

November 18, 2015

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable John F. Kerry  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St., N.W.  
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Todd Stern  
Special Envoy for Climate Change  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St., N.W.  
Washington, DC 20520

RE: 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21/CMP11)

Dear Mr. President, Mr. Secretary, and Mr. Stern:

As members of the New York State Legislature, we urge you to do everything in your power to ensure that the 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris this November and December results in a strong, realistic agreement to aggressively mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and put the planet on a trajectory to stem the increase in global average temperatures.

For New Yorkers, as for people throughout the U.S. and the world, climate change is already impacting our health, welfare, and prosperity. Rising sea levels, increasingly intense storms and droughts, threats to global water and food supplies and loss of critical biodiversity jeopardize lives, livelihoods, and the integrity of our society. New Yorkers face a long list of impacts and escalating risks associated with climate change, including increasing healthcare costs, higher insurance rates, loss of property value, contamination of water and soil, losses to agriculture, fisheries and tourism, and destruction of homes and displacement of families and communities.

To address the current impacts and avoid the worst effects of climate change, COP21 must at the very least commit to a goal of keeping the increase in global average temperatures below 2°C. However, a 2°C increase will still lead to significant negative impacts, and evidence suggests that a cap of 1.5°C would increase the ability of societies to adapt to climate disruption. Regardless, what is clear is that if we allow “business as usual” to continue we face the prospect of temperatures increasing by more than 5°C by the end of the century, with potentially catastrophic results.

Maintaining a 2°C level of warming will require COP21 to address the implications of a “carbon budget” of around 800 gigatons of total, cumulative anthropogenic carbon emissions. The nations of the world have already emitted well over half of this budget, leaving less than 300 gigatons of emissions before passing the threshold. To prevent “overspending,” it will be necessary to eventually reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions globally. The acceptable timeframe for this goal must be established using the best available science.

Moving toward net zero emissions will require a range of actions, including research and development, innovative power generation, carbon pricing, demand management and energy efficiency. Addressing deforestation, agricultural practices and other land use issues will be key elements. Regulation of black smoke and tropospheric ozone, and the elimination of HFC emissions as admissible under the Montreal Protocol are low-cost measures that would have an immediate positive impact on greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, financing mechanisms and solutions must be created to help developing nations transition to cleaner growth models and invest in resiliency, augmenting economic development through energy efficiency and renewable and distributed energy investments. A truly successful global agreement must be fair and equitable in order to gain support from both developed and developing countries.

The realities of international diplomacy require that an accord from COP21 be based on voluntary contribution pledges. Insisting on legally binding commitments will only result in the world’s largest emitters walking away from the negotiating table. However, measuring, reporting and verification (MRV) of contribution pledges is also essential. Some countries may balk at MRV, but this obstacle can and must be overcome. The contributions of non-national organizations, such as state, provincial and municipal governments must also be recognized and included, as should those of non-governmental organizations and major corporations, many of whom have recently come forward with strong commitments to reduce their carbon footprints.

Any agreement reached in Paris must not be viewed as a static, one-off accord, to be revisited ten or fifteen years in the future. Instead, the agreement must establish a framework for further action by the international community and individual countries, empowering them to achieve greater emissions reductions than would otherwise be possible. Countries must agree to submit revised emissions goals every five years as technology and other factors change, with a one-way “ratchet” in place to ensure increasingly ambitious benchmarks. Such a commitment would send a clear signal to the private sector that the future will be carbon-free. With greater certainty about the future, the energy industry and investors will be incentivized to take a leading role in the transition to clean energy.

We understand that the Paris conference will not produce a single and complete solution to the challenge of climate change. But it is vital that a global agreement be reached that accelerates our trajectory toward a carbon-free future. The technology exists and the economics are favorable for a rapid transition away from self-destructive practices; but the longer we wait, the more expensive and difficult the inevitable transition becomes.

Now is the time for bold leadership and long-term thinking. Without action, untold millions of people throughout the world, today and in the future, will suffer. We, along with the people of New York who we represent, are relying on you to deliver that action. Failure is simply not an option.

Sincerely,



Liz Krueger  
State Senator  
28th District



Brad Hoylman  
State Senator  
18th District



Bill Perkins  
State Senator  
30th District



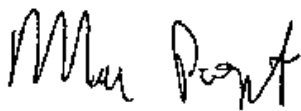
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State Senator  
29th District



Timothy M. Kennedy  
State Senator  
63rd District



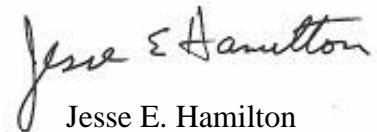
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State Senator  
37th District



Marc C. Panepinto  
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60th District



Ruth Hassell-Thompson  
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36th District



Jesse E. Hamilton  
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20th District



Leroy Comrie  
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14th District



Velmanette Montgomery  
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James Sanders Jr.  
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Martin Malavé Dilan  
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