



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

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## Opening Statement

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

Energy Subcommittee Hearing:  
*Fostering Equity in Energy Innovation*  
July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Thank you to all our witnesses joining us virtually today to discuss the importance of energy justice for frontline and marginalized communities. Equity cannot be pushed aside as we transition to renewable energy and tackle the climate crisis. Rather, it is essential that we consider equity in every stage of innovation.

For example, energy storage technology today is primarily designed for single family households. This design does not suit community solar projects that aim for collective ownership to achieve an energy system that is of, by, and for *the people*. Incorporating equity from the beginning of the research process will help us avoid technological pathways that only serve a select few. Without every American experiencing the benefits of a good, healthy, zero-carbon life, we will never be able to meet our climate goals.

This goes to the heart of why we need to address climate change, inequality, and systemic racism in an integrated fashion. Reducing energy costs is especially important for families struggling with electricity bills – almost one third of households, according to a 2018 U.S. Energy Information Administration report. In some regions of the country, half of Black households are energy insecure. Many green technologies, such as the use of heat pumps for electrification instead of relying on natural gas, can cost upwards of \$10,000. We need federal research on how to reduce costs and deploy these technologies faster. This is already happening in marginalized communities in my district, New York's 16<sup>th</sup>: in the city of Mount Vernon, community organizers and green energy experts are working together, to help low-income households switch to heat pumps. They just received a major state grant to scale up that work.

This is why research and development cannot be forgotten as part of the equation of President Biden's Justice 40 initiative, which says that 40 percent of overall benefits of federal dollars should flow to disadvantaged communities. We must build an equitable future from the ground up, not tack it on as an afterthought as technologies are ready to go out the door. One way to ensure that frontline community needs are being addressed, is to include them in the conversation. Harvard University received more federal R&D financing than all Historically Black Colleges and Universities combined in 2018. This disparity in federal funding is unacceptable. We can do better. We must do better. To achieve the best solutions, we need a diverse array of experts seated at the table.

Through the Office of Economic Impact and Diversity, the Department of Energy has been working to expand the participation of underrepresented groups in all DOE programs, and in the energy industry at large, through the Equity in Energy initiative. I was very pleased to see the appointment and nomination of Shalanda Baker to lead this office, and encourage her swift confirmation in the Senate. One goal of this initiative is to strengthen the relationship between our national labs and minority serving institutions. We need people all backgrounds to perform this research and help lead us into a sustainable, just future. We need to support innovators and creators of color, so that they are helping to shape the green energy transition. I am proud that this Committee is working to make our research activities more inclusive at every stage of development.

Additionally, diversity of *expertise* is important for fostering equity in energy innovation. As we will hear from many of our witnesses here today, including social scientists as well as STEM professionals is key. Social scientists can develop metrics to measure climate equity. Technologies must meet certain quantitative metrics before they are ready for commercialization, and the same should be said for meeting equity standards. So we really need a combination of science, engineering, *and* social science experts to guide effective green investments for all communities. And we need to be studying the social and economic dimensions of renewable energy deployment as well – including the benefits of public, cooperative, and community ownership of green technologies.

If we do this right, we can build a better, safer society for all Americans, and show the world how to do the same.

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.