

# THESE VOTES HAVE IMPACTS

Environmental Leadership from Congressional Caucuses of Color



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The 2019 and 2020 *National Environmental Scorecards* revealed that the new pro-environment majority in the U.S. House of Representatives hit the ground running by passing bills to protect our air, water, lands and wildlife and to combat the climate crisis. Many of these bills were led and supported by members of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), collectively referred to as the Tri-Caucus. What's more, Tri-Caucus members have been vocal advocates of strong environmental policies, addressing environmental injustice, and spoke up in a record number of congressional hearings on climate change.

## LEADING ON LEGISLATION

From the very beginning, the 116th Congress shattered records—22 new members of color were sworn into the House of Representatives, and we saw the chamber begin to more closely mirror the racial diversity of the United States. New members in the Tri-Caucuses wasted no time in creating pro-environment policies. Congressman Joe Neguse (CO-02), for instance, sought to increase access to parks and restrict exploration of fossil fuels on public lands. His bill, the CORE Act (H.R. 823), would protect 400,000 acres of public land in Colorado by withdrawing 200,000 acres from future oil and gas development and establishing new wilderness and conservation areas. This would create more opportunities for families to do activities like hiking and biking on public lands while helping to boost the outdoor recreation economy. The House ultimately passed the CORE Act, scoring a win for our country's natural and cultural heritage, our public lands and waters, and the outdoor recreation economy. The Senate, however, has not taken up the bill.

LCV's *National Environmental Scorecard*, which is released annually, provides factual information about the most important environmental legislation considered that year and the corresponding voting records of all members of Congress. The *Scorecard* represents the consensus of experts from about 20 respected environmental and conservation organizations who select the key votes on which members of Congress should be scored. LCV scores votes on the most important issues of the year, including energy, climate change, public health, public lands and wildlife conservation, and spending for environmental programs. The *Scorecard* is the nationally accepted yardstick used to rate members of Congress on environmental, public health, and energy issues.



REP. JOE NEGUSE (CO-02) (left) speaking with LCV president GENE KARPINSKI

The pro-environment House also moved quickly on policies aimed to tackle climate change and push back against the Trump administration's climate denial. One major bill among the 10 bills of honor (H.R.s 1-10), the Climate Change Now Act (H.R. 9), did just that: it would honor America's commitments to the Paris Climate Agreement, recognize the urgency of tackling climate change, and lay the groundwork for further action. Congressman Adriano Espaillat (NY-13) helped strengthen the bill by leading, on the House floor, the addition of provisions addressing climate justice. His amendment called on the House to consider the impact of climate change on communities of color and disenfranchised communities when upholding our commitment to the Paris Climate Agreement. This provision is critical because climate change hits low income communities and communities of color the hardest and exacerbates underlying inequities caused by systemic and environmental racism. Despite the urgent need to take ambitious climate action, the Senate still has not taken action on this legislation or other critical climate policies.

Another issue that should be non-controversial is protecting the Grand Canyon, one of our country's most iconic landscapes. Sadly, the Senate has yet to take action on House-passed legislation, the Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act (H.R. 1373), which House Natural Resources Committee Chair Raúl Grijalva (AZ-03) led. The bill would permanently ban mineral extraction in 1 million acres surrounding Grand Canyon National Park. This bill would be a major win for Indigenous communities; the Grand Canyon is the ancestral home to the Havasupai, Hualapai, Hopi, and the Navajo, who have protected this sacred land for hundreds of years and continue to rely on this land for sustenance and safe drinking water.

The Grand Canyon was not the only sacred site that Tri-Caucus members fought to protect: then-Representative, now Senator, Ben Ray Luján (D-NM) sponsored legislation to protect Chaco Canyon, the ancestral land of the Pueblo people. The Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act of 2019 (H.R. 2181) would establish a 10-mile buffer zone from oil and gas development around Chaco Culture National Historical Park. Chaco Canyon is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, home to ancient indigenous structures and artifacts sacred to many tribes including the Pueblo people. In the past decade, Indigenous communities and leaders in New Mexico and Arizona have been concerned about the encroachment of oil and gas drilling to Chaco Canyon and the possible destruction of ancestral structures these activities could cause. The House approved H.R. 2181, but the Senate took no action on this legislation.

Another truly powerful piece of legislation earning a spot among the 10 bills of honor (H.R.s 1-10),

was the American Dream and Promise Act of 2019 (H.R. 6), led by Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard (CA-40). This bill would provide permanent protections for Dreamers, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) holders who are living in limbo due to the Trump administration's decision to strip away their legal status. Dreamers, or people who were brought to the U.S. without papers as children, are integral members of our communities and make invaluable contributions to our society—including as LCV staff, members and volunteers. Many of the individuals who have qualified for TPS came to the U.S. in the wake of natural disasters—including hurricanes and earthquakes—that devastated their homelands and because of wars over diminishing natural resources, much of which is being driven by the growing climate crisis. And communities of color and immigrant communities face a higher rate of harm from exposure to toxic pollution, are hit first and worst by climate change's impacts, and far too



