

**Attachment—Additional Questions for the Record**

**Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change  
Hearing on  
“Back in Action: Restoring Federal Climate Leadership”  
February 9, 2021**

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**The Honorable Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)**

1. The frequency and cost of billion-dollar weather and climate emergencies have increased significantly over the past decade, leading to increased displacement, loss of life, and other damaging consequences for marginalized and disadvantaged communities. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency’s estimates, the direct costs of disasters between 2018 and 2019 amounted to [over \\$136 billion](#). Due to the climate gap, poor communities of color bear the brunt of climate disasters.

In your view, how can FEMA build disaster resilience against climate emergencies in communities, particularly those that are historically marginalized and disadvantaged?

**RESPONSE:**

Federal aid in the wake of a disaster is not distributed equitably or received by those most in need of support. The consideration and use of cost-benefit calculations, which are meant to minimize taxpayer risk, oftentimes result in the interests of well-resourced communities being prioritized over communities of color and those of low income. It also creates an environment where:

**More privileged residents and property owners may gain access** to new resources and opportunities that include:

- new business prospects supported by federal recovery investments;
- low-interest loans;
- significant payouts from public and private insurance policies and
- opportunities to transfer wealth to adult children through sharing of financial windfalls or property restoration and investment.

**Less privileged residents and non-property owners may experience** financial liabilities that include an increased likelihood of:

- job loss;
- disaster-related displacement;
- rent gouging;
- economic vulnerability connected to leveraging meager savings to fill income gaps; and
- legal protection in some cases, government recovery programs have even suspended legal protections for low-wage workers to speed up recovery and get local economies “going again.”

For example, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the federal government directed billions of dollars of aid to the Gulf Coast as it simultaneously suspended wage regulations, worker safety laws, and

affirmative action considerations for businesses receiving federal contracts. The polarizing effects of these initiatives were compounded by federally funded contracts that paid , oftentimes to undocumented migrants. These workers faced even greater injustices when they completed jobs and were not paid for their labor.

To remedy these concerns, Congress can:

- Direct FEMA to allow communities to repair damaged public buildings and infrastructure so they can be resilient to natural hazards, including extreme weather events exacerbated by the climate crisis.
- Direct FEMA to address flood insurance affordability for low income households and small businesses through a combination of means-tested discounts, loans, and revolving loans, and allow policyholders to pay flood insurance premiums in monthly installments. Information about the full risk rate should accompany discounts, so that recipients understand the full cost of their flood insurance.
- Direct FEMA to pilot a grant program to provide temporary premium assistance for policyholders who have requested buyouts that are pending funding and implementation.

### **The Honorable Nanette Diaz Barragán (D-CA)**

1. President Biden's recent Executive Order on climate change includes a promising new "Justice40 Initiative" to deliver 40 percent of the overall benefits of relevant federal investments to environmental justice communities.

It also raises questions around implementation. For example, the Order said 40 percent of "overall benefits", rather than funding. We need to understand how benefits will be measured. We also need to clarify what is considered a "relevant federal investment", and how these investments will be tracked to ensure they're going to communities in need.

What are WE ACT's priorities around the implementation of the "Justice40 Initiative"?

### **RESPONSE**

WE ACT for Environmental Justice is among those within the environmental justice movement who were pleased to see President Biden's commitment to direct 40 percent of benefits from climate investments into communities most impacted by the climate crisis.

Our position is that it is critical to move beyond words and to define what these investments can look like and to prioritize those who have been saddled with the most harm and are experts in generating solutions. To that end, we believe that compliance and accountability must be a key component of Justice 40 implementation and look forward to providing recommendations in this area.

We want to see the 40 percent invested in upscaling community-based worker training programs like our Solar Uptown Now initiative, which has given life changing credentials to underemployed individuals.

2. I recently reintroduced legislation called the Climate Smart Ports Act to invest zero emissions technology for cargo handling equipment and trucks at ports, and shore power for idling ships. Nearly 40 percent of Americans live within three miles of a port, including my constituents near the Port of Los Angeles.

Can you speak to how investing in investing in climate smart ports can combat environmental injustice and create good-paying green jobs?

**RESPONSE:**

The reduction of pollution in the goods movement system is incredibly important to addressing long standing environmental justice issues caused by poor zoning and lacks regulations of medium to heavy duty vehicles that come through our communities. WE ACT and other environmental justice groups have been working in this area for years and appreciate your work on this. We would like to connect you with Communities of Better Environment in California and Deep South Center for Environmental Justice in New Orleans, Louisiana as experts on this issue. The Moving Forward Network is also a strong coalition of groups working on this issue who should be able to provide their expertise.

3. A year ago the Energy and Commerce Committee released a draft of the CLEAN Future Act to get the United States to a 100 percent clean energy economy by 2050.

Are there any specific improvements or changes you would like to see to the CLEAN Future Act that our committee's members can consider as we work to pass clean energy and climate legislation this year?

**RESPONSE:**

Thank you for the opportunity to share suggestions to the CLEAN Futures Act. After an initial reading, this is our feedback:

**Include Mandatory Emissions Reductions**

Ideally, the bill would maximize the reductions of co-pollutants like fine particulate matter while achieving a specified GHG reduction goal. Greenhouse Gases are considered global pollutants without direct local health impacts. Criteria air pollutants and hazardous air pollutants ("HAPs") are also emitted and can have detrimental local health effects. Fine PM air pollution, all airborne particles less than or equal to 2.5 micrometers in diameter (also known as PM 2.5), has been connected through numerous studies to a variety of detrimental health impacts including cardiovascular disease, cardiopulmonary disorders, and lung research. Data has shown that EJ communities suffer from a disproportionate number of unwanted land uses and a corresponding disproportionate exposure to air pollution. The CLEAN Futures Act should result in the reduction of harmful co-pollutants in EJ communities. The next best policy would be to require mandatory emissions reductions of GHGs from polluting power plants located in EJ communities. This policy would benefit EJ communities because even without the intentional maximization of co-pollutant reduction, there should be incidental co-pollutant reductions as GHGs are being reduced. This incidental co-pollutant reduction should improve the health of local communities.

**Carbon Capture and Environmental Justice Engagement**

Technological carbon sequestration methods have been pursued for nearly 30 years and there are no examples that CCUS can be deployed on the scale we need to address the climate crisis, particularly within the power sector. I urge Congress to consult with EJ communities who have grave concerns regarding CCUS facility siting; storage impacts on the natural world; and the potential to prolong the life of fossil fuel resources. Furthermore, public engagement and education on the differences between CCUS for the power sector vs. the industrial sector would be beneficial for a more nuanced policy discussion.

The funds provided for research and development for CCUS would be better utilized for projects that prioritize renewable energy and battery storage. We believe these technologies will get us closer to pollution free energy creation. We also recommend a focus on natural sequestrations as a preferred method to address the climate crisis.