**Report on the DA Event: *Opportunities for Environmental and Climate Justice in the Biden Era***

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On Thursday , April 22, 2021 Earth Day at 7:30 PM Beijing Time, Democrats Abroad hosted a live on-line panel discussion event*,* co-sponsored by the DA China Progressive Caucus, DA China Black Caucus, DA Global Black Caucus, and the Global ProDA Caucus. The panellists were Michelle Deatrick (policy analyst, editor, poet, and Founder and Chair of the DNC Environment and Climate Crisis Council), Dr. Michael K. Dorsey (solar power entrepreneur and expert on global energy, environment, and sustainability) and Professor N. Bruce Duthu (Chair of Native American Studies at Dartmouth College. Full biographies appended below). The event was moderated by Alexander Lee (former DA China general counsel and Environmental Sciences educator.) The session was recorded and is available on YouTube at https://youtu.be/bT5ldZTQ9tA

The session opened with a moment of silence for the late Vice-President Mondale and a statement from DA urging support for the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act. There was then a short video of White House National Climate Advisor Gina McArthy outlining the Biden Administration’s commitments to addressing environmental justice issues.

Questions and discussion by the panellists ranged across a wide array of topics. Michelle Deatrick addressed the question of what environmental justice means and what needs to be done in the US, not just to address current impacts, but also the to redress the legacy of past harms. Dr. Dorsey then dug into the details of the history of the Office of Environmental Justice and the need to “keep their feet in the fire.” Professor Duthu concurred and enlarged the horizon to future generations. He also raised the issue of the special challenges faced by native people, particularly the way that the language of equality can oppress the special status of sovereign tribes. Dr. Dorsey and Michelle Deatrick then addressed the path to recovery from the ineptitude and deliberate sabotage of environmental protection during the Trump years, and were optimistic that the new administration and the EPA could build back. Bruce highlighted the back-stopping role of activist organizations fighting in the courts, and went on to give an overview of the opportunities and challenges for stewardship of public lands by the Dept. of Interior under the leadership of the first Native American cabinet secretary, Deb Haaland. Michael pointed out the historic and momentous switch to renewable energy and what this means for fossil-fuel companies, for native people and for environmental justice. Michelle highlighted the value of resources from nature, but also pointed out that nature should be understood of have its own rights.

Alex then raised the issue of the USDA and opportunities and challenges for reducing agriculture’s impacts on the environment. Michelle pointed out that much more than 9% of US carbon emissions come from agriculture and drew on her personal passion as a farmer to highlight the many issues that need to be addressed in agriculture, including past and current racial injustices in policy. Bruce taught of the injustices from the historical policy of “allotment,” which divested 2/3rds of Indian farmlands and put it in the hands of white settlers. He also highlighted the tensions over control of water and forests on Indian lands, but pointed out the encouraging recognition of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in forest management, such as traditional methods for controlled burns. Michael advised not to expect much from the USDA under Secretary Villsack, but to expect a big rethink and many opportunities in forest management.

The audience submitted a number of questions, starting with the central question of how members of Democrats Abroad could take action. Michael encouraged DA members to plug in with local groups. Dr. Allison Stephens of the DNC Council reminded all that the American Jobs Plan needs our support right now. Michelle called for DA members to share climate stories with the DNC Council. Bruce responded to an audience question with an example of a partnership between tribal leaders and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to share indigenous knowledge for the benefit of biodiversity. He was not optimistic about the possibility of restoration of tribal control of lands, because of the implications for tax revenues. Michael used the example of Indian lands held in so-called “trust” by the Federal government to point out the importance of the vernacular with its roots in injustice, and how it needs to change. He believes that the ideological divide on climate and the environment in the US has already been bridged at the local level and certainly in business. Michelle and Allison agreed that building consensus now is not necessary before taking action.

The event ended with a brief introduction to the developments in DA Germany, which has just established an official Climate Caucus.

65 RSVPs were received by the time of the event and at least 30 viewers attended the 1 and a half hour Zoom event live. The somewhat low turn-out may have been in part because of conflicts with other EarthDay events, and also because the reminder following up the RSVP was somewhat delayed. Request for the event approval and poster design was submitted on April 6 and finalized soon after following a back and forth for revisions. The poster was put up on the DA Announcement WeChat site and elsewhere on social media on April 12 and 32 RSVPs were received by Saturday April 17, 5 days before the event. Post-event feedback indicated that the event was appreciated and well-received.

**Michelle Deatrick**, Founder and Chair of the first-ever DNC Environment and Climate Crisis Council, is a policy analyst, editor and internationally honored poet. She is a member of UAW Local 2230 and the National Writers Union, and serves as a delegate to her regional labor federation as well as being on the Climate Power’s National Advisory Board and the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy’s Board of Directors. A recent county commissioner who flipped a rural three-term red seat to blue, and a former Peace Corps Volunteer, Michelle is the Chair of Women’s March Ann Arbor. She lives on her family’s 80 acre farm.

**Dr. Michael K. Dorsey** is a recognized expert on global energy, environment, and sustainability matters. A graduate of the University of Michigan, Yale University, and Johns Hopkins University, as a trained social forester, in 1996, Dorsey began research in the upper Amazon basin, in Ecuador. He has also worked in the sub-tropical and tropical forests of Costa Rica, Colombia, Peru and Brazil. Between 2000 and 2010, he was professor in the environmental studies program at Dartmouth College. For fall 2020, Dr. Dorsey was the Macmillan Scholar in Residence and Global Affairs. In 2013 Dr. Dorsey and two former student collaborators co- created the predecessor to the Sunrise Movement. (In late 2018 the Sunrise Movement co- orchestrated launching the Green New Deal.) Presently, Dr. Dorsey is a JV partner in the Indian based solar panel manufacturer Pahal Solar and a limited partner in the Spanish solar concern IberSun, s.l. Dr. Dorsey is a “Full member” of the Club of Rome and, in 2013, the National Journal named him one of 200 US “energy and environment expert insiders.”

**Professor N. Bruce Duthu** is the Samson Occom Professor and Chair of Native American Studies at Dartmouth College. An internationally recognized scholar of Native American law and policy, Professor Duthu joined the faculty of Arts & Sciences at Dartmouth in 2008. He served as Dartmouth’s Associate Dean of the Faculty for International Studies & Interdisciplinary Programs. Duthu earned his BA degree in religion and Native American Studies from Dartmouth College and his JD degree from Loyola University School of Law in New Orleans. Prior to joining the Dartmouth faculty, Duthu was Professor of Law at Vermont Law School where he also served as inaugural director of the VLS-Sun Yat-sen University (Guangzhou, China) Partnership in Environmental Law. He is the author of Shadow Nations: Tribal Sovereignty and the Limits of Legal Pluralism (Oxford University Press 2013) and American Indians and the Law (Viking/Penguin Press 2008) and much more. He is an enrolled tribal member of the United Houma Nation of Louisiana.

**Moderator: Alexander Lee**, former DA China general counsel, taught Environmental Justice at Middlebury College in 1996, a year after he founded Project Laundry List, an organization that he led till 2010. He has worked for the NH PUC as Assistant to the Commissioners and was NARUC ERE Committee Staff Co-Chair during that time. He currently teaches Environmental Science and is the head of the social studies department at a school in Guangzhou.