REP. DONALD MCEACHIN (VA-04) addressing attendees at LCV's Emerging Leaders Summit

## Congressional Black Caucus

	CAUCUS RANK	PARTY	DISTRICT
Rep. Karen Bass	<i>Chair</i>	D	CA-37
Rep. Joyce Beatty	<i>1st Vice Chair</i>	D	OH-03
Rep. Brenda Lawrence	<i>2nd Vice Chair</i>	D	MI-14
Rep. Hank Johnson	<i>Secretary</i>	D	GA-04
Rep. A. Donald McEachin	<i>Whip</i>	D	VA-04
Rep. Steven Horsford	<i>Parliamentarian</i>	D	NV-04
Rep. Dwight Evans	<i>Member At Large</i>	D	PA-02
Rep. Frederica S. Wilson	<i>Member At Large</i>	D	FL-24

often face barriers to equitable participation in our democracy. The Senate has yet to take action on this legislation, which would help provide security for families across the country.

It is critical that federal agencies are adequately funded to protect our health and environment. Thankfully, Representative José Serrano (D-NY) helped lead this effort by sponsoring H.R. 3055, the Commerce, Justice, Science, Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, Interior, Environment, Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Act, 2020. This bill rejected the Trump administration's irresponsible proposed budget cuts, including a nearly 30 percent decrease to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) budget, and instead increased investments to fight climate change, protect communities from toxic pollution, safeguard our lands and waters, cut air pollution, and boost clean energy. H.R. 3055 increased funding for the EPA to specifically address environmental justice and for our land management agencies, such as the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service, to improve our parks and wildlife refuges. Ultimately, the bill was signed into law in December 2019.

Although the final spending bill signed into law was stripped of specific improvements to environmental policy, it rejected the draconian cuts originally proposed by Trump and included some spending increases for key environmental programs.

In September 2020, the House passed an energy package that focused on investments for clean energy technology research, development, demonstration, and deployment. Representative Deb Haaland (D-NM), currently nominated to lead the Biden-Harris Department of the Interior, introduced and successfully passed an amendment to this bill that will increase these investments by 50 percent and authorize total funding of the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy at \$3.2 billion in 2021 increasing to \$3.4 billion in 2025. This legislation will help to advance the renewable energy

technologies that are necessary to fight climate change, create good-paying clean energy jobs, and reduce carbon emissions from several sectors.

During the 116th Congress, several groundbreaking pieces of environmental justice legislation were introduced in close collaboration with communities most impacted. Chair Grijalva worked with Representative Donald McEachin (VA-04) to advance an inclusive process of developing the Environmental Justice for All Act (H.R. 5986). After months of discussions with environmental justice leaders, the committee convened a daylong summit at the Capitol where environmental justice leaders, environmental advocacy groups, and members of Congress discussed the challenges and policy priorities for front-line and fence-line communities. Following the summit, they brought a group of environmental justice and community leaders together to draft the bill, placing a high value on public input and authentic collaboration, particularly with low-wealth communities of color who have been most impacted by climate change and pollution.

Another bill that ensures frontline communities' voices are heard in policymaking is the Climate Equity Act of 2020 (H.R. 8019/S.4513). This bill, introduced by then-Senator, now Vice President, Kamala Harris (D-CA), and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14), would hold lawmakers

*During the 116th Congress, several groundbreaking pieces of environmental justice legislation were introduced in collaboration with communities most impacted.*



accountable to centering equity impacts in federal climate action. The Climate Equity Act requires environmental legislation in Congress to receive an equity score to estimate the impact on frontline communities and that the score is developed in consultation with frontline communities and updated periodically. The bill would also directly impact the executive branch; it would create an Office of Climate and Environmental Justice Accountability within the Office of Management and Budget to represent the views of frontline communities in rulemaking.

Yet another critical environmental justice bill, The Environmental Justice Legacy Pollution Cleanup Act of 2020 (H.R.8271/S.4617), aims to heal existing harms in environmental justice communities. Introduced by Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Representative Haaland, the bill would invest \$100 billion in pollution cleanup efforts across the country. Ultimately, H.R. 8271 and S. 4617 aim to eliminate the pollution borne by communities of color,

## Congressional Hispanic Caucus

	CAUCUS RANK	PARTY	DISTRICT
Rep. Joaquin Castro	<i>Chair</i>	D	TX-20
Rep. Ruben Gallego	<i>First Vice Chair</i>	D	AZ-07
Rep. Nanette Diaz Barragán	<i>Second Vice Chair</i>	D	CA-44
Rep. Adriano Espaillat	<i>Whip</i>	D	NY-13
Rep. Veronica Escobar	<i>Freshman Representative</i>	D	TX-16

Indigenous communities, and low-income communities for generations.

