

Drawdown Georgia: An Equitable Framework for Bringing Climate Solutions Home

Summary

Georgia is the first state to take a localized approach to Project Drawdown, but scaling climate solutions here means centering equity as a core value, not an afterthought. In this conversation recorded at The Carter Center as part of the Living Future 2022 conference, Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks of Spelman College and the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance welcomes Rev. Dr. Gerald Durley, a lifelong civil rights and environmental justice leader, John Lanier of the Ray C. Anderson Foundation, and Nathaniel Smith, chief equity officer of the Partnership for Southern Equity, to unpack how Drawdown Georgia is building a "leader-full" movement that treats equity as the compass for climate action.

Key Takeaways

- Rev. Dr. Gerald Durley draws a direct line between his years in the civil rights movement and today's climate movement, arguing that both require a willingness to sacrifice and take risks, and that the difference between equality and equity is history.
- John Lanier traces Drawdown Georgia's origin to a 2016 family conversation inspired by Project Drawdown, which led to a research partnership spanning Georgia Tech, the University of Georgia, Emory, and Georgia State to identify 20 high-impact climate solutions for Georgia, evaluated not just on carbon impact but on equity, health, economic opportunity, and environmental benefit.
- Nathaniel Smith argues that structural inequity and climate injustice share the same roots in the American South's history of extraction, and that a truly sustainable, resilient world is only possible if it is also a just one, "we don't just need new solar, we need new values."
- Both Lanier and Smith emphasize that meaningful philanthropic support for equity means more than writing checks: it means multi-year, general operating grants, real investment in leadership development, and a willingness for funders to give up power and pride, not just dollars.
- Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks and Nathaniel Smith point to concrete efforts already underway, including a Resilience Hub at the Atlanta University Center, a green workforce pipeline designed and led by young people, and ongoing work to bring women of color, who are disproportionately leading environmental justice work nationwide, more fully into climate solutions.

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Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks: Good afternoon. Well, good afternoon once again. My name is Na'Taki Osborne Jelks, and I'm here to welcome you to Drawdown Georgia: An Equitable Framework for Bringing Climate Solutions Home. We have a very interesting afternoon planned for you today. We have both a live audience here, as well as a livestream audience that will join us about 4:30, after we hear from Reverend Durley, who's kind of the centerpiece for this afternoon. Please feel free to grab some water if you need to, and we'll get started with Dr. Durley's remarks in just a few minutes, along with the rest of the program.

Today we want to focus on the Drawdown Georgia framework of climate solutions and centering equity as a priority, and that's something very important to me. I'm an environmental health scientist, I work at Spelman College in the Environmental and Health Sciences program. I also co-founded the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, a community-based organization that's been working for a number of years to advance issues around environmental justice, which for us means it's inclusive of climate justice. So as we think about equity, we think about issues around public health, we think about communities that have been made most vulnerable to climate change, our communities of color, low-income communities, in our state and throughout this country.

Climate change is something that's impacting, and will continue to impact, all of us, from Georgia to the global stage. But even though we're in the same storm, we don't always find ourselves in the same boat, meaning some communities are more vulnerable. When we think about the communities most impacted by exposure to environmental toxicants and hazards, including air pollution, we're talking about those same vulnerable communities. Just recently, a study was published covering a number of cities throughout the United States, Atlanta among them, that talked about the legacy of redlined communities, and the fact that there's more air pollution in many of those communities across the country. Atlanta was no different. There have also been studies looking at extreme heat, and again, Atlanta has been identified as a place where communities made most vulnerable by policy decisions are also more vulnerable to extreme heat exposure. We can talk about energy burden, we can go down a whole list of things and find those same communities disproportionately impacted. So when we talk about solutions for climate change, we cannot just talk about technical solutions, we've got to talk about root causes. We've got to talk about equity, and if we're going to talk about equity, we have to talk about the very real challenge of racism in this country.

As we have this conversation this afternoon, Reverend Durley will illuminate our minds, he's kind of looking around like I'm not talking about him, but he knows what he's going to come and do. He's going to illuminate our minds, inspire us, as he does every time I hear him speak, and he's going to talk about his journey and how he tied his work on climate change and climate justice into a lifelong ministry. We'll also hear from John Lanier, executive director of the Ray C. Anderson Foundation, and my very good friend Nathaniel Smith, chief equity officer for

Partnership for Southern Equity. We go back to college, he was just remarking that I've perhaps been working on environmental issues a little longer than he has, but when I think about the time I've spent in Atlanta now, close to 30 years, it was Nathaniel who introduced me to a lot of our local civil rights legends and heroes, international heroes really, who just happen to be here in Atlanta. As students at Spelman and Morehouse, he introduced me to a circle that's been part of his extended family for a long time, as someone who grew up in this area. So I'm pleased to share this stage with all of these individuals today.

Just a reminder that we'll be livestreaming this conversation beginning approximately at 4:30. This is part of Living Future 2022, the annual conference of the International Living Future Institute, a global nonprofit that inspires the greenest buildings for a healthy world. The Institute's mission is to advance communities that are socially just, culturally rich, and ecologically restorative. You might be familiar with the Institute's Living Building Challenge, the world's most ambitious, holistic performance standard for green, resilient, healthy buildings, we actually have a groundbreaking Living Building here in Atlanta, the Kendeda Building on the Georgia Tech campus. This year's conference theme is Restoration and Justice, which makes our conversation today particularly relevant for this global audience. We'll stream from 4:30 to 5:30, with an opportunity for questions following John and Nathaniel's conversation, and I'll come back up to help moderate those, both from you here in person and from our livestream audience. We've also set aside time to continue the conversation with those of you here in person after the streaming session ends, so help yourself to some beverages if you'd like.

But first, before we move into the conversation between Nathaniel and John, I'd be honored to have Reverend Dr. Gerald Durley join me at the podium, after I give a brief bio. Reverend Dr. Gerald L. Durley is pastor emeritus of the historic Providence Missionary Baptist Church here in Atlanta. He's from Denver, Colorado, and joined the civil rights movement in 1960 while attending Tennessee State University in Nashville. Upon graduation, he volunteered as one of the first Peace Corps members to serve in Nigeria. He subsequently completed a master's degree in community mental illness and psychology, and served as an administrator and director of several university programs. Continuing his deep interest in civil and human rights, he assumed the position of program manager at the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C., then became vice president of the Institute for Services to Education, designing interdisciplinary study programs for historically Black colleges and universities. He later earned a doctorate in urban education and psychology from the University of Massachusetts, and a Master of Divinity from Howard University School of Divinity. Upon graduation, he became assistant pastor of Mount Olive Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., and after relocating to Atlanta, became a pulpit associate at the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church while serving as dean of Clark College. He was called to pastor historic Providence Missionary Baptist Church in 1987, where he served for 25 years, concurrently directing the Morehouse School of Medicine's Health Promotion Resource Center and serving as executive director of 19 Head Start sites.

