

**Achieving Community Tasks Successfully (TX) • Africa Town Historic District (AL)
Air Alliance Houston (TX) • CEqO (GA) • COALITION OF BLACK TRADE UNIONISTS (DC) •
Coalition of Community Organizations (TX)
Community In-power & Development Association (TX) • Concerned Citizens of Melia (LA)
Cooperation Jackson (MS) • East New Orleans Advisory Commission (LA)
Education, Economics, Environmental, Climate & Health Organization (“EEECHO”) (MS)
Deep South Center for Environmental Justice (LA) • Global Environmental Justice Project (CA)
Green Door Initiative (MI) • Harambee House, Inc. (GA) • Hip Hop Caucus (DC)
Jesus People Against Pollution (MS) • Kingdom Living Temple (SC)
Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement (LA)
NAACP - Environmental and Climate Justice Committee • NAACP – Flint Branch (MI)
RoadMap Consulting (CA) • Sierra Club (CA) • Unity in the Family Ministry (FL)
Urban Planning and Environmental Policy (TX) • WeACT for Environmental Justice (NY)**

January 17, 2017

Honorable John Barrasso
Chairman
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Thomas R. Carper
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Barrasso and Carper:

Please name one achievement by Scott Pruitt, as Oklahoma State Attorney General, that has improved the environment or protected civil rights. Don't bother to Google it because the answer is NONE.

As the African American leaders of environmental justice organizations, we urge the Senators serving on the Environment and Public Works Committee to oppose the confirmation of Scott Pruitt as Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. We are outraged that Mr. Pruitt promises to set back and dismantle the policies and programs we have worked for more than 30 years to develop with community organizations across the nation. These policies were developed pursuant to both federal civil rights laws and environmental laws in order to remove racial disparities in environmental protection.¹

As you know, the Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee has scheduled a hearing on January 18, 2017 to examine the nomination of Mr. Pruitt to the office of the EPA Administrator by President-Elect Donald Trump. There is nothing in Mr. Pruitt's record as the current Oklahoma State Attorney General to demonstrate that he would be dedicated to the mission of the EPA, which is to protect human health and the environment. Nor does his career indicate any action to improve environmental conditions in people of color communities, who are disproportionately burdened with pollution.

¹ See, for example, [Obama Administration's Memorandum of Understanding on the President's Executive Order No. 12,898 \(August 4, 2011\)](#). [President's Executive Order No. 12,898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-income Populations \(February 11, 1994\)](#). [Presidential Memorandum to the Heads of All Departments and Agencies \(February 11, 1994\)](#). The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's regulations implementing Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 are found in [40 C.F.R. part 70](#).

Mr. Pruitt seeks to rise to the position of EPA Administrator as a reward for his efforts to block the EPA from mitigating the harmful effects of pollution “outside the fence-line” of toxic industries.² Let’s be clear: the people who live beyond the fence of polluting industrial facilities and suffer the acute, chronic, cumulative and synergistic effects of exposure to pollution are predominantly African American and other people of color.

Mr. Pruitt appears to relish the opportunity to remove standards that are protective of our basic rights to a healthy and safe environment. Case in point: Mr. Pruitt’s dogged effort to axe the Obama Administration’s Clean Power Plan would have devastating effects on predominantly African American communities. The Clean Power Plan requires the reduction of carbon pollution from power plants. It is the first federal air quality standard to establish requirements for states to achieve environmental justice.³ These requirements are based on the egregious fact that 78% of power plants are disproportionately located in close proximity to people of color and poor communities.⁴ The Clean Power Plan recognizes the vulnerability of people of color and poor communities to the disastrous effects of climate change, which is brought on by the burning of fossil fuels.⁵ In the U.S., the largest source of pollution driving climate change is power plants. Additionally, this air quality standard direct states to ensure meaningful and effective participation of vulnerable communities in developing state plans for reducing power plant pollution.⁶

We recognize that the biggest climate and environmental threats to our nation and planet are fueled, in part, by racial disparities in environmental protection. Industrial sites and major transportation routes are disproportionately located in and around predominantly African American neighborhoods, where residents are daily exposed to the smokestack and vehicle emissions that warm the planet as well as trigger asthma attacks and cause other severe health problems. We cannot effectively confront the threats of climate change by confirming Mr. Pruitt, a climate denier, to the post of EPA Administrator. We also cannot pursue remedies for racial disparities in environmental protection with Mr. Pruitt at the helm of the EPA, as he has shown himself to be hostile to preventing pollution that occurs disproportionately in communities of color.

