

# COMMITTEE ON ETHICS

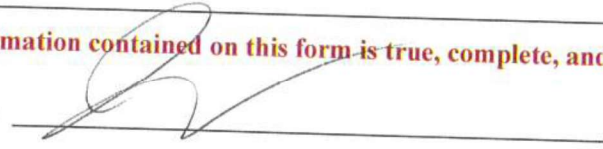
## EMPLOYEE POST-TRAVEL DISCLOSURE FORM Original Amendment

This form is for disclosing the receipt of travel expenses from private sources for travel taken in connection with official duties. This form does not eliminate the need to report privately-funded travel on the annual *Financial Disclosure Statements* of those employees required to file them. In accordance with House Rule 25, clause 5, **you must complete this form and file it with the Clerk of the House by email at [gifttravelreports@mail.house.gov](mailto:gifttravelreports@mail.house.gov), within 15 days after travel is completed.** Please **do not** file this form with the Committee on Ethics.

**NOTE: Willful or knowing misrepresentations on this form may be subject to criminal prosecution pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 1001.**

1. Name of Traveler: Jacob Vurpillat
2. a. Name of Accompanying Relative: \_\_\_\_\_ **OR**  None  
b. Relationship to Traveler:  Spouse  Child  Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_
3. a. Dates: Departure: June 16, 2025 Return: June 19, 2025  
b. Dates at Personal Expense, if any: \_\_\_\_\_ **OR**  None
4. Departure City: Washington, DC Destination: Knoxville, TN Return City: Washington, DC
5. Sponsor(s), Who Paid for the Trip: Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition Institute
6. Describe Meetings and Events Attended: On this trip, I visited the Great Smoky Mountain National Park to observe conservation efforts and meet with local leaders working on recovery following flooding caused by Hurricane Helene.
7. Attached to this form are **each** of the following, *signify that each item is attached by checking the corresponding box*:
  - a.  a completed *Sponsor Post-Travel Disclosure Form*;
  - b.  the *Primary Trip Sponsor Form* completed by the trip sponsor **prior** to the trip, **including all** attachments **and** the *Additional Sponsor Form(s)*;
  - c.  page 2 of the completed *Traveler Form* submitted by the employee; **and**
  - d.  the letter from the Committee on Ethics approving my participation on this trip.
8. a.  I represent that I participated in each of the activities reflected in the attached sponsor's agenda. *Signify statement is true by checking the box.*  
b. If not, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**I certify that the information contained on this form is true, complete, and correct to the best of my knowledge.**

Signature of Traveler:  Date: 07/2/2025

I authorized this travel in advance. I have determined that all of the expenses listed on the attached *Sponsor Post-Travel Disclosure Form* were necessary and that the travel was in connection with the employee's official duties and would not create the appearance that the employee is using public office for private gain.

Name of Supervising Member: Sean Casten Date: 07/2/2025

Signature of Supervising Member: 

# COMMITTEE ON ETHICS

## SPONSOR POST-TRAVEL DISCLOSURE FORM

Original  Amendment

This form must be completed by an officer of any organization that served as the primary trip sponsor in providing travel expenses or reimbursement for travel expenses to House Members, officers, or employees under House Rule 25, clause 5. **A completed copy of the form must be provided to each House Member, officer, or employee who participated in the trip within 10 days of their return.** You must answer all questions, and check all boxes, on this form for your submission to comply with House Rules and the Committee's Travel Regulations. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in the denial of future requests to sponsor trips and/or subject the current traveler to disciplinary action or a requirement to repay the trip expenses.

**NOTE: Willful or knowing misrepresentations on this form may be subject to criminal prosecution pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 1001.**

1. Sponsor(s) who paid or provided in-kind support for the trip: Sustainable Energy and Environment Coaliton

2. Travel Destination(s): Townsend, TN, Fontana, NC, Asheville, NC

3. Date of Departure: 06/16/25 Date of Return: 06/19/25

4. Name(s) of Traveler(s): See attached

*Note:* You may list more than one traveler on a form only if **all** information is **identical** for each person listed.

5. **Actual amount** of expenses paid on behalf of, or reimbursed to, each individual named in Question 4:

	Total Transportation Expenses	Total Lodging Expenses	Total Meal Expenses	Total Other Expenses (dollar amount per item and description)
Traveler	see attached	see attached	see attached	see attached
Accompanying Family Member	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

6.  All expenses connected to the trip were for actual costs incurred and not a *per diem* or lump sum payment. Signify statement is true by checking box.

