

4.19.2021

US House Committee Hearing on The Climate Leadership and Environmental Action for our Nation's (CLEAN) Future Act.

My name is Donnel Baird. I run a climate tech startup named BlocPower, that focuses on analyzing, financing, and installing efficient and all electric energy equipment in low-income buildings. Clean energy in low-income communities across America is central to recovery, and to the survival of our species. I am on the Boards of the Climate Reality Project, Columbia University's Entrepreneurship Committee, the Sierra Club Foundation, the Sunrise Movement, Better Markets, the NYC Workforce Development Board, the NYC Tech Alliance, and the New York Federal Reserve Bank Advisory Board.

We believe that community ownership of clean energy, energy efficiency, and internet connectivity infrastructure must be owned and controlled by low-income communities across America. Low-income communities need ownership and equity. Not just ownership, in the sense of moral ownership, and equity, in the sense of justice and equality, but literal economic ownership, and equity ownership of stock in Special Purpose Entities that house infrastructure assets.

I grew up low income, in Brooklyn, New York, in the 1980's, and became a community organizer right after I left college at Duke University. I spent another 3 years as a liaison between the US Dept of Energy and the Obama Biden administrations US Dept of Energy, focusing on \$6.5bn of ARRA funding to low-income communities. A coalition of labor unions, Change To Win, assembled \$90bn of private sector capital to coinvest with the Obama Biden Dept of Energy to create green construction jobs and introduce clean energy at scale to buildings across America.

After learning from that role for several years, I enrolled in Columbia Business School, to learn enough about business and finance to be able to create jobs for the low-income communities I care about. In my determination, the young families in Brownsville and the Bronx didn't necessarily need more programs, or even grants. They needed jobs, so they could take care of their young families, and have dignity, and independence.

I won a global competition for startup capital from the Echoing Green Foundation, and once I received permission from my fiancée (since she'd be the one paying off my enormous student loans while I launched a startup), I started BlocPower to connect Wall Street, Silicon Valley, government, workers, and community leaders in a network to bring clean energy to low-income buildings.

The technology now exists in Japan that would allow BlocPower to reach our goal, which is to turn buildings into Teslas, and create 20 mm American jobs, with bi partisan support.

It's Not a moonshot! The technology currently exists to move 120mm American buildings entirely off of fossil fuels.

BlocPower works in the hardest hit communities: communities ravaged by poverty, the sub-prime mortgage crises, gentrification, the opioid and COVID-19 crises.

For example, the neighborhood Brownsville, Brooklyn, where I was a community organizer, is the poorest census tract in NYC. 30% of adults have been incarcerated, real unemployment rates are above 50%, with the highest rates of child homelessness, lack of access to broadband, and domestic violence of any census tract in NYC.

During my time in Brownsville, I saw a lot of WASTED energy in the buildings, burning oil to overheat buildings, having windows open during freezing winter weather due to overheating, and I also saw a WASTE of human potential, due to high rates of unemployment, and incarceration. The community of

Brownsville had a juvenile justice center, but no high school. That's where they expected the teenagers and children to end up.

I started my tech company to fix that waste, of fossil fuels, and waste of human potential.

One of the first buildings we worked in was private school in NYC. The school burned oil for heat, and for hot water. The school was near a highway, and not too far away from an industrial location where lots of trucks would make deliveries and idle their engines all day. Lots of air pollution and emissions.

There was chronic asthma in 50% of the school's kids, and the school nurses had 90 inhalers, with the NAMES of the children TAPED on the sides of the Ziploc bag holding each individual inhaler.

One unfortunate day, a 4-year-old had an asthma attack. His PARENTS were CALLED to take him to the ER. Later that evening, HE DIED. We installed air quality and temperature systems in the building, and learned that the school's ventilation system was taking all of the air pollution from the oil heating system in the basement, and sucking in all of the air pollution from the highway nearby and funneling it into the school's cafeteria, where lots of kids would have asthma attacks each day.

This is 2021, and this is 2021 America. This isn't ancient Mesopotamia. We don't need to heat our buildings by burning dead dinosaurs in the basements. We can turn millions of buildings into Teslas, all electric, healthy, using cutting edge software, and create millions and millions of permanent jobs.

