



Martin Luther King, III
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Chairman Markey and members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to speak to you today.

As first son of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and an international human rights activist, I have been involved in significant humanitarian and policy initiatives, whether as a presidential appointee to promote peace in foreign countries or as president of two of the Nation's most recognizable civil/human rights organizations. I am CEO and founder of Realizing the Dream, a non-partisan organization that seeks to continue and advance the legacy and work of my parents, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mrs. Coretta Scott King. Realizing the Dream seeks to give a stronger voice to the economically disadvantaged and to foster the elimination of poverty in America.

Recently, I have been conducting a "Looking, Listening, and Learning" tour to study causes of poverty in 50 selected communities throughout the United States of America. I have completed tours of thirty five communities, including 3 Native American Reservations, communities across Appalachia and the Gulf Coast as well as both urban and rural America.

Forty years have passed since Dr. King's death, but his concerns about inequality and deprivation are at least as topical today as they have been in the past: 38 million Americans live below the official poverty line, the highest rate among developed countries. This number has increased by four million people over the last four years, the size of the population of Kentucky.

Today, his words still provide hope and inspiration to all of us, a resounding echo of the moral leadership that has at critical junctures of our nation's history lifted America to a higher place. In 1964, upon winning the Nobel Peace Prize, my father said:

"Granted that we face a world crisis which leaves us standing so often amid the surging murmur of life's restless sea. But every crisis has both its dangers and its opportunities. It can spell either salvation or doom."

Today, a new world crisis looms, one that we knew little about forty years ago. Last week, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to former Vice President Al Gore and to a panel of 2,000 scientists who have been lifting our veil of ignorance on the global warming crisis.

There is a bridge between this crisis and that which my father confronted, because both require a new paradigm of moral courage and leadership. In this

climate crisis, I too see both opportunity and danger, and I am hopeful that we can find our salvation.

I am here today to tell you that global warming is a form of violence upon the most vulnerable among us, and to ask for you to step forward to protect those in need.

I am not a scientist or expert on global warming, but I listen to those experts. And I listen to people in communities across this nation who is concerned about the health and safety of their families. To lift families from poverty, we need to empower people to take charge of their lives and the life of their communities. Global warming and other environmental threats erode that power. The poor are victims of choices made by corporations over which they have no say, and Congress needs to protect all Americans from the threats that are being created.

Earlier this year, the scientific panel that last week won a share of the Nobel Peace Prize released reports compiling the consensus views of thousands of scientists, and agreed to by the nations of the world including the United States.

I want to point to a statement by the Chairman of that panel, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), who said: "It is the poorest of the poor in the world, and this includes poor people even in prosperous societies, who are going to be the worst hit."

According to the IPCC report, "hundreds of millions of people are vulnerable to flooding due to sea-level rise." The human suffering from Hurricane Katrina serves as vivid testament to all of us of the vulnerability of the poor to severe weather events and floods.

The scientific report in many ways echoes the findings of a landmark report by the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation from 2004, titled "African Americans and Climate Change: An Unequal Burden."

The Caucus report concluded that "African Americans will disproportionately bear the substantial public health burden caused by climate change." According to the report, African Americans are nearly three times as likely to be hospitalized or killed by asthma as others, with climate change expected to worsen air pollution and increase the incidence of asthma for our children.

When disaster strikes, the poor are left in harms way and innocently unprotected. As one illustration, according to the Congressional Black Caucus report, African Americans are 50 percent more likely than others to be uninsured.

I want to be clear, however, that the global warming is a dire threat for all of the nation's and the world's poor. As was the case 40 years ago what appeared to many Americans to be mostly an African American issue still today concerns the whole nation: poverty in America today affects all races. The majority of the poor are white, not African American or Hispanic.

We are all in this struggle together, poor or rich, black or white.

While global warming is a crisis, it is not cause for despair. I am filled with hope. Every generation has had to tackle threats of magnitudes that are almost unimaginable to us today. Global warming has been ignored for too long, and it is time for our generation to step forward.

Solving global warming can help lift the poorest among us and provide new economic opportunities. Global warming is fueled by our dependence on dirty energy fuels that assail our health and drain our wallets. The pathway to solving global warming is a pathway to safer communities for our children, and better economic opportunities.

I would like to lend my support to the testimony of Van Jones, President of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, before this Committee in May. He outlined a national commitment to “green-collar jobs” that will give ordinary Americans a shot at life-long careers in the growing clean energy economy.

As Congress crafts an action plan on global warming, we must also look to the economic impacts of the plan on the poor. The financial resources to provide economic opportunity and avoid economic burdens are at hand if it embraces the principle that industrial polluters should bear the financial responsibility for their actions. When designing an emissions trading system for greenhouse gases, Congress should invest revenues from polluter payments to help the poor be part of the solution and to protect those who are least able to afford the costs of cleaning up.

We all need the moral courage to rise above the complacency, to rise above the injustice, and to rise above the political differences that have led us to turn deaf ears to this crisis again and again and again.

I conclude by asking, Who among us will aspire to the opportunity and salvation that lies within the climate crisis? Where are the voices of hope today in America? Who among us will stand up and lift our children and the poorest among us from the impacts of a crisis not of their making? Who here in Congress will lead this fight and put aside the whisperings of those who fear change?

The energy bill that the House has passed is a strong first step. Congress needs to pass a bill with the best parts of both the House and Senate versions, and it must not stop there but keep pressing forward with even more comprehensive solutions. Chairman Markey, I appreciate your leadership on these matters and the work of other Committee members.

There are many leaders among you. I ask you all to work together to lead, and look forward to supporting your efforts.

Thank you.