**I certify that the information contained in this form is true, complete, and correct to the best of my knowledge.**

Signature: Max Frankel Date: 06/24/25

Name: Max Frankel Title: Executive Director

Organization: SEEC Institute

**I am an officer of the above-named organization. Signify statement is true by checking box.**

Address: 611 Pennsylvania Ave. SE Suite 150. Washington, DC 20003

Telephone: 828-384-3275 Email: max@seecinstitute.org; pearson@seecinstitute.org

*Committee staff may contact the above-named individual if additional information is required.*

If you have questions regarding your completion of this form, please contact the Committee on Ethics at 202-225-7103.

# COMMITTEE ON ETHICS

## TRAVELER FORM

1. Name of Traveler: Jacob Vurpillat
2. Sponsor(s) who will be paying or providing in-kind support for the trip: The Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition (SEEC) Institute
3. City and State **OR** Foreign Country of Travel: Townsend, TN, Fotana & Ashville, NC, Smoky Mount Ntl. Park
4. a. Date of Departure: 06/16/2025 Date of Return: 06/19/2025  
b. Yes  No  Will you be extending the trip at your personal expense?  
If yes, list dates at personal expense: \_\_\_\_\_
5. a. Yes  No  Will you be accompanied by a family member at the sponsor's expense? **If yes:**  
(1) Name of Accompanying Family Member: \_\_\_\_\_  
(2) Relationship to Traveler:  Spouse  Child  Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_  
(3) Yes  No  Accompanying Family Member is at least 18 years of age?
6. a. Yes  No  Did the trip sponsor answer "Yes" to Question 8(c) on the *Primary Trip Sponsor Form* (i.e., travel is sponsored by an entity that employs a registered federal lobbyist or a foreign agent)?  
b. **If yes**, and you are requesting lodging for two nights, explain why the second night is warranted:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Yes  No  *Primary Trip Sponsor Form* is attached, including agenda, invitation, invitee list, and any other attachments and Additional Sponsor Forms.  
NOTE: The agenda should show the traveler's individual schedule, including departure and arrival times and identify the specific events in which the traveler will be participating.
8. Explain why participation in the trip is connected to the traveler's individual official or representational duties. **Staff should include their job title and how the activities on the itinerary relate to their duties.**  
As Senior Advisor to Rep. Casten, a member of the Financial Services Committee, I help Rep. Casten develop and discuss policies to address gaps in home insurance. On this trip, we will visit areas like Biltmore Village and Canton, NC, which have seen the devastating impacts of extreme flooding on homes that did not have flooding insurance. Further, as Communications Director, a key job duty of mine is assisting Rep. Casten in effectively advocating for climate action, his top legislative priority. This trip includes multiple stops on the impacts of climate change.
9. Yes  No  **Is the traveler aware of any registered federal lobbyists or foreign agents involved in planning, organizing, requesting, or arranging the trip?**
10. For staff travelers, to be completed by your employing Member:

### ADVANCED AUTHORIZATION OF EMPLOYEE TRAVEL

I hereby authorize the individual named above, an employee of the U.S. House of Representatives who works under my direct supervision, to accept expenses for the trip described in this request. I have determined that the above-described travel is in connection with my employee's official duties and that acceptance of these expenses will not create the appearance that the employee is using public office for private gain.

Signature of Employing Member:  Date: May 13, 2025

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# COMMITTEE ON ETHICS

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## PRIMARY TRIP SPONSOR FORM

This form should be completed by private entities offering to provide travel or reimbursement for travel to House Members, officers, or employees under House Rule 25, clause 5. A completed copy of the form (and any attachments) should be provided to each invited House Member, officer, or employee, who will then forward it to the Committee together with a *Traveler Form* **at least 30 days before the start date of the trip**. The trip sponsor should *NOT* submit the form directly to the Committee. The Committee's website (ethics.house.gov) provides detailed instructions for filling out the form. The Committee will notify the House invitees directly of its decision and will not notify the trip sponsors.

**NOTE: Willful or knowing misrepresentations on this form may be subject to criminal prosecution pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 1001. Failure to comply with the Committee's Travel Regulations may also lead to the denial of permission to sponsor future trips. Signatures must comply with section 104(bb) of the Travel Regulations.**

1. Sponsor who will be paying for the trip:

The Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition (SEEC) Institute

2.  I represent that the trip will not be financed, in whole or in part, by a registered federal lobbyist or foreign agent. *Signify that the statement is true by checking box.*

3. **Check only one.** I represent that:

- a.  The primary trip sponsor has not accepted from any other source, funds intended directly or indirectly to finance any aspect of the trip; **OR**
- b.  The trip is arranged without regard to congressional participation and the primary trip sponsor has accepted funds only from entities that will receive a tangible benefit in exchange for those funds; **OR**
- c.  The primary trip sponsor has accepted funds, services, or in-kind assistance from other source(s) intended directly or indirectly to finance all or part of this trip and has enclosed disclosure forms from each of those entities.

