

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 5, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Alexander Acosta
Secretary
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave NW C-2318
Washington, D.C. 20210

Dear Secretary Perdue and Secretary Acosta,

We write to express strong opposition to your Departments' recent decision to permanently close over a third of Civilian Conservation Center (CCC) program facilities and end the program in its current form. We strongly urge you to reconsider this decision.

Civilian Conservation Centers have a unique mandate within the Job Corps program to help conserve, develop, and manage public natural resources and public recreation areas and respond to natural disasters, including wildfires and hurricanes. The 25 CCCs operate in 17 national forests and grasslands across 16 states and aim to train over 4,000 youth and young adults, many of whom are at-risk individuals originating from low-income, rural communities. These centers not only help support these underserved youth and young adults with invaluable job training, but they also provide essential capacity for the U.S. Forest Service to fulfill its mission and provide economic opportunities in rural areas.

The closure or alteration of all 25 CCCs—representing a fifth of all Job Corps sites—is a massive revision of the program undertaken without congressional consultation, notification or approval. This is especially troubling given that CCCs are overrepresented in the ranks of the highest performing Job Corps Centers. According to data from the Department of Labor, six of the top 15 Job Corps centers were Civilian Conservation Centers, including the highest performing center in the nation, in Program Year (PY) 2017. Four of the five centers with the highest graduate employment rates were Civilian Conservation Centers and 16 of the 25 CCCs were in the top 10 of at least one of Job Corps' employment-related performance measures in PY 2017.

Furthermore, these students were on the frontlines in response to the natural disasters that hit the United States in 2018 and CCCs are, in fact, the only Job Corps Centers that can participate in disaster response. For example, according to the Forest Service, in 2017 1,200 students at CCCs participated in fire assessments, providing the equivalent of 450,000 hours of service during the height of the fire season. Students at CCCs also provided 5,000 hours of support in response to Hurricane Harvey. Additionally, students contributed 14,000 hours treating 35,000 acres of hazardous fuels with prescribed fire and 10,000 hours of forest restoration work.

After a difficult year of natural disasters and with hurricane and wildfire season quickly approaching, now is precisely the wrong time to be reducing capacity at CCCs. We strongly urge you maintain the CCC program.

We ask that you further explain your decision by answering the following questions:

- CCCs play a vital role in responding to natural disasters, including wildfires. How will you replace this lost capacity? Have you conducted an impact assessment regarding how the loss of Job Corps fire crews will impact the upcoming fire season? Have you consulted with the Forest Service throughout the decision making process?
- It was announced that you have suspended enrollment at all CCCs. In five states—Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, South Dakota—Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers are currently the only centers operating in the state. How will current enrollment opportunities be impacted for youth in these states, as well as other impacted states? When will youth in these states be able to enroll in Job Corps again?
- Many CCCs are located on public lands, which carries unique obligations and responsibilities. How will management of centers on public land be shifted to the private sector or other non-federal entities and what additional costs and requirements will this entail?
- Please provide an explanation for how this complies with appropriations law and reprogramming guidance related to personnel actions and reorganizations.
- Please provide the statutory authority the Departments are relying on to complete these transfers, closures, and the associated reduction in force.
- Nearly 1,100 people are employed at CCCs. What will happen to employees currently in the process of relocating between facilities, some of whom have sold homes and shipped household goods? Will employees be able to apply for jobs with contractors expected to take over the facilities?
- Rural development is a core USDA mission, and CCC students provide significant services to rural America. Have you conducted an impact assessment with respect to the economic impact on the rural communities affected by this announcement?

Given your Departments' stated timeline for implementing these changes, we look forward to your prompt reply.

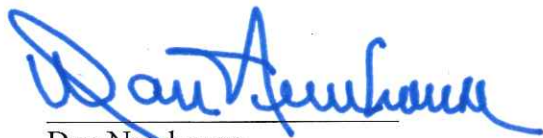
Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



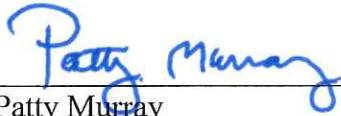
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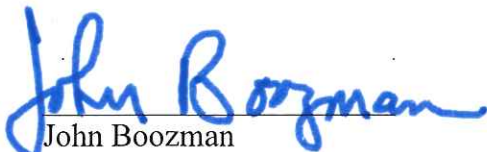
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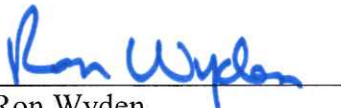
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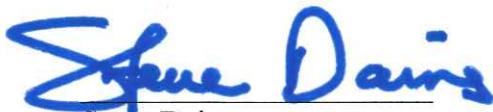
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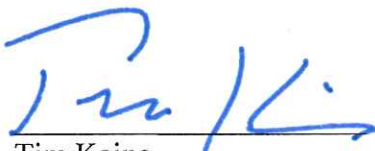
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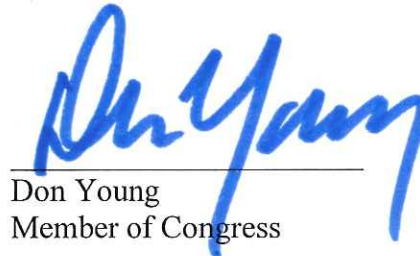

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