

THE WALL WE MUST BUILD

Justice First Campaign

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Honorable Members of the Congress US House of Representatives:

I would like to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to testify before the House Committee on Energy and its Commerce Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change. This hearing entitled “Time for Action: Addressing the Environmental and Economic Effects of Climate Change” is both urgent and timely.

I have been involved in environmental justice and climate change issues for over 25 years from a community, regional, national, and global levels. From April 2018 to August of 2018; I, along with more than 300 organizations and hundreds of individuals conducted a Justice First Tour through 12 southeastern states and 25 cities. During that tour, we were able to visit numerous communities that were impacted by environmental toxins and pollutions. Many of these communities were ravaged by devastating weather disasters, and intensified climate change. With the recent reports released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and USA National Climate Assessment Report, there is irrefutable evidence that if we do not address the issues impacting our environment, climate, and economy, unprecedented devastation will occur. It is imperative that we construct a wall of mitigation, adaptation, and resilience to save the lives, property, communities, and the way of American life as we know it. We are told by the recent IPCC report (a conservative estimate) that we have less than 12 years to get on a serious path to reduce carbon emissions, or there will be little that we can do in the foreseeable future. As a resident of South Carolina, I have seen the increasing devastation being wrought throughout the south and throughout our country. In the lower ninth ward of New Orleans, Louisiana, communities are still struggling to recover from the impacts of Hurricane Katrina that occurred almost 14 years ago. During and after Hurricanes Florence and Michael in South Carolina, we saw widespread flooding and community evacuations (in some cases for the second time in two years). In Marion County, SC, just this past week, 248 residents were told that they had to elevate their homes or face the prospect of having no home owner’s insurance when the next weather-related disaster strikes. Some of these residents are elderly, alone, and poor. Some of them are the people who harvested our crops and cleaned our homes, and whose employers never paid into Social Security for them. They, therefore, barely get by with the support of their friends and family with a SSI checks that typically is no more than \$600 to \$800 per month. Consider the prospect of the 90 year old woman whose home I visited in Sellers, SC; she was told that she

must elevate her home by 7 feet with no means to do so. I pray for her and others in anguish, who after the next hurricane comes, who if they have nowhere to turn, may transition in a nursing home, alone with a broken heart.

We must protect our American citizens and communities. **We Must Build a Wall** of mitigation, adaption and resilience that will create jobs in the areas of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and infrastructure. We must do this through lens that are both just and equitable: to those who will lose their jobs in the fossil fuel industries and those who have had their opportunities deferred and denied because polluting facilities were cited in their communities discouraging other businesses from locating there. We can only do these things that will strengthen us environmentally and economically by moving forward on a macro and micro level. By that I mean, we need community-based climate solutions, as well as community in place training and education, along with incentives for utilities, states and municipalities. Imagine the number of adaptation jobs that can be created as we elevate the homes of those residing in flood plains across our country. The people in urban areas desperately needing employment who can construct bios wells to mitigate flooding and clean up brownfields by using plant remediation. Federal support can also provide jobs to assist people in recovering from lost and damages while they clean out and restore drainage systems, particularly rural areas that for far too long have been left unattended.

We desperately need community based climate change solutions that can swiftly meet the environmental and climate change urgency of our nation. Standing shoulder to shoulder in a wall of solidarity, Americans can install demand side energy management devises to reduce our carbon emissions. Entrepreneur and employment opportunities can blossom when communities are allow to construct small scale on and off grid renewal energy devices and systems. Community in place training can provide the much needed education and training that will allow our community to become more resilient and recover from weather related disaster more quickly. Community in place training will provide the services that university and colleges will not be able to provide if they do not have tuition support.

The people of American need protection from many things. Climate change's weather related disasters do not differentiate between democrats or republicans, race or gender, geographic location, citizenship or immigrant status. Everyone within our boarders need to have a wall of protection as climate change become more intense and more frequent. I want to commend this august body for its proactive foresight, courage, love of this country and pray that your efforts will in result in definitive and fruitful results. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity to share the concerns of those who participated in the justice tour and everyone who continues to increase the effective capacity of addressing the Environmental and Economic Effects of Climate Change.