

JULY 14, 2023

Remarks by Vice President Harris on Combatting Climate Change and Building a Clean Energy Economy

*Coppin State University
Baltimore, Maryland*

3:30 P.M. EDT

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon, everyone. Good afternoon. Good afternoon. Please have a seat. Please have a seat.

But I'm going to ask you applaud — to — to applaud again for Vernice, please, (inaudible). (Applause.) Really.

Because, you know, Michael Regan and I have talked about this as we travel the country, and there is so much about what we are accomplishing in these last two years with the work we have done — (phone rings) — that really is about answering the calls — (laughter) — and the — and — no, but — but I mean that in all seriousness: answering the demands, answering — for Vernice, over 30 years — and so many other leaders who are here and around our country who have been talking about and shouting about and organizing about and leading about the need for us to take seriously the health and the safety and the well-being of all communities.

It is leaders like Vernice who talk about places like Baltimore. Who understand the capacity of the community as well as the needs of the community as well as the dreams and the desires of the community.

So I stand here before you, as Vice President of the United States, proud to make the announcements we are making today, which are historic. And I am very clear: I stand here on the shoulders of people like Vernice — (applause)

— and her decades of work and leadership in the fight for environmental justice.

So, it is good to be back in Baltimore. (Laughs.) (Applause.) You know, I'm from Oakland. Baltimore is like home to me. (Laughs.)

And it is, of course, wonderful to be here with my friend, with my colleague, the EPA Administrator, Michael Regan, who I have to tell you — because he and I have been working very closely, like I said, traveling around the country — he is extraordinary.

Vernice talked about it, and you can see when he talks: He is truly committed, and he is bold and he is relentless, and he is tireless, and he is ambitious about the rights and the responsibilities that we have to respond to the needs of the American people.

Michael, it's such a joy to work with you. Thank you for your leadership. (Applause.) Thank you.

And it is also wonderful to be here with my — when I was in the Senate, my Senate classmate, Chris Van Hollen. (Applause.) Thank you for your leadership. Chris is always saying, "Come back to Baltimore. I'm here." (Laughs.)

Senator Tom Carper, a great, great leader, a great friend to the President, and one of the people who is responsible for being a leader in the state Sen- — in — in our national Senate in the Capitol on this issue, as well as Senator Ed Markey, all the way from Massachusetts here, because of the work that he has been doing tirelessly for years and years. He and I talked about a similar announcement that we made together in Boston.

Congressman Frank Pallone — where are you? — thank you for your work. There he is. Again, a long way from home but here because this is about national impact, this work we're doing.

And, of course, Congressman David Trone, thank you for your leadership and your work.

And I also want to mention the governor, Wes Moore. He's out of state at the moment, but he wanted to be here, and he's doing incredible work, and I want to applaud his leadership as well. (Applause.)

And I want to thank this audience and all of the folks who are here, if not in person, but because of their work, they are here and present with us.

In particular, the students, the activists, the union workers, the elected officials — (applause) — everyone who is here. The mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers and aunties and uncles and all of the leaders who have participated in a day like today.

I want to thank you for your leadership and your partnership in taking on one of the most urgent matters of our time: this climate crisis.

So, every day, all across our nation, we feel and see the impact of the climate crisis. I mean, if you watch the morning news, it will be the lead story. It's been every day for the last couple of weeks. It is the lead story. I think we finally, at least in our progress, come to the point that most people can no longer deny it because it is so obvious.

And we have seen, around our country, where communities have been choked by drought, have been washed out by floods, and decimated by hurricanes. Here in Baltimore, you have seen your skies darkened by wildfire smoke. And you have seen the waters of the Chesapeake Bay rise, threatening homes and businesses that have stood for generations.

It is clear that the clock is not only ticking, it is banging. And we must act.

As Vice President, as I said, I've traveled across our nation to speak with thousands of Americans about this crisis. I have met with students and entrepreneurs, small-business owners, community leaders, nonprofit leaders, labor leaders — folks with new approaches to reduce our emissions and accelerate our clean energy transition, but folks who often do not have access to the funds they need to make their ideas a reality. And that is a problem.

For years, one of the missing pieces in our strategy to fight the climate crisis is that we have not invested at scale in community climate action. For years, the people of the community — folks who know what their neighborhood needs and how to provide it — have not been given adequate resources to implement climate solutions that match the magnitude of the crisis we face.

And that's why we're here today. And that's why we're here today.

Today, I am proud to announce the largest investment in financing for community-based climate projects in our nation's history. (Applause.) It's a good day.

And one of the reasons that it is so significant is because we also — frankly, we've got to make up for lost time. So, by dramatically accelerating our work, we know we can lower emissions.

