

**STATEMENT  
OF  
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**BEFORE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES DEMOCRATS  
ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ENTITLED:  
“CLIMATE JUSTICE: COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES AND WHERE WE GO FROM HERE”**

**JULY 29, 2024**

Good afternoon Representative Stansbury and members of the committee. Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today about climate justice. I want to celebrate the progress we've made and discuss the work ahead. I also want to highlight the risks from flawed policies that would undermine this progress.

The Biden-Harris administration and environmental champions in Congress have taken bold action to put us on a pathway to combating climate change and advancing environmental justice with historic investments. And it's not just the largest climate investment in U.S. history. They've enacted more programs and authorized more resources and policies to confront climate change than any other nation at any other time in the history of the world. In 2021, President Biden signed the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs act into law, containing \$1.2 trillion in total spending over five years, with \$550 billion dedicated to new investments and programs across various sectors. The following year, Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act to address climate change, lower healthcare costs, and improve economic fairness, directing approximately \$369 billion towards new investments in energy and climate change initiatives, and an unprecedented \$60 billion in new investments toward environmental justice initiatives. The Biden-Harris Administration has taken swift action to implement this important law

Beyond these significant investments, the administration is infusing climate and environmental justice considerations into agency actions and engaging communities most-impacted by pollution, environmental degradation, and climate change. Collectively, these steps represent bold progress to confront environmental injustice, save countless lives and ensure that no community is left behind or sacrificed in our energy transition.

I am of course, greatly heartened by the fact that by crafting agency environmental justice strategic plans, and Presidential executive orders, agencies are now charged with incorporating cumulative pollution impacts into agency action. Moreover, guidance and rulemakings to consider environmental justice through the National Environmental Policy Act have been finalized to further cement these considerations in law.

It cannot be denied that this administration has followed the template of addressing environmental injustice that was set by this committee's Ranking Member, Raúl Grijalva through the historic A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice For All Act – a consequential bill that Vice President Harris also originally introduced during her Senate tenure.

Sadly, this progress is under attack by climate deniers and their allies in Congress. While the Biden-Harris administration is using executive authorities to confront environmental injustice and invest in communities, a new administration that is hostile to addressing environmental injustice could undo that progress. The pursuit of environmental justice can't simply rely on who controls the executive branch. Communities need durable policy change that has the force of law – they need the passage of the EJ For All Act. They need tools for public input and community empowerment that are central to that legislation.

We know that when communities are included in decisions that impact them and when agencies make those decisions through a transparent, participatory approach with robust public input it leads to better outcomes, faster review times, and less litigation. All of these features of good environmental decision-making are in the EJ For All Act. It envisions a future where communities are protected from cumulative pollution impacts; where

communities have a say in how to transition from fossil-dependent to clean energy economies and are provided the resources to accomplish their own community's vision for a just transition. It's a future where no community is discriminated against through disproportionate adverse environmental impacts and where all communities benefit from equal protection under our environmental laws. That is one future.

Unfortunately, powerful polluting industries and their congressional allies are pushing for another future. One where communities are further stripped of their ability to comment on agency decisions through arbitrary and unreasonably short comment periods, limited access to life-saving information, and denied the right to seek redress in the courts. All to increase polluter profits.

I'm not speaking in the abstract. It's happening now. Just this week, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee will vote on the Energy Permitting Reform Act of 2024, a bill from Senators Barrasso and Manchin covered in the dirty fingerprints of polluting industries. Among other things, it greenlights a dangerous buildout of fossil fuel infrastructure that will further exacerbate harm in communities already reeling from the worst impacts of climate change and pollution. This is unacceptable. And without strong pushback, it could become the new status quo.

Which future we choose, which path we take will largely hinge on the decisions that you make as leaders and representatives in Congress. I urge you to choose the path of climate and environmental justice.