We need an EPA Administrator who will work to remedy the persistent and pervasive problem of environmental racism that results in:

- 79% of African Americans living in polluted neighborhoods;⁷
- African American children being three to five times more likely than white children to be hospitalized or die from asthma;⁸

² [Comment from the Attorneys General of the States of Oklahoma . . . on Proposed EPA Carbon Pollution Emission Guidelines for Existing Stationary Sources: Electric Utility Generating Units](#), U.S. EPA Docket No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2013-0602, November 14, 2014. *See also* [Complaint filed in Oklahoma v. Gina McCarthy, US EPA Administrator](#), U.S. District Court (Northern District, Oklahoma), Case No. 15-CV-369-CVE-FHM, Complaint filed on July 1, 2015, pp. 8 and 13.

³ In the [Clean Power Plan](#), the EPA explains that communities in located in close geographic proximity to power plants have a higher percentage of people of color and people with low-incomes than national averages (Federal Register, Vol. 80, No. 205, Part III, October 23, 2015, p. 64670). The EPA recognizes that communities of color and poor communities are disproportionately affected by, and less resilient to the impacts of climate change (*id.* at pp. 64670, 64915).

⁴ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, [EJ Screening Report for the Clean Power Plan](#), July 30, 2015, p. 113.

⁵ *See* note 3.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ David Pace, [Minorities Suffer Most from Industrial Pollution](#), ASSOCIATED PRESS, December 14, 2005.

⁸ American Lung Association, [Key Facts about Asthma](#). *See also* Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, [Information about Asthma, Allergies, Food Allergies](#), 2015.

- African Americans in 19 states being more than twice as likely as whites to live in neighborhoods with high pollution levels, compared to Hispanics in 12 states and Asians in 7 states;⁹
- more than 68% of African Americans living within 30 miles of a coal-fired power plant – the distance within which the maximum negative health effects of the smokestack plume are expected to occur – compared with 56% of whites and 39% of Latinos who live in the same proximity to a coal-fired power plant;¹⁰
- African Americans being more vulnerable than whites to climate change, and less likely than whites to recover from disastrous weather events;¹¹
- the percentage of African Americans living near the fence line of a chemical plant is 75% greater than for the US as a whole, and the percentage of Latinos is 60% greater;¹² and
- predominantly African American neighborhoods with households incomes between \$50,000 and \$60,000 being more polluted than predominantly white neighborhoods with households incomes below \$10,000.¹³

There is nothing in Mr. Pruitt’s record as Oklahoma State Attorney General to indicate that he would be sensitive to and willing to help communities throughout the United States, where African Americans and other people of color disproportionately suffer and die from unhealthy environmental conditions, which also contribute to climate change. For all of the reasons stated above, we urge you to take a stand in opposing the confirmation of Mr. Pruitt as EPA Administrator.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Beverly Wright, Executive Director of the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, Inc., 1631 Elysian Fields Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70118, BeverlyLWright@gmail.com, 504-383-3563.

Sincerely,

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⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Clean Air Task Force for Clear the Air, *Air of Injustice: African Americans and Power Plant Pollution*, 2002.

¹¹ J. Andrew Hoerner and Nia Robinson, *A Climate of Change: African Americans, Global Warming, and a Just Climate Policy for the U.S.*, Environmental Justice & Climate Change Initiative, 2008.

¹² Environmental Justice and Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform, *Who’s in Danger? Race, Poverty, and Chemical Disasters: A Democratic Analysis of Chemical Disaster Vulnerability Zones*, 2014.

¹³ Liam Downey and Brian Hawkins, *Race, Income and Environmental Inequality in the United States*, SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE, December 1, 2008, 51 (4): 759-781.

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