

**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight**

**“Justice for Whom? Examining the Justice40  
Initiative’s Oversight and Implementation”  
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**Testimony of Donna Jackson  
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Chair McCormick, ranking member Sykes and members of this subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Donna Jackson and I am a senior policy analyst with the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow (CFACT), a Washington D.C.-based public policy group with a strong focus on environmental and energy issues. We actively contribute to the public debate, offering a balanced view on environmental stewardship and other significant energy issues.

My own background is in accounting and finance, and I will bring some of that experience to bear in my testimony today. But my main qualification is that I lived more than half my life in disadvantaged communities, the kind that would have met the Biden administration’s Justice40 criteria. This includes my years as a single mother of five. And I can say without hesitation that the environmental justice agenda is as out of touch as it gets with the real needs of the people in these communities. To put it bluntly, families struggling with failing schools, crime, drugs, few job opportunities, low homeownership rates, rising car and energy and food prices as well as other pressing issues don’t want a government spending billions on solar panels and EV charging stations and bike paths. The environmental justice agenda is not what get

if you ask the black community what its priorities are – it's what you get when you tell the black community what its priorities are.

There is no question that the Biden administration's Justice40 program and the trillion dollar spending measures like the infrastructure bill and the Inflation Reduction Act opens up the government checkbook in a big way for designated environmental justice communities. But the money is being wasted on a green agenda these communities don't want or need, and I am glad to see the Trump administration pushing back against it.

Now we can certainly discuss this massive misallocation of resources and who the real beneficiaries are. But to me the problem is not just the money down the drain on an ill-advised and out of touch environmental wish list, but also the chilling effect being designated as a disadvantaged community has on the kind of private investments needed to truly turn these communities around. Overall, the environmental justice agenda serves as a form of redlining that discourages community development and upward mobility for its residents.

**Manufacturing Jobs** - One of President Trump's top agenda items is revitalizing the American manufacturing sector, and I certainly hope he succeeds. Low-income and minority Americans would benefit the most from a manufacturing turnaround, but not if these kinds of facilities are kept away from these communities.

My family experience demonstrates the benefits of manufacturing jobs. Several of the previous generation in my family completely transformed their lives by moving out of the South to Detroit and other Northern industrial cities where they went to work for companies like Ford and Chrysler and U.S. Steel. These good paying gateway jobs allowed people with limited

formal education but a willingness to work hard a pathway into the middle class and self-sufficiency. And those manufacturing jobs permanently broke the cycle of poverty for their kids and grandkids. By the way, if there ever was a government welfare program with a track record that good, I'd like to hear about it.

I saw such a transformation myself when I lived in Tennessee after the big Nissan facility opened in Smyrna. The local economy was completely turned around by this investment, as were the lives of thousands of families that benefitted directly and indirectly from those jobs. And for every major facility like the Nissan plant, there are many small businesses in the community, including minority-owned ones, that partner with it.

It's absolutely ridiculous to suggest that my relatives were victims of Ford and Chrysler and U.S. Steel or that the low-income and minority residents of Smyrna would have been better off if the Nissan plant had been blocked by activists. But that is exactly the ideology of the Justice40 agenda which seeks to force industry and its high wage blue collar jobs away from the communities that need them most. With friends like that, who needs enemies?

**Home Ownership** -The same is true for housing. Home ownership is absolutely critical to family stability, upward mobility, self-sufficiency, and intergenerational wealth. And low income and minority households have a long way to go to close the homeownership gap. But sadly, the environmental movement spends a good deal of time suing homebuilders and blocking more housing. And the previous administration's near obsession with climate friendly housing further raised prices by piling on mountains of costly regulations on homes. Thankfully, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Scott Truner is fighting back against the red tape.