And we will do that by providing \$20 billion to a national network of nonprofits, community lenders, and other financial institutions to fund tens of thousands of climate and clean energy projects across America. (Applause.)

So, here is what that will mean: Okay, so imagine, for example, the construction companies that build affordable housing here in Baltimore that, because of this investment, will now have the capital they need to install energy-efficient appliances in new units, to lower energy use, and to help tenants save on their electric bills.

Imagine, for example, the small-business owner who will now be able to receive zero-interest loans to electrify their fleet of delivery vehicles so we can reduce pollution and save on gas.

Imagine, for example — (applause) — right? Imagine, for example, the house of worship that will now be able to have access to loan guarantees so they can install solar panels on the roof of their building — (applause) — to generate affordable clean electricity for the entire neighborhood. Imagine.

You know, when President Biden and I took office, we set an ambitious goal.

Yes, people said, “That can’t be done.” We said, “Well, you know what? We believe in dreaming with ambition and then seeing it thorough.”

And so, we set an ambitious goal to cut our greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030 and to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. The investment we are announcing today will help us to achieve these goals, and it will do so much more, because think also about the impact on not only the local economy, not only on an investment in the entrepreneurs and innovators from and in the community. Think about the impact on something like public health.

When we invest in clean energy and electric vehicles and reduce ~~population~~ [pollution], more of our children can breathe clean air and drink clean water. (Applause.)

Think of the impact on family budgets. When we help folks upgrade their heating and cooling systems, we lower the cost of electricity, which means lower energy bills for working parents so they have more money for groceries and home repairs and school supplies.

And think of all the jobs that these investments will create, including many good-paying union jobs. (Applause.) Jobs, for example, for the workers of IBEW who will install energy-efficient lighting. (Applause.) Jobs for the sheet metal workers who will replace gas furnaces with electric heat pumps. (Applause.) Jobs for the laborers who will build net-zero housing. (Applause.) Right.

So, understand, when the President and I invest in climate, we intend to invest in jobs, invest in families, and invest in America.

And this investment is also about a partnership with the private sector. You know, my whole career, I have believed in the power of public-private partnerships. I have seen how much more we can accomplish when we combine the experience and expertise of the private sector with the reach and the scale that only the government can provide.

And as the business leaders here today can confirm, this investment is an incentive — this public investment is an incentive by design for billions more

dollars from the private sector.

And in all this work, we have put a special focus on communities that have been historically left out and left behind. The climate crisis impacts everybody, but it does not impact all communities equally.

Poor communities, rural communities, Native communities, and communities of color are often the hardest hit and the least able to recover.

So let's be clear about that: The least, in terms of where investments have been made in mitigation and adaption; the hardest hit and the least able to recover.

So to address this inequity, nearly \$12 billion of this funding we're announcing today will be invested in overlooked communities. (Applause.) Yes. Yes. It's time. It's time. It's time.

So, including in this vision of how we think of the best way and the fastest and most effective way to get the resources to the community, we are working specifically and intentionally with community banks. Why? Well, because as everyone here probably knows: Community banks, by their nature, are run by people who live and work in the community; people who know firsthand the incredible potential in the place they themselves call home. They not only know the needs of the community. They know the capacity of the community. They know the dreams of the community. They know the ambitions of the community. And that's the kind of vehicle we need to actually think about how we will get these billions of dollars to the folks who know what to do with it.

As a United States senator, I helped secure \$12 billion for community banks. And as Vice President, I have made community banks central to our economic agenda. (Applause.)

And because of the unique role that community banks can play in addressing the climate crisis, we made sure that they are eligible for the funds that we are announcing today in a significant way, so that more small businesses around our country have opportunity to join the clean energy economy.

And so I'll close with this. Last month, I met with a group of young climate activists in Colorado, and — and it was a group of high-schoolers who organized thousands of students. And they made Denver Public Schools one of the first school districts in our nation to adopt a climate action plan.

These young leaders were phenomenal. And they were bold, and they were not listening to “no.” And they — look, I like to say, “I eat no for breakfast.” So I get it, right? (Laughs.) And these young leaders, of course — like all the all the young leaders who are here and the young-ish leaders who are here — we know we don't have time to waste. They knew that.

And so they weren't sitting around waiting for somebody else to get it done. They led, understanding the profound challenges that we face.

And yet, I will tell you about them: They had incredible hope and optimism and joy about what is possible and the work that is being done. And I do believe it's because they, like we, know that we have time to make a difference, but we got to get on with it.

And so, let us share their hope and recognize that when we work together, when we invest in our communities, when we take action, we will meet this moment and build a better, cleaner, healthier future for generations to come.

May God bless you. And may God bless America. (Applause.)

Thank you. Thank you.

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3:46 P.M. EDT

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