Electrifying millions of American buildings will need sensors, smart grid, solar, batteries, carbon capture and storage, IoT, Cloud, mobile, and edge computing. These are new industries, that we can launch and own and manufacture right here in America. We believe that as many as many as 5mm permanent jobs will be created, with 25 mm temporary jobs created.

To date, BlocPower has focused on testing out different approaches to financing, analyzing, and reducing fossil fuel waste and health disparities in NYC buildings, and buildings in rural New York. We've:

- Greened 1100+ apartment and community buildings in NYC, using data, private sector capital.
- Raised \$63mm of capital to expand to 20+ cities.
- Designed a community owned clean energy solar microgrid in partnership with NY State. Community ownership of clean energy assets is a
- Launched a Community owned Wi-Fi mesh network, during the pandemic, which rural and urban and communities can use at a fraction of the monthly rates that Big Telecom and cable companies charge low-income Americans.
- On Thursday, Lt Gov of New York is joining us to kick off a Houses of Worship clean energy strategy, since Houses of Worship are central to all communities. We've analyzed over 300 churches, synagogues, mosques, and non-profits to reduce their monthly payments to utility companies.
- We take pride in workforce development: we've employed a visually impaired sales associate, homeless young people that we are training in green tech, immigrants, 55-year-old Caucasian construction manager, veterans who led the fight during three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We've done all this while focusing in on Clean Energy in Low Income communities. Here's what we've learned.

- Public Private Partnerships are critical, combining community groups, workers, finance, tech, Silicon Valley, Wall Street, + the best and the brightest from government.
- We need to leverage each dollar of taxpayer subsidy with 5 to 10 dollars of private capital, to make our government infrastructure investments stretch farther.
- We need to utilize cutting edge software emerging from Silicon Valley to continue to lower the costs of connecting regular Americans to low-cost smart, healthy, green equipment for their homes.
- The Hardware exists to create 25mm jobs transitioning our economy to 100% electric buildings and cars.
- We Need community support and trust.
- We Need a new generation of skilled and tech enabled construction labor to refresh our nation's capacity to build in the physical world.
- We Need Performance. At BlocPower, we believe in Pay For Performance, even in, and especially in low-income communities. These communities deserve the highest level of service, and if a service provider isn't willing to stand behind their work and participate in a Pay for Success model, we shouldn't use government capital to reward those who don't have confidence in their work to guarantee success.
- Clean energy at scale MUST include low-cost internet connectivity at scale. All of the data and finance necessary to deploy clean energy at scale requires internet connectivity. To that end, it is paramount that the Congress protect President Biden's recommendation that community owned internet remain a pillar of any infrastructure plan.

We Americans have a unique opportunity in front of us right now—the opportunity to launch several new clean energy industries that will save this planet, and employ millions of Americans, for generations. These industries will restore global American leadership. We must do everything we can to secure an American-led clean energy future. We cannot take it for granted.

BlocPower's lead investor, Mitch Kapor, co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, and founding Chair of the Mozilla Foundation, was an early pioneer in the technology industry. He built Lotus, an early tech powerhouse that made him a contemporary of Steve Jobs and Bill Gates. I asked Mitch how he thought about the way the internet developed, vs the way they hoped it would develop. His answer is relevant not only to the internet industry, but to the emerging clean energy industry as well.

“Those of who helped the Internet come of age in the 1990s saw hope in a decentralized architecture, one in which infrastructure and services genuinely reflected the interests of its participants, not the agenda of corporate monopolies and oligopolies.

Again, today there is an opportunity to renew that promise through locally based, highly affordable, cooperatively owned and operated mesh Wi-Fi systems”.

That promise is available to us to build equity for low-income people into ALL of the smart, clean, green healthy infrastructure that we will discuss here today—the solar, the EVs, the charging, the electric heat pumps, the community owned mesh internet networks. This technology will form the foundation of our society for future generations to come, and it must have equity at its center. This bill is strong start towards doing that.

Thank you,

Donnel