Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 6, 2007

Honorable John M. Spratt, Jr.
Chairman, House Committee on the Budget
207 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Spratt:

Congratulations on your ascension to Chair of the Budget Committee. As Democrats concerned with protecting our environment and human health, we look forward to working with you to ensure that, unlike in the previous several budget cycles, core environmental programs receive needed investments.

While we certainly recognize that the nation faces a difficult budget situation, complicated by the cost of the war in Iraq and tax cuts for the nation's wealthiest, we believe that we can no longer defer needed investment in our nation's core environment programs. In that regard, we are writing today to express our support for strong funding levels for budget function 300, which supports natural resources. The core programs within this function are important to the public health of our communities and landscape of our nation, and we hope that the House Budget Resolution will include at least $34 billion for this function for Fiscal Year 2008.

Over the last several years core programs in Function 300 have been cut significantly. These funding cuts have resulted in significant and very real adverse impacts on our local communities. Examples of the funding problems facing several of these core problems include:

- The Congressional Research Service has calculated that the President's budget request of $842.2 million for the **Drinking Water State Revolving Fund** is only $802 million when adjusted for inflation in 2006 dollars. That is the lowest amount of purchasing power in the history of the program. At the same time the infrastructure needs for the states – which EPA estimated at $263 billion in its 2005 report – are growing.

- Despite the fact that States and Native American tribes are important partners and co-regulators with the EPA in implementation of environmental laws, the **State and Tribal Assistance Grants** account budget took 94 percent and 100 percent of the cuts to EPA's budget in 2005 and 2006. If President Bush's proposed budget is enacted, it would result in the largest cuts in support to states in the history of the agency, totaling more than $1 billion since 2004.

- Underground storage tanks that leak petroleum or other hazardous substances can contaminate nearby soil and groundwater, which serves as the source of drinking water for nearly half of all Americans. Unlike other funds, the **Leaking Underground Storage Tanks** Trust Fund has a surplus of $2.67 billion which we believe should be spent to clean up the 117,000 leaking tanks. Unfortunately, the President's budget only requests $72.4 million for FY 2008, less than .005 percent of the amount available, at a time when the GAO estimates leaking tanks would require $12 billion in public funding to clean up.

- Funding for preserving forests, wildlife refuges, and other open spaces is at historic lows. Hundreds of staff positions at natural resource agencies and programs have been lost. One of the most successful Department of Interior conservation programs, the **Land and Water Conservation Fund** (LWCF), provides matching federal grants to states and local communities preserve open space and develop recreational facilities. Although it is authorized at $900 million a year, the President's budget

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continues a trend of significant cuts, providing only $59 million for core LWCF purposes. At a time when state and local governments are struggling to create parks and preserve open spaces threatened by development, the President's budget eliminates all LWCF stateside matching grants.

- The **Superfund** program is responsible for addressing public health and environmental threats from uncontrolled releases of hazardous substances. The President's budget recommends $15 million less than his FY 2007 request and $35 million less than his FY 2006 request. Adjusted for inflation in 2006 dollars, this request is the lowest in ten years. In December, 2004, the EPA's top Superfund program official noted that if the EPA's budget remains flat for the foreseeable future construction funding could be delayed. Already in FY 2007 EPA staff has cut their goal for construction completions from 40 sites to 24 sites. The Superfund tax which provided significant funding for cleanups has expired; its renewal is one way to redirect funding to support a core program.

- The **Brownfields** program is important for many cities struggling to revitalize blighted areas. Unfortunately, support for the program by the Administration has totaled less than 56 percent of the authorized level and resulted in only one-third of applications receiving grants.

Our communities are suffering as a result of the Administration's failure to prioritize core programs. State and local agencies may be forced to lay off staff, leave vacancies unfilled, shut down existing air monitors, or otherwise curtailing monitoring programs. The EPA cannot be sure that the cleanup at the Libby, Montana Superfund site sufficiently reduces the risk to public health, and regional or contract personnel are making judgments about water systems despite lacking qualifications.

These core programs are just an example of those programs within Function 300 that are vital to the health and wellbeing of our communities and our environment, but which have been the target of continued cuts. Other such examples include environmental justice programs, the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, and Farm Bill conservation programs, critical to conserving working lands. Finally, two high level commissions, the US Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission, have released reports recognizing the crisis facing our oceans and the need for significant and immediate action to reverse ocean decline.

We believe it is critical to ensure that available funds are being used in a responsible manner such that our environment and our health benefit. We strongly believe the path to achieve this is by focusing on adequately funding Function 300 and the core programs within it, which have born the brunt of a misguided Administration. We do not envy the difficult decisions you will have to make and are eager to work with you to find ways to fund these core programs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

EDWARD J. MARKEY
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