

Testimony of Gilbert Campbell
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The Select Committee on the Climate Crisis Hearing
“Good for Business: Private Sector Perspectives on Climate Action.”

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Chairwoman Castor, Ranking Member Graves, and members of the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, I am honored to be invited to testify on today’s hearing “Good for Business: Private Sector Perspectives on Climate Action.” My name is Gilbert Campbell, and I am the Founder and CEO of Volt Energy Utility, a national renewable energy firm that finances and develops utility-scale solar and energy storage projects for large corporate clients, municipalities, and other institutions. Volt Energy Utility recently executed the first Environmental Justice Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with Microsoft, to supply Microsoft with 250 megawatts (MW) of utility-scale solar energy, that will benefit rural and minority communities across the country.

In 2009, I co-founded Volt Energy, a national distributed generation solar development company. Volt Energy successfully developed solar projects for numerous public and private sector clients including: Accenture, Exelon/Pepco, The Cheesecake Factory, Subaru, District of Columbia Government, Howard University and Wake Forest University.

Currently, I serve on the Board of Directors at The Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA), The Renewable Energy Buyers Alliance (REBA), and The American Association of Blacks in Energy (AABE).

I am here today to share why I strongly support the Build Back Better Act. We are facing the biggest crisis of our lifetime, and that is the climate crisis. If we just look at the intensification of extreme weather events that transpired just this year, it is clear the devastating impact that climate change is having on our nation. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA), in the first nine months of this year, extreme weather and climate disasters in the U.S. have taken more than 538 lives and cost more than \$100 billion. We have all witnessed the devastating wildfires in the west, hurricane after hurricane in the gulf region, flooding in the Northeast, and heatwaves all across the country. Our nation is still financially recovering from extreme weather events last year, like Hurricane Harvey. If we fail to get more resilient and control climate disaster spending, there could be catastrophic implications for communities across the country, for the economy and for the federal budget.

While I am here as a small business owner to talk about the financial toll and implications that climate change is having on businesses across this country, I am a concerned citizen first. I know how divided our nation is on literally everything, but the climate crisis should not be viewed as a red or blue partisan issue, but rather as a red, white, and blue opportunity to ensure that our kids, grandkids, and future generations will be blessed with opportunities many of us have received.

This is our moment to do what we have always done well and that is to lead on the global stage on big issues. Currently, we are lagging behind other countries in one of the biggest economic

transitions in modern history. Other countries' investments in clean energy – and the new jobs they have created – [far exceed the United States](#).

- 2 million Chinese work in solar, compared with over 230,000 Americans in solar.
- 320,000 Europeans work in wind energy, compared with 117,000 Americans.
- Brazil has three times as many jobs in solar heating and cooling as we do in the United States.
- The global vehicle market is swiftly shifting to Zero Emission Vehicles. If our auto industry is going to compete in the global market, we need to invest in Clean Vehicles here at home.

The Build Back Better Act's investment in clean energy and clean vehicle innovation, financing, manufacturing, and deployment will contribute to US global competitiveness—and will ensure we create jobs in the process.

Entire businesses are suffering and going under from the extreme weather events highlighted above, and tens of thousands of other businesses are broadly impacted by supply chain and labor disruptions stemming from these extreme climate events. From the agriculture and food processing industries to the hospitality and transportation sectors, climate change has affected productivity and financial resources.

I recently joined a press event with fellow CEOs and business leaders, many of whom offered specific examples of the direct impacts of climate disasters as well as the resulting effect of supply chain disruptions. All of the participants called on Congress to pass the Build Back Better Act. As one business leader from the hotel sector expressed: “We can invest now, or we can pay tenfold later to clean up more disasters.”

I will also note that [over 1000 business leaders have signed letters in support of the Build Back Better Act](#). The American Sustainable Business Council (ASBC), E2 (Environmental Entrepreneurs), and Clean Energy for America (CE4A) organized letters from businesses urging Congress to pass historic investments through reconciliation to combat climate change and make our country stronger and more resilient.