In contrast, the Justice40 agenda has nothing good to offer those saving to buy their first home. It may give us “sustainable” government housing projects with solar panels on the roof, but it is absolutely no friend to would-be home buyers. We want to encourage homebuilders to increase the supply of affordable homes for purchase, not chase them away from environmental justice communities or hit them with costly climate regulations.

**Affordable Transportation** - The same is true for personal transportation. Affordable cars are absolutely essential to upward mobility. The reality of those living in environmental justice communities is that the best jobs are usually not in the neighborhood, but in another part of the city or in the suburbs. Owning a car also opens up opportunities in the gig economy. And it lets you drive to suburban supermarkets where the prices are better. The list goes on of the benefits of affordable personal transportation.

Romanticize all you want about public transportation, the reality is it can only take you to a fraction of the employment opportunities available if you have a car, and it can’t help much with personal needs such as shopping or shuttling kids around to school activities or doctor visits. But if anybody here wants to tell this former single mom that I could have done it relying on public transportation, go ahead and try.

In addition, we need to stop pretending that the EV agenda is good for poor families and have a little respect that fact that most people in these communities don’t want them. And I would note that the higher sticker price of EVs isn’t the half of it. Many families can only afford one car, and an EV is simply not practical as that one go-to vehicle. That is why nearly 90 percent of EVs are part of wealthier multi-vehicle households. And charging overnight in your

garage isn't an option for those who don't have a garage. I would also add that owning an asset as expensive as an EV would disqualify many from public assistance programs.

The previous administration's pro-EV agenda is also a big part of the reason why gasoline powered cars have gotten more expensive. The average new car price is now \$48,000, which is more than the average black household's income, and used car prices have also skyrocketed.

Anyone pushing the EV agenda while saddling gasoline vehicles with costly regulations is no help to families trying to get ahead. The same is true of those supporting endless subsidies for public transportation or silly crusades against racist overpasses. This is why the environmental justice agenda is badly out of step with the real transportation needs of low-income and minority families.

**Affordable Energy** – Struggling families need affordable energy, not costlier but supposedly greener energy. The problem they face is poverty, not greenhouse gas emissions or air pollution. This really should not have to be said but in an age of environmental extremism it does. And it is why the environmental justice movement is no friend of households trying to make ends meet.

The Department of Energy reports that fully 25 percent of American households endure instances of having to reduce purchases of necessities like food and medicine in order to pay their energy bills. That number of double for low-income and minority households. Yet the overriding concern of some is climate change, which in nearly every case means moving away from the most affordable forms of energy, which are the fossil fuels that American possesses in great abundance, to costlier and less reliable alternatives.

In a rational world, the fracking revolution would be seen as tremendously good news for low-income and minority households. In addition to the many good paying jobs created in the energy industry, fracking has lowered electric bills, natural gas bills, and the price at the pump below where they would otherwise be. For example, a Department of Energy study estimates that gasoline and diesel fuel prices would double if fracking were banned. But from the environmental justice perspective, fracking and affordable energy are things that the poor need to be shielded from.

Perhaps the clearest example of environmentalists taking sides against low income and minority communities happened several year ago over a natural gas pipeline. This pipeline would have provided natural gas to a rural and largely minority community in Pembroke Township Illinois. Its easy to see why the citizens wanted natural gas, as it is at least three times cheaper than electricity, according to the Department of Energy. But climate activists oppose natural gas since it is a fossil fuel, and they fought against the pipeline. Fortunately, the pipeline was built, but in many other cases needed fossil fuel infrastructure does get stopped from serving the communities most in need of affordable energy.

Overall, the answer to turning communities around is not massive government spending – that approach has been a 60-year failure going all the way back to the Johnson administration’s war on poverty. Justice40 and the environmental justice agenda is just the latest version of that ill-advised approach. The real answers lie in policies that encourage private sector investment in these communities and those that strengthen families by making them more self-sufficient. That is why the environmental justice agenda is the latest costly step in the wrong direction, and I welcome the Trump administration’s efforts to dismantle it. Thank you.