Reverend Dr. Durley is a legendary leader of civil and human rights causes, and in recent years has become intensely active as an environmental warrior. He believes that God created the

Earth and gave us dominion over a perfect, ecologically balanced world, but that humans are destroying this gift, and that we have a moral obligation and civic responsibility to speak up about climate change, global warming, and environmental justice. Reverend Durley combines the ethical teaching of the faith community with scientific research and his civil rights background to make a difference, and he's received a long list of awards and recognition from leaders across the country, including former President Barack Obama. He currently serves as national chair of the board for Interfaith Power & Light, and is a sought-after speaker, preacher, and presenter locally, nationally, and internationally. He believes that faith is the foundation upon which other traditions can establish their grounding, and there's more, but we just don't have time to list it all. I know most of us have heard of this outstanding young man, I'll call him, his birthday is coming up. He's been a strong example and mentor to me and to my husband, who's also in gospel ministry. So without further ado, let me welcome Reverend Dr. Gerald L. Durley.

Rev. Dr. Gerald Durley: What a great speech about me. You know, there are times in all of our lives where we feel excited about being something, and if you're excited about the environment, if you're excited about what's before us, somebody ought to give a hand clap of praise. There's nothing worse than a bunch of dull environmentalists, nothing worse than people talking about polar bears and trees and legislation like it's just another item on the agenda. No, this is our time. This is our moment. We are right now at the precipice of making a difference in saving our environment and our planet, and I get excited about that.

I never thought I'd be standing here at the Carter Center, talking about this. I think that in all of our lives, there are moments that change us, moments when you go to a theater expecting to see one thing, and something else happens, and it changes you. I never thought I'd be standing here talking about climate change, tree huggers, carbon dioxide, wildfires, tsunamis. Why? I'm concerned about civil and human rights, about the inequities and inequalities in people's lives. But in all our lives, there are certain moments where things just change. That happened to me about 10 or 11 years ago. But it started long before that. I joined up in 1959 at Tennessee State, I was 18 years old, and there was another young kid we got close to, he was 20, two years older, and he called me his little boy. His name was John Lewis. There was an older man who used to talk to us too, he was 34, and what could he tell us? His name was C.T. Vivian. He was there with Dr. King. We were in Nashville in 1959, talking about civil rights, human rights, educational rights, access to healthcare, constitutional rights for all Americans. And we were willing to do two things I think we're going to have to do again in the climate movement: we were willing to sacrifice, and we were willing to risk, at any cost, because we believed in it so much. But at 18 or 20, what do you really know? We fussed a lot, we were fighting for equality, fighting for parity, but we didn't yet understand the concept of equity.

There are things in your life that change you inextricably, and you don't even know you're being changed, you're just sitting there, and something clicks. I think that's what happened to me after all those years in the movement, in and out of jail, then leaving the country for Africa. I was through with America, too racist for me, institutional racism had been too much. All I wanted to do was become a great basketball player, but that didn't go so well. I came back and did quite a

few things, as Dr. Jelks mentioned. Then one day, about 15 years ago, a lady came to me here in Atlanta. A white lady came and said, "I'd like to talk to you about teenage pregnancy among young Black girls in the city of Atlanta." I wondered why a white woman would come to me about that, I had other things on my agenda. But we went out to the airport, where there were about 60 pastors, all white, talking about equity in teenage pregnancy among Black girls in Atlanta, how to make it fair and just. And I said, well, I'll ride out and meet with them. She got up and started talking, and I overheard someone ask, "Who is that guy standing there? Is he your bodyguard?" That stereotype. I said no. Then they asked if I had a PowerPoint. I said, "I'm pointing to my power right now, it never goes out." And I went on. Afterward, she said, "I'd like you to meet my husband." That lady's name was Jane Fonda. Her husband was Ted Turner. The next thing I knew, I was with Sally Bingham and others talking about these kinds of issues, and I began to understand that the environmental movement and the civil rights movement were, at their core, the same fight. We were fighting for constitutional rights that had already been put in place, voting rights, educational rights, access to healthcare, and we faced the same challenges the environmental movement faced. We had no political allies, we were underfunded, we didn't have a national headquarters. But we had one thing on our side, and I believe you have that same thing in this room today: we had justice on our side, we had right on our side, moral and ethical positions on our side. And we were willing to sacrifice and to risk. I tell people now, if you're not willing to sacrifice or risk, go home.

I went out to New Mexico once and told a room of environmentalists, the way you pull conferences together out there is profound, but my assessment was you're the dumbest people I've ever met in my life. You keep saying the same thing and getting the same results, going from one meeting to another rather than getting down to the crux of the inequities being perpetrated against people who did not pollute as much as other communities. You kept funding the same people doing the same thing and wondering why you got the same results. There was loud applause after that. So when we talk about equality, when we talk about equity, we've got to understand the difference. It's one thing to be equal, another thing entirely to have equality. Don't just say, "I'm going to give everybody the same thing," and then turn around and suppress voting and other rights. We didn't used to think about equity, we talked about parity and equality, but now, equity. I applaud the Ray Anderson Foundation for bringing John and Nathaniel together to talk about it. What good is it to say you've got equal access, and then cut off my legs? That's what equity is about, and that's why it's so important.

I'm taking that same energy we had 62 years ago. Some people ask how I can still be so excited, my birthday is May 11th, I'll be 80 years old, and I don't feel tired at all, I feel like running on. That's the enthusiasm, that's the strength that John Lewis and C.T. and Martin and Jesse and everybody had. You've got to have that enthusiasm. This is not a Frankenstein movie, when you leave, don't be frightened and go out saying it's all over. This is not an end, this is a beginning. So I want to compliment this great group today, this is your time, this is your moment. Do not bend, do not back up, do not bow, but always stay on the cutting edge. Remember, none of us will survive unless we all survive. So I'm saying to you, John, and to you, Nathaniel, the future is uncertain, the end is always near, but the beginning is now. Take us home, brothers.

John Lanier: Wow. This is not the first time I've had to follow Reverend Durley, and it continues to be a remarkable honor. I cannot match that enthusiasm, no matter how hard I try, but I'll try to be just a shade of your brilliance, my friend. And happy birthday. It's really tremendous to be here, to be with people in person, it's been quite a challenging last two years for so many people, and the ability to come back together, I take real joy in that. Our work collectively hasn't stopped these last two years, but to feel part of this community again is something I'm incredibly grateful for.

So let me set the stage a little for my remarks, and for teeing up Nathaniel. As you heard, this is part of the Living Futures Conference, and will be part of their climate justice track for this conference. It's really an honor for us at the Ray C. Anderson Foundation to have our work in community here in Georgia be on the radar of people elsewhere, for others to know that here, in Georgia of all places, we're trying to lead not just on climate, but on equity, in a city where perhaps no place anywhere in the world has done more on that issue than Atlanta. This is a good place to be having this conversation, here at The Carter Center. So my welcome goes out to those watching online too. My job is to tell the story of how we got here with Drawdown Georgia, how it came to be, what it is, and I'll also share a bit about what's coming next. But in between those two things, looking back and looking forward, I want to share some of the learning I've been doing in the equity space, the intersectionality between my focus on climate and the very real equity challenges that continue to exist in our world, because I've learned so much since the murder of George Floyd, and I want to share those learnings here.

