



To: Members of the House Committee on Agriculture
From: Andrew Lautz, Director of Federal Policy
Date: September 10, 2021
Subject: Committee's Reconciliation Spending Raises Concerns

I. Introduction and Key Taxpayer Considerations

On behalf of National Taxpayers Union (NTU), the nation's oldest taxpayer advocacy organization, I write to Committee Members and staff as you consider certain provisions in the Committee's reconciliation title focused on forestry, rural energy, rural development, agriculture, and more. NTU is deeply troubled by several provisions in this proposal, including but not limited to the following concerns:

- Subtitle B commits a staggering **\$31 billion** to a dizzying array of new and existing federal programs concerning forestry. While there should be little doubt that preventing wildfires and mitigating the impacts of climate change on the nation's forests are laudable policy goals, we question the taxpayer commitment of \$31 billion to this subtitle given Forest Service appropriations in the prior two fiscal years have only [averaged](#) \$7.5 billion per year.¹ Taking the annual average of Subtitle B's funding commitments over the next decade, lawmakers are effectively proposing a 41-percent funding boost for the Forest Service over each of the next 10 years, with few legislative instructions or guardrails attached to this funding boost. We are also concerned about some individual items in this subtitle that could be wasteful or duplicative, such as the \$4.5 billion committed to two Civilian Climate Corps programs (for more on our Civilian Climate Corps critique, [see here](#)).
- Subtitles C and D commit nearly **\$26.5 billion** to rural development/energy and research and urban agriculture programs. Again, while research on the impacts of climate change is an important endeavor for the public and private sectors, major boosts to federal research commitments should be handled in the regular appropriations process and should be paired with commensurate spending reductions elsewhere in the USDA budget. The average discretionary appropriations commitment for USDA in the past ten years (fiscal years 2012 through 2021) was just \$21.8 billion per year. The annual average of Subtitles C and D funding commitments over the next decade would boost the USDA budget by more than 12 percent with few legislative instructions or guardrails attached to this funding boost. Potentially wasteful spending in these subtitles includes nearly \$1 billion for biofuel infrastructure. NTU has [written before](#) about how biofuel mandates put upward pressure on food prices and create market distortions.

¹ This average is inclusive of additional funding Congress has provided the Forest Service in each of the past two years for wildfire response.

Absent *significant* changes to the Committee's reconciliation title, NTU would urge all Committee Members to **OPPOSE** the legislation.²

II. Amendments That Could Improve the Committee's Reconciliation Title

The following amendments would improve the Committee's reconciliation title from the taxpayers' perspective:

- **Strike the \$4.5 billion in funding for Civilian Climate Corps projects in Secs. 11001 and 11002:** NTU [wrote](#) in its reconciliation memo to the House Committee on Natural Resources that proposed Civilian Climate Corps (CCC) money was wasteful and duplicative. Many proposed CCC projects are already handled by the federal agencies receiving CCC money under the proposed reconciliation bill, and even as lawmakers mark up their reconciliation legislation they [cannot completely agree](#) on how the CCC would be structured across federal agencies. Now would be an appropriate time for lawmakers to pause on CCC plans and remove these expensive projects from the reconciliation bill. A more cost-effective way for lawmakers to achieve the goals of CCC may be to shift some of AmeriCorps' existing work to climate change mitigation, adaptation, and response, without committing additional taxpayer dollars to standing up and implementing a new program.
- **Strike the \$960 million in biofuel funding in Sec. 12006:** As noted above, biofuel mandates create market distortions and raise food costs for consumers and taxpayers. In a time of troubling inflation, lawmakers should not be passing policies that could further raise prices on Americans. Doubling down on infrastructure that enables the perpetuation of biofuel mandates could certainly raise prices on consumer goods, and lawmakers should scrap this section.
- **Increase the share of title funding directed to the USDA Inspector General in Sec. 14001:** It is deeply troubling that less than one one-thousandths of one percent of total funding in this title is devoted to the USDA Office of Inspector General (OIG). Given the significant commitments taxpayer funding, and the new programs USDA and the Forest Service are being asked to stand up under this title, lawmakers should increase the proportion of total funding going to USDA OIG to conduct essential oversight. The USDA Inspector General received \$99.9 million in FY 2021 appropriations; given this title boosts combined USDA and Forest Service discretionary funding by nearly 20 percent, on average, over the next 10 years, a 20-percent boost to the OIG budget would be more appropriate (totaling \$20 million per year over the next 10 years, or \$200 million total). Lawmakers should significantly increase the USDA OIG proportion of appropriations in this title, and offset the increase with spending reductions elsewhere in the title.

² As a reminder and to avoid any confusion, NTU does *not* include Committee markup votes in our annual rating of Congress. That said, we weigh in at the markup level to improve legislation from the perspective of the taxpayer before it reaches the House and/or Senate floor.

III. NTU's Current Thinking on the Combined Reconciliation Package

As the authorizing committees in Congress work on separate reconciliation bills, NTU wishes to inform Members and their staff that we have several significant concerns with the current framework of the overall, combined reconciliation effort. This proposed legislation would spend a staggering \$3.5 trillion—possibly adding trillions to the national debt and impacting America's economic recovery effort from the COVID-19 pandemic. If the combined reconciliation bill came to the House or Senate floor today, we would advise Members to vote "NO" on the legislation. The bill would be heavily weighted in NTU's annual rating of Congress.

IV. Contact Information

Should you have any questions about the recommendations in this memo, please do not hesitate to reach out to Andrew Lautz at alautz@ntu.org.