



July 18, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to ask for increased federal support for our efforts to respond to Japanese tsunami debris. This debris has already arrived, or is anticipated soon, along our coastlines. Earlier this year, the U.S. Coast Guard had to sink a large fishing vessel that appeared in northwest coastal shipping lanes because it was a hazard to navigation and coastal communities. In early June, a large dock measuring 66 feet long landed on an Oregon beach. This dock could have wreaked havoc on large ships, commercial fishing boats, and recreational boaters as it made its way across the Pacific Ocean and washed ashore. Upon inspection, it was found to be teeming with invasive species that pose a potential threat to our coastal ecosystems and shellfish industries. Most recently, a boat washed up on Washington's southern coast and kayakers found a large debris deposit from a house on a remote section of Washington's coast. Debris is also beginning to appear on remote islands in Southcentral Alaska. All were confirmed to have originated in Japan.

These are the early indicators of the unpredictable challenges we face. Our coastal communities and state agencies are reporting significant increases in marine debris that are straining our financial and human resources. We are also concerned about the debris that may pose health and safety hazards, the identification and removal of debris from our more remote waters and shorelines, and invasive species threats to the environment. We recognize that this debris issue rose out of the great tragedy experienced by the Japanese people last year, and we are committed to return items of a personal nature to their rightful owners.

Thousands of miles of coastline and coastal waters will be impacted by the tsunami debris for some time to come. While various federal, state, local and tribal jurisdictions are engaged in response efforts, we are on the front lines of this problem. Individual jurisdictions currently have tsunami debris response plans in place or under development, working cooperatively with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), our primary federal partner in this response, as well as with our tribal, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian, and local community partners. Our collective efforts will result in maximum efficiency as well as leveraging of resources. We have asked state agency staff to address the impacts associated with this marine debris and have identified sources of limited state and federal funds that can be used.

Without question, what we are facing is unprecedented. It is estimated that as much as 1.5 million tons of tsunami debris may remain floating in the ocean. Although we do not know the magnitude of what lies ahead, we must be prepared for a long-term, daunting, and extraordinary challenge if we are to ensure the public's health and safety and protection of our shorelines, coastal waters, and coastal economies.

The Honorable Barack Obama

July 18, 2012

Page 2

We cannot do this alone and we require federal support. First, we need a comprehensive federal plan developed to respond to this situation. Second, we request the active engagement of multiple agencies of the federal government working under your guidance and direction. NOAA has responded appropriately with its limited resources, but we need the involvement of other agencies, notably the U.S. Coast Guard. We would welcome a strengthened partnership with the Coast Guard to address in-water debris that poses a hazard to navigation, coastal communities, and ecosystems, as well as effective reporting channels and notification about incoming debris. Other federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of the Interior, and the Department of Defense, have areas of jurisdiction and expertise that can help us respond. Third, because this is a unique problem of an unknown magnitude, it is imperative that we immediately establish a scalable, coordinated, and unified effort so that we can respond quickly and effectively. We seek your leadership and partnership on this issue.

Finally, we need federal funding to respond to this situation as it unfolds and criteria that clearly specify when and how such funds will be used. This would include costs incurred not only by the states and territories as they follow protocol to properly dispose of tsunami debris, but also by federal land managers where debris is likely to be deposited. We are concerned about the potential cutbacks to NOAA's marine debris program, particularly in light of incoming tsunami debris, and we request a clear framework for federal funding of tsunami debris response costs.

The active engagement of the federal government is essential to support our multi-state efforts to address tsunami debris. We look forward to working with your Administration in responding to this escalating situation.

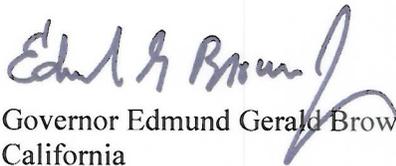
Sincerely,



Governor Chris Gregoire  
Washington



Governor Sean Parnell  
Alaska



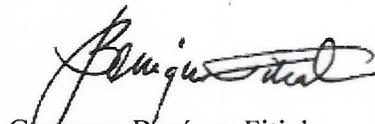
Governor Edmund Gerald Brown  
California



Governor Eddie Baza Calvo  
Guam



Governor Neil Abercrombie  
Hawaii



Governor Benigno Fitial  
Northern Mariana Islands



Governor John Kitzhaber  
Oregon

The Honorable Barack Obama

July 18, 2012

Page 3

cc: The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary, Department of State  
The Honorable Lisa Jackson, Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency  
The Honorable Janet Napolitano, Secretary, Department of Homeland Security  
The Honorable Leon Panetta, Secretary, Department of Defense  
The Honorable Ken Salazar, Secretary, Department of the Interior  
The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Admiral Robert J. Papp, Jr., Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard  
The Honorable Jane Lubchenco, Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
The Honorable Nancy Sutley, Chair, White House Council on Environmental Quality  
The Honorable Jeffrey Zients, Acting Director, Office of Management and Budget  
The Honorable Christy Clark, Premier of British Columbia  
The Honorable Togiola T.A. Tulafono, Governor of American Samoa