

**United States House of Representatives
Select Committee on the Climate Crisis**

Hearing on October 20, 2021

“Good for Business: Private Sector Perspectives on Climate Action”

Questions for the Record

**Gilbert Campbell
Founder and CEO
Volt Energy Utility**

The Honorable Kathy Castor

- 1. Climate change is both a crisis and an opportunity. How would federal investment in the transition to a clean energy economy help businesses like yours make clean energy more affordable, reliable, and accessible for all Americans?**

Thank you for the question Chairwoman Castor. Federal investments in the transition to clean energy will accelerate the decarbonization of our electricity system and help firms like Volt Energy Utility deliver clean energy that is more affordable, reliable, and accessible to a variety of stakeholders. An extension of the Investment Tax Credit (ITC), and incorporating direct pay as an option, provides certainty to investors and lenders that allows project financing for the solar projects that we develop in both rural and minority communities. Additionally, investments in our aging grid infrastructure will allow for more Americans to have access to affordable, reliable, and accessible clean energy.

- 2. There are many cost-effective policy solutions that could be put in place today to help reduce electricity bills for families while also reducing carbon pollution. Could you please describe some of the cost-effective policies you would recommend Congress adopt to expand clean energy deployment and promote environmental justice?**

The climate crisis produces many environmental injustices. Promoting environmental justice while addressing the climate crisis requires a multifaceted approach, which we have begun to develop at Volt Energy Utility.¹ To address the climate crisis equitably, we need to make sure that underserved communities have access to the assets and health benefits of clean energy. The following are examples of cost-effective policy solutions that would help American families and especially underserved minority and rural communities:

- National Clean Energy and Sustainability Accelerator: Referred to as the Greenhouse Gas Reduction fund in Build Back Better, this strategy is based on the state green bank model and is critical in addressing the financing issue that plagues underserved communities.

¹ <https://www.voltenergyutility.com/services#environmental-justice>

Not only does the legislation require that **40% of investments from the accelerator supports communities most effected by climate; including communities of color**, it also:

- i. Provides technical support to business leaders to help them package their projects for financing.
 - ii. Provides for flexible financing which can help homeowners, farmers and small businesses who may have resources, but do not have a high FICO credit rating. They can look at other factors like consistency of paid utilities to assess credit worthiness.
- Improving Affordability and Accessibility of Assets: The other piece of the asset pie is to make assets more affordable and accessible, so that there is less need for financing. Some of these policies include:
 - i. Tax credits with bonus credits for underserved communities and communities with high energy burdens
 - ii. Investments in clean vehicle infrastructure to ensure that funding reaches communities of color
 - iii. Energy efficiency loan and grant programs
 - iv. Consumer incentives for energy efficient appliances

3. How would distributed renewable energy increase the reliability of electricity for everyday Americans?

Distributed renewable energy is an extremely effective way to increase the reliability of electricity for everyday Americans. The extreme weather events amplified by the climate crisis are causing power outages that have serious health and financial implications to American families. Distributed renewable energy has demonstrated the potential to be more resilient, reliable, and in many cases more affordable, all while decreasing carbon emissions. For example, distributed solar energy has been found to enhance grid reliability, redundancy, and resilience. Community benefits include increasing utility cost savings, reducing peak loads, improving the accuracy and response times to outages with smart inverter technology, as well as increasing community's adaptability and independence following a disturbance.

4. How could inaction on climate change lead to increased electricity bills for Americans?

Between 2000 - 2009 the annual average cost of U.S. climate disasters was around **\$54 billion** (according to NOAA). Between 2010 - 2019 the average was about **\$85 billion**. Last year alone, we had **\$99 billion** in climate-related disasters and this year we are on track to break that record. While our nation is working our way out of a pandemic that has wreaked havoc on our economy, we cannot afford for our economy to continue to take the additional hits from disasters stemming from climate change. This trend is not sustainable and we have the ability to make the investments to curb these costs. A weakened economy from climate inaction will absolutely lead to increased electricity bills for Americans. In Texas, the deadly power outages in February

caused by the deep freeze, left 4.5 million Americans without power for several days. Many Texas residents incurred astronomical electricity bills along with the loss of food, productivity, and other costs associated with a prolonged power outage. Additionally, while the burdens of costs will be felt across American communities, there will be a disproportionate impact on communities that reside in substandard homes with limited energy efficiency. As we experience more high heat and high cold days, those community members will be forced to spend more to maintain safe temperatures in homes.

5. How has the solar industry worked to ensure that its supply chain is free of forced labor and other human rights concerns?

Ensuring that there is an ethical supply chain is of the utmost importance to the U.S. solar industry. Our country's transition to renewable energies also provides an opportunity to create energy systems that primarily consider environmental health and equity. For example, selecting mining sites for metals needed to produce renewable technology can be assessed with biodiversity and habitat conservation in mind to protect the lands and waters revered by indigenous communities, and shared by other Americans.

I am proud to be a Board Member of the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA), who has been a leader in working to stamp out the force labor and other human rights issues in the solar supply chain. Volt Energy Utility was one of over 300 firms that signed SEIA's Forced Labor Prevention Pledge.² SEIA also led the development of an industry-led solar supply chain traceability protocol used as a tool for identifying the source of primary raw materials and inputs and tracking their incorporation into finished products, including solar modules.

²<https://www.seia.org/sites/default/files/Solar%20Industry%20Forced%20Labor%20Prevention%20Pledge%20Signatories.pdf>

The Honorable A. Donald McEachin

Mr. Campbell, thank you again for appearing today and for your continued work to ensure equity and diversity as we continue to move towards a zero-carbon future.

As you know, I also share a passion for environmental justice.

Low-income and minority communities, those that have been disproportionately impacted by pollution and have already seen the effects of climate change, must be a part of the coming energy transition. And importantly, these communities must be brought to the table as partners as we move towards a net-zero carbon economy.

- 1. Mr. Campbell, can you speak to the work you're doing and how industry can employ innovative solutions, like Volt Energy Utility's Environmental Justice Power Purchasing Agreement, to ensure these communities are partners in the transition?**

Communities relegated into marginalized positions due to systems of inequity should be centered in our country's energy transition to renewables. This ensures equity is built in at the onset of a robust renewable energy system. Centering marginalized communities, such as communities of color and low-income communities, also allows for a diverse array of perspectives and solutions to be advanced across communities, which can promote efficacious programs. Volt Energy Utility has designed the EJPPA to serve the dual purpose of assisting corporate clients to meet and exceed their clean energy milestones and fulfill their commitment to support programs that increase opportunities for underserved communities to benefit from the expanding clean energy economy. The primary funding mechanism established to identify, evaluate and determine which clean energy-focused causes to support is the Environmental Justice Community Impact Fund.

For more information about Volt Energy Utility's Environmental Justice PPA, please visit here: <https://www.voltenergyutility.com/services>.

- 2. What role do you believe Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other Minority Serving Institutions can play?**

At Volt Energy Utility, we value supporting the next generation of sustainability practitioners. We also value diversifying the sustainability sector, to enrich perspectives and spur innovation. The opportunity to include HBCU's in this work is ample, because these students already bring interdisciplinary thinking to environmental issues - as they naturally combining social, economic, and other frameworks in environmental conversations. Cultivating HBCU students' interests and natural abilities to consider how different systems intersect, would create new sustainability leaders that are ready to tackle the complex environmental challenges of our times. These institutions are critical in advancing a clean energy system and promoting healthy and sustainable communities.