

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC

April 23, 2020

The Honorable Steven T. Mnuchin
Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20220

Secretary Mnuchin,

As the ongoing COVID-19 crisis continues to claim lives and cause economic disruption and uncertainty, it is vital that the government take whatever reasonable steps possible to allay unforeseen burdens on American families and businesses. In that spirit, we urge you to extend the continuity safe harbor, provided under existing Treasury Department guidance, for both the production tax credit (PTC) and energy investment tax credit (ITC), from four years to five years for projects that started construction in 2016 or 2017. This modest adjustment to the PTC and ITC guidance would help preserve tens of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in investments and provide some certainty in these challenging times.

Under current law, taxpayers seeking to claim a PTC for electricity produced from qualifying facilities or an ITC for qualifying energy property must generally begin construction of the qualifying facility or property by specified dates.¹ Under current Internal Revenue Service (IRS) guidance, a taxpayer is treated as having begun construction by starting physical work of a significant nature or, alternatively, by satisfying safe harbor requirements by incurring 5 percent or more of the total cost of the facility or property.² The taxpayer must then demonstrate continuous efforts to complete construction and can be deemed to satisfy this requirement if the facility or property is placed in service within four years (“continuity safe harbor”).³ These safe harbors provide certainty and flexibility to taxpayers, and prevent costly and unnecessary disputes over the various facts and circumstances related to the financing, permitting, and construction of energy facilities.

In addition to its severe toll on human lives, the COVID-19 crisis has disrupted supply chains, construction operations, and permitting timelines, delaying projects otherwise on track to be in operation by the end of 2020. While existing IRS guidance provides certain exceptions for specified setbacks in construction, these exceptions do not anticipate nor fully capture the wide-ranging interruptions now faced by developers. Providing a temporary extension of the continuity safe harbor of five years, in lieu of the current four, would address the unforeseen interruptions developers are experiencing due to COVID-19 and provide the certainty businesses need to move forward with existing projects.

¹ See, e.g., IRC § 45(b)(5), § 45(d), § 48(a)(2)-(7), and § 48(c).

² IRS Notice 2013-29, 2018-59.

³ IRS Notice 2016-31, 2018-59.

As Congress and the Administration continue to work to provide relief and assistance to Americans grappling with fallout of COVID-19, this simple modification would provide significant benefits to an important and growing sector of the American economy.

We appreciate your time and attention to this important matter and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,


Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator


Ron Wyden
United States Senator


John Thune
United States Senator


Maria Cantwell
United States Senator


Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator


Joe Manchin III
United States Senator