



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Chairman Jamaal Bowman (D-NY)
of the Subcommittee on Energy

Subcommittee on Energy Hearing:
Building Technologies Research for a Sustainable Future

March 25, 2021

Good afternoon, and thank you to all of our witnesses who are joining us virtually today to discuss the importance of sustainable buildings research. This is a critical component of fighting the climate crisis.

In my state of New York, we have some of the most densely populated cities in the country. We also have some of the most aggressive climate goals in the world. Thanks to a broad coalition of social movements, New York State passed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act in 2019. Part of this law was the inspiration for President Biden's Justice40 Initiative, which will channel 40% of the federal government's climate investments into marginalized communities.

Also in 2019, New York City passed a first-of-its-kind law to cut greenhouse gas emissions from buildings. Now, we need to come together as a nation and build on these victories at the federal level.

When we think of reducing emissions, we often think of renewable power, or electrifying our transportation sector. But another large source of emissions, especially in New York, is buildings. Currently, about 40% of our country's carbon dioxide emissions comes from the structures that we live, work, and sleep in, and that we depend on for life-sustaining care.

This goes to the heart of why we need to address climate change, inequality, and racism together. As we have been discussing on this Committee, when climate disasters strike, redlined communities of color and low-income people are hit hardest. They're the first to lose power when the electricity grid is strained, as we saw in Texas. And these are the same communities that struggle with housing and utility costs. They face health risks from toxic materials in buildings, including in the public housing that we have allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. In my district and around the country, the people who live in these buildings have been dying at higher rates from COVID - partly because of co-morbidities caused by the fossil fuel economy. We need sustainable buildings now, and we need to rebuild our communities from the ground up.

The Department of Energy invests millions of dollars every year in improving building technologies in a variety of ways. DOE, along with other federal science agencies, plays a role in making buildings more resilient to extreme weather. DOE also researches energy efficiency and increased electrification in buildings, with an emphasis on ensuring the equitable distribution of the effects of this clean energy research.

Let's also think about how federal research can become more interdisciplinary. Social scientists, for example, have started exploring how green investments in neighborhoods can lead to gentrification. This process is not only unjust, but can undermine climate goals. Instead of cutting emissions for everyone, this can create a low-carbon economy for people with privilege, while displacing communities of color and other low-income people out of dense, walkable neighborhoods. We need a combination of natural science, engineering, and social science to guide equitable and effective green investments for everyone.

And research alone won't be enough. The other work that DOE must continue to focus on is how to get the results of this research into the hands of the communities that need it most. A week ago, I released a proposal to heal our K-12 school system from the impacts of climate change and the pandemic, and from decades of disinvestment. A huge part of this plan is focused on retrofitting public school buildings and removing toxic materials, beginning in the highest-need districts. Schools can become living laboratories for the energy transition – putting students and young people at the center of the Green New Deal, and launching STEM careers across the country.

Big problems require big solutions, and that is exactly what we will be pursuing together on this Committee. I am excited to Chair the Energy Subcommittee this Congress, and to hold this first subcommittee hearing on such an important topic. Investing in building technologies means investing in a safe, healthy future for our country, and for the entire world.

I want to again thank our excellent panel of witnesses assembled today, and I look forward to hearing your testimony. With that, I yield back.