### LEADING ON CAUCUSES AND COMMITTEES

The pro-environment House held more than 119 hearings on climate—more than any other Congress in history. Members of the Tri-Caucuses have also been using their positions in leadership to examine the impacts of climate change and build momentum for serious action. House Committee on Science, Space and Technology Chair Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), for instance, immediately

restored respect for scientists and focused on climate change. Specifically, she made sure to invite a broad range of witnesses to testify before her committee; everyone from renowned climate scientists and technical experts weighed in on the importance of making investments in clean energy in order to fight climate change. This strongly contrasts with previous committee leadership, which frequently promoted climate science denial. Chair Grijalva has also centered climate action in his committee hearings. He brought in experts and advocates to highlight the nexus between climate change, public lands and environmental justice.

Representatives Luján, McEachin, and Neguse also displayed innovative leadership on the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis. The committee, formed by Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Democrats in 2019, was given a



REP. NANETTE BARRAGAN (CA-44) addressing attendees at LCV's Emerging Leaders Summit

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mandate to investigate and report out on the impacts of climate change and recommend the best way to tackle it. Representative Kathy Castor (D-FL) chairs the bipartisan committee, which spent a year holding hearings to investigate and gather evidence to inform different pieces of the report. These hearings were not just taking place in DC—the committee held “field hearings” in cities across the country to learn from youth activists, environmental justice leaders, and scientists about a wide-range of climate-related topics. In June of 2020, the Select Committee Released the report *Solving the Climate Crisis: The Congressional Action Plan for a Clean Energy Economy and a Health, Resilient, and Just America*. The comprehensive report lays out policy recommendations for congressional climate action, including ideas to build a clean energy economy, strengthen climate resiliency, create family-sustaining jobs, and center environmental justice.

In April of 2019, Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Booker, and Tom Carper (D-DE) launched the new Senate Environmental Justice Caucus to shed light on environmental racism in the United States. Throughout the 116th session of Congress, this caucus focused on making clean energy more accessible to low-income communities, called on Congress to include critical investments for environmental justice communities in COVID-19 relief packages, and delivered wins on water resources development and infrastructure. The Senate Environmental Justice Caucus continues to work closely with environmental justice leaders to make the air cleaner and water safer in low-wealth communities and communities of color, while holding polluters accountable.

## Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus

	CAUCUS RANK	PARTY	DISTRICT
Rep. Judy Chu	<i>Chair</i>	D	CA-27
Rep. Grace Meng	<i>First Vice Chair</i>	D	NY-06
Rep. Mark Takano	<i>Second Vice Chair</i>	D	CA-41
Rep. Ted Lieu	<i>Whip</i>	D	CA-33
Rep. Andy Kim	<i>Freshman Representative</i>	D	NJ-03

*The Senate Environmental Justice Caucus continues to work closely with environmental justice leaders to make the air cleaner and water safer in low-wealth communities and communities of color, while holding polluters accountable.*



SEN. TAMMY DUCKWORTH (D-IL) addressing attendees at the Buy Clean America conference

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR MORE PROGRESS

Representative McEachin also led on critical climate action legislation, the 100% Clean Economy Act of 2019 (H.R. 5221), with fellow member of color, Representative Haaland, and Representatives Paul Tonko (D-NY), Debbie Dingell (D-MI), Chellie Pingree (D-ME), and Earl Blumenauer (D-OR). The bill would put us on a path to achieve a 100 percent clean energy economy, defined as economy-wide net-zero greenhouse gas pollution, by no later than 2050. The bill has strong provisions focusing on environmental justice, clean energy investments and jobs, and public health. The policies and goals of this bill were featured in the CLEAN Future Act, unveiled in 2020 as the House Energy and Commerce Committee's first comprehensive climate bill in a decade by CBC member and Energy Subcommittee Chairman Bobby Rush (D-IL) and Chairman Frank Pallone (D-NJ) and Environment Subcommittee Chairman Tonko.

Another critical climate and health bill introduced in 2019 was the Clean School Bus Act (S. 1750/H.R. 3973), led by Senator Harris and Representative Jahana Hayes (D-CT), respectively. The bill aims to tackle climate and soot pollution from the transportation sector, which is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the nation. It would provide a total of \$1 billion over five years in grants of up to \$2 million to replace diesel school buses with electric school buses, charge and maintain these new electric buses, and provide workforce training. The legislation would prioritize zero-emissions buses for lower-income students, replace the most polluting diesel buses, and address areas with poor air quality. This ultimately



REP. BEN RAY LUJAN (NM-03) (left) speaking with advocates from New Mexico for LCV's Lobby Day

*In the 116th Congress, members of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Congressional Black Caucus, and Congressional Hispanic Caucus went on the offensive in the fight to protect our health and environment.*

targets relief to those communities of color that have for too long borne the brunt of diesel pollution.

In the 116th Congress, members of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Congressional Black Caucus, and Congressional Hispanic Caucus went on the offensive in the fight to protect our health and environment. We have been so excited to see members introducing and passing pro-environment legislation

and completely transforming the role of leadership in Congress. It is clear that the pro-environment policies championed by members of the Tri-Caucuses has set the stage for the 117th Congress and Biden-Harris administration to take bold and swift action to combat the climate crisis, address environmental injustice, and protect our air, lands, water, and wildlife.