

TESTIMONY
CONGRESSMAN ADRIANO ESPAILLAT (NY-13)
HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS
NOVEMBER 13, 2019

Thank you for accepting our testimony, today, Madam Chair.

Mitigating and adapting to climate change is the issue of our time. It is an existential problem, one that we have waited much too long to take seriously, and we are already paying the price for that. And it is frontline communities, communities of color, indigenous communities, women, children, migrants, people with disabilities, and other marginalized communities who bear the greatest burden, though they contribute the least to the causes of climate change. A recent study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America makes this incredibly clear. It finds that Black and Hispanic individuals in the United States on average bear a “pollution burden” of 56 percent and 63 percent excess exposure, respectively, relative to the exposure caused by their consumption¹. But I don’t need to statistics to know that air pollution in Washington Heights makes my grandson’s asthma worse, and that it is not my neighbors in Washington Heights, Harlem, Inwood or the Bronx that are the greatest contributors to pollution that affects our health or contributes to climate change.

When the House passed the Climate Action Now Act earlier this year, it included an amendment of mine that simply stated that climate justice and environmental justice must be included in our efforts to meet the Paris Agreement and mitigate and adapt to climate change. This must be a core tenet of all our policies to address climate change. Every law we pass, every action to mitigate and adapt to climate change must include acknowledgement of and protections for marginalized and frontline communities who bear the burden climate change. My predecessor, the great Adam Clayton Powell Jr., one of the great Civil Rights leaders, led his Powell Amendments to ensure federal funding did not support segregation. Environmental justice is my Powell Amendment, and I want to work with you to ensure that in every bill this House considers, environmental justice is upheld.

We need serious investments to mitigate and adapt to climate change. But it will cost us more in the long-term if we do not act now, financially and existentially. By the time a child born today retires, 2085, the U.S. will be spending \$300 billion each year on climate resiliency. The to invest is now. In fact, the time to invest was two decades ago, but here we are. We need serious investment in our infrastructure and our transportation systems. We need to invest in green roof technology and innovative urban agriculture to address not just the carbon emissions of the agricultural field, but to also address the intersectional issues of food security and climate change.

I want to also recognize that climate change does not just require domestic commitments. Climate change is an international problem that requires international solutions. That is why I have introduced H.R. 4986, the Green Climate Fund Authorization Act of 2019, which now has 10 cosponsors and counting, in response to the Trump Administration formally announcing U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement last week. The Green Climate Fund is an independent, multilateral fund established by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to help developing countries limit or reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. Developing counties have limited capacity to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, and through the Green Climate Fund the U.S. can contribute our fair share enable mitigation and adaptation activities that uphold environmental justice around the globe. Because it is these exact nations that are also on the frontline of climate change, though they too contribute the least to its causes.

¹ Inequity in Consumption Of Goods and Services Adds To Racial–Ethnic Disparities in Air Pollution Exposure
Christopher Tessum-Joshua Apte-Andrew Goodkind-Nicholas Muller-Kimberley Mullins-David Paoletta-Stephen Polasky-Nathaniel Springer-Sumil Thakrar-Julian Marshall-Jason Hill - <https://www.pnas.org/content/116/13/6001>