So, looking back: what is Drawdown Georgia, how did we come to be sitting here today? In many respects, it started with a conversation I had with my family. I'm fortunate to be one of five grandchildren of Ray Anderson, the late industrialist turned environmentalist who dedicated the last 17 years of his life to making his carpet tile company, Interface, as environmentally sustainable as possible, and who was a champion for the business case for sustainability. When he passed away, he made the decision to leave his estate to our family foundation, and it became an opportunity for our family to try to advance his legacy. We had a conversation reflecting on that responsibility and opportunity, and collectively felt that climate change was the issue we needed to give the most attention to. This was around 2016. But we didn't know how best to intervene, or what the most significant impact we could make would look like. So we looked for inspiration, and found it in the work of Project Drawdown, which at the time was about to release a book listing the hundred most substantive solutions to the climate crisis. What we came to appreciate was that they were focused on solutions, not just on how dire the challenge is, but on how much we can do, right now, to address it.

But there was one thing Project Drawdown couldn't do for us: tell a family foundation in Atlanta, Georgia, which climate solutions work best in our own community. We're not the size of foundation that can be more than a drop in the bucket of international philanthropy on this issue, we wanted to make a difference here, and be part of those already doing this work. So the fundamental question became: what would be the most impactful climate solutions for the

state of Georgia? To answer a question like that, you've got to do some research, and it turns out I'm not the person to do that research. But Georgia has this amazing wealth of talent, professionals across our many universities who've dedicated their careers to understanding our climate and what we can do to help bring it back into balance. In conversation with a number of them, we realized there was an opportunity to regionalize the work of Project Drawdown, to do for Georgia what they'd done for the globe, analyzing which climate solutions could do the most to reduce our state's carbon footprint, and critically, evaluating them against other essential metrics too. Things like equity, what we're here to lift up today. What climate solutions can do the most to solve inequity in our society? To advance human health? To provide meaningful economic opportunity, new jobs, hopefully jobs that invite people who've long been left out of the conversation to benefit? And what are the opportunities to enrich our natural environment as well?

That was the charge given to a research team spanning Georgia Tech, the University of Georgia, Emory University, and Georgia State. After more than a year of work, they identified 20 high-impact climate solutions for Georgia, with a detailed understanding of these other considerations that often matter more to people than the raw amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. It was a tremendous research project, but it's not just about the research, that's the backbone of the work around which we need to build a movement in favor of scaling these solutions. And that's the work ahead, which I'll speak to in a moment. But first, I want to share some of the learning I've had as part of the philanthropic sector focused on climate solutions, because while the research was ongoing, I came to realize how much more I needed to learn about the racial injustice and inequities that continue to plague our society.

When George Floyd was murdered, it was a moment of awakening for me, as a white man of privilege. I remember desperately looking for guidance from people I trusted, to help make sense of that tragedy. Nathaniel was one of those people, and the Partnership for Southern Equity was at the forefront of making sense of that senseless act. I was so grateful to have teachers like him, like Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks and Reverend Durley, people who could help me make sense of something fundamentally outside my own lived experience. I spent time reflecting then, and have continued to, on what we're trying to do at the Ray C. Anderson Foundation in this space, and on how we can do better centering equity in our work. Three things came out of those reflections that I want to share.

The first is that I'm incredibly proud of the diversity of the research team that generated this best-in-class climate research, but I have to acknowledge that just because it was great doesn't mean it couldn't have been better. There was an opportunity, missed by our foundation, at the very beginning of Drawdown Georgia, to welcome other institutions into that work, and we didn't take it. For that, I'm sorry and regretful, because there are other institutions, HBCUs in our state, that could have added even more to that work. I'm grateful they're part of this work now, and we need to find ways to keep deepening that. What I realized is that diversity doesn't just exist at the level of the individual, it also exists at the level of the institutions you invite to the table, and

there are multiple tables where we need to be mindful about who's being invited, not just to have a seat, but to have a voice.

The second thing I realized is something my grandfather was fond of saying: "Status quo is a powerful opiate." For him, that was about the business world and how slow it had been to embrace a new way of doing business, mindful of its environmental impact. But I think that phrase applies well beyond business, because when we talk about racial injustice, status quo is a powerful opiate too. Before the murder of George Floyd, if I'm honest, I would have said, "Well, I'm not contributing to these injustices, I may not be proactively solving our equity challenges, but at least I'm not part of the problem." It turns out that's not enough. It's not enough to say "I'm not a bad guy," I have to proactively choose to be one of the good guys. Sitting on the sidelines, watching the work being done without finding your own place on the field, is no longer acceptable given the challenges we face now, and will continue to face. So I feel a need to get into this space more proactively, both in our work and as an individual.

The third thing I've come to realize is a deeper understanding of what urgency really means. Urgency in climate, for me, has long meant making sure we act now so we don't see climate change spiral terribly out of control. I've said before, and I'll say it again, I did the math: my son will turn 84 and my daughter will turn 82 at the end of this century. There's a good chance they'll live to see every day of this century, and I'm motivated by making sure the world they grow old in is as rich, vibrant, and just as possible. But here's my realization: what a privilege it is to worry about the life my children will have in their 80s. How fortunate I am to only worry about their challenges in the future, when so many people are facing challenges across the spectrum today, in climate too. People are wrestling with that right now. My intentions for my children are good, but I can't focus only on that, I have to accept that others struggle more than I do, more than my family does, and that we have an opportunity to address that. Those are my learnings, and more are still to come, I have a life ahead of me of learning about these issues.

But now, let me tell you a bit about what's coming with Drawdown Georgia. As I said, we have this research backbone, but we need people to pick it up and do something with it. We're grateful for the role so many people have played in this space, and ultimately, we need to lift up the experts. We need to lift up the Nathaniel Smiths, the Partnership for Southern Equity, and many other outstanding organizations who've been doing this work for a long time, so that the right messengers are bringing the message of climate solutions to their audiences. That's the idea behind much of what we're trying to do, breathing life into initiatives under the Drawdown Georgia umbrella that make these solutions relevant to whatever stakeholder group there is. We're excited that Georgia Interfaith Power & Light has taken on the work of bringing Drawdown Georgia solutions to congregations, they're best situated to speak to people of faith across the state about why this list of solutions matters to them, we want them to be the messengers. Similarly, we have Drawdown Georgia for Higher Education, where the Georgia Climate Project is making these solutions relevant to campuses and institutions across the state.

And there's no one I know better situated to speak about the intersectionality between climate and equity than Nathaniel Smith, chief equity officer of the Partnership for Southern Equity. I'll turn it over to you, my friend.

Nathaniel Smith: Oh my goodness, John, thank you. I could listen to John talk about equity all day, it's a great thing to behold. I tell you, it's been a long and beautiful journey of learning, I always tell my friends that equity is both a journey and a destination, it's both, and if you take the time to smell the roses along the way, you'll have the opportunity to be not only a better leader, but a better human being. I'd be remiss if I didn't take a moment to honor Reverend Durley, for his leadership over so many years, when he was, in many ways, the voice crying in the wilderness on both sides of this discussion, trying to get the more established sustainability organizations to see Black folks as partners in realizing a more sustainable and resilient world, and trying to get the Black community to understand that as our climate continues to change, we'll be on the shortest end of the stick as we continue to face these challenges as a human family. We also have to realize that for some communities, when it comes to climate, they'll get a cold, while other communities get pneumonia, because of history, because of the many challenges we're facing. And of course, my sister, Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks, we've known each other since our Morehouse and Spelman days, trying to figure it out, but I'm always the first to say she figured it out before I did, and I've been following behind her ever since. So I just want to take a moment to give you your flowers, and honor you as a great leader and friend, and my sister in this work.

