

Statement of Donna Jackson, National Advisory Council, Project 21
Before the House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife
Hearing on “Environmental Justice for Coastal Communities: Examining
Inequities in Federal Grantmaking”
October 15, 2020

Chairman Huffman, Ranking member McClintock, thank you for inviting me to testify on environmental justice and federal grantmaking issues. My name is Donna Jackson and I am a member of the National Advisory Council for Project 21, America’s oldest black conservative organization. The views I express on this subject are my own and not necessarily those of Project 21.

There are far too many people who try to make environmental justice into a one-sided issue. They focus only on claims that disadvantaged and minority communities are disproportionate victims of environmental threats such as water pollution, air pollution, climate change, and others. But I think the greater threat comes from the disproportionate impacts of environmental *policies* and the damage they do to the economic aspirations of those who can least afford them.

Most of us participating in this hearing today are in a comfortable economic position. Environmental laws and regulations that may raise our electric or water bills ten or twenty percent or add another fifty cents to the price of a gallon of gasoline aren’t going to change our lives very much if at all. We can afford to be complacent about the costs of environmental policies. But for those struggling to make ends meet the economic impacts can be devastating. According to a recent survey by the Energy Information Administration, one in three households face difficulties paying for their energy needs, and one in five report having to forego necessities such as food and medicine to pay an energy bill. The numbers are nearly double for Black

households, and just as staggering for Latino households. And yet proposed environmental measures like the Green New Deal would further raise energy costs – worsening energy poverty and leading to even tougher sacrifices.

In addition, most of us participating in this hearing have comfortable white collar jobs. We can afford to be indifferent to the impacts of environmental policies that may block a new factory or new natural gas pipeline or new oil well or new mine, and we may not even think about the jobs these projects would have created. But for those at the lower rungs of the economic ladder and who don't have the benefit of a college degree, these high-wage blue collar jobs are literally the ticket to a better life for themselves and their families. In addition, other minorities who seek to climb the economic ladder through small business ownership, as pointed out in Project 21's "Blueprint for a Better Deal for Black America," are disproportionately burdened by regulatory costs – including environmental regulations.

The same is true for affordable housing. Environmental laws and regulations can serve to kill new housing projects and raise the cost of existing housing. California is probably the worst state when it comes to affordable housing, due in part to its costly environmental measures. And once again, the environmental justice movement is part of the problem, not part of the solution.

I can tell you that most Black families don't want handouts. We have more ambition than to just get by a little more comfortably. We want upward mobility. We want opportunities that give us economic independence. We want home ownership, not subsidized rents. The American dream is alive and well in the hearts of minority and low-income families, and we need to make certain that policymakers don't stand in their way.

And that is the perspective from which I look at the question of environmental grants. If the purpose of these grants is to pursue policies that serve to raise the cost of living on those who

can least afford it, or to stifle the creation of good-paying jobs for those who most need them, then minority communities are better off without the money. The only winners seem to be environmental activists, bureaucrats, and lawyers – not the communities these people claim to serve.

In conclusion, I was a supporter of President Clinton's welfare reform efforts many years ago. He and others realized that these poorly designed programs were hurting the very people they were supposed to help. I think the environmental justice movement is at a similar crossroads. It is time to end environment justice as we know it. Thank you.