

# **Democrats reintroduce sweeping environmental justice bill**

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Congressional Democrats today reintroduced the "Environmental Justice for All Act," a much-anticipated, landmark piece of legislation aimed at protecting vulnerable communities negatively affected by pollution, toxic exposure and climate change.

Advocates think the measure, which mirrors that which was written in the last Congress, now has new life in a Democratic-controlled Congress and given all the allies across the Biden administration.

Former Rep. Deb Haaland (D-N.M.), an original co-sponsor of the first iteration of the "Environmental Justice for All Act," was just sworn in as secretary of the Interior, while Vice President Kamala Harris was the bill's lead champion in the Senate when she was still representing California.

President Biden has also made environmental justice a priority within the White House, recently creating a centralized environmental justice working group and directing 40% of the government's climate change spending to disadvantaged communities.

"With new leadership in Congress and the White House, we're in a window of opportunity to save lives and establish environmental justice that this country can't afford to miss," House Natural Resources Chairman Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.) — the lead architect on the legislation alongside Rep. Donald McEachin (D-Va.) — said in a statement today.

"President Biden understands the need for this legislation," they said, "and we're going to do all we can to ensure environmental justice for all."

Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), the new lead Senate sponsor of the "Environmental Justice for All Act," having taken over the mantle from Harris, said the legislation "would go a long way toward making real every American's right to breathe safe air, drink clean water and live on uncontaminated land — regardless of their ZIP code, the size of their wallet or the color of their skin."

The "Environmental Justice for All Act" would require permitting decisions under the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act to account for the "cumulative impacts" of harmful emissions, and allow private citizens in environmental justice communities to seek redress for discrimination under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

The bill also would impose new fees on oil, gas and coal companies to bolster an assistance fund to help communities transition away from economies that are dependent on fossil fuels.

Republicans have balked at these proposals, saying the policies would be overly burdensome, invite frivolous lawsuits and be punitive against an industry that in their eyes is already being targeted by the Biden administration.

It will be difficult to overcome this opposition in the Senate, which is split 50-50 and stymied by the reality of the filibuster.

Democrats, however, are hopeful that even if the full legislation doesn't get signed into law, there is an appetite for elements to be incorporated into larger legislative vehicles or implemented through executive orders.

McEachin, in a statement today, reflected on how long it has taken for environmental justice advocates to get to the point of introducing this type of legislation amid overwhelming enthusiasm from not just the activist community but the establishment as well.

"Years ago, grounded in a shared hope and optimism for a future that empowers communities, we began the process to create this legislation," he said, "and while the journey toward justice may be long, we are making progress."

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