I won't tarry too long, but I do have some things that may make you uncomfortable, and I don't care, because I think the urgency of where we are in the world means we have to get a little uncomfortable. We also need to get uncomfortable because we're sitting in a place that, in many ways, has been ground zero for extreme extraction, the American South. Before we truly relied on fossil fuels to advance our extractive economy, we used the power of free labor, indentured servitude and slavery were the primary ways we moved this economy forward. And the ripple effect of that history of structural injustice and white oppression continues to affect not just our most vulnerable communities, but our planet too. Structural inequity and climate injustice are cousins, whether you want to understand it or not, both come from the same place, a place of extreme extraction, injustice, and even inhumanity. We have to be willing to stand up and speak that truth. We will never have a more just and sustainable society without liberation. We must work to ensure that all people are not just in a clean environment, but free, free to experience the beauty of this world, free to have the opportunity to reach their full potential, free to make friends, free to go to uncommon places and learn and explore.

So when we talk about this connection between climate and equity, yes, it's about making sure we're good stewards of the planet, but are we really able to understand that we're all connected? We live in a place that provided the environment for one of the most incredible prophets this nation has ever known, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who lived not far from here, as a young man on Auburn Avenue. He talked a great deal about what he called the network of mutuality, that we live in this network, bound together by a single garment of destiny, what affects one directly

affects us all indirectly. You cannot focus on what's happening to our wildlife without also caring about what's happening to the people who live in homes in Vine City and English Avenue, who have to choose every day between paying the light bill or buying groceries. You cannot worry about what happened at COP26, and whether we'll work together to lower carbon emissions, when every day there are children who can't breathe because they live next to I-285 and I-20. We cannot talk about the beauty of parks and green space and their importance to climate remediation strategies, while some of the people who live near Westside Park in Atlanta are afraid, because they understand their property values will increase and they may not be able to benefit from the very park their public money helped build, essentially positioning them to subsidize their own displacement.

We will never realize the world we need for ourselves if we're willing to turn away and believe that only a small percentage of our communities deserve to live in a beautiful, healthy, sustainable environment. We will never realize a truly sustainable, resilient world if it is not also a just world. At the Partnership for Southern Equity, that is our focus, ensuring that as we move toward freedom, for our planet and our communities, our compass is always equity. While we're searching for that end, where all people and our planet are loved, embraced, and supported, we make sure we get there centered and grounded by a commitment to just and fair inclusion. Without a compass, you can't get to the proper destination, and we believe equity is that destination. Why? Because equity is not equality, and the greatest difference between the two is history. You can't talk about where you want to go if you're not willing to repair and heal the past. You can't talk about a more resilient future without understanding that there's nothing you can tell a woman in Southwest Atlanta, trying to feed her family on minimum wage while still paying her light bill, about resilience. I'll say that again, because I don't think you heard me, there is nothing anyone in this room could tell a mother raising three kids, doing her best to help them reach their full potential in spite of the structural challenges she faces every day, about resilience.

We believe at the Partnership for Southern Equity that the people closest to the problem are actually closest to the solution. It's our responsibility not to be missionaries, but to make sure people have their own agency cultivated and supported, so that their commitment and vision for a better world can be realized, not ours. And why should you do that? Because if you say you're committed to equity, that's the only way. Equity isn't just about what you're willing to give, and I've talked to John about this, I'm really excited about the role of philanthropy in moving this work forward and expanding its dollars, God knows we need it, especially for the frontline organizations we support and love, the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, EcoAction, and others across the state. But it's not exclusively about what you're willing to give that realizes equity, it's about what you're willing to give up. Are you willing to give up your privilege? Are you willing to give up your perceptions about certain communities?

Let's be clear: when we talk about beyond carbon, let's talk about why we don't have a regional transit system in this city and region. Let's talk about why we've been trying for so long, Pastor Durley, to move beyond Fulton, the city of Atlanta, and DeKalb. At the organization I lead, we

were able to expand MARTA into Clayton County for the first time in 40 years. But let's talk about why we can't get to Gwinnett, or Cobb, or other counties. It's not about the color of the buses, it's about the perceived notions certain communities have about the people who ride those buses, and because of that fear and ignorance, we all sit in traffic. I have never sat in Black traffic in my life, Nataka, or white traffic, or Latino traffic, we all sit in traffic. So the work of equity isn't just about communities of color and Black communities, it's about all of us, because even though communities of color have been hurt and harmed by decisions made by certain segments of the community, those other communities have been harmed too, they just can't see it or understand it, because it's disconnected them from humanity and from our planet. So the work isn't just about policy change, it's about how we transform people in ways that let them see themselves in other people, John, people they usually don't sit with and talk to, even though those are the people who hold our future in their hands.

I sit in a lot of environmental conversations, and everybody keeps patting themselves on the back for the same accomplishments, over and over. We've got to bring new people to the table, but we've got to make sure they understand the value proposition of their engagement in the work. That's why PSE is a multi-issue organization, you can't talk about climate without talking about health, you can't talk about health without talking about economic inclusion, you can't talk about economic inclusion without talking about growth. That's how we have to engage communities that have been marginalized by this history of structural inequity. The people John and I are talking about don't have a light bill problem on Monday, a jobs problem on Tuesday, and an education problem on Wednesday, they have all of those problems, every day. So we have to find ways to connect the dots, and while we're connecting the dots, we have to connect our hearts to the work and to people's livelihoods. It's not just about the hard work, people, it's about the heart work. What are you willing to give up, and is it time for our environmental community to be courageous enough to care? Because it's going to take courage to move this work forward, and let's not get it twisted, there's a backlash coming, which is why I have so much respect for John and others who understand that.

Equity is cool right now, it's the new coconut water. Everybody wants to talk about equity, everybody wants a racial equity plan, everybody's stealing my staff, you didn't catch that, because they want to be part of this conversation. But what happens when the legislature starts doing things that affect your bottom line, or the people you care about? Are you willing to stand for racial equity then? When we were fighting for a more equitable democracy in this state, a lot of corporations were silent. I wrote an op-ed and asked one question: how can you say you love Black people and not love Black democracy? It's either, or. Either you love justice, or you don't. You can't love justice a little bit, when it's convenient, you can't be for equity Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, you've got to be for it every day. So we're at this moment where we have to understand that moving down the road of equality alone isn't going to get us to a more resilient world. We have to understand our past, and work to ensure that all people have what they need to realize their full potential. It's not just about transitioning to a clean energy economy, it's about making sure that as we transition, we don't leave anybody behind, or replace one unjust economy with another. It's about making sure that when we talk about solarizing

communities, we're not positioning that solarization as a driver of displacement and gentrification. Are we working to ensure people are actually trained and positioned to benefit from this new technology on the supply side, not just the demand side? Are we making sure that when conversations happen around energy policy, we're not just inviting communities of color to show their faces so the fight looks diverse, but that when it's time to actually share the grant money, it becomes a real conversation? I always tell my frontline friends, if you can't see it in the budget as a line item, it's not real.

