

Huda Alkaff: The next 100 days for environmental justice in Wisconsin

Posted on Thursday, May 20, 2021

The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.

For Muslim communities in the United States and around the world, the holy month of Ramadan is a time to reflect, fast, and pray. With the blessed month over, we are full with a renewed sense of hope, care, compassion, and commitment to serve others.

This spirit of service reminds me of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad and the importance of giving, planting and tending to the garden. My faith has always guided me in my work as an ecologist and environmental educator, and in 2005, I founded Wisconsin Green Muslims to start a dialogue within our community around climate and environmental issues. I knew then as I know now that communities like mine are facing a multitude of problems that require bringing together those impacted to find truly intersectional solutions.

That is why the actions of the Biden-Harris administration in its first 100 days have left me so hopeful. On a global stage, President Joe Biden showed that the United States is in the struggle to address climate change. His Leaders Summit on Climate brought together 40 world leaders to tackle the climate crisis, and during it, he announced our country's commitment to reducing climate pollution by 50 to 52 percent from 2005 levels by 2030.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

At home, he has committed to making environmental justice a part of the mission of every federal agency, and has established the first ever White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council. He also re-established the White House Office of Faith-

Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, an invaluable point of access for the work I do. As a woman of color and an interfaith leader and environmental justice advocate, I recognize the need for continuous conversation and collaboration around climate issues especially during the next 100 days and beyond on all levels.

The president's own commitments in his first 100 days show he is serious about bringing us together to tackle the biggest issues facing our country and addressing environment justice. His Justice40 Initiative proposes that 40 percent of the overall benefits from federal investments, including in climate and infrastructure, will go to those communities that have traditionally been overburdened by pollution.

Milwaukee is all too familiar with these historic injustices. There are about 70,000 lead pipes that need replacing in the city, which at the city's current rate would take 70 years. That is unacceptable – these pipes and infrastructure are already poisoning our children and homes, leaving too many without access to safe, clean water. President Biden's proposed American Jobs Plan would replace every lead pipe and service line in the city, while investing in a better future.

This future includes pollution-free renewable energy and climate-resilient infrastructure. As of 2020, there were nearly 70,000 Wisconsinites working in clean, efficient and renewable energy, including me as a coordinator of the Wisconsin Faith and Solar Initiative, and the president's plan invests in creating more family-supporting jobs to strengthen our communities. The last decade alone has made it clear that we need a plan to tackle climate change: from 2010 to 2020, our state experienced up to \$10 billion in damages from 16 extreme weather events.

We need to go big on equitable climate action, and the next 100 days is the time to do just that. As a systems ecologist, I see the value of a systems thinking and multi-faceted approach to addressing all of these issues and their cumulative impacts, and our communities need our champions at the federal level to think boldly to take on these interconnected challenges. And I have to hope that they will do just that.

– Alkaff is an ecologist, environmental educator, and the Founder and Director of Wisconsin Green Muslims. Alkaff founded the group in 2005, which works to bridge faith, environmental justice, sustainability and healing through education and service. She is a member of the Milwaukee Coalition on Lead Emergency, Milwaukee Environmental Justice Roundtable Leadership Team and the national Environmental Justice Leadership Forum.

