

**Written Testimony Submitted to The Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming by Elsa Barboza, SCOPE/Convener of the Los Apollo Alliance  
May 22, 2007**

## **Introduction**

Good Afternoon. My name is Elsa Barboza. I am representing SCOPE, a Grassroots Organizing & Policy Institution in Los Angeles. We convene a progressive alliance called the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance which includes 23 Community Organizations, Labor unions and Environmental groups throughout Los Angeles. We are committed to shaping the second largest US city's regional economy into a sustainable, equitable and clean energy economy and to addressing poverty in Los Angeles' low-income communities of color. Thank you for inviting me to share our perspective as you consider the critical issue of green jobs and global warming. I would like to share with you today our perspective from the 15 months of on-the-ground experience with the LA Apollo Alliance and our first Green Jobs Campaign, as well as what SCOPE has learned from the 14 years of leading initiatives that create pipelines for the unemployed, underemployed and existing workers to careers in key regional industries.

## **CONTEXT FOR OUR WORK**

In Los Angeles, low-income communities of color like South Los Angeles and East Los Angeles, face the same underlying systemic trends that contribute to other low-income and working-class communities in the major cities in the US, like (1) **Economic Restructuring and Globalization which has resulted in a** thirty-year trend of high-wage, long-term, union jobs being lost, and so-called economic growth resulting in tens of thousands of new jobs with low-wages, temporary and/or part-time status, and few, if any, benefits; (2) **Shifts in Public Policy** where almost every major social gain won in the last 50 years have been cut or rolled back in a series of attacks; (3) **Increased division along geographic, racial and income lines** resulting in thirty years of divestment in urban communities of color and competition over shrinking public resources amongst City suburbs and urban areas; and (4) **Severe environmental inequity and crisis-level health impacts in poor communities.** According to the World Health Organization, in the United States, some groups, such as the inner city poor, have extremely poor health, more characteristic of a poor developing country rather than a rich industrialized one.

Today, about one-third of households in the Los Angeles region are struggling to make ends meet; a single parent with two children needs to earn over \$45,000 in order to be self-sufficient.<sup>i</sup> One in four Latinos and African-Americans lives in poverty.<sup>ii</sup> Furthermore, pollution and degrading environmental conditions are contributing to high rates of asthma, cancer, diabetes and other health problems. Communities of color in Los Angeles are most likely to be living in unhealthy conditions and suffer from poor health. Latinos are 66% and African Americans are 50% more likely to live near hazardous waste sites than whites.<sup>iii</sup>

With this stark context, SCOPE's mission is to build a multiracial grassroots organization and leadership in LA's affected communities to become active participants in public policy to shape institutions and policies that will create an economy that works for all and creates access to quality economic opportunities for the unemployed and the underemployed. Toward this, we seek to contribute to proactive strategies in collaboration with municipal, state and hopefully federal leadership to shape an equitable and sustainable economy.

As the Select Committee considers these issues, I would like to highlight the need to prioritize Workforce Development Training and True Equity for All Communities as the key lynchpins for creating access to a quality economy.

#### CONTRIBUTION TO GROWING THE JOB SECTOR BY THE LOS ANGELES APOLLO ALLIANCE

The LA Apollo Alliance mission is to focus political power toward shaping and transitioning to a new economy that is environmentally sustainable & economically prosperous for all. In February 2006, 23 labor, community and environmental groups came together to:

- Create Quality jobs in the new "green" industry and focus on unionization of this new economy to ensure livable wage jobs and benefits for families.
- Focus on workforce development training and access for communities of color and low-income communities to lead and establish the needed work to make move to a clean energy economy. Our vision is to create a pipeline to upgrade the skills of existing workers, backfill with new workers and address the basic skills gap of low-income communities of color.
- Create healthier and safer communities and prioritize the environmental uplift of inner city communities

- Impact the public sector to take leadership and grow and show a critical mass of results to move into the private sector