If "c" is checked, list the names of the additional sponsors: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Provide names and titles of **ALL** House Members *and* employees you are inviting. **For each House invitee, provide an explanation of why the individual was invited** (include additional pages if necessary): See additional pages

5. Yes  No  Is travel being offered to an accompanying family member of the House invitee(s)?

6. Date of Departure: 06/16/25 Date of Return: 06/19/25

7. a. City of departure: Washington, DC or Member's district

b. Destination(s): Townsend, TN, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Fontana and Asheville, NC

c. City of return: Washington, DC or Member's district

8. **Check only one.** I represent that

- a.  The sponsor of the trip is an institution of higher education within the meaning of section 101 of the Higher Education Act of 1965; **OR**
- b.  The sponsor of the trip does not retain or employ a registered federal lobbyist or foreign agent; **OR**
- c.  The sponsor employs or retains a registered federal lobbyist or foreign agent, but the trip is for attendance at a one-day event *and* lobbyist / foreign agent involvement in planning, organizing, requesting, or arranging the trip was *de minimis* under the Committee's travel regulations.

9. **Check only one of the following.**
- a.  I checked 8(a) or (b) above; **OR**
  - b.  I checked 8(c) above but am not offering any lodging; **OR**
  - c.  I checked 8(c) above and am offering lodging and meals for one night; **OR**
  - d.  I checked 8(c) above and am offering lodging and meals for two nights. If you checked this box, explain why the second night of lodging is warranted. \_\_\_\_\_
- 

10.  Attached is a detailed agenda of the activities House invitees will be participating in during the travel (i.e., an hourly description of planned activities for trip invitees). *Indicate agenda is attached by checking box.*

11. **Check only one of the following.**
- a.  I represent that a registered federal lobbyist or foreign agent will not accompany House Members or employees on any segment of the trip. *Signify the statement is true by clicking the box; OR*
  - b.  *Not Applicable.* Trip sponsor is a U.S. institution of higher education.
12. For **each** sponsor required to submit a sponsor form, describe the sponsor's interest in the subject matter of the trip **and** its role in organizing and/or conducting the trip:  
SEEC Institute is organizing this trip to strengthen Congressional climate leadership through informed, place-based learning and programming.
- 

13. **Answer parts a and b. Answer part c if necessary:**
- a. Mode of travel: Air  Rail  Bus  Car  Other  (specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
  - b. Class of travel: Coach  Business  First  Charter  Other  (specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
  - c. If travel will be first class, or by chartered or private aircraft, explain why such travel is warranted:  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- 

14.  I represent that the expenditures related to local area travel during the trip will be unrelated to personal or recreational activities of the invitee(s). *Signify that the statement is true by checking box.*

15. **Check only one.** I represent that either:
- a.  The trip involves an event that is arranged or organized *without regard* to congressional participation and that meals provided to congressional participants are similar to those provided to or purchased by other event attendees; **OR**
  - b.  The trip involves events that are arranged specifically *with regard* to congressional participation. If "b" is checked:
    - 1) Detail the cost *per day* of meals (approximate cost may be provided): Approximately \$63 a day, according to GSA per diem rates.
    - 2) Provide the reason for selecting the location of the event or trip: see attached
- 

16. Name, nightly cost, and reasons for selecting each hotel or other lodging facility:

Hotel Name:	<u>Dancing Bear Lodge</u>	City:	<u>Townsend, TN</u>	Cost Per Night:	<u>\$250</u>
Reason(s) for Selecting:	<u>See attached</u>				
Hotel Name:	<u>Fontana Village Resort</u>	City:	<u>Fontana Dam, NC</u>	Cost Per Night:	<u>\$250</u>
Reason(s) for Selecting:	<u>See attached</u>				
Hotel Name:	<u>Hotel Indigo</u>	City:	<u>Asheville, NC</u>	Cost Per Night:	<u>\$149</u>
Reason(s) for Selecting:	<u>See attached</u>				

17.  I represent that all expenses connected to the trip will be for actual costs incurred and not a per diem or lump sum payment. *Signify that the statement is true by checking the box.*

18. **Total Expenses for each Participant:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Actual Amounts <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good Faith Estimates	Total <b>Transportation</b> Expenses per Participant	Total <b>Lodging</b> Expenses per Participant	Total <b>Meal</b> Expenses per Participant
For each Member, Officer, or Employee	\$1200 (details attached) <sup>+</sup>	\$649.00	\$174 (details attached) <sup>+</sup>
For each Accompanying Family Member	N/A	N/A	N/A

	<b>Other</b> Expenses (dollar amount per item)	Identify Specific Nature of "Other" Expenses (e.g., taxi, parking, registration fee, etc.)
For each Member, Officer, or Employee	None expected	None expected
For each Accompanying Family Member	N/A	N/A

19. **Check only one:**

- a.  I certify that I am an officer of the organization listed below; **OR**
- b.  *Not Applicable.* Trip sponsor is an individual or a U.S. institution of higher education.

