

More than a Shot Across the Bow Ensuring Equitable Access to Clean Energy

(Time: 1 hour)

Moderator: Susan Stevens Miller, Esq. – Clean Energy Attorney, Earthjustice

Panelists: Jacqueline Patterson – Director Environmental & Climate Justice Program, NAACP

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Electric utility restructuring in the 1990s promised broad access to a wide range of innovative and affordable electric service and technology options. Today, most utilities still retain a monopoly at the distribution edge of the system and are using that monopoly to limit consumer choice. Many utilities are increasing fixed charges, reducing clean energy service options, proposing charges on clean energy options, and trying to eliminate or curtail net metering.

The new energy economy and how we design, structure, implement, and evaluate it has significant equity implications. Currently, people who are most impacted by polluting electricity producing industries and practices have the least influence over who is making decisions and what decisions are made regarding these polluting industries and practices. Not only do low-income communities devote a high proportion of their income to their energy bills, low-income communities also are more likely to be located next to coal-fired or other fossil fuel plants and suffer the ill health effects that exposure to such toxins are known to cause.

The time has come to complete the process of sector transformation. As we build the new energy economy, it must be built on principles and practices of energy democracy that prioritize significantly increasing energy efficiency and savings, as well as production of energy through clean energy. This session will analyze the current energy landscape, discuss recommendations on how we can advance an equity based energy platform going forward, and offer examples of promising practices where communities, utilities, and organizations are already making strides in advancing energy democracy.