




Our Earth Is Worth Fighting For

THESE VOTES HAVE IMPACTS

Environmental Leadership from
Congressional Caucuses of Color



2021



LCV's *National Environmental Scorecard*, which is released annually, provides factual information about the most important environmental legislation considered each year and the corresponding voting records of all members of Congress. The Scorecard represents the consensus of experts from about 20 respected environmental, environmental justice, 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, environmental and racial justice, worker protections, democracy, 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.

The 2021 *National Environmental Scorecard* revealed the new pro-environment Biden-Harris administration and pro-environment Congress' tireless work to protect the health of families across the country. While still in the midst of a global pandemic, the federal government has made significant progress toward restoring environmental programs and agencies that the Trump administration undermined and gutted. The Biden-Harris administration and Congress are seizing the critical moment that we are in, and they are on track to make transformative investments to tackle climate change.

Members of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) have been at the forefront of this effort. These groups of members, collectively known as the Tri-Caucus, voted overwhelmingly to advance and protect environmental safeguards. In 2021, all of the Tri-Caucus leadership scored 100% and every member received top marks of 90% or higher on the Scorecard. Many Tri-Caucus members have also led the introduction and passage of pro-environment amendments and legislation and helped lay the groundwork for even more action on climate and voting rights.

LEADING ON LEGISLATION

Black, Indigenous, and Brown members of Congress were a trailblazing force for pro-environment legislation in 2021, introducing many bills that Congress considered or passed, and ultimately, some became law. The sections below highlight some examples of this leadership in action.



Clean Transportation

In the House, multiple bills introduced by members of color were included as amendments to the Invest in a New Vision for the Environment and Surface Transportation (INVEST) Act. The INVEST Act package became the vehicle for the broader Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) that was signed into law in November 2021. The surface transportation bill vote and block of 42 amendments were both included in the *National Environmental Scorecard*.

One of these amendments was the EV Freedom Act, led by Representative Andy

Levin (MI-9) and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14), who is a member of the CHC. This legislation will help to expand and accelerate the number of electric vehicle (EV) chargers along highways. This policy also requires the Department of Transportation (DOT) to identify any possible gaps in establishing a national network of charging stations. LCV endorsed the bill when it was first introduced in May of 2021 and recommended members support it when it came to the House floor later that year. Now that this bill has become law, DOT is moving swiftly to make a network of EV charging stations a reality—they are currently gathering input from the public to enact this policy.

Accelerating the switch to electric vehicles is just one of several ways to reduce transportation emissions. Expanding rail transit can help to decrease dependence on cars altogether; another amendment included in the INVEST Act aims to do just that. Representative Mondaire Jones (NY-17), a member of the CBC, sponsored an amendment that requires the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to study the benefits of commuter rail systems between urban and suburban areas. Such research will aid efforts to reduce commute times and better connect communities.



Outdoor Recreation

Another bill that passed as part of the INVEST Act was the Outdoors for All Act. Introduced by two members of the CHC, Representative Nanette Barragán (CA-44) and Senator Alex Padilla (CA), the bill will dedicate funding to the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) program. Based in the Department of the Interior (DOI), this program will help to fund parks and outdoor recreation programs in low-income and urban communities across the country. This policy is critical in the movement to protect 30 percent of public lands and waters by 2030.



Immigration

In recent years, the *National Environmental Scorecard* has featured several votes focused on immigration because many migrants come to the U.S. in the wake of climate change-fueled natural disasters. One key immigration vote included in the 2021 *Scorecard* was H.R. 6, the American Dream and Promise Act of 2021. This bill, sponsored by Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard (CA-40), a member of the CHC, would provide permanent protections for Dreamers, individuals with Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) holders who are living in limbo due to their uncertain legal status under various court cases and administrative changes. Dreamers, or adults 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.

It is important to note that climate change, environmental justice, and immigration are inextricably linked—many immigrants come to the U.S. to escape disasters like hurricanes, floods, and droughts that have devastated their homelands and because of wars over diminishing natural resources. Additionally, communities of color and immigrant communities face a higher rate of harm from exposure to toxic pollution, are often hit first and worst by impacts of climate change, and far too often are not able to participate equitably in our democracy. H.R. 6 successfully passed the House in March 2021, but the Senate has still not taken up this legislation.



High-quality Union Jobs

Investing in clean energy and green infrastructure presents a huge opportunity to maintain and create millions of high-quality, union jobs. It is critical, however, that this new workforce has strong workplace protections and that it fully reflects the diversity of America. Fortunately, the INVEST Act passed with a provision to support a racially diverse workforce. Representative Brenda Lawrence (MI-14), a member of the CBC, and Representative Jackie Speier (CA-14) introduced an amendment that promotes a diverse workforce and helps build more inclusive work sites for infrastructure projects.

House Education and Labor Committee Chair and CBC member Bobby Scott (VA-3) has also led the charge to empower workers to unionize. His bill, the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, would help workers collectively bargain for higher wages, safer working conditions, and better benefits. As we transition to a clean energy economy, protecting workers' rights to organize would help ensure that the jobs created are good, family-sustaining jobs that address economic inequality. Additionally, unionized workers are better equipped to handle potentially hazardous workplace situations and have more support and protection to blow the whistle in dangerous situations. This can avert industrial accidents and result in safer communities, as well as cleaner air and water. The PRO Act passed in the House last March, but the Senate has yet to take up this critical legislation.



