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Commission to Engage African Americans on Climate Change Issues Principles for Equitable Climate Program

81% of African Americans Favor Strong Government Action

(Washington, DC–June 26, 2009) – As the U.S. House of Representatives prepares to vote on major climate legislation, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies’ Commission to Engage African Americans on Climate Change (CEAC) today issued a set of legislative principles aimed at advancing the interests and concerns of African Americans and other people of color in the climate debate.

The CEAC believes that responsible and equitable climate change legislation should achieve the following goals:

1. Reduce emissions to avoid dangerous climate change, thus improving overall air quality and public health;
2. Shift America away from an over reliance on fossil fuels to a clean energy economy; and
3. Recognize and minimize any adverse and disproportionate economic impacts on vulnerable communities resulting from both climate change and policies to address it – while seeking to fulfill international emissions reductions commitments.

“There is a fierce urgency regarding climate change and its effects on the African American community,” said Ralph B. Everett, President and CEO of the Joint Center and Co-Chair of the CEAC. “People need to understand what is at stake--our very health and economic well-being. We are encouraged by the attention Congress and the Administration are giving to the concerns of communities of color regarding these issues.”

“Addressing climate change must be a priority for all Americans, but it’s especially important for African Americans, who have been and will continue to be one of the most impacted groups,” said Texas State Senator Rodney Ellis, Co-Chair of the CEAC. “On this challenging issue, African Americans and communities of color are leading the call for government action.”

The efforts of Congress and the Obama administration with respect to climate change policy are supported by a public opinion survey on the views of African Americans on key climate and energy questions released last year by the Joint Center. That survey found that a majority of African Americans (54 percent) characterize global warming as a major problem, with another 24 percent thinking it a moderate problem, while 81 percent believe that the federal government should take strong action to deal with global warming. The poll also found strong support (72 percent) among African Americans for legislative action that would mandate the U.S. to begin achieving the goals of the Kyoto treaty on climate change. On balance, while African Americans do not believe dealing with global warming will be cost-free, they do believe that **not** dealing with global warming will be more costly, and that a clean energy economy represents a better future.

“There is clear and strong support for action on climate change from the African American public,” said David Bositis, Ph.D., senior research associate with the Joint Center and noted scholar on black electoral politics and



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voting. “President Obama has urged the passage of climate change legislation and his advocacy certainly reflects the dominant sentiment of the black community.”

“African American communities are disproportionately affected by climate change, in terms of health impacts, economic effects, and quality of life issues” said Benjamin T. Jealous, President and CEO of the NAACP and member of the CEAC. “The climate legislation currently under consideration in Congress is a much-needed step toward energy independence and a cleaner environment.”

The Joint Center and the CEAC are continuing to monitor the opinions of communities of color on these important climate issues, and are looking forward to working with Congress and the Obama administration to implement a climate program that benefits all Americans.

CEAC membership:

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The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies is one of the nation’s premier research and public policy institutions and the only one whose work focuses exclusively on issues of particular concern to African Americans and other people of color. For more information, go to www.jointcenter.org

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