



**House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Roundtable on the Costs of Energy
January 10, 2023**

Remarks of Donna Jackson, Director of Membership Development, Project 21

I would like to thank the members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee for inviting me today. My name is Donna Jackson, and I am the Director of Membership Development for Project 21. Project 21 is one of the oldest and largest Black conservative think tanks in the country. Our hundreds of members come from all walks of life, from police officers to small business owners to teachers to energy industry workers to clergy to health care workers - both professionals and non-professionals. We are in the business of looking for and promoting better solutions to the challenges faced by the Black community and America in general. And energy affordability is definitely one of those challenges.

I applaud this Committee for kicking off the new session of Congress by looking at energy costs. Needless to say, these costs are tough enough on the middle class, but they are even harder on those still struggling to reach the middle class. In fact, it may be worse than you think.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration has some very useful statistics on the problem. For example, it found that nearly one-third of households struggle to pay their energy bills, and that one in five reports having to reduce or forego necessities like food or medicine in order to pay an energy bill. And of course, these numbers are nearly double for low-income and

minority households. Also note that this study is several years old and does not reflect the much higher energy prices we have experienced during the Biden Administration.

But perhaps even more damaging than the immediate economic impact of sky-high electric and natural gas bills and expensive fill-ups at the gas pump are the barriers it creates to upward mobility. In so many ways, plentiful and affordable domestic energy is part of the ticket out of poverty and dependence. For example, we see the entrepreneurial spirit of the Black community in many Black-owned small businesses, but those businesses struggle and sometimes fail under the weight of expensive energy. Unaffordable energy also means less of the industrial employment that has historically led to the emergence of a vibrant black middle class. Without these high paying blue-collar gateway jobs, low-income and minority communities have fewer options to earn what is needed for home ownership and decreasing the wealth gap. In addition, the energy industry itself is a source of many good paying jobs, and in fact Bobby Rush and others on this Committee helped enact job training programs so that more minorities could take advantage of the opportunities created by the shale revolution. But none of this can happen with a President who has promised to kill off the American oil and gas sector. And perhaps most importantly, every extra penny struggling households have to spend on expensive energy is a penny we can't save for home ownership or our children's education or other things that can help lift up the next generation.

Let me conclude by telling you what the Black community does not want – and that's climate change policies and environmental justice initiatives that take us in exactly the wrong direction by raising energy costs and stifling our pursuit of the American dream. I believe that energy affordability should always come first, and that's a message the Black community wants to hear from Congress. Thank you.