20. **I certify by my signature that**

- a. **I read and understand the Committee's Travel Regulations;**
- b. **I am not a registered federal lobbyist or registered foreign agent; and**
- c. **The information on this form is true, complete, and correct to the best of my knowledge.**

Signature: Max Frankel Digitally signed by Max Frankel  
Date: 2025.05.12 15:13:17 -04'00' Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Max Frankel Title: Executive Director

Organization: The Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition (SEEC) Institute

Address: 611 Pennsylvania Avenue SE, #150 Washington, DC 20003

Email: max@seecinstitute.org; pearson@seecinstitute.org Telephone: 828-384-3275

If there are questions regarding this form, please contact the Committee on Ethics at 202-225-7103 or [travel.requests@mail.house.gov](mailto:travel.requests@mail.house.gov).

Michael Guest, Mississippi  
*Chairman*  
Mark DeSaulnier, California  
*Ranking Member*

John H. Rutherford, Florida  
Andrew R. Garbarino, New York  
Ashley Hinson, Iowa  
Nathaniel Moran, Texas

Deborah K. Ross, North Carolina  
Glenn F. Ivey, Maryland  
Sylvia R. Garcia, Texas  
Suhas Subramanyam, Virginia



ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

**U.S. House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON ETHICS

Thomas A. Rust  
*Staff Director and Chief Counsel*

Jordan Downs  
*Chief of Staff to the Chairman*

David Arrojo  
*Counsel to the Ranking Member*

1015 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515-6328  
Telephone: (202) 225-7103  
<https://Ethics.House.gov>

June 10, 2025

Mr. Jacob Vurpillat  
Office of the Honorable Sean Casten  
2440 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Vurpillat:

Pursuant to House Rule 25, clause 5(d)(2), the Committee on Ethics hereby approves your proposed trip to Townsend, Tennessee, and Fontana Dam and Asheville, North Carolina, scheduled for June 16 to 19, 2025, sponsored by Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition (SEEC) Institute.

You must complete an Employee Post-Travel Disclosure Form (which your employing Member must also sign) and file it, together with a Sponsor Post-Travel Disclosure Form completed by the trip sponsor, with the Clerk of the House within 15 days after your return from travel. As part of that filing, you are also required to attach a copy of this letter and both the Traveler and Primary Trip Sponsor Forms (including attachments) you previously submitted to the Committee in seeking pre-approval for this trip. If you are required to file an annual Financial Disclosure Statement, you must also report all travel expenses totaling more than \$480 from a single source on the "Travel" schedule of your annual Financial Disclosure Statement covering this calendar year. Finally, Travel Regulation § 404(d) also requires you to keep a copy of all request forms and supporting information provided to the Committee for three subsequent Congresses from the date of travel.

If you have any further questions, please contact the Committee's Office of Advice and Education at extension 5-7103.

Sincerely,

Michael Guest  
Chairman

Mark DeSaulnier  
Ranking Member

MG/MD:nl

**SPONSOR POST-TRAVEL DISCLOSURE FORM ATTACHMENT  
SEEC INSTITUTE TRAVEL**

**4. Names of travelers**

Category	Name	Affiliation / Title
Staff	Allie Cavanagh	Policy Adviser, Office of Rep. Sarah Elfreth
Staff	Ana Unruh Cohen	Staff Director, House Natural Resources Committee
Staff	Jaelyn Evans	Legislative Aide, Office of Rep. Mike Quigley
Staff	Sheron Luk	Policy and Communications Advisor, U.S. House of Representatives SEEC
Staff	Jessica Merritt	Legislative Director, Office of Rep. George Latimer
Staff	David Schutt	Executive Director, U.S. House of Representatives SEEC
Staff	Melody Tan	Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Rep. Jennifer McClellan
Staff	Jasleen Vig	Legislative Assistant, Office of Rep. Ilhan Omar
Staff	Jacob Vurpillat	Senior Advisor and Communications Director, Office of Rep. Sean Casten

