

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Energy Chairman Bobby L. Rush

Hearing on “Generating Equity: Deploying a Just and Clean Energy Future”

April 20, 2021

Good morning. The Subcommittee on Energy convenes today as a continuation of its work to advance a 21st century clean energy system with the principles of equity and justice chief in mind. Historically, the impacts of climate change and the consumption and production of energy have disproportionately burdened the health and environments of our nation’s most vulnerable communities. A University of Washington and Stanford University study lays this alarming fact bare: Black and low-income people face the highest risk for death from pollution linked to energy production.

This truth is compounded by the fact that these same communities lack adequate access to clean energy solutions. As an illustration, a Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory report shows that low-income households represent only 15 percent of U.S. solar adoptions. The vast majority of these low-income households, instead, rely on polluting alternatives. In addition to this, the Department of Energy’s Low-Income Energy Affordability Data (LEAD) Tool shows that the national average energy burden, or the percentage of gross household income spent on energy costs, is three times higher for low-income households than for non-low-income household. Frankly speaking, it really is costly to be poor. These inequities also affect rural families, as they face some of the highest energy burdens of any U.S. household group. With these factors in mind — and given that the clean energy transition is already underway — it is incumbent upon this body to advance policies that ensure a resilient, reliable, and equitable clean energy system for all.

The CLEAN Future Act includes a series of policy proposals that seek to balance the scales by delivering clean energy solutions to our nation’s underserved and disadvantaged communities. These policies — many of which were created with input from my esteemed colleagues from this Subcommittee — include efforts to deploy a clean energy standard, distributed energy systems, and community and low-income solar. The CLEAN Future Act also includes my bill, the Energy Equity Act of 2021, which would drive equitable access to clean energy technologies through the creation of an energy equity office within the Department of Energy.

The threat that climate change poses to our communities — especially the most vulnerable among us — requires a whole of government approach. With this in mind, I applaud the Biden–Harris Administration for their work to ensure that underserved and disadvantaged communities receive their fair share of benefits through their Justice40 Initiative. I also applaud Secretary Granholm for recruiting Ms. Shalanda H. Baker, a key energy justice thought leader, who is working to further integrate the Department of Energy’s mission around this work.

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Bipartisanship is equally important to the creation of just and equitable policies. Therefore, I look forward to working with my colleagues across the aisle toward those ends.

And with that, I yield to my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Michigan, Ranking Member Upton.