

Mr. Tonko's Opening

The Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change will now come to order. I recognize myself for five minutes for the purposes of an opening statement.

Our efforts to confront the climate crisis must address historic environmental injustices.

A just and equitable transition is necessary. But recent assessments of ongoing federal environmental justice efforts show that much more work must be done.

Low-income communities, communities of color, and indigenous peoples already suffer disproportionate harm from the effects of pollution and are often at the greatest risk from the consequences of climate change.

Frontline communities in high-pollution and climate-exposed areas are dealing with unsafe drinking water, harmful air pollutants, and other toxic chemical threats.

In recent years we have witnessed flooding and severe storms disrupt coal ash pits, Superfund sites, CAFOs, and chemical facilities, all of which can put nearby communities at risk.

These toxic hazards are likely to be exacerbated in the future as we experience more and increasingly extreme weather events.

Just this week, GAO released a report finding 60 percent of Superfund sites are located in areas vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Cleaning up and increasing the resilience of these sites should be a priority for comprehensive climate action. It will also create public health benefits and economic opportunities in these communities.

A just and equitable transition also requires giving everyone a seat at the table.

Our climate policies must make sure no person or neighborhood is left behind.

That means meaningful community involvement in environmental policy, developing and implementing community-driven solutions by seeking engagement and participation with people that have been too often ignored or bypassed.

I look forward to hearing how our efforts to confront climate change can also promote this approach to incorporate more community-driven solutions in broader efforts to promote environmental protection.

I thank our witnesses for being here today, and I yield the remaining time to the Vice Chairman of the Subcommittee and a leader on environmental justice in Congress, Dr. Ruiz.