So there's a real reckoning we have to have as a community, and it's not just about the polluters, not just about the so-called bad guy. What do we need to clean up in our own environmental family? What do we have to do to make sure we're moving forward together, in a more just and inclusive way? How do we begin to live our sermon, and show that we're serious about a more sustainable, resilient world, one where we're not willing to leave anybody behind, and where everyone is positioned to reach their full potential, not just within the context of a changing climate and a clean energy economy, but in a more just society, one focused not just on new technologies, but on a new way of being. That's what we need right now. We don't just need new solar, we need new values. So I'll stop there, I'm really looking forward to the Q&A. I'm so pleased to see so many people here to hear John and me talk about this. I'm really excited about Drawdown, I have to say that too, being one of the co-chairs. John knew exactly what he was getting with me, and we had a really authentic conversation about what this had to be, and he's come through every time. I appreciate that, not just for me, but for the people who don't have the time or the convenience to sit in rooms like this and have this conversation. Those are the people I fight for every day, and I hope you'll choose to fight for them too, and be part of this movement we're working to create. I'll stop there, John, thank you.

Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks: Thank you so much for that really enlightening exchange. Now we're going to open the floor for some questions and answers, I'll start with a question to each of you, John and Nathaniel, and I believe we'll have some questions from the livestream as well. So Nathaniel, you've laid out quite a bit for us to think about, but I want to ask you to get a bit more specific about certain communities. John's talked about what he's doing with other local and statewide funders in the philanthropic space, but what else do you see as critical for the funding community? You've talked about how the communities facing these problems are often closest to the solutions, and I'll just note that Partnership for Southern Equity isn't a typical organization, since you're working on behalf of frontline organizations, you're not a traditional funder, but you've pooled resources to give grants to frontline groups, really stepping into a space where there's been a void, especially around a lot of the issues raised today. So if PSE can do that to help fill this void, being a group that isn't a traditional funder, what would you say to the philanthropic community? Can you give us some concrete things we need that community to do, to help us advance equity specifically in this climate solutions space?

Nathaniel Smith: That's great, Taki. A couple things. First, it's very important, and it's one of the first things I said, that we have to remove the missionary mentality in how we engage frontline communities, Black communities, and historically disinvested communities of color. We've got

to invest in leadership development, invest in cultivating the agency of people on the ground, so they have real clarity, not just about what the solutions are as they read about them, but about what those solutions could be through their own experience and their own genius. So leadership development is key. The other thing we're learning is that while we talk about solar, solar, solar, clean energy, clean energy, when you look into a room of people doing solar or clean energy technology, it looks just like this room. So we have to make sure we're ensuring a level of economic inclusion, we talk a lot about the demand side of this discussion, but Black folks and communities of color need to be on the supply side too, they need to be the new entrepreneurs, they need to be trained and cultivated, that workforce development piece is going to be really important.

The other thing I think is really important is how we can play a role in jump-starting the clean energy economy through retrofitting many of the communities that have been disinvested in, moving from a culture of just sustainability and resilience to a culture of repair and healing. If we lead with repair and healing within the context of sustainability, there are a lot of opportunities, our HBCUs, many of them can be weatherized and retrofitted, which could create a clean energy revolution in those communities. Many communities that have been disinvested in through redlining and other policies could really benefit from a more targeted approach to energy efficiency, retrofitting, solarizing, and other clean energy technologies. So being laser-focused on leveraging this moment to encourage a clean energy transition, Taki, while working with those communities in ways that position them to lead, not just follow, those are three things I think we can start doing right away.

Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks: Thank you so much for that, and I appreciate you talking about leading with repair and healing. My criticism, from my vantage point, is that as a city and a region, we invest so much in the new and shiny, what new thing can we start, what new building, what new initiative, and sometimes what remains, what's been under-invested in, just gets overlooked. So I appreciate you talking about the potential in retrofitting, and leading with repair and healing. John, my question to you is about the venture you just announced, you're partnering with other foundations, locally and across the state, coming together collaboratively. Each of you has said there's something important about making investments in a new and different way. So what's your biggest hope for what comes out of this effort, and what do you hope it can grow into beyond this initial phase?

John Lanier: My biggest hope is that we'll see new people across the state of Georgia understand that they have a place in solving the climate crisis, that we need them, that they can be the champions we've been desperate for to address these challenges. That's the central thesis behind what Drawdown Georgia is meant to be, a movement. What if the state of Georgia had a widespread movement in favor of climate solutions? We need everybody, and that's what I hope this can begin to do, tap into organizations who've long been doing important work but haven't always felt like they've had a meaningful place at the climate table, who don't feel like they can even speak to these issues because they're drowning under the day-to-day challenges Nathaniel has spoken about. If we can help solve those challenges through the process of

scaling climate solutions, bringing solutions we know work into these communities, that's my biggest hope. So it needs to be something with staying power, more than just the coconut water Nathaniel spoke to, something others come to join us in, and that our foundations remain engaged in for the long haul.

One thing I've been grateful for with our other peer funders in this work is how thoughtful the process has been. At the beginning, I only had in mind the equitable outcomes we wanted from this work, and it's been through collaborating with them, and through the guidance of a consultant, Chaundra Pope with the Rooted Group, that I've come to see the importance of the equity side of the process itself. Because it's not just about giving dollars, it's about how you give them, how you listen to others. Nathaniel speaks so well to the question of not what will you give, but what will you give up. For philanthropy, what we need to give up is power and pride, and maybe this can be a step in that direction for the Ray C. Anderson Foundation. In many respects, I look at these other funders with gratitude, because I see they're further along on that journey of giving up power and pride, something so important for our sector.

Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks: Thank you so much for that really thoughtful response. It's really encouraging to hear you share this, and to know you're not the lone one, that there are others who think it's important to invest in this work too. Just a reminder for those in the room, if you have a question, there are mics on either side, feel free to get up and ask. Maybe for some of you this is one of the first times we've been back in an in-person space, but okay, I see some folks, go ahead please, sir.

Audience Member: Thank you. My name's Ed Outlaw. Someone mentioned earlier that Atlanta is perhaps the place where more has been done for racial and economic justice than anywhere else, but Atlanta is also on the list of cities with the highest level of inequality. I wonder, what is it about Atlanta, compared to other cities, and what can we be doing better?

Nathaniel Smith: I'm trying to be good today. There are a couple things. I think a lot of this started with the burning of Atlanta, and people like Henry Grady, who focused a great deal on his idea of the New South, after Reconstruction, this story that Atlanta was different now, industry from the North, please come help us rebuild, we're treating Black people like human beings now, we've learned a lot. That's really been the culture of Atlanta for a long time, it shifted from the New South to the Atlanta Way, a way that's really been focused on selling, more marketing than meaning. The challenge, and I know Reverend Durley is frustrated by this too, is that we love to invoke the name of Dr. King, we love to invoke Joseph Echols Lowery, James Orange, all these people who poured into me and poured into Reverend Durley, but we're not really willing to live their values.

Another big challenge is that philanthropy, in many ways, has been part of the problem, in that it's been very strategic about what it's funded over the years, and unfortunately, a lot of that funding hasn't gone to courageous organizations, or organizations working to build power in community so community voices can speak for themselves. I call it the Peter Pan syndrome,

giving organizations just enough money to survive, but not enough to grow. That's why I'm really excited, I think we're at a moment now in Atlanta where we could potentially break through this civic culture that's been more committed to saving face than saving children. At the Partnership for Southern Equity, we've worked hard on issues like income inequality, and we're near the top of the list nationally on that measure, but I want to be clear, that number is falling not because we're getting better, it's because folks on the other end of the spectrum are getting pushed out of the city. We now have more poor people in the suburbs than in the city of Atlanta, because they've been pushed out by market shifts and changes.