I have, and will, continue to work with a wide range of key stakeholders from all political parties, electric utility companies, oil and gas companies, businesses, energy trade associations, and others to tackle this important issue. However, the Build Back Better Act is not only essential to mitigate environmental harms; it also presents an opportunity for our great nation to make overdue investments in our infrastructure that incorporates clean technology which reduces carbon emissions. The Act will create millions of good paying jobs in every corner of America, and wealth creation opportunities for small businesses.

President Biden has set an ambitious goal to decarbonize our power sector by 2035. According to the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA), my industry, solar energy, currently accounts for only 4% of our electricity generation. With only 4% of the energy generated, the solar industry currently has over 10,000 businesses and over 230,000 workers. In a recent study, the Department of Energy highlighted that in order to fully decarbonize our power grid by 2035, solar energy will have to account for 45% of our electricity generation. Again, at 4%, there are

10,000 businesses and over 230,000 solar workers in this nation. Imagine how many more small businesses will be created and how many more American workers will have good paying jobs.

If we are going to tackle climate change and decarbonize our power sector, we also will have to make significant investments in our aging grid infrastructure to account for the new renewable energy generation coming online, including transmission, distribution, and interconnection. Currently, there are hundreds of Gigawatts (GWs) of renewable energy projects waiting to be connected to the grid, but due to backlogs and costs, they are sitting in the queue. Build Back Better Act investments in our grid infrastructure will provide greater grid reliability, which is vitally important as extreme weather events shut down power for days and weeks, resulting in significant financial loss for businesses and is a major burden for American citizens.

We must also prioritize investments in communities of color that have long suffered from environmental injustices. Environmental justice is defined as the “fair” distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. For far too long, underserved minority communities have been on the wrong side of the ledger and have incurred extreme environmental burdens and minimal environmental benefits. According to the American Lung Association, an estimated 141 million American live in counties with unhealthy levels of air pollution. In lower income communities of color, there are greater exposures to higher levels of air pollution. This chronic exposure is believed to worsen underlying diseases, including many that represent risk factors for severe cases of COVID-19. African American communities have suffered the burdens from discriminatory environmental policy and regulations but have not benefited from the job growth and wealth creation stemming from clean energy. According to a recent analysis titled [Help Wanted: Diversity in Clean Energy Jobs](#), African Americans only represent 8% of the clean energy workforce, and during COVID-19, workers of color have lost jobs at a faster rate and have been slower to be rehired compared to their white counterparts. Over the last two weeks, I have had the privilege of talking with students at both Howard University and Clark Atlanta University, two prominent Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs). We discussed the intersection of environmental justice and the clean energy investments needed in their communities. The students are strong proponents of Build Back Better, especially because of several provisions that are geared towards providing greater climate equity. Here are some of the investments in the climate bill that will bridge the climate equity gap:

1. National Clean Energy and Sustainability Accelerator (called the Greenhouse Gas Reduction fund in the Build Back Better Act) – is based on the state green bank model. This is critical to addressing the financing issue.
 - a. Not only does the investment require **40% of investments from the accelerator go to communities most impacted by climate -- including communities of color**, it also
 - i. **provides technical support to business leaders** to help them package their projects for financing and
 - ii. **provides for flexible financing** -- which can help homeowners, farmers and small businesses who may have resources but not have high FICO credit rating. They can look at other factors like consistency of paid utilities to assess credit worthiness.

2. In efforts to ensure that investments in clean energy are more affordable and accessible so that there is less need for financing, the Build Back Better Act also includes:

- iii. Tax credits- with bonus credits for underserved communities and communities with high energy burdens
- iv. Investments in clean vehicle infrastructure to ensure it reaches communities of color;
- v. Energy efficiency loan and grant programs.
- vi. Consumer incentives for energy efficient appliances

In short, climate change poses a threat to our economy and our communities. This issue transcends race or politics or whether one lives in cities, suburbs or rural communities. Climate change adds to the already disproportionate burdens on communities of color. The Build Back Better Act is essential to mitigating these harms by providing important opportunities that advance job creation here at home, increasing US competitiveness abroad and expanding environmental equity across our country. For all these reasons, I strongly support the legislation.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts on the Build Back Better Act.