



February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020

The Select Committee On The Climate Crisis

Longworth House Office Building

15 Independence Ave SE, Washington DC 20515

Greetings Chair Castor,

Ranking Member Graves and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak.

I'm Derrick Hollie, president of Reaching America, an education and policy organization I developed to address complex social issues impacting African American communities. One of the issues Reaching America does the most work on is reducing energy poverty across the board.

Energy Poverty exists when low income families or individuals spend up to thirty percent of their total income on their electric bill. And when this happens, it puts people in a difficult situation and having to make tough choices like, do I eat today or pay the electric bill? Do I get this prescription filled or do I put gas in my car? We all know someone who faces these tough choices every month.

For members of minority, rural, low income and senior citizen communities, Energy Poverty is a reality. And unfortunately, members of our community don't have the luxury to pay more for green technologies and adequate health care. We need access to affordable energy to help heat our homes, power our stoves and get back and forth to work each day.

Through Reaching America I've had the opportunity to speak with thousands of African Americans in several states who question the rising cost of energy along with fees and subsidies they don't benefit from and how they struggle to keep up.

My passion for energy is deeply rooted, after graduating from college I worked as brakeman for Norfolk Southern Railways at Lambert's Point in Norfolk, Virginia. Our job

and responsibilities was loading coal ships that transported coal all around the world and I constantly ask the question, “If our coal and natural resources are good enough for other countries – why is not good enough for us here at home. My grandfather was also a black coal miner in Southwest VA. It’s safe to say if it weren’t for the energy industry, I wouldn’t be here to speak with all of you today.

When the government creates policy, its first priority should be the welfare of the people, especially those impacted the hardest, rather than big businesses and special interests looking for a handout. And if people can’t afford to stay warm, they certainly can’t afford healthcare especially those on a fixed income.

And here’s a real-life example. Last week my eighty-four-year-old mother-in-law on a fixed income was at our house. She was complaining about a \$150 deductible on a prescription that needed to be filled. In addition to her electric bill that includes renewable mandates – a subsidy that she is required to pay and will never benefit from it right here in the District of Columbia. My mother-in-law has three daughters that help her. However, millions of Americans don’t have that benefit and are forced to try and balance paying for healthcare and energy. And most have to choose between one or the other.

A new study out of Northwestern University confirms that increases in electricity and natural gas prices lead to more winter deaths. The effects were even larger among the poor, as families are forced to choose between putting food on the table, health care and keeping their homes warm. With the amount of affordable and reliable energy in America, these are choices we shouldn’t have to make.

It would be helpful to have a “Impact Assessments” before any regulation is passed. This would be a major step toward increasing economic opportunities. And having input from Governors and community leaders the same way “Qualified Opportunity Zones” were created. It will also establish a level of trust in communities that never existed before.

After all, the government requires environmental impact statements to estimate the effects of projects like roads and buildings on nature. Shouldn’t the government act similarly when it comes to how regulations impact the population?

A minority impact assessment would create a list of all the positive and negative impacts a proposed regulation would have on factors including employment, wages, consumer prices and homeownership. This regulatory impact would then be analyzed for its effect on minorities and other communities mentioned in contrast to the general population.

The bottom line, any policy that contributes to energy poverty is a bad one for low income families, minorities, rural and senior citizens communities. Fortunately, our nation has an abundant supply of natural gas that is a solution to our nation’s energy

needs. Recent polar vortex temperatures dropped so low in some areas that windmills couldn't turn. We need a plan B and that's Natural Gas.

Natural gas is clean. The U.S. Energy Information Administration reports that almost two-thirds of the CO2 emission reductions from 2006 – 2014 came from the fuel shifting toward natural gas. And right now, our air quality in America is the best it's been in decades. The New York Times even confirmed that in an article published June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

Natural gas is also reliable. Natural gas generation efficiently meets the needs of our nation's energy grid. And natural gas is affordable. For many Americans, this allows them to not have to choose whether to keep the lights on or get a prescription filled.

In closing, I'm all for protecting the environment and clean energy however until we have figure out a way to harness the sun, wind and water to sustain ourselves, we need to use what we have especially if it can lower energy cost, create jobs and boost the economy and allow for adequate health care.