

## Nomination Speech for EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson to Receive the Creation Care Award

The Rt. Rev. Eugene Taylor Sutton, Bishop of Maryland  
Annual Prayer Breakfast of the National Religious Coalition on Creation Care (NRCCC)  
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It is my honor this morning to nominate Lisa Jackson, head of the US Environmental Protection Agency, to receive our award for her extraordinary leadership in creation care. Through the giving of this award, our coalition composed of various faith traditions and religious backgrounds affirms that there is a growing body of evidence that *everything is connected*.

In Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, the spiritual teacher Father Zosima speaks of the interconnectedness of all life:

All is like an ocean, all flows and connects; touch it in one place and it echoes at the other end of the world... Love all of God's creation, both the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love animals, love plants, love each thing. If you love each thing, you will perceive the mystery of God in all things.

That spiritual wisdom is what lifts people of faith to care for all of God's creation. It is what moved St. Francis of Assisi to compose his great canticle celebrating "Brother Sun and Sister Moon" and a host of other creatures. It has compelled the world's greatest spiritual leaders from Christian mystics to Mahatma Gandhi to the Dalai Lama to Archbishop Desmond Tutu to believe in God's universal love that knows no bounds of race or faith or nation—or even of species. Scientists now tell us that nature participates in a seamless web of connection; it is actually possible that the flap of a butterfly wing in Japan can set off a hurricane in the Caribbean. And the driving of a gas guzzler in here in Washington, DC can melt an iceberg in Greenland. Everything really is connected.

In a similar way, *we* are all connected—to one another and to the natural world in which we live—and that is why it pains the religious community deeply to know that *some* of us are more adversely affected by the destroying of God's creation than others. For sadly, it is true that environmental degradation in the United States is very much tied to issues of justice and race.

Our honoree today, Administrator Jackson, has reminded us that the environmental achievements over the last 40 years—including significantly cleaner air and water throughout much of the US—have not been equally shared by low-income communities and people of color.

"We've come a long way," she said in a newspaper interview last year, but quickly added that the EPA and environmentalists in general, "need to do a better job of using the clout

they've accumulated since 1970 to ensure more 'environmental justice'" — a term that the EPA and others use to describe the idea that everyone, no matter their race or income level, has the right to live in a healthy environment.

This clearly is a huge but neglected part of the "unfinished business" for the environmental movement. Numerous studies have shown that low-income and communities of color tend to suffer disproportionately from exposure to toxic substances and resulting health problems. Dr. Robert Bullard, a professor at Clark Atlanta University and a pioneer in the environmental justice movement, maintains that race has historically been the most potent variable in determining the location of hazardous sites, even after factoring in the factors of income and education levels.

Prof. Bullard's research shows that this racial disparity has widened even further in recent years. He co-authored a 2007 study that said that, nationwide, 56% of Americans living within two miles of a commercial hazardous waste facility were people of color. That was up from 33% in a 1987 study.

Similarly, a separate 2008 study by University of Colorado sociologist Liam Downey found, based on U.S. Census data, that an average black household with an income of \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year coped with higher levels of pollution than an average white household with an income of less than \$10,000. Thus one's skin color is a greater factor than one's income level in determining how much environmental degradation affects that person. I am African American, and I know of the devastation in our black communities from the deterioration of the environment. Increasingly, I know that to be black in America, means that one should be green.

So the question for this generation is: aren't we as a nation better than this? Can't we work together to build a more just and sustainable environment for our children?

Our honoree today says yes. Lisa Jackson is the first African American to serve as the head of the national government's agency charged with protecting our air, land and water resources for the benefit of *everyone*. She has made it a priority to focus on vulnerable groups including children, the elderly, and low-income communities that are particularly susceptible to environmental and health threats. In addressing these and other issues, she has promised all stakeholders a place at the decision-making table.

In January 2010, Administrator Jackson formed a new EPA priority called *Expanding the Conversation on Environmentalism and Working for Environmental Justice*, and she incorporated it into the Strategic Plan for 2011-2015. To implement this priority, the EPA launched Plan EJ 2014 as that agency's overarching strategy for integrating environmental justice (EJ) in its programs, policies and activities. The goals of that plan are to protect health in communities over-burdened by pollution, empower communities to take action to improve their health and environment, and establish partnerships with local, state, tribal and federal organizations to achieve healthy and sustainable communities.

The NRCCC believes that in this and many other ways, Lisa Jackson is doing God's work in the world. Her drive, energy and vision for a sustainable earth is a modern testament of the truth that everything is connected, and we all belong to each other. It gives me great pleasure to nominate her to receive this prestigious award.