



House Committee on Natural Resource Hearing on H.R. 5986 – Environmental Justice for All Act

Testimony for Derrick Hollie, President Reaching America

October 1, 2020

Greetings Chairman Grijalva,

Ranking Member Bishop and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak.

I'm Derrick Hollie president of Reaching America, an education and policy organization I developed to address complex social issues impacting African American communities. This is my third time before this Committee and Chairman as you know one of the issues, I do the most work on is reducing energy poverty. Energy Poverty exists when low income families or individuals spend up to thirty percent of their total income on their electric bill. I believe it would be a fair to say many Americans who struggled with rising energy cost before COVID 19 are struggling even more now. And with millions still out of work, many are experiencing energy poverty for the first time.

We know that communities around the country, particularly low-income, minority, rural, and senior citizen communities, suffer from a lack of access to reliable energy sources and spend proportionately much higher amounts of their income on electricity costs and when this happens the result is energy poverty.

Eliminating energy poverty is a goal we all are interested in achieving. But in working towards that goal, we need to be mindful of how policies will impact the communities we are trying to serve.

When the government creates policy, its first priority should be the welfare of the people, especially those impacted the hardest. And with the uncertainty that comes with this virus, it would not be prudent to eliminate safe reliable energy sources like oil and natural gas for unproven and unreliable renewable sources – certainly not right now.

Chairman Grijalva's bill may attempt to bring environmental justice to historically under-served or vulnerable communities – and I get that, but purposefully shutting down the oil and gas industry in the United States is not the way to do it – higher electricity prices and diminished access to affordable energy sources are the last things these communities need. Renewable energy mandates, and natural gas bans like those enacted in California, for new buildings, for example, would make access to affordable housing even more challenging than it already is. An article published this month by NBC

Channel 4 Los Angeles, regarding affordable housing that was to be built by taxpayer dollars are now costing the city over \$530,00, and as high as \$746,000, per unit due to regulations.¹

If we want to help eliminate energy poverty, we should be making federal energy projects easier to build, not more difficult. Chairman's bill would tie federal projects up so tight in red tape, low-cost sources of energy like natural gas would never make it to the communities that his bill attempts to help.

A bill introduced just this morning by Congressman Hern is a step in the right direction, by trying to determine what kinds of policies are actually helpful for communities suffering from energy poverty, which policies are hurtful, and directing federal agencies and Congress to help come up with real, workable solutions that will help improve people's lives. My grandfather was a black coal miner in Southwest Virginia, and I worked as a brakeman for Norfolk Southern loading ships that transported coal around the world. I believe in our Americas energy and we all should. Why you ask? Currently the United States is number one in the world in exporting oil and natural gas. How can our natural resources be worthy enough for the rest of the world but not good enough for us here at home?

We need to find ways that will actually help vulnerable communities and not just say we're helping. Americans are struggling right now due to COVID and imposing more regulations and shutting down the oil and gas industry does not make sense. The industry employs many of the same people in those communities your bill claims to help Chairman and eliminating their jobs and way of life is not helping them.

One example of a project that could have benefitted an environmental justice community - was cancelled due to an onslaught of litigation and mis leading information is the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. The ACP proposed to transport cheap, clean-burning, American produced natural gas across West Virginia, Virginia, and North Carolina, creating about 17,000 **well-paying, union jobs** and \$2.7 billion worth of economic activity in the process.

The project was also expected to generate about \$4.2 million in local tax revenue EVERY year to communities along the pipeline route. One of those communities is Union Hill, Virginia in Buckingham County, which was treated as an environmental justice community in the process. However, the result was a devastating loss for Buckingham County and the surrounding areas. The pipeline proposal called for a compressor station built in this county so the pipeline could connect to the ALREADY existing Transco pipeline, which runs through county. Besides the jobs and revenue, there was much more the community would have benefitted from. The project sponsors went in and worked with the local community and leaders and offered 5 million dollars towards projects that included a new recreation center, new health clinic and a fully funded year-round fire station.

I attended several hearings for the ACP including the initial hearing in Buckingham County. There were about 250 people in attendance that included maybe 8 or 9 black people including myself. During hearing the term "environmental racism" kept being used repeatedly -- only by white people who were claiming to help the black people of that community.

¹ <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/investigations/las-homeless-housing-now-costs-more-than-some-luxury-condos/2425373/?amp>

I understand the need and the want from some to shift towards renewable energy however given the current global situation and the unknowns – the shift must be done sensibly and gradually.

Thank you, I yield back and look forward to taking your questions.