

September 15th, 2022

United States House of Representatives: Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Hearing: Fueling the Climate Crisis: Examining Big Oil's Prices, Profits, and Pledges

Written Testimony of Jasmin Sanchez, NY, NY - Baruch Houses Resident

Distinguished Members of Congress and Staff:

I would like to thank Chairs Representative Maloney and Representative Khanna for the invitation and acknowledge Ranking Members Representative Herrell and Representative Comer.

My name is Jasmin Sanchez and I am a lifelong resident of Baruch Houses - the New York City Housing Authority's largest public housing development in Manhattan, with over 10,000 residents. I start by saying this because this was one of the developments that was affected by Superstorm Sandy on October 29th, 2012.

The day Sandy hit my community, I was sent home early from work. I worked as a babysitter in Park Slope in Brooklyn. Unlike the families I worked for, I did not have the luxury of leaving my apartment to seek refuge in a safe place. There was nowhere else I could go but back to my apartment. At 8:26PM, I saw a green spark in the sky and everything went dark. It was then that I saw the East River rising and flooding my community. When we lost power, I had no idea it was because the Con Edison plant exploded. The Con Edison plant is a 6 minute walk from my development. This was the light I saw at 8:26PM. Within the next few minutes I saw cars, jeeps, and wagons floating down what would normally be busy streets. I also saw some cars remain in place but submerged. I waded through the freezing water to find that I was unable to open the lobby door because of the force of water. When I was finally able to get into the building, the water was above my knees.

Sandy showed the inequities in our city. If you didn't have a car, you couldn't leave, if you didn't have financial means, you couldn't relocate, if you weren't financially stable, you still had to work and if you didn't have cash on hand, you couldn't buy the basic necessities. I, along with many of my neighbors, were in survival mode.

My community and communities that look like mine feel the ramification of climate change more harshly. After Sandy, I felt compelled to learn about why this happened. This was when I started to learn about fossil fuels. NYC operates on fossil fuels. Frontline communities in NYC that have historically borne the brunt of pollution are usually Black and Brown and other low-income communities. We see heat waves, poor air quality, and extreme weather and climate events ravage through poor communities without a second look. I live on the FDR Drive, I live by Con Edison, I live by the Williamsburg Bridge and I live by the holding station for the buses. All this within a 4 block radius. The fossil fuel sector is literally choking us to death with no regard to how they contribute to the exacerbation of other conditions in my community.

There is a racist placement of power plants in NYC. I have lived by the Con Edison plant my entire life and my mother, father and sister have lived across from the Ravenswood Power Plant in Astoria for over 25 years. The fact that these facilities are located in black and brown communities is not an accident, it is by design. It stems from decades of racist policies and it severely affects the quality of life for individuals in these communities.

NYC is facing warming temperatures and more intense and frequent heat waves as the climate changes. Higher temperatures lead to more deaths and illness. I am asthmatic and diabetic. Heat stress can exacerbate heart disease and diabetes, and warming temperatures result in

more pollen and smog, which can worsen asthma and COPD. I barely go outside in the summer months because of the heat, not only because of my asthma and diabetes but because I get heat rashes that spread throughout my body and last for a few days. In my community, residents who don't have access to cooling centers and don't have the money to purchase an air conditioner for their apartment are particularly susceptible to the effects of increased heat. In addition, low-income areas in cities have been found to be 5 to 12 degrees hotter than higher income neighborhoods because they have fewer trees and parks, and more asphalt that retains heat. When Sandy hit my development, we saw 250 trees being removed. Seven years later the FEMA funds came in and we are seeing all our lawns being converted to asphalt.

As we approach the 10 year anniversary of Sandy, I feel scared about where we are. I feel that the government is willingly sacrificing my community and communities like mine for the sake of profit. While we associate fossil fuel costs with our utility bills, people that look like me pay for fossil fuels with our health, our safety, our democracy, and our children's right to a clean and a healthy future.

Sería negligente si no mencionara el huracán María. La quema de combustibles fósiles no solo daña a nuestras comunidades en los Estados Unidos, sino también a nuestras islas. A medida que nos acercamos al quinto aniversario de este devastador huracán, la gente de mi isla aún no se ha recuperado. Así que pienso en cómo nosotros, como humanos, podríamos decidir no cumplir con nuestra responsabilidad global de cuidar a nuestros hermanos y hermanas y continuar alimentando la crisis climática dando ganancias a las compañías de combustibles fósiles.

I'll translate that for those who did not understand. I would be remiss if I did not mention Hurricane Maria. Burning fossil fuels not only harms our communities stateside but also our islands. As we approach the five year anniversary of this devastating hurricane, the people on my island have yet to recover. So I think about how we as humans could decide not to fulfill our global responsibility to care for our brothers and sisters and continue to fuel the climate crisis by giving profits to the fossil fuel companies.