So, in a nutshell, and I had to tell that story because people who aren't from Atlanta may not understand this is a long history of these challenges, but I think with leadership like John's and others I care about in local philanthropy, we have an opportunity to change. For many years, and Nataki will tell you this, local funders didn't fund the Partnership for Southern Equity at all, it took years for that to happen, not because we didn't have a persuasive case, but because we were unapologetic about what we stood for and what we were committed to. We have to be willing to do that today too. But I think there's a whole new generation of philanthropists emerging who are taking the time to really try to get to the heart of the matter, and I'm really excited about that. That's been the culture, but I think there's an opportunity to disrupt it, though it'll take everybody, particularly the philanthropic community and other civic leaders in the city.

Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks: Thank you for that. I have a couple of questions that came in from the chat I'd like to share, since the livestream will be ending soon, so let me get those out of the way, then I'll go to those of you standing. This is another one for you, Nathaniel, building on what you were just discussing: what are the best ways to build equity into grant and project budgets to have real impact?

Nathaniel Smith: Wow, that's a somewhat complicated question. I think, first and foremost, it's important for philanthropists to actually look at the organization, what does the board look like, is it representative of the communities they say they're serving? There's a difference, we have this whole exciting thing now about organizations that are Black-led, or brown-led, or led by people of color, and that's a great thing, but if they're not governed in a way that's consistent with that leader's values, you're really just doing what they used to call window dressing back in the '60s. You're putting somebody of color in a leadership position, but the culture of the organization isn't shifting, and I've seen that recently in Atlanta, in philanthropy and elsewhere, where a great leader of color leaves for another position, and the person right behind them isn't necessarily consistent with the person who left. So are we ensuring the organizations we're funding are governed in a way that will realize equity? Is the senior leadership representative of that same commitment?

I also think it matters to commit more to general operating support versus programmatic funding. A lot of people don't understand that the opportunity for organizations to be flexible and nimble creates the opportunity for them to be successful for the long haul. And then there's the duration of the funding, you can't expect a frontline organization to undo structural racism in

a single grant cycle, it doesn't work that way. So can we be honest about how much time this is really going to take, and can we begin to give multi-year grants, and trust those organizations, especially if they're led by people who look like me? That's the other big issue, there's a difference between how white money and Black money move in philanthropy. If you look at the funding white-led organizations receive versus Black-led organizations, or organizations led by our Latino brothers and sisters or other people of color, it's usually not the same amount, and there's usually more scrutiny placed on communities of color leading these organizations, because for some reason there's an assumption that we don't know how to manage money. We've got to undo all of that if we're going to move forward. And the last thing, really, is about developing a real, authentic relationship with the grantee, you can't just give away money, you have to get in the foxhole with these organizations and build real relationships. I always say, and Taki and Reverend Durley and John have heard me say this a thousand times, that change moves at the speed of trust, and it's real, so you've got to create that trust in a way that will create the change you want to see.

Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks: Thank you so much for that. I have one last question for John, since I know the livestream needs to end in just a moment. You've talked a little about this already with the effort you just announced, but what are some other meaningful strategies you see for getting new voices to the table, with a meaningful role in defining the vision for how we move forward with Drawdown Georgia?

John Lanier: For Drawdown Georgia in general, yes, all right, I'll answer this and then say goodbye to our friends online. For the Ray C. Anderson Foundation, doing this work as part of Drawdown Georgia, we are not Drawdown Georgia, it's not even its own organization, we intended it to be very loose and joinable in that respect. So one of the fundamental pieces of this strategy is for Drawdown Georgia to be the wind in the sails of people and organizations who've already been doing great work, maybe who haven't seen themselves as part of the climate movement before. That's what's amazing about 20 solutions spanning five different sectors, there's something that connects to the work you're doing, or the issues you care about, whoever you are, I can find that connection point. So we hope this overall movement is something people feel they find themselves in, and where they find an opportunity to lead. We only see the state of Georgia become a leader on climate if we build this leader-full movement, that's the only way. I think of this work like a room, and it doesn't have one door I need people to walk through, it has a hundred doors, it doesn't matter which one you're willing to walk through, as long as I get you to walk through one of them, and then we treat everybody in that room with dignity and respect, then you've become part of this. That's my hope, infused into every aspect of what we're doing, that this leader-full movement can come about because of the network we're building within our state. I'm so grateful to everybody watching online with the Living Futures conference, we hope you have an excellent rest of your conference. Thank you, friends. And for those of you here, the conversation is going to continue, we still have a bit more time. Nataki, come join us, because your wisdom and brilliance needs to be right here with us. So we invite continued questions from our audience.

Audience Member: Good afternoon, my name is Brendan Barclay, and I represent the National Wildlife Federation, specifically as manager of education and engagement. I work with emerging leaders that Nathaniel spoke of, but I first want to thank you, John, because your organization, Ray C. Anderson, has supported our work as well. My question is about leaders, since we work with emerging leaders from K through 12 and even college, what guidance should we give them? When I was coming up, Dr. Durley was my mentor, I wanted to go into the Peace Corps and follow in his footsteps, didn't make it there, but went into AmeriCorps. It was clear, if you wanted to lead, you followed these steps. But today, young people, they TikTok, they Vine, they Instagram. Nathaniel, what would you say is a route we could lead emerging leaders toward, to make this work effective and sustainable?

Nathaniel Smith: Well, I'll tell you, we've been very committed to this as an organization. We just acquired a national organization called Youth Empowered Solutions, YES, about a year ago, and reimagined it as a new initiative of ours called YES for Equity. One of the things we're very serious about is giving young people the tools they need to be effective and successful, because real systems transformation doesn't happen through TikTok, or Clubhouse, or Facebook, it takes organizing, and work that truly reflects the values of the people we need to hear from. So we don't waste a lot of time, we focus on engaging young people and getting them to move beyond just talking, to understanding what real change looks like, and we actually put them in positions of engagement. For example, we just hired ten youth organizers, in Durham and in Atlanta, to begin really organizing around the work in all the areas of PSE's engagement.

The second thing I'm really excited about, because I believe it's the work itself that purifies capacity and relationships, we recently got a significant grant from the NBA Foundation to develop a green youth pipeline. Basically, we're trying to create a workforce development pipeline for young people in Georgia, but here's the key, they're designing and leading the pipeline themselves, we're positioning them to be leaders in developing their own pipeline, and to train other young people. Getting them involved and engaged early, and also exposing them to our elders, I think is really important, because they often come in assuming they can do your job tomorrow, and we have to help them understand this is a marathon, not a sprint, and exposing them to people who've been at this a while really matters. There's one other key thing we do with YES for Equity, we can't assume that as adults, we're automatically positioned to be the best allies for young people, there's a lot of challenges around ageism, so it's also about doing due diligence with your adult staff, to make sure they're not bringing that ageism into the work, what are you doing to position your older staff to be partners and advocates for youth leadership? We do a lot of work around that too.

And I think you've got to be honest with your young leaders, you may want to make a hundred thousand dollars a year at 22, but this is the wrong job for you if you think that's going to happen. I think we're not always honest with them about what the journey really looks like if you're truly committed to the work of liberation, and I think we do them a disservice by not being honest, because if we're not giving them the tools to fight the good fight, who are we going to

leave this work to? So those are just some things to think about, and I'd definitely be happy to talk to y'all more about it offline. But I really appreciate your question.

