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October 20, 2005

Dear Senator:

We write to you as representatives of organizations whose membership includes thousands of Gulf Coast residents, and we write to you as individuals whose lives have been forever changed by the hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Our message is simple: Please, do not weaken or waive the critical public health, safety and environmental protections upon which our futures rely.

We implore you to work vigorously to oppose any bill or proposal that would undermine the laws meant to guarantee to us – just like all other Americans – protection from polluted air, contaminated drinking water, unsafe waste disposal practices, dirty waterways and other environmental hazards.

As you know, the devastation of the Gulf Coast is unprecedented. Weeks after Katrina hit land, many drinking water plants are still inoperable, sewage treatment plants have been damaged or destroyed, and millions of tons of debris has been spread across the coast. Black mold is growing in homes; mud, muck and remaining floodwaters show troubling levels of pathogens and toxics; and responders still struggle to control spills of oil and other hazardous chemicals.

The dangerous conditions left by the hurricanes and flooding need to be addressed as quickly as possible, and critical drinking water and wastewater systems must be repaired and rebuilt expeditiously so that displaced residents can return home and begin the difficult task of recovery. But this work must be done in compliance with the highest possible standards, not in defiance of environmental protection laws. In fact, anything less would treat us, the residents of the affected areas of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas, as second-class citizens – as if we are not worthy of the same safeguards that other Americans take for granted.

It is unconscionable that some members of Congress would try to take advantage of the vulnerable and precarious situation hundreds of thousands of area residents currently face by taking from us the very safeguards needed to ensure that hurricane recovery and response efforts do not threaten our health or the short-term or longer-term livability of our communities.

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