United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 26, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We strongly support your Administration's efforts to address climate change through implementation of your *Climate Action Plan* as we continue to push for climate action in Congress. In the absence of Congressional action, we are relying on you to use existing legal authorities to address this dangerous threat. One critical step forward in the fight against climate change is to establish national standards to reduce methane pollution from the oil and gas sector.

We appreciate your March 2014 *Climate Action Plan Strategy to Reduce Methane Emissions*, which recognizes that curbing methane pollution is essential to solving climate change. Methane is the principal component of natural gas. When burned to generate heat or electricity, it releases less carbon dioxide than coal or oil; however, when unburned methane is emitted, it is a significantly more potent greenhouse gas. Ton for ton, methane causes at least 80 times more warming than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period. Pollution from oil and gas operations also contributes to unhealthy air by forming smog, which triggers asthma attacks and aggravates respiratory conditions like bronchitis.

The oil and gas sector is the United States' largest industrial emitter of methane. Currently, this sector emits significant methane in the form of leaks from oil and gas wells, compressors, pipelines, and other equipment, as well as intentional venting of methane to the atmosphere. In some areas, such as the Bakken shale formation in the Northern Great Plains, oil drillers are also wastefully flaring natural gas rather than capturing and using it. This leaked, vented, and flared gas wastes valuable and finite resources – often extracted from public lands – and pollutes the atmosphere. In addition to being environmentally destructive, it's fiscally irresponsible. According to Ceres, in 2012 alone, North Dakota oil and gas producers flared more than $1 billion worth of natural gas from the Bakken.

There are cost-effective solutions to these problems, which should form the basis of strong standards that protect communities across the country. Voluntary standards are not enough. Too many in the oil and gas sector have failed to adopt sound practices voluntarily, and the absence of uniform enforceable standards has allowed methane pollution to continue, wasting energy and threatening public health.

Your methane strategy directs the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to begin solving these problems by determining how best to reduce methane pollution from the oil and gas sector nationwide no later than this fall. The strategy further directs the Bureau of Land Management

(BLM) to reduce venting and flaring from oil and gas production on public lands. These are critical steps, and EPA and BLM should move quickly to adopt national standards to reduce methane pollution, prevent waste, and protect our public health and environment.

We are encouraged that BLM is poised to issue proposed standards to address venting and flaring on federal lands. We urge you to ensure that BLM releases its proposal this year and that its standards protect our public lands, valuable natural resources, and climate. EPA has also taken initial steps, but must go further. EPA has a responsibility under the Clean Air Act to address methane throughout the oil and gas sector. We urge you to ensure that EPA exercises its authority expeditiously to control methane pollution and its harmful effects.

Your methane strategy is a key component of your Administration's effort to combat climate change, and EPA and BLM are central to your strategy's success. You have outlined what is necessary and you have authority to achieve these goals. We stand ready to support your action.

Sincerely,

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

cc: John Podesta, Counselor to the President
The Honorable Gina McCarthy, Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency
The Honorable Sally Jewell, Secretary, Department of Interior