John Lanier: I want to bring Nataki into this, because your perspective as an educator, on how young people are wrestling with these issues today, is one I'd welcome.

Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks: Well, I'd echo a lot of what Nathaniel said, but what's impressed me about these younger generations is that those who are really committed, once they understand the issues and challenges, are a lot more uncompromising than some of us who are older. When we talk about environment and climate, bringing in issues of racial justice and equity is a no-brainer for the younger generation, some of us who are older are still trying to grapple with how these things fit together, but young people get it. So I'm kind of impressed with them for that. But I do think it's important to ground them honestly, let's be honest about the struggles and challenges we've had, and really work with them to build solutions for how we break through some of these barriers, while also grounding them in the necessary skills. Sometimes young people say, "Oh, we don't even need that, why is this part of the curriculum or this training?" And as visionary as I see some young people being, I think they sometimes miss some of those fundamental things, understanding the tactics that have been used in the past. I used to hear, though I think this is changing, and I feel like the events of 2020 shifted things, young people who used to say marching and protesting weren't accomplishing anything, but now I feel like they're coming back to some of those tactics and strategies, alongside working on action plans and policy change. So those skills matter, and that intergenerational dialogue is still really important, being able to learn from our elders is critical, and I think the learning goes both ways, it sharpens everybody at the table.

Audience Member: Thank you, and I'll be quick since I know the food's coming out. Miguel Garagña, from ATDC and Georgia Tech. I have a real quick question about the chicken and the egg situation when it comes to workforce development. There's such a great opportunity, in particular for equitable workforce development with green jobs, and we know some of these jobs can really open up opportunities for communities of color, but at the same time, there's a risk, somebody invests, trains, and does that work, but there isn't a job there yet, because those jobs haven't quite scaled up to meet demand. It's a tricky situation. I was wondering, especially from a philanthropic and advocacy standpoint, what can be done, and what's already being done here?

John Lanier: I don't want to speak first on this.

Nathaniel Smith: No, go ahead, go ahead.

John Lanier: To me, it's perhaps best to take this broader chicken-and-egg question, which I think applies in many respects to the challenges we're trying to solve. In workforce development, while it's not necessarily a narrow focus of our philanthropic work, things are changing so fast that I think there's real value in making sure people are being trained to be

nimble and responsive. Reflecting on my own experience, I got my formal education in sustainability back in 2014, I'm an attorney by trade, and in many respects I've been unlearning what I learned in law school to do this work. I was fortunate to study under Paul Hawken at the Presidio Graduate School, and the enduring lesson I took from that class is that you have to think about sustainability challenges as a system, it's a systems thinking problem. They didn't try to teach us skills and strategies with a narrow focus, they taught us to be systems thinkers, to understand the problem as a whole, because when you have a tricky chicken-and-egg challenge, if you can zoom out and understand the system it operates within, the linkage points and leverage points for change, you may be able to flip that problem and see progress happen at the same time. So for me, fundamentally, we need a next generation of problem solvers coming at this work equipped with as many tools as possible, as systems thinkers.

Nathaniel Smith: Yeah, I also think we can't turn away from the role of government in creating opportunities for large-scale engagement. To me, there's only one thing worse than preparing a workforce for an opportunity that hasn't arrived yet, and that's training workers for an economy we're about to transition away from. That's a more horrible outcome, training people for an economy that won't exist. So how do we begin to think about workforce development as a continuum? Yes, there's the work of training, but there's also the work of the advocate, creating and advancing policies that create that demand. Opportunities like Drawdown Georgia, the Just Energy Circle, the group we lead at PSE, and others working along that continuum of inclusion and economic opportunity, give us a real chance to not just focus on training folks, because if you look at who's being trained now, and who owns the businesses, it's not diverse at all. That's one reason we proposed to the NBA that we've got to find a way to diversify that pipeline now. But we also have to be willing to fight for opportunities like Build Back Better, the Justice40 executive order from President Biden, and local opportunities like the City of Atlanta's climate action plan and the Better Buildings Challenge, continuing to institutionalize these opportunities, and really looking for ways to train people while preparing them for this new economy.

That's actually a great segue into a question I wanted to ask you, Nataki, about the Resilience Hub we're partnering on at the Atlanta University Center, which to me creates a great opportunity to realize both the demand and the supply side. I wanted to give you some space to really talk about the work of the Resilience Hub, and what we're doing there through Spelman's leadership, and I guess, hanging out with y'all.

Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks: I guess you could call it that. Well, thank you for that. While I'm not a leader of this initiative, I'm really excited about the Resilience Hub, and the collaboration coming together across the Atlanta University Center schools, with PSE, and others. We have a set of Energy Equity Fellows, students digging into this issue from a curricular standpoint, getting training, and getting engaged in internship projects. We have new courses focused on sustainable energy, and we're looking at launching a microgrid. There's a lot happening, and our students will be at the forefront of this work from a training perspective, but we're also tapping into the expertise of our faculty across the Atlanta University Center institutions to push this forward. The collaboration is really beautiful, to have groups like PSE at the table alongside, I

guess you could say a son of Morehouse, for this initiative. It's definitely something to look out for, something that I think will reach real potential in future years.

There's been a lot of work happening in pockets prior to this too. Spelman was the first HBCU to open a green dorm, and since we opened that dorm several years ago, every renovation project or new building on campus has been built to at least LEED Silver standards. We have Art Frazier, an architect by training who runs our facilities program and co-chairs Sustainable Spelman, and Dr. Fatemeh Shafiei from the faculty side, the other co-chair. We've been working for years to green the operations of the institution, students worked years ago to get a green fee instituted, another first for an HBCU. We've also worked with organizations like EcoAction, alongside Morehouse, Spelman, and the Interdenominational Theological Center, to look at stormwater issues across these campuses, how stormwater is being generated and how it's impacting communities on the West Side, and to look for solutions there. All of this is woven into this idea of building out a resilience hub in the Atlanta University Center, so thank you for that.

Nathaniel Smith: And here's the beauty of it, we have HBCUs all around the state of Georgia that represent untapped opportunities, not just for workforce development, but for these resilience hubs, and for the work required around energy efficiency and retrofitting. So there's real economic opportunity here, if we're willing to see it, and if we're willing to fight for it at the legislature too, which is the other piece. But I definitely wanted to make sure we talked about that.

John Lanier: Thank you, please.

Audience Member: Hi, my name is Rachel Usher, and I really appreciate, Nathaniel, your comments earlier about the history of Atlanta, where we've been, and how it shapes where we're going. We're all in Georgia, and we're sitting looking at a November that's going to be quite monumental for our state, in shaping the future and what an equitable future looks like here. Voting rights are under attack, reproductive rights are under attack, how can the climate community, writ large, contribute meaningfully, in the very short term, to this pressing conversation about our state?