**Actual amount** of expenses paid on behalf of, or reimbursed to, each individual named in Question 4:

	Transport	Lodging	Meal	Other
Traveler	\$848.79 per person	Dancing Bear: \$293.13 Fontana Village: \$209 Indigo: \$168.37 Total lodging charges with tax and gratuity: \$670.50	\$223.00 including tax and tips	Guides hired to provide education across the programming in the absence of participation from the National Parks Service: \$117.11  Boat ride: \$28.57
Accompanying family member	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

**Final Agenda: SEEC Institute Congressional Delegation  
Great Smoky Mountains National Park**

**June 16**

**Arrival times**

<b><u>Group 1</u></b>	<b><u>Group 2</u></b>	<b><u>Group 3</u></b>	<b><u>Group 4</u></b>
Time: 10:46 AM Flight: DELTA 4983 People: 1	Time: 1:32 PM Flight: UA4887 People: 2	Time: 4:47 PM Flight: Allegiant 1398 People: 13	Time: 4:57 PM Flight: UA 5523 People: 3

**Upon arrival** | *Transit from Knoxville Airport to Dancing Bear Lodge.* Drop off bags and check in.

**6:40 PM** | *Transit to dinner*

**6:45 - 8:30 PM** | *Working Pizza Dinner at Peaceful Side Social* – Remarks by Todd Witcher, Discover Life in America and staff from the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont.

**June 17**

**7:00 - 8:00 AM** | *Dancing Bear Lodge* – Breakfast.

**7:55 AM** | *Meet in lobby of Dancing Bear Lodge*

**8:00 AM** | *Depart Dancing Bear Lodge* – Pickup by Smoky Rides with guides:

Jeff Hunter, National Parks Conservation Association

Phil Francis, Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks

Don Barger, retired expert previously of the National Parks Conservation Association

They provided context and insights during transportation and at each site visit throughout the day.

**9:00 – 10:30 AM** | *Look Rock, Foothills Parkway* – Hike and climate discussion on clean air. Megan Womack from Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont joined to talk about engaging youth, how climate and nature-based education plays a role.

**10:30 - 10:45 AM** | *Drive to Abrams Creek*

**10:45 – 12:35 PM** | *Abrams Creek and Chilhowee Lake, working lunch* – Presentation from Bo Baxter, Director & Senior Conservation Biologist, Conservation Fisheries and Todd Witcher, Discover Life in America. Learned how layered conservation efforts intersect, particularly in protecting freshwater habitats that are among the most biologically diverse in North America. Explored the ecological and conservation significance of the lake and its systems. Looked at habitat restoration efforts and the protection of threatened and endangered aquatic species. Continued the discussion over lunch.

**12:35 - 1:35 PM** | *Drive to Fontana Dam*

**1:35 – 3:00 PM** | *Staff and guides visited Fontana Dam and Visitors Center – Visited TVA Center & Appalachian Trail shelter, discussed water conditions & climate impacts.*

**2:00 – 3:00 PM** | *Members of Congress went to the Fontana Village hotel and attended a House of Representatives security briefing*

**3:00 - 5:00 PM** | *Fontana Lake – Boat ride and learnings on the region's environmental and cultural history.*

**5:00 - 6:00 PM** | *Check in at Fontana Village – Checked into the hotel and break before dinner.*

**6:00-7:30 PM** | *Working Dinner at Fontana Village – Working dinner, discussion with guides.*

### **June 18**

**7:00 - 8:00 AM** | *Fontana Village – Breakfast*

**8:00 AM** | Pickup by Smoky Rides with guides:

Jeff Hunter, National Parks Conservation Association  
Phil Francis, Coalition to Protect America's National Parks

They provided context and insights during transportation and at each site visit throughout the day.

**8:00 - 9:00 AM** | *Drive to Oconaluftee Visitors Center*

**9:00 – 10:40 AM** | *Oconaluftee Visitors Center – This stop offered insights into the park's partnerships with Tribal communities, current wildlife and resource management efforts, and the increasing impact of severe weather events on park infrastructure and nearby communities. Jeffrey Hunter and Phil Francis along with Jaqueline Harp, Smokies Life and Ann Sentz, Appalachian Trail Conservancy led educational discussion and short hike.*

**10:40 - 11:00 AM** | *Drive to Cherokee, NC*

**11:00 AM – 1:00 PM** | *Meeting and lunch with leaders from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Chief Joyce Dugan Cultural Arts Center in Cherokee, NC – This meeting offered Members and staff a unique opportunity to hear directly from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Tribal leaders hosted a discussion on climate resilience, land stewardship, partnerships with the National Parks Service, and the impacts of severe weather on their communities and cultural resources. Over lunch, the discussion focused on shared priorities for conservation, sustainable development, and the role of Indigenous leadership in shaping climate and regional policy.*

