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*Remarks to Select Committee on  
Energy Independence and Global Warming*

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***Clean Energy Jobs: Creating Green Pathways Out Of Poverty***

Chairman Markey and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today.

I am here representing the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, in Oakland, California. We work hard every day to free urban youth from the cycle of violence, incarceration and joblessness. It is hard, uphill work.

But we come here today with great hope in our hearts.

We come here because we believe the green, clean-energy economy can do more than create business opportunities for the rich, as important as that is. We believe it can do more than give consumer choices to the affluent, as essential as that is.

We also believe that the green economy also can create job opportunities for the poor.

We believe a shift to clean energy can improve the health and well-being of low-income people, who suffer disproportionately from cancer, asthma and other respiratory ailments in our dirty-energy economy.

Also, we believe it can create entrepreneurial, wealth-building opportunities for those who need new avenues of economic advance.

In other words: we believe that the national effort to curb global warming and oil dependence can simultaneously create good jobs,

safer streets and healthier communities.

For us, our highest calling is to ensure that the clean-energy economy in the 21st century in fact does all of these things. Indeed, we would say that America's chief moral obligation is to build a green economy that is strong enough to lift many people out of poverty.

Such a goal is attainable. At one time, many experts feared that breaking our addiction to oil would hurt the U.S. economy. Fortunately, those days are behind us. The business and financial communities increasingly are embracing a transition to a lower-carbon, clean energy economic system. They see such a shift as good both for the planet – and for their own profitability.

That is a very good thing. It means that we have – or we very soon will have – the clean technologies we need.

Today, the investors are lining up. The consumers are lining up. Polls show that a super-majority of voters are now ready for change.

Only two questions remain: do our elected leaders have the wisdom and the will to get our government firmly on the side of this transition? And do they have the moral commitment to ensure that this new “green wave” does in fact “lifts all boats?”

Fundamentally, both of these questions are moral ones. We simply have no “throw-away” resources or species. Nor do we have any “throw-away” neighborhoods or children. All of creation is sacred. All our people are precious. And we must begin to act again as if we know this fundamental truth – and that it matters to us.

The first step toward keeping faith with this truth is to begin to prepare American workers now for new jobs in the clean-energy future – especially those who most need jobs.

To do this, Congress must realign our workforce development and job training dollars – to give ordinary Americans a shot at life-long careers in this growing part of the U.S. economy.

Congress must give our struggling vocational schools, community

colleges and public high schools the resources they need to train and retrain our youth, displaced workers and veterans. A prepared “green-collar” workforce will be key to successful transition to a green economy.

That is why we applaud Senator Bernie Sanders, Congressman George Miller and Congresswoman Hilda Solis for their commitment to passing a Clean Energy Jobs Bill this year. A proposal is being developed to put \$120 million into job training to get more than 30,000 U.S. workers (and would-be workers) properly install tens of millions of solar panels, build and maintain thousands of wind farms and weatherize millions of buildings.

God willing, you will all have the opportunity to vote for it. And I hope you will do so.

But this first jobs bill is only a first step. We cannot stop there.

We forget sometimes. But Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., did not get famous giving a speech called, “I Have A Complaint!”

That was not his speech. We remember Dr. King because, in the midst of segregation, he was bold enough to have a dream.

And now is the time for America to dream again. Even in the midst of new dangers, now is the time for us to free our imaginations. Let us envision America meeting our economic and ecological challenges with our heads held high – not buried in our hands.

I think all of us here can embrace the dream of clear skies over our major port cities. Where idling ships once fouled the air, we dream of solar-powered energy stations that let docking sea vessels power up cleanly.

We imagine trucks purchasing cleaner bio-diesel blends, to take fair trade goods off the ships without polluting the neighborhood.

We envision eco-industrial parks on land once blighted by prisons.

We dream of seeing our dying blue-collar towns, struggling rural

regions and poor neighborhoods blooming again—as dignified, “green-collar” meccas. We dream of rust-belt cities blossoming as Silicon Valleys of green capital.

We imagine Solution Centers, training young urban workers in new technologies and ancient wisdom. We imagine rural and urban youth creating zero-pollution products to sell. We imagine formerly incarcerated people moving from jail cells to solar cells – helping to harvest the sun, heal the land and repair their own souls.

We dream of local communities joining hands – across lines of class and color – to honor the Earth, create new jobs and reduce community violence.

And we need not limit the genius and industry of America to communities within our own borders. We can imagine global cooperation to give Africa and other struggling regions the means to grow economically, while preserving their natural environments.

We can imagine U.S. entrepreneurs and workers helping vast regions of China and India to power up with clean energy.

The best answer to our ecological crisis also answers our social crisis. The surest path to safe streets and peaceful communities is not more police and prisons, but ecologically sound economic development. And that same path can lead us to new, green economy – one with the power to lift people out of poverty while respecting and repairing the environment.

Some will call this unrealistic. They will advise America to keep her dreams small. But that cynicism is the problem, not the solution.

A national commitment to “green-collar jobs” will help this nation to address simultaneously our economic, ecological and spiritual crises.

We have the opportunity to honor God’s creation in a new – and at the same time creating green pathways out of poverty for all of God’s children. Let us begin.

Thank you very much, for your time and your attention.

- *Van Jones*,  
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