



**House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Hearing on “American Energy Expansion: Strengthening Economic,  
Environmental, and National Security”**

**January 31, 2023**

**Remarks of Donna Jackson, Director of Membership Development, Project 21**

Chair Rodgers, ranking member Pallone and members of this Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Donna Jackson, and I am the Director of Membership Development for Project 21 – the black leadership network of the National Center for Public Policy Research. Project 21 is one of the oldest and largest black conservative think tanks in the country. Our hundreds of members come from all walks of life, from small business owners to law enforcement to teachers to energy industry workers to clergy to health care workers -- both professionals and non-professionals. Most of us are not career activists, lawyers, or lobbyists and more than a few of us actually live in the communities we hope to improve.

I applaud this Committee for kicking off the new session of Congress by looking at increasing domestic energy supplies and reducing energy costs. Needless to say, these costs are tough enough on the middle class, but they are even harder on those still struggling to reach the middle class. In fact, it may be worse than you think.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration has some very useful statistics on the problem. For example, it found that nearly one-third of households struggle to pay their energy bills, and that one in five report having to reduce or forego necessities like food or medicine in order to pay an energy bill. And of course, these numbers are nearly double for low-income and minority households. Also note that this

study is several years old and does not reflect the much higher energy prices we have experienced during the Biden Administration.

But perhaps even more damaging than the immediate difficulties of paying sky-high energy bills and making it to the next paycheck are the long-term barriers to upward mobility and achieving a piece of the American dream. In so many ways, plentiful and affordable domestic energy is part of the ticket out of poverty and dependence.

For example, we see the entrepreneurial spirit of the black community in many black-owned small businesses, but those businesses struggle and sometimes fail under the weight of high energy costs. And expensive energy comes on top of other regulatory compliance costs that the Small Business Administration has shown to have disproportionate impacts on small businesses. It all adds up to a regressive tax on those seeking to better themselves, their families, and their communities by owning and operating their own businesses.

Unaffordable energy also means less of the industrial employment that has historically led to the emergence of a vibrant black middle class. Without these high paying blue-collar gateway jobs, low-income and minority communities have fewer options to earn what is needed for home ownership and decreasing the wealth gap.

In addition, the energy industry itself is a source of many well-paying jobs, and in fact Bobby Rush and others on this Committee helped enact job training programs so that more minorities could take advantage of the opportunities created by the shale revolution. But there will be far fewer such opportunities if the President makes good on his promises to kill off the American oil and natural gas sector.

And perhaps most importantly, every extra penny struggling households must spend on expensive energy is a penny we can't save for home ownership or our children's education or retirement savings as well as other things that build family wealth and help lift up the next generation.

Let me conclude by telling you what the black community does not want – and that’s climate change policies and environmental justice initiatives that take us in exactly the wrong direction by blocking domestic sources of energy, raising costs, destroying jobs and stifling our pursuit of the American dream. I believe that energy affordability should always come first, and that’s a message the black community wants to hear from Congress. Thank you.