**1:00 - 2:00 PM** | *Drive to Canton - Members spoke to the Mayor of Canton, Zeb Smathers, for 25 minutes in the car during the ride.*

**2:00 - 3:15 PM** | *Visit central Canton, NC and meet with local leadership (Riverview Farm and Garden)* – In Canton, Members and staff will toured recently impacted by severe flooding and storm events, witnessing firsthand the toll of extreme weather on rural towns and infrastructure. Local leaders shared how the community is working to recover, adapt, and build resilience, providing valuable insight into the support needed from federal policy and programs. We spoke with the Mayor Pro Tem, the Governors Recovery Office for Western North Carolina, Haywood Waterways Association, and local business owners.

**3:15 - 3:45 PM** | *Drive to Biltmore Village*

**3:45 - 5:15 PM** | *Asheville: Biltmore Village* – This visit focused on the impacts of Tropical Storm Helene on Biltmore Village, a historic neighborhood in Asheville. Walking tour of flood-affected sites and engagement with community leaders to discuss recovery efforts, the role of federal support, and how climate resilience planning can better protect cultural landmarks and vulnerable communities. Group met with local Councilwoman Maggie Ullman, Buncombe County Commissioners Drew Ball and Parker Sloan, as well as business owners Tim Rosebrock (Biltmore Company), Ben Mitchell (Biltmore Property Group), and Vanessa Salomo (Corner Kitchen).

**5:15 - 5:30 PM** | *Drive to Hotel Indigo, Asheville*

**5:30 - 6:00 PM** | *Group check in at Hotel Indigo, Asheville*

**6:00 - 7:30 PM** | *Break*

**7:30 - 8:00 PM** | *Met in lobby and walked to dinner*

**8:00 - 9:30 PM** | *Working dinner with local leaders at Chestnut* – Members, staff, and regional partners had the opportunity to share takeaways from the day's visits and discuss the path forward for climate resilience, conservation, and community partnership. Councilwoman Maggie Ullman and Scott Elliott, Deputy Director of Governor's Recovery Office for Western North Carolina, as well as a local business owner joined to speak to these topics.

**9:30 PM** | *Return to Hotel Indigo, end of programming* – Overnight stay

## **June 19**

**Approx. 8:00 AM** | *Depart for airport*

**8:00 - 8:30 AM** | *Transit to airport*

**Approx. 10:30 AM** | *Flights departed*

**4. Provide names and titles of ALL House Members and employees you are inviting. For each House invitee, provide an explanation of why the individual was invited (include additional pages if necessary):**

We're bringing this delegation of climate-focused Members of Congress and staff to the Great Smoky Mountains to see how climate change is affecting national parks, public lands, and surrounding communities. By witnessing storm damage and engaging directly with local leaders, nature educators, land managers, and Tribal representatives, they gain firsthand insight to shape more effective and responsive climate and conservation policy - insight that can also inform broader policy making across areas like national security, education, and economic development.

Category	Name	Affiliation / Title
Member	Sean Casten	IL-6
Member	Maxine Dexter	OR-3
Member	Jared Huffman	CA-2
Member	Mike Quigley	IL-5
Member	Nikema Williams	GA-5
Staff	Serena Baserman	Legislative Assistant, Office of Rep. Pramila Jayapal
Staff	Allie Cavanagh	Policy Adviser, Office of Rep. Sarah Elfreth
Staff	Ana Unruh Cohen	Staff Director, House Natural Resources Committee
Staff	Jaelyn Evans	Legislative Aide, Office of Rep. Mike Quigley
Staff	Sheron Luk	Policy and Communications Advisor, U.S. House of Representatives SEEC
Staff	Jeremy Marcus	Chief of Staff, Office of Rep. Doris Matsui
Staff	Jessica Merritt	Legislative Director, Office of Rep. George Latimer
Staff	Victoria Oms	Communications Director, Office of Rep. Mike Quigley
Staff	David Schutt	Executive Director, U.S. House of Representatives SEEC
Staff	Melody Tan	Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Rep. Jennifer McClellan
Staff	Jasleen Vig	Legislative Assistant, Office of Rep. Ilhan Omar
Staff	Jacob Vurpillat	Senior Advisor and Communications Director, Office of Rep. Sean Casten

