

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “The CLEAN Future Act and Environmental Justice: Protecting Frontline Communities”

April 15, 2021

Today we continue this Committee’s important work on environmental justice, examining 11 bills that address the pressing needs of environmental justice communities.

For far too long, low-income communities and communities of color have borne the brunt of air pollution, exposure to contaminated sites, and unsafe water. Environmental injustice can be attributed to many things, from intentionally racist policies like red-lining that lead to vulnerable communities being excluded from siting and permitting decisions, to unequal investment in these communities. Climate change and deteriorating infrastructure are exacerbating these problems and this inequality.

It’s time for Congress to act. We must address the overlapping crises facing our nation, including inequality, climate change, and the economic downturn caused by this pandemic. As President Biden has said, we need to build back better, and that means building back cleaner, healthier, and with greater equity. I believe the 11 bills before us today can help us do that.

One of the bills is H.R. 1512, the CLEAN Future Act, which I introduced last month with Chairmen Tonko and Rush, and several other Committee members. The CLEAN Future Act is a comprehensive and ambitious plan to combat the climate crisis and achieve net zero greenhouse gas pollution by no later than 2050. Environmental justice is a key component of the CLEAN Future Act, and must be a focus of our efforts to address climate change and infrastructure.

Many of the environmental justice provisions in the CLEAN Future Act are reflected in President Biden’s American Jobs Plan. Both proposals prioritize investments for environmental justice communities and commit 40 percent of investments to directly benefit those communities. Both proposals seek to clean up the sectors of our economy, like ports, that not only increase the amount of carbon in the atmosphere, but also add to the amount of hazardous air pollutants concentrated in environmental justice communities. And both policy proposals make long-overdue investments in cleaning up Superfund sites, replacing lead service lines, and updating the energy grid.

Other bills we will hear about today focus on important environmental justice topics including climate justice, port climate readiness, cumulative impacts assessment, and the tools available to identify environmental justice communities. Many of these bills align with the American Jobs Plan and can help us make that plan a reality.

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I want to thank my colleagues for their engagement and help in refining and expanding the environmental justice provisions of the CLEAN Future Act. I also commend them for their leadership on the other bills we are discussing today. These bills reflect thoughtful stakeholder engagement with communities of color and low-income communities, and I am proud to continue that engagement with today's hearing.

I also want to thank our witnesses, who are leaders and experts in environmental justice communities. We are fortunate to have this panel with us today, and I hope we can have a constructive dialogue and work with these stakeholders to enact needed change.

Environmental justice can and should be a bipartisan issue. Many of us were excited to pass environmental justice provisions out of the House as part of last year's energy bill, and were disappointed we could not find the bipartisan support we needed to get those provisions enacted. I hope we can start to find common ground and build that support.

Building back better will require bold action, and a focus on the communities most in need. The bills before us are a great start. I thank the Chair for calling this important hearing, and I look forward to working together to see environmental justice provisions enacted into law.