Congress


BOB FILNER
Member of Congress


LYNN WOOLSEY
Member of Congress

CC: Acting Secretary Rebecca Blank, Department of Commerce
Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton, Department of State
Nancy Sutley, Chair, White House Council on Environmental Quality



July 18, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to ask for increased federal support for our efforts to respond to Japanese tsunami debris. This debris has already arrived, or is anticipated soon, along our coastlines. Earlier this year, the U.S. Coast Guard had to sink a large fishing vessel that appeared in northwest coastal shipping lanes because it was a hazard to navigation and coastal communities. In early June, a large dock measuring 66 feet long landed on an Oregon beach. This dock could have wreaked havoc on large ships, commercial fishing boats, and recreational boaters as it made its way across the Pacific Ocean and washed ashore. Upon inspection, it was found to be teeming with invasive species that pose a potential threat to our coastal ecosystems and shellfish industries. Most recently, a boat washed up on Washington's southern coast and kayakers found a large debris deposit from a house on a remote section of Washington's coast. Debris is also beginning to appear on remote islands in Southcentral Alaska. All were confirmed to have originated in Japan.

These are the early indicators of the unpredictable challenges we face. Our coastal communities and state agencies are reporting significant increases in marine debris that are straining our financial and human resources. We are also concerned about the debris that may pose health and safety hazards, the identification and removal of debris from our more remote waters and shorelines, and invasive species threats to the environment. We recognize that this debris issue rose out of the great tragedy experienced by the Japanese people last year, and we are committed to return items of a personal nature to their rightful owners.

Thousands of miles of coastline and coastal waters will be impacted by the tsunami debris for some time to come. While various federal, state, local and tribal jurisdictions are engaged in response efforts, we are on the front lines of this problem. Individual jurisdictions currently have tsunami debris response plans in place or under development, working cooperatively with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), our primary federal partner in this response, as well as with our tribal, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian, and local community partners. Our collective efforts will result in maximum efficiency as well as leveraging of resources. We have asked state agency staff to address the impacts associated with this marine debris and have identified sources of limited state and federal funds that can be used.

Without question, what we are facing is unprecedented. It is estimated that as much as 1.5 million tons of tsunami debris may remain floating in the ocean. Although we do not know the magnitude of what lies ahead, we must be prepared for a long-term, daunting, and extraordinary challenge if we are to ensure the public's health and safety and protection of our shorelines, coastal waters, and coastal economies.

The Honorable Barack Obama
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We cannot do this alone and we require federal support. First, we need a comprehensive federal plan developed to respond to this situation. Second, we request the active engagement of multiple agencies of the federal government working under your guidance and direction. NOAA has responded appropriately with its limited resources, but we need the involvement of other agencies, notably the U.S. Coast Guard. We would welcome a strengthened partnership with the Coast Guard to address in-water debris that poses a hazard to navigation, coastal communities, and ecosystems, as well as effective reporting channels and notification about incoming debris. Other federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of the Interior, and the Department of Defense, have areas of jurisdiction and expertise that can help us respond. Third, because this is a unique problem of an unknown magnitude, it is imperative that we immediately establish a scalable, coordinated, and unified effort so that we can respond quickly and effectively. We seek your leadership and partnership on this issue.

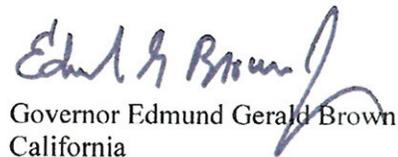
Finally, we need federal funding to respond to this situation as it unfolds and criteria that clearly specify when and how such funds will be used. This would include costs incurred not only by the states and territories as they follow protocol to properly dispose of tsunami debris, but also by federal land managers where debris is likely to be deposited. We are concerned about the potential cutbacks to NOAA's marine debris program, particularly in light of incoming tsunami debris, and we request a clear framework for federal funding of tsunami debris response costs.

The active engagement of the federal government is essential to support our multi-state efforts to address tsunami debris. We look forward to working with your Administration in responding to this escalating situation.

Sincerely,

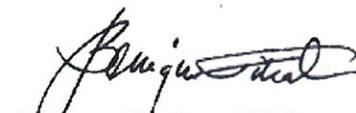

Governor Chris Gregoire
Washington


Governor Sean Parnell
Alaska


Governor Edmund Gerald Brown
California


Governor Eddie Baza Calvo
Guam


Governor Neil Abercrombie
Hawaii


Governor Benigno Fitial
Northern Mariana Islands


Governor John Kitzhaber
Oregon

The Honorable Barack Obama

July 18, 2012

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cc: The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary, Department of State
The Honorable Lisa Jackson, Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency
The Honorable Janet Napolitano, Secretary, Department of Homeland Security
The Honorable Leon Panetta, Secretary, Department of Defense
The Honorable Ken Salazar, Secretary, Department of the Interior
The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
Admiral Robert J. Papp, Jr., Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard
The Honorable Jane Lubchenco, Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
The Honorable Nancy Sutley, Chair, White House Council on Environmental Quality
The Honorable Jeffrey Zients, Acting Director, Office of Management and Budget
The Honorable Christy Clark, Premier of British Columbia
The Honorable Togiola T.A. Tulafono, Governor of American Samoa