Nathaniel Smith: Well, I think the first thing is that the climate community, in particular the more established parts of it, have to be willing to embrace that they've been part of the problem. Because they've been so adamant about keeping their circle close, believing only a certain group of folks should be part of the conversation, it's minimized their ability to be impactful and influential. So it's going to be really important for them to humble themselves and admit they were part of the problem, and once they can do that, they need to go out into the community and ask forgiveness from the communities they've left behind on this climate conversation. That creates an opportunity for dialogue, which begins a real conversation about what strategies we can pursue together going forward. There are a lot of lessons we can all learn from each other, but first we have to create a table broad enough for everyone, and one of the critical aspects of that table is that the work has to be intersectional, we can't just focus on climate solutions and

energy challenges without also focusing on health. We have to meet people where they are, and work to ensure we're always creating a table sophisticated enough to understand how all these dots connect. That's why, when I started this conversation, I said if we're going to talk about a clean energy future, you've got to start with slavery, whether people want to understand it or not, because that energy was used to grow this economy before fossil fuels. It's about creating those conversations, how are you engaging the affordable housing community, the health equity community, economic development, because they all have a part to play. If we can create that table in a real and authentic way, which is some of the work, and I don't want to make this a commercial, but I'm just so thankful the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance has been part of what we've built over about six years now with the Just Energy Circle, trying to create a space for diverse voices to come together around this issue.

I really think equity starts inside first, because at the end of the day, it's not just a what, but a way, and if you're willing to embrace the way of equity, you have to start with a conversation about repair and healing, you have to. That creates the opportunity for people to work together in a different way. I think we're finally getting to that point, I'm extremely optimistic about it, but if we're not careful, and I've seen it so many times, we'll go right back to the way things were if we don't take advantage of this moment. So that would be my thoughts and recommendation.

John Lanier: I know y'all hear those bottles popping, we're getting wrapped up, I know, celebration's happening. We'll do two more questions, I'm going to selfishly take the first one, and let Nathaniel have our last one here. Nataki, this one's for your perspective with the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, what does progress look like? Are you seeing it? What does it look like when things are getting better?

Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks: Good question. From my vantage point, with the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, from the beginning we've been about working hand-in-hand with community residents in West Side communities, and we do our work through a watershed lens, the Proctor Creek and Sandy Creek watersheds, most of Northwest and Southwest Atlanta. Progress really means seeing strong and equitable environmental protections for our communities, it means making sure people have a voice at decision-making tables. That's critical, because we got our start when there were projects happening in Southwest Atlanta communities in particular, without real community engagement, things our local government was going to push through where even the city council person for the area wasn't clear on projects that could have negative environmental and health effects on the community. When community residents found out, some of our elders, Reverend Richard Bright and others, really led a movement to stop some of that work, and I know Reverend Durley is shaking his head, because he remembers, we had issues around sewers and the building of sewage overflow facilities in community parks in Southwest Atlanta.

So when I think about progress, it means people have a more meaningful voice in decision-making, it means we're investing in leadership development. One of the programs WAWA is working on with EcoAction is called the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network, which

trains local residents to seek out and advance solutions around things like green infrastructure. And, without saying too much about some of the leaders who've been in our community a long time, one of our graduates, Jason Dozier, is now on the Atlanta City Council, he helped start the Entrenchment Creek Community Stewardship Council, and is taking that work forward. That speaks to the benefit of the leadership development Nathaniel was talking about. It's all of that, but it's also making sure that as Atlanta grows and develops, communities aren't forgotten, aren't left behind. There are a lot of investments happening on the West Side now, and I think many of us look at those things with wonder and excitement, but I can't help being concerned about the people who asked for these solutions, who worked for these solutions to be implemented. Because if we don't have the right policy supports in place, if we're not working across sectors, then the park that gets built, or whatever else gets built, can end up displacing people, if we're not bringing the housing folks and the watershed people and all these different groups together.

And so progress looks like making sure we have these tables, busting through these silos, where there's even some shared governance with communities, I know Mayor Dickens is looking at things like participatory budgeting. That's the kind of thing we need to really see progress, because the progress is happening, but we've got to make sure that those who fought for it get to benefit from it in place, and aren't displaced and moved away from it.

John Lanier: Brilliant, thank you. Please.

Audience Member: Thank you, my name is Reverend Jenny Phillips, I work with Global Ministries, the humanitarian development arm of the United Methodist Church. I'm so grateful for this conversation. I came in this afternoon with women on my mind, because of the headlines of the day, and feel a heightened awareness of something briefly mentioned, that people of color experience the deepest burdens of the climate crisis, but in particular, women of color. I'd love to hear more about how Drawdown Georgia is specifically and intentionally drawing in the wisdom of women of color as it seeks solutions.

John Lanier: We have more work to do, but it's wonderful that we have people like Nataki here doing this work. My hope is that this whole theory of change, of building this movement, is one that people see as led by women, and in particular, by women of color. If we can do that here, there's so much strength and wisdom we need to be lifting up, for the benefit of all of us. So I want to hear your perspective on how we can have more Natakis elevated in this space.

Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks: Well, we just say the word, and we can make it happen, for sure, let's put the resources out there. This is kind of interesting, because I've been doing an unofficial study for the last several years, really looking at the work women of color across this country are doing in the environmental space, particularly environmental justice. And increasingly, that means women of color are lifting up this banner of climate justice, and they're in every community across this country, leading these efforts. Not that the men aren't there, but women have definitely been the caretakers of home and family, when we talk about health impacts,

they're seeing it, experiencing it, caring for children, caring for the elderly, and the impacts are very clear. So I think we've got to do more to make sure those doors are accessible, and that people know those doors exist to walk through. There are lots of groups and organizations, I know Valerie Rawls has the Eco Womanist Institute, focused specifically on women of color in this work, that's a group we need to connect with. People like Felicia Davis, who's been working on green issues forever, as well as women's empowerment and voting rights. Helen Butler, with the Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda. I could run down this whole list of women who get it, who are really trying to do this work and bring together these issues around climate with these other broader issues, which have, as Nathaniel so eloquently laid out, the same genesis as many of the challenges we're facing.

So we've got to reach out, open up these spaces to those women, to the organizations they're working in and leading, we can broaden this really quickly, but we've got to see the value, and thank you for that question, and for elevating that wisdom, the power of women of color, of Black women. Let me also make one last point: when we talk about these issues from a climate perspective, from a policy perspective, look at the records, look at the records of women of color, of Black women, in Congress and legislatures across this country, and how they've pushed environmental issues forward, you don't see any greater champions. So we've got to make sure these women are at the table, that our organizations are resourced to keep doing this work, organizing, mobilizing, and educating, to help us move toward the solutions we need to implement.

Nathaniel Smith: Yeah, and as men, we have to be committed to that too. As I said before, equity is a way, and it's not just about supporting organizations led by women of color and Black women, it's also our responsibility to create spaces for them to be seen fully and completely as the leaders and change agents that they are. For example, at PSE, and Nataki knows this, 80% of my staff are Black women, that wasn't by happenstance, that was intentional. Our Just Energy portfolio has been primarily led by Black women. So it's more than a notion, it goes back to this deep commitment, to making sure we create these spaces for all of us to show up for humanity, the way we've been called to. And it means we have to understand our shortcomings, and be willing to create spaces for people to reach their full potential. It's not just about supporting organizations, which we need to do, but about a commitment, if you're a leader of a fairly large organization, are we creating the spaces for Black women to thrive? For women of color to thrive? That's been my personal commitment, because so many women played a part in who I am, Black women in particular, that's been my personal charge and commitment.

John Lanier: Well, my deep gratitude for you all being here. We want the conversation to continue among all of us in community, so please, we hope you enjoy the drinks and food that's provided, and we'll look forward to chatting more with you. Thank you all so much.