## 10. Agenda

Date	Time	Location	Activity / Notes
<b>June 16</b>	Various arrival times in afternoon	Transit from Knoxville Airport to Dancing Bear Lodge	Arrival and shuttle(s) to hotel (schedule TBD based on flight times)
	Upon arrival	Dancing Bear Lodge	Hotel check-in
	6:00 - 7:30 PM	Working Dinner at Peaceful Side Social	Remarks by Todd Witcher, Discover Life in America, focused on connecting communities and scientists in discovering, understanding, and conserving the natural world.
<b>June 17</b>	8:00 AM	Depart Dancing Bear Lodge	Pickup by Smoky Rides with guides Jeffrey Hunter and Phil Francis of the National Parks Conservation Association, who will provide context and insights during transportation and at each site visit throughout the day.
	9:00 – 10:30 AM	Look Rock, Foothills Parkway	Hike and climate discussion on clean air.
	10:30 - 10:45 AM	Drive to Abrams Creek	
	10:45 – 11:30 AM	Abrams Creek	Lunch and presentation from Bo Baxter, Director & Senior Conservation Biologist, Conservation Fisheries. Learn how layered conservation efforts intersect, particularly in protecting freshwater habitats that are among the most biologically diverse in North America.
	11:30 - 11:50 AM	Drive to Chilhowee Lake	
	11:50 – 12:35 PM	Chilhowee Lake	Explore the ecological and conservation significance of the lake and its systems. Look at habitat restoration efforts and the protection of threatened and endangered aquatic species.
	12:35 - 1:35 PM	Drive to Fontana Dam	
	1:35 – 2:35 PM	Fontana Dam Visitors Center	Visit TVA Center & Appalachian Trail shelter, discuss water conditions & climate impacts.
	2:35 - 2:45 PM	Drive to Fontana Lake	Drive to Fontana Lake
	2:45 - 4:45 PM	Fontana Lake	Boat ride and learnings on the region's environmental and cultural history, highlighting the intersection of hydropower, conservation, and displacement. Learn how large-scale

			infrastructure like Fontana Dam shaped local communities, ecosystems, and public lands.
	4:45 - 5:30 PM	Check in at Fontana Village	Check into the hotel and prepare for dinner.
	5:30-7:30 PM	Discussion and Working Dinner at Fontana Village	Discussion with National Parks Conservation Association guides about the day's learnings. Working dinner during this conversation and to discuss the next day's agenda.
<b>June 18</b>	7:00 - 8:00 AM	Fontana Village	Grab-and-go breakfast and coffee
	8:00 - 9:45 AM	Depart and drive to Newfound Gap	Pickup by Smoky Rides with guides Jeffrey Hunter and Phil Francis of the National Parks Conservation Association, who will provide context and insights during transportation and at each site visit throughout the day.  Learn on the drive how climate change is altering species ranges, forest health, and weather patterns across elevation zones.
	9:45 – 10:00 AM	Newfound Gap	Visit high-elevation mountain pass, view site where President FDR dedicated the park in 1940, giving historical context on the legacy and future of America's public lands.
	10:00 - 10:25 AM	Drive to Oconaluftee Visitors Center	
	10:25 – 10:45 AM	Oconaluftee Visitors Center	This brief stop will offer insights into the park's partnerships with Tribal communities, current wildlife and resource management efforts, and the increasing impact of severe weather events on park infrastructure and nearby communities.
	10:45 - 11:00 AM	Drive to Cherokee, NC	
	11:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Cherokee, NC	This meeting offers Members and staff a unique opportunity to hear directly from Tribal leaders about climate resilience, land stewardship, and the impacts of severe weather on their communities and

			cultural resources. Over lunch, the discussion will focus on shared priorities for conservation, sustainable development, and the role of Indigenous leadership in shaping climate policy.
	1:00 - 2:00 PM	Drive to Canton	
	2:00 - 3:00 PM	Visit Canton, NC and meet with local leadership	In Canton, Members and staff will tour areas recently impacted by severe flooding and storm events, witnessing firsthand the toll of extreme weather on rural towns and infrastructure. Local leaders will share how the community is working to recover, adapt, and build resilience providing valuable insight into the support needed from federal policy and programs.
	3:00 - 3:45 PM	Drive to North Fork Reservoir	
	3:45 - 4:45 PM	North Fork Reservoir	The North Fork Reservoir and Water Treatment Plant serve as the City's primary drinking water source, providing 70% of Asheville's water. Learn about the impacts of Tropical Storm Helene on the water system and the current work being done on mitigation for future weather events.
	4:45 - 5:15 PM	Drive to Biltmore Village	
	5:15 - 6:30 PM	Asheville: Biltmore Village	This visit will focus on the impacts of Tropical Storm Helene on Biltmore Village, a historic neighborhood in Asheville. Tour flood-affected sites and engage with community leaders to discuss recovery efforts, the role of federal support, and how climate resilience planning can better protect cultural landmarks and vulnerable communities.
	6:30 - 7:00 PM	Drive or walk to dinner	
	7:00 - 8:30 PM	Working dinner with local leaders at The Radical Asheville or other local restaurant ( <i>restaurant TBD</i> )	Members, staff, and regional partners will have the opportunity to share takeaways from the day's visits and discuss the path forward for climate resilience,

			conservation, and community partnership.
	8:30 PM	Check in at Hotel Indigo, Asheville	Overnight stay
<b>June 19</b>			
	Morning, various times depending on flights	Depart for airport, end of programming	

