

## **The Senate Needs to Pass Biden's Build Back Better Plan Now**

President Biden ran on progressive climate ideals, promising the future generations of this country a sustainable environment they would be proud to live in and inherit. During his campaign trail and on his campaign website, President Biden pledged that his administration would “[stand up to the abuse of power by polluters who disproportionately harm communities of color and low-income communities](#).” Yet, when he proposes an infrastructure bill that includes harmful fossil fuel subsidies and subsequently increases climate emissions, but is also unable to [advance the Build Back Better Plan](#) which is used to combat these provisions, he is falling short of his promises to America.

Houston is unfortunately disposed to disproportionate environmental and health disparities as a result of petrochemical facility and refinery placement. Whereas predominately white and affluent areas are not exposed to carcinogenic compounds, minority and low-income communities are subject to live in close proximity to refineries and chemical plants, [creating long-lasting and negative health impacts such as asthma, and cancers like leukemia](#). These health disparities are exacerbated by the release of toxic chemicals into the air such as benzene and formaldehyde, both of which further aggravate air pollution and are dangerously cancer-inducing. These health concerns also go unnoticed as limited access to healthcare and financial resources are available for families in these areas. Communities like Pasadena, Deerpark, Manchester/Harrisburg and Channelview in East Houston are all at risk for negative health outcomes, and also are at higher risk of exposure to toxic chemicals, demonstrating just how catastrophic environmental racism is.

This is exactly why President Biden needs to push the Senate to pass the Build Back Better Plan now. The Build Back Better reconciliation package is a \$1.8 billion bill that would not only invest in clean energy technologies, but would also spearhead the creation of a Civilian Climate Corps, a new and innovative workforce development program dedicated to conservation and empowering marginalized communities to build sustainable capacity, all while tackling the most pressing issue of our lifetime: [climate change](#). The House has already taken monumental steps to pass this piece of legislation, and the Senate needs to follow suit. [Port communities in Houston have to endure constant air pollution due to the increase in freight and industry traffic](#), and with this, the Build Back Better Plan would enable the transition of port electrification within the Port of Houston. This would reduce greenhouse gas emissions and allow the port to consciously operate in the environment. However, we cannot simply talk about carbon emissions in legislation, call it a day, and claim to have addressed the subject of environmental inequality. Emissions are a symptom of a much larger issue facing us, but without also directly addressing

other consequences of the problem, such as the health disparities presented earlier, we are deliberately neglecting to craft comprehensive policy and help those in most need.

Although the Infrastructure bill has passed (and this is not to say that the emphasis on transportation and pure water are not paramount either), without the Build Back Better plan, environmental justice efforts will be deemed futile. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez from New York took to Twitter to explain the relationship between the BIF and the BBB, referring to the bills as “interlocking policy” and comparing the situation to a lock and key. She states that “[BIF climate benefits ONLY unlock with BBB’s Key provisions.](#)” and “[If BBB gutted/dies, we may have just locked in US emissions & thrown away our biggest chance to combat climate change.](#)” If the Build Back Better Plan fails to pass the Senate, we are stuck with subsidies and increased emissions without any policy to counteract the deadly outcomes.

What can you do? Call or email your Senators, pressure them into supporting the Build Back Better Agenda and show our Senate that we need comprehensive environmental reform, not just mediocre and incomplete pieces of legislation. The opportunity we have to shape policy right now is the opportunity of a lifetime, and the American people deserve to be heard because ultimately, we cannot have climate reform without including both marginalized voices in the conversation and an intersectional approach to our advocacy. The situation is dire, and using each other’s strengths, we can ensure that the needs of our Houston communities are met at the national level.