Los Angeles is unique in the level of collaboration and political leadership. The formation of the LA Apollo Alliance is poised to contribute a critical piece of a national strategy. The commitment of these groups to strategize and come together under one mission is a positive step vs. working separately on single efforts. This alliance strategy resulted in a successful public launch of our Alliance and efforts with over 500 community supporters, alliance members and policymakers present. Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Council President Eric Garcetti and a key South Los Angeles Councilman Herb J. Wesson embraced the Alliance effort and a Partnership was formed to shape a new economy in Los Angeles. An overwhelming grassroots and public action plan has also added to this dynamic collaboration. African-American and Latino community members and alliance members around the city have collected over 5,000 signatures from communities and constituencies seeking to new economic opportunities for Angelenos. Over 15,000 Angelenos were educated and mobilized to vote with these issues used as a measuring stick when gauging California propositions last Fall. Why is there such a resonance? Because the seeding of a “Green” industry that could potentially catapult large-scale job creation, link unemployed community members and upgrade local, incumbent union workers through training programs with innovative, specialized training in “green” AND promote environmental benefits is what’s needed today.

#### OUR GREEN JOBS CAMPAIGN

Our first Green jobs and training campaign calls on the City of Los Angeles to

(1) Conduct an energy audit of city building to identify the sites and job potential, (2) Secure \$100 Million to retrofit 100 existing city buildings with energy and water efficient technologies (3) Create 2,000 union jobs for new & incumbent workers, (4) Establish policies to Seed the Development of Local Green Building Manufacturing, and (5) Establish a Careers Ladder Training Program to connect inner city communities to Green Jobs.

Greening existing infrastructure such as buildings is a great way to preserve and make more sustainable older urban communities that have been neglected. Historically disinvested communities should be prioritized because these neighborhoods have typically been ignored in favor of larger projects in richer more high-profile areas. Equitable public investment in urban areas means not only improving infrastructure , but also improving economic opportunities, particularly

for low-income inner city residents. Projects that pay workers a fair wage can also benefit the local community, particularly low-income urban workers. Cities and states have the opportunity to shape a new economy that creates demand for green products and services; generates jobs in green construction, facilities maintenance and operations, manufacturing and professional occupations; and healthy, sustainable communities. Municipal green retrofitting provides important environmental, social and economic benefits to the urban core of Los Angeles. For example, the City of Los Angeles alone owns over 1800 City buildings. Just in the community of South Los Angeles, there are close to 200 City-Owned buildings. This does not include the vast number owned by the proprietary departments of the City of Los Angeles like the Airports, the Ports, etc. Therefore, the level of Reduction of pollution caused by inefficient buildings and the level of cost savings for the City the size of Los Angeles IS ENORMOUS and the scope and scale of economic opportunities is vast.

In addition, the historical disinvestment of resources and jobs has crippled our community, which is the case of many American cities and in most inner-city, working-class and low-income communities of color. South Los Angeles families have over 30 years under their belt of a declining manufacturing industry and union jobs, disinvestment and environmental decay and pollution. The LA Apollo Alliance sees a number of green career ladder pipelines that could impact the regional economy and access for low-income communities. There is a green-building Construction pipeline which provides an opportunity to upgrade the skills of current workers and train new workers in skills and technologies. Another pipeline is the operations and maintenance jobs to maintain the large number of water and energy efficient retrofitted buildings. And a third is the largest pipeline of manufacturing and assembly jobs of green-building products and green technologies.

#### THE TIME IS NOW

The time is now for strategic opportunities to make major strides and take advantage of the political window to win larger-scale job creation and long-lasting systemic policies that significantly impact regional trends and conditions.

Targeting policy and resources towards the development of an emerging, regional, green industry in Los Angeles is an opportunity to craft a regional strategy that re-energizes Los Angeles' economy, environment and neighborhoods. As the first of many public policy initiatives, our first initiative demonstrates a comprehensive environmental, public health and economic workforce development strategy.

Thank you for allowing me to share the work of Los Angeles Apollo Alliance with you this afternoon.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, (2000) "The World health Report 2000 Health systems: Improving Performance" Available at: <http://www.who.int/whr/previous/en/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> Pearce, Diana and Rachel Cassidy, "Overlooked & Undercounted" prepared for Wider Opportunities for Women and Californians for Family Economic Self-Sufficiency, 2003.

<sup>3</sup>US Census Bureau, PCT15A, Census 2000 Summary File 3.

<sup>4</sup>Communities for a Better Environment, "Building a Regional Voice for Environmental Justice," September 2004.