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Advocacy organizations to host presidential candidate forum on environmental justice

NBCSL and community leaders call on presidential candidates to connect with voters most impacted by environmental injustice

ORANGEBURG, SC – Today, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) along with some two dozen national and local organizations announced the 2019 Presidential Forum on Environmental Justice: *“Moving Vulnerable Communities from Surviving to Thriving,”* which will be held on November 8th from 6 pm to 9 pm EST, in the historic Martin Luther King Jr. Auditorium of South Carolina State University. All Democratic candidates and Republican primary challengers are invited to this unprecedented nonpartisan event on environmental justice.

Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and entrepreneur Tom Steyer confirmed their attendance. Additional candidates will be announced as they confirm. For an up-to-date list of participants log on to ejpresforum.org.

The forum gives candidates an opportunity to share their policies and visions for the country through an environmental justice lens, and moreover, connect and learn from voters of color whose issues are frequently overlooked. The forum will center the voices of marginalized communities to learn how presidential hopefuls intend to manage climate change, environmental pollution and public health risks that disproportionately affect communities of color.

“Candidates who want to earn the votes of communities impacted by environmental justice should step up, hear our concerns and explain their plans for a cleaner, healthier future for all,” said NBCSL President Gilda Cobb-Hunter. “This forum provides a rare opportunity for the candidates to show us where they stand on clean water, clean air and so many of the important issues that people living on the front lines of environmental degradation face. We call on every candidate to commit to attending this important forum.”

Moderated by representatives of the sponsoring organizations, the forum will have candidates appear on stage one by one to answer questions derived from the Joint Climate Platform which is open to students and representatives of communities from around the country.

Questions for candidates can be submitted at ejpresforum.org.

Over 100,000 people – a disproportionate number of whom are Black and Latinx – die prematurely from air pollution every year. Over 3,000 towns across the country have higher lead concentrations in water than Flint, Michigan, had at the height of its crisis. In fact, people of color face most of the impacts of the climate crisis, industrial pollution, and environmental degradation, yet their issues often go unreported and unaddressed.

NBCSL, as a part of “creating systemic collaboratives to improve our communities' future,” convened the Climate and Environmental Justice Policy Work Group to meet with the appropriate NBCSL Policy Committees. The January 2019 meeting in South Carolina included front line

environmental justice organizations from across the country who planned to share their positions with members of Congress and the 2020 Presidential candidates.

The EJ work group was challenged to broaden its focus beyond the federal level to include state and local governments as additional options for action on the platform and policy. Accordingly, the Joint Climate Platform will be debated as a Policy Resolution by NBCSL Policy Committees in December at its Annual Legislative Conference in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Further, NBCSL volunteered to facilitate a venue to share the Joint Climate Platform with the Presidential candidates and the idea of a forum was born. This is the first of two Presidential Forums NBCSL will host. A second forum on gun violence and mental health will be held at the December ALC.

Primary sponsors are: NBCSL, NAACP, National Wildlife Federation, National Children's Campaign, and South Carolina State University. Local, state and national environmental justice and civil rights organizations have worked tirelessly on this issue and partnered with the sponsoring organizations on this event. Lead media partners include Grist, Democracy Now, with additional announcements to come.

WHAT: 2019 Presidential Forum on Environmental Justice – “Moving Vulnerable Communities from Surviving to Thriving”

WHO: Presidential candidates, leaders from frontline and tribal communities, civil rights and environmental organizations, HBCU students and groups led by people of color

WHERE: Martin Luther King Jr. Auditorium, South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, SC.

WHEN: November 8, 2019 – 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM; Doors open at 5:00 PM (all times Eastern)

HOW TO WATCH: Broadcast and livestream coverage to-be-announced

Interested media may RSVP at ejpresforum.org

Those interested in attending may also register at ejpresforum.org