

House Select Committee on The Climate Crisis Hearing

Testimony for Derrick Hollie, President Reaching America

July 15, 2021

Greetings Chair Castor,

Ranking Member Graves and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity and allowing me to speak today.

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, I do the most work on is reducing energy poverty. Energy Poverty occurs when low-income families or individuals are unable to afford basic heating, electric and gas needs. Some of these Americans spend more than twenty five percent or more of their total income on their electric bill.

Eliminating energy poverty is a goal we all should be interested in achieving. However, in working towards that goal we need to be mindful of how policies will impact the same communities that you claim to protect with this kind of proposed legislation. We all know that communities around the country, particularly low-income, minority, rural, and senior citizen communities, suffer from a lack of access to reliable energy sources and spend proportionately much higher amounts on electricity costs.

Today's hearing "Advancing Environmental Justice Through Climate Action" sounds great, however it would be much more prudent and productive for everyone to include energy poverty in the conversation. Why -- because the same communities and people that you claim to protect through environmental justice are the same communities and people who are struggling with energy poverty.

For the record I do think climate change exist however I do not believe there is a climate crisis, and that narrative is very misleading. Also, your so-called solutions are misleading, they promote false hope and unrealistic outcome for America. Here's why, there is not a poll, survey or research that suggest climate change is a major issue or conversation in the black community – because it is not, and we have the media to blame for that. Most black people think getting shot by a police officer is the biggest issue and we all know that is not true either.

My sister Dana is a devoted Democrat and just waited seven months for her new vehicle to be delivered because they could not get the various chips needed to complete her car. Earlier this week I had to settle on a rental because there is a shortage of cars due to the lack of chips. There are solar companies also voicing concerns because they are not able to get the materials either.

This is a supply chain issue for precious minerals like cobalt. Cobalt is needed for every solar panel, lithium battery, cell phone and radiation treatment. Over sixty percent of the world's cobalt comes from the Congo being mined in most cases by little black kids. We have cobalt mine in Minnesota right now trying to be shut down by environmental groups. To me that is very racist and a glaring example of the hypocrisy that exist. Why is it okay for little black kids in Africa to mine for cobalt – shouldn't environmental justice be a global issue or is it just for us in America?

Right now, we see electric charging stations going up everywhere -- even in communities where they are not being used. Studies show an estimated 90% of EV owners earn over 100k a year and you get your little tax credit. Most people living in vulnerable communities do not make that kind of money and are not interested in an electric vehicle. It is very easy to see how your environmental justice policies will do more harm than good to individuals

In closing, my grandfather was a black coal miner in southwest Virginia, and I had the opportunity to visit that area. The poverty that exists in rural America is different and these areas have never recovered from the mines that were shut down decades ago. My fear Madam Chair is the same will happen to healthy thriving communities that have relied on good paying oil and gas jobs for generations. I know plenty of black folks in Houston, Dallas and Louisiana who work in the industry, and they are not in agreement with new policies and regulations that will ultimately destroy their lifestyle.

I'm a licensed captain and have fished the Atlantic and the Gulf, and as an environmental steward, I recognize -- we have to protect our planet, however the bottom line is to do it sensibly

I think we all would agree, the American people have gone through enough and with the uncertainty that still exists from the global pandemic of COVID 19, the last thing we need to do is take away good paying jobs, disrupt people's lifestyle more than it already has -- and destroy an industry that we have relied on for centuries. The same industry that has allowed us to create a life that Americans have grown to appreciate from petrochemicals, including plastics, fibers, pharmaceuticals and your yoga mat.

We need market-oriented energy policy that will allow America to keep exploring and developing our own natural resources safely and will allow us to maintain our energy and supply chain independence.