Voting Rights

The fight to secure voting rights and uphold our democracy was front and center in 2021. Everyone's right to be heard and counted in the political process is essential to the function of our democracy and protection of our environment, and far too often people of color and frontline communities are targeted by restrictive voting laws and partisan gerrymandering. Black members of Congress have been at the forefront of this work, carrying on the legacy of the civil rights movement today. CBC member, Representative Nikema Williams (GA-5) has been a resounding voice in this fight—in floor speeches, she highlighted the need to uphold our democracy, and she helped to strengthen protections for voters across the country. Her amendment, the Voters on the Move Registration Act, was included in a larger package of bills to strengthen our democracy, the For the People Act of 2021 (H.R. 1). The amendment would help to make it easier for citizens to register to vote when they move to a new home and the larger

package was passed by the House in March of that year. Fellow Georgian and CBC member Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock (GA) led the Senate version of the Voters on the Move Registration Act. Sadly, the Senate companion legislation, S. 2093, failed on a procedural vote. Williams, however, continues to be a leading force in the democracy space, and was named as a co-chair of the Congressional Voting Rights Caucus.

Another co-chair of the Congressional Voting Rights Caucus and member of the CBC, Representative Terri Sewell (AL-7), has been leading efforts to protect the fundamental right to vote. She introduced the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021 (H.R.4). This bill would defend against inequitable voting practices by restoring the full protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In 2013, the *Shelby v. Holder* Supreme Court decision ruled Section 5 of this law, which is meant to prevent racial discrimination in voting, unconstitutional. As hundreds of anti-voter bills have been filed in state legislatures across the country, upholding and updating civil rights protections will help protect voters from disenfranchisement and suppression. The Senate companion, S. 4, also failed on a procedural vote.

The fight for Washington, D.C. statehood is another voting rights effort that was championed by a CBC member last year. Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC-AL) introduced the Washington, D.C. Admission Act (H.R. 51), which would provide statehood to D.C. and its more than 700,000 residents. As the D.C. license plate notes,

District residents experience “taxation without representation.” For far too long, residents of Washington, D.C. have been denied a vote in Congress and the ability to govern locally without the threat of targeted interference. District residents, therefore, face a disproportionate impact of our federal government’s failure to act on environmental issues. Low-income, Black and Indigenous communities have historically suffered the consequences of pollution and public health risks, and D.C. residents, more than half of whom are people of color, have experienced this environmental racism for generations. H.R. 51 seeks to address this injustice by admitting D.C. into the union with full representation in Congress.

Clean Water

In 2021, champions in Congress secured a major win in the movement to ensure clean drinking water for all. Senator Tammy Duckworth (IL)—CAPAC member and EPW Subcommittee Chair for Fisheries, Water and Wildlife—led on the Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act of 2021 (S. 914), legislation to increase funding for new and existing drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater programs. The legislation works to tackle environmental injustice by replacing lead service lines, reauthorizing the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds, creating a pilot program at EPA for low-income water assistance, and dedicating funding for rural and disadvantaged communities. The bill, which was signed into law last fall, was an important step toward ensuring that everyone, regardless of their race or zip code, has clean water to drink.



Electric School Buses

Electrifying school buses has recently gained steam in the movement for clean air. Each day, 25 million children ride buses to school that use dirty diesel engines. These diesel school buses emit toxins that harm the health of children, their parents, bus drivers and aides. Members of the Tri-Caucuses are working to protect the health of our children and are now the biggest champions of electric school buses.

Since 2015, LCV’s Chispa program has been organizing to help transition schools from dirty buses to pollution-free electric school buses at the local and state level. In recent years, this work has expanded to the federal level, and Black and Brown members of Congress have joined and stepped up as leaders in the electric school bus fight. In last year’s report, we highlighted then-senator, now vice president, Kamala Harris’ efforts to uplift the need for zero-emission school

buses by introducing the Clean School Bus Act. She continues that work in her role as the vice president today, and her successor Senator Alex Padilla (CA) has now taken up the mantle in the fight to maximize federal funding for transitioning to electric school buses.

Padilla, along with Senators Raphael Warnock (GA) and Catherine Cortez Masto (NV), and Representatives Jahana Hayes (CT-5) and Tony Cárdenas (CA-29)—all of whom are members of the CHC and CBC—have fought tirelessly to support the transition to pollution-free school buses. Senator Patty Murray (WA) has also been a critical leader in this effort.

In early 2021, Vice President Harris visited Thomas Built Buses, a manufacturer in North Carolina that produces electric school buses. She saw firsthand how electric school buses can both create good-paying jobs in the U.S. while

safeguarding the health of children riding the bus to school. During the visit, she highlighted a proposed \$20 billion investment to help schools make the switch to pollution-free buses.

Since Harris' proposal, congressional electric school bus champions have successfully passed \$5 billion in funding for electric school buses through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. In addition to these funds, the EPA announced \$7 million of American Rescue Plan funding would go to the purchase of electric school buses in environmental justice communities. The implementation process for both programs is underway, and LCV, Chispa, and the Alliance for Electric School Buses is actively engaging with the Biden-Harris administration to maximize the support that goes to underserved communities.

Throughout 2021, Tri-Caucus members again went to bat for climate, jobs, and justice. The initiatives in this report, however, are just the beginning. **The Senate needs to pass the full \$555 billion in climate, clean energy, and environmental justice investments** that has already passed out of the House, so the package can be signed into law and the benefits of these funds can be put to work for our planet and communities can be delivered. **The health and safety of communities across the country, and the planet, is at stake.**



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