



February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Natural Resources Committee Hearing

H.R. 5435, the "*American Public Lands and Waters Climate Solution Act*"

RM 1324 Longworth House Office Building

15 Independence Ave SE, Washington DC 20515

Greetings Chairman Grijalva,

Ranking Member Bishop and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak.

I'm Derrick Hollie president of Reaching America, an education and policy organization I developed to address complex social issues impacting African American communities. One of the issues Reaching America does the most work on is reducing energy poverty.

Energy Poverty exists when low income families or individuals spend up to thirty percent of their total income on their electric bill. And when this happens, it puts people in a difficult situation and having to make tough choices like, do I eat today or pay the electric bill? Do I get this prescription filled or do I put gas in my car? We all know someone who faces these tough choices every single day.

For members of minority, rural, low income and senior citizen communities, Energy Poverty is a reality. And unfortunately, members of our community don't have the luxury to pay more for green technologies and going green is not the most glaring issue in these communities. We need access to affordable energy to help heat our homes, power our stoves and get back and forth to work each day.

Through Reaching America I've had the opportunity to speak with thousands of African Americans in several states who question the rising cost of energy along with fees and subsidies that most will never benefit from and how they struggle to keep up.

My passion for energy is deeply rooted, after graduating from college I worked as brakeman for Norfolk Southern Railways at Lambert's Point in Norfolk Virginia. Our job and responsibilities was loading coal ships that transported coal all around the world. Last year booming shale production helped the US become the [world's top oil exporter](#) . And I've asked the question many times, how can our natural resources be worthy enough to supply other countries, but not good enough for us here at home?

My grandfather was a black coal miner in Southwest VA. I visited SW Virginia last year and I've never seen poverty at that level. Many of the proposed suggestions and ideas of HR 5435 are unproven and implementing a policy like this would result in thriving energy communities around the country mirror the poverty that exists in SW Virginia and others Appalachian communities.

When the government creates policy, its first priority should be the welfare of the people, especially those impacted the hardest, rather than big businesses and special interests groups. And if people can't afford to stay warm, they certainly can't afford healthcare and basic needs especially those on a fixed income.

And here's a real-life example. About two weeks ago my eighty-four-year-old mother-in-law on a fixed income was at our house. She was complaining about a \$150 deductible on a prescription that needed to be filled. In addition to her electric bill that includes renewable mandates – a subsidy that she is required to pay and will never benefit from it right here in the District of Columbia. My mother-in-law has three daughters that help her. However, millions of Americans don't have that benefit and are forced to try and balance paying for healthcare and energy. And most have to choose between one or the other.

A [new study](#) out of Northwestern University confirms that increases in electricity and natural gas prices lead to more winter deaths. The effects were even larger among the poor, as families are forced to choose between putting food on the table, health care and staying warm. With the amount of affordable and reliable energy in America, these are choices we shouldn't have to make.

It would be helpful to have a "Impact Assessments" before any regulation is passed. This would be a major step toward increasing economic opportunities. And having input from Governors and community leaders the same way "Qualified Opportunity Zones" were created. It will also establish a level of trust in communities that never existed before.

After all, the government requires environmental impact statements to estimate the effects of projects like roads and buildings on nature. Shouldn't the government act similarly when it comes to how regulations impact the population?

HR 5435 establishes an advisory committee including public interest groups. I would ask respectfully of Mr. Chairman that our organization The Energy Poverty Project be a

part of the committee to serve as a voice for those impacted the most in low income, rural, minority and senior citizen communities.

A minority impact assessment would create a list of all the positive and negative impacts a proposed regulation would have on factors including employment, wages, consumer prices and homeownership. This regulatory impact would then be analyzed for its effect on minorities and other communities mentioned in contrast to the general population.

We need market-oriented energy policy that will allow America to keep exploring and developing our resources safely, and to follow the example of environmental stewardship set by areas like Port Fourchon, Louisiana. The port serves as a major oil and gas hub on the Gulf Coast. It's also a commercial and fishing Mecca that continues to amaze scientists and researchers from around the world.

CO2 emissions is down because of America's shift towards natural gas. And right now, according to a New York Times article published on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019 our air quality in America is the best it's been in decades.

In closing, I don't dispute climate change and as a licensed boat captain, I'm all for protecting the environment, our waterways and clean energy however until we figure out a way to harness the sun, wind and water to sustain ourselves, we need to use the natural resources we have especially if it can lower energy cost, continue to create jobs boost the economy, allow for adequate health care and basic needs.