**15. b. The trip involves events that are arranged specifically with regard to congressional participation. If “b” is checked: 2) Provide the reason for selecting the location of the event or trip:** The Smoky Mountains National Park and surrounding region are a climate hotspot, home to some of the nation’s richest biodiversity, most visited public lands, and communities increasingly affected by extreme weather. The area offers policymakers a powerful lens into the intersection of conservation, climate resilience, and both rural and urban livelihoods.

**16. Name, nightly cost, and reasons for selecting each hotel or other lodging facility:**

**Hotel Name:** Dancing Bear Lodge

**City:** Townsend, TN

**Cost per Night:** \$250 (includes breakfast) / person

**Reason for Selecting:** Located in a rural area with limited lodging options, Dancing Bear Lodge offers a secure and clean environment. Its proximity to our programming sites provides an ideal starting point for the morning, ensuring we can complete the day’s programming efficiently.

**Hotel Name:** Fontana Village Resort

**City:** Fontana Dam, NC

**Cost per Night:** \$250 / person

**Reason for Selecting:** Fontana Village is one of the only lodging options near key program sites in and around the park. Located near Fontana Dam, our final stop of the day, it offers a convenient overnight stay that minimizes travel, offers food options, is secure, and sets us up efficiently for the next day’s departure and activities.

**Hotel Name:** Hotel Indigo

**City:** Asheville, NC

**Cost per Night:** \$149 / person

**Reason for Selecting:** Centrally located in downtown Asheville, Hotel Indigo offers convenient access for evening arrivals and next-day departures. Its walkability, reliability, and proximity to dining options make it a practical and comfortable choice for the final night of the trip. During this high season for Asheville which books up quickly, it was a reliable, clean, and cost effective location.

## 18. Total Expenses

<i>Good faith estimates</i>	Total Transportation Expenses per Participant	Total Lodging Expenses per Participant	Total Meal Expenses per Participant
Each member, officer, or employee	<p>Flight costs will vary, as members will depart from various cities across the country. We are flying into Knoxville and out of Asheville.</p> <p>Good faith estimate for total flight and local transportation per participant: \$1200</p>	\$649.00	<p>Approximate per participant food cost estimate using GSA per diem benchmarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dinner on first night: \$28</li> <li>• Two full days: \$63 × 2 = \$126</li> <li>• Breakfast on departure day: \$20</li> </ul> <p>Total Estimated Per Participant Cost: \$174</p>
Each accompanying family member	SEEC Institute will not pay expenses for accompanying family members	SEEC Institute will not pay expenses for accompanying family members	SEEC Institute will not pay expenses for accompanying family members

<i>Good faith estimates</i>	Other Expenses	Nature of expenses
Each member, officer, or employee	None expected	N/A
Each accompanying family member	SEEC Institute will not pay expenses for accompanying family members	N/A



**To:** Members of Congress and staff  
**From:** Max Frankel, Executive Director

**Date:** May 2025  
**Re:** SEEC Institute Great Smoky Mountains  
National Park Delegation

Good afternoon,

On behalf of SEEC Institute, I am pleased to invite you to join a congressional delegation to the Great Smoky Mountains from June 16–19, 2025. This will be a fact-finding trip to explore the climate impacts, conservation challenges, and resilience strategies shaping one of America’s most iconic national parks and its surrounding communities.

The trip will provide a firsthand look at how climate change is affecting public lands, freshwater ecosystems, rural economies, and communities in the region. Through site visits, discussions with scientists and park experts, Tribal leaders, conservation experts, and engagement with community stakeholders, you will gain valuable insights into how federal policy can support local adaptation, biodiversity protection, and equitable climate resilience.

Your leadership is critical to advancing climate solutions that safeguard our natural heritage and strengthen communities. This delegation offers an opportunity to engage directly with those on the frontlines of environmental stewardship and bring back lessons that can inform policy making in Washington.

We hope you will join us for this important and informative visit.

Warm regards,

**Max Frankel**  
**Executive Director**  
**SEEC Institute**

**Contact:** Pearson Croney-Clark, Director of External Affairs, [pearson@seecinstitute.org](mailto:pearson@seecinstitute.org)