

JEWELL HARPER*

Good afternoon. It is indeed a pleasure to be here today to talk to you about something I am obviously very committed to, environmental justice. I am here to bring you greetings from EPA Region 4 Regional Administrator Gwendolyn Keyes Fleming. Our RA would love to have been here. This would have been her first opportunity to talk on the topic, solely on the topic, of environmental justice. She's very passionate about that. But she had a family emergency last week that has forced her to stay pretty close and she'll have to do that for a couple more weeks. So, things are going well, but family has to come first in this instance. I'd like to also thank Mr. Stephen McKinney for extending the invitation to our regional administrator Gwen Keyes Fleming. Again, she is very sorry that she can't be here. In her previous career, Gwen always kept community engagement at the top of her priority list. I don't know if you all are aware of the fact that she is the former district attorney for Dekalb County in Georgia, which is just outside of Atlanta. And it's a huge county. She basically, on almost a daily basis, had some form of community engagement as a part of her efforts as district attorney with regard to more than 740,000 people in that county. Then and now, she spends a good deal of her personal time engaging with the community and being interactive in a number of ways. Any opportunity for a conversation with the community on issues of concern to the community are very high on her list, particularly those such as the ones that are taking place at this symposium today.

Under the leadership of administrator Lisa P. Jackson, EPA uses three basic principles as guidelines for undertaking discussions. EPA keeps science as the backbone of all of its decisions and programs, it follows the rule of the law, and it maintains that its actions must be transparent. And obviously, all of those have a role with regard specifically to the issue of

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environmental justice. These guiding principles also shape the implementation of the agency's current seven priorities, those priorities being: taking common sense modest steps that will yield measurable reductions in carbon pollution, updating air pollution standards, cleaning up our communities, assuring the safety of chemicals, protecting America's waters, building strong state and tribal partnerships, expanding the conversation on environmentalism and working for environmental justice. And particularly it's that last principle, that last priority, that I want to focus on.

As part of her administration, regional administrator Keyes Fleming is placing a renewed focus on communities that have been underserved or underrepresented in the past. These include environmental justice communities and sensitive populations, particularly those in pockets of poverty that are located throughout the southeastern United States. We recognize the active environmental justice communities in region 4 that have been overburdened by environmental hazards that have driven away economic growth and brought fear about disparate health impacts to these citizens. Now is the time to give these communities a seat at the table, to retool and strengthen the health of these communities in order to decrease associated healthcare costs and to increase opportunities for sustainable tax base. In her first six months on the job, regional administrator Fleming has identified several avenues of engagement for the region with communities. First, she's gotten out on the ground to engage stakeholders at all levels through congressional visits, state commissioner meetings, local commissioner and executive meetings, tribal meetings, environmental justice community listening sessions, regulated community listening sessions, and discussions with academia. These represent a snapshot of her commitment to expanding the conversation on environmental justice. Second, she wants to engage in these 360-degree discussions to ensure environmental justice principles are effectively communicated to all of EPA's external partners. Environmental justice is defined, and I'm repeating something that an earlier speaker said, is defined as the fair treatment and meaningful environment, and I repeat, fair treatment and meaningful involvement, of all people, regardless of race, color,

national origin, or income as the administration develops, implements, and enforces federal laws, regulations, and policies. What does this mean to EPA in region 4? It means that region 4 will ensure that we have a meaningful relationship and honest conversations with states and environmental justice communities. We will accomplish this through prioritization of our efforts, transparency of our actions, proactive engagement of all stakeholders, enforcement, and integrating environmental justice across all of our programs. Third, by incorporating regional administrator Fleming's elements, we in the region will broaden the conversation on environmentalism and bring environmental justice communities to the table as partners. Most importantly, EPA will work with these communities to ensure that our children can benefit from an environment that is the same or better than what we have. To do so is to promote sustainability. Native American communities have a saying that I like to repeat, which is that "We do not inherit the earth from our fathers. We borrow it from our children." That so succinctly states what sustainability is and, in addition, it's what we all want. We want our children to be able to breathe clean air, drink clean water, and to play, work, worship, study, and live in a safe environment.

I'd like to spend a couple of minutes outlining EPA's national environmental justice plan. Expanding the conversation on environmentalism and working for environmental justice is a priority that's been included in EPA's strategic plan for the years 2011 through 2015. And in accomplishing that effort, EPA has developed a plan, EJ 2014, an overarching strategy for EPA to integrate environmental justice into its programs, policies, and activities. To accomplish the goals outlined in EJ 2014, EPA developed nine draft implementation plans which will guide the agency's actions in the areas of rule making, permitting, compliance and enforcement, community-based action, administration-wide action, science, law, information, and resources. To just briefly touch on each of these, the first one is incorporating environmental justice into rule making to better protect human health and the environment for overburdened populations. The second is considering environmental justice in permitting to enable overburdened populations to have full, meaningful access, to permitting processes—i.e., a seat at the

table. Thirdly, advancing environmental justice through compliance and enforcement through case targeting, program planning, and meaningful remedies. Fourth, supporting community-based action programs by building useful, productive partnerships that promote healthy, sustainable, green communities. Also, fostering agency-wide action to diminish disproportionate burdens by federal action and to foster positive public health and economic health for environmental justice communities and indigenous peoples. The last four of that group of nine are all tools that are being developed in four different categories. The first one uses science, and the idea is to use data and analytical tools to develop and conduct research in a way that invites all communities to be engaged in understanding and communicating workable solutions to our combined effort to eliminate environmental injustice with regard to health disparities in minority and low-income communities. The second one of the tool group is law, and that involves providing legal support to EPA policy makers in the process of advancing environmental justice objectives. The third of that group involves information, which you heard about earlier today, which is designed to develop a number of things. One of which is a national environmental justice screening tool that will be used across the board, and this will be done within the next three years. One thing I forgot to mention with regard to the science—the data analysis, etcetera, and the research—that is to be conducted within the next five years. So these are more immediate in terms of actual items that we want to focus on with regard to EJ. And last, resources, the tools to develop resources, to develop effective financial and technical assistance to communities working to improve with regard to health disparities.

So what else is needed? EPA needs you. And I mean you, and the ubiquitous you as well. We need to have comment on the *EJ Plan 2014* and that opportunity still exists. Comment is still being taken, you can access the plan at regulations.gov and comment will be taken through April 29, 2011—i.e., through the 29th of this month at regulations.gov. I recommend, please, you comment, if you have commented, comment some more. If you know people, encourage them to comment because the more input we have the better a job we can do. Secondarily, EPA needs feedback from

communities, from you, from everyone, from citizenry on how effective our EJ programs are and what we can do to improve.

I want to close with a quote that was given to me by regional administer Fleming and it's basically one which embodies the principles that she adheres to with regard to environmental justice. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., postured this concept of equality in describing his own dreams, and I quote: "A dream of equality, of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed. A dream of a land where men will not take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few." That's how environmental justice plays a role in everyone's daily lives. Everyone wants opportunity, the opportunity to make the community they live in, to make certain that it has the same benefits and luxuries of the community that's fifteen miles across town, the opportunity to show that a low-income minority community does not equate to a low priority community. That's why we have to educate, educate, educate in order to elevate. Finally, I'd like to say please know that EPA Region 4 Regional Administrator Gwendolyn Keyes Fleming is an advocate and a sincere champion for environmental justice. She, and therefore we—the rest of us in the region—are definitely here for you and for everyone else in the country when it comes to environmental justice matters. Thank you very much.

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