

June 14, 2021

Administrator Michael Regan  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Ariel Rios Building  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20460  
*Via email.*

CC: Sinceré Harris, Matthew Tejada, David Gray, Gloria Vaughn

Dear Administrator Regan,

On behalf of the individuals and organizations listed below as well as the tens of thousands of members we represent, we are writing to register our support for Dr. Elena Craft, Dr. Earthea Nance, and Ms. Deborah Trejo in the search for a new EPA Region VI Administrator.

These three comprise the very short list of candidates that we in the environmental and environmental justice community believe will fulfill the hope for a sustainable environmental and economic future promised by the Biden Administration and evidenced by current EPA appointments in D.C. and across the nation.

As the agency shifts away from the blatant industry apologia of the Trump years toward fair, factual, science-based policy, these three individuals possess the qualifications and leadership necessary to move Region VI forward. While some of us prefer one or the other of these three candidates, the environmental community believes any of these candidates will bring real change to our region.

Before reaching our consensus decision, we conducted a series of interviews looking for candidates with a demonstrated record and unquestionable commitment to public health, particularly among fenceline communities. We also looked for environmental justice advocates who understand the very real geographic, racial and socioeconomic inequalities involved with siting a polluting facility. In harmony with President Biden's statements, we also sought an appointee with a commitment to the use, not the abuse, of science in crafting environmental policy. Perhaps most importantly, environmental advocates in Region VI looked for a potential administrator who does not possess conflicts of interest due to lobbying work with polluting industries.

Dr. Elena Craft, Dr. Earthea Nance, and Ms. Deborah Trejo most fully embody these qualifications.

As you well know, Region VI is home to a number of pressing environmental issues that require innovative policy solutions and bold action. Challenges vary from petroleum refining,

petrochemical, coal, waste, gas drilling and nuclear facilities to non-attainment areas in Texas and the dead zone in the Gulf. Dr. Craft, Dr. Nance, and Ms. Trejo demonstrate the ability to look at these issues from diverse perspectives, to analyze data without preconception and to elucidate reasonable yet broad-minded, forward-thinking ideas to protect our natural resources and our communities. In fact, we believe that these people are among the best candidates that Region VI has seen. Any of them would be an outstanding choice for the Regional Administrator position.

### **Elena Craft Ph.D.**

Dr. Elena Craft is a toxicologist with the Environmental Defense fund who holds a Ph.D. in toxicology from Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment and Earth and Ocean Sciences and an M.S. in toxicology from North Carolina State University. She previously served on the EPA Science Advisory Board's Environmental Justice Technical Review Panel.

Her toxicology work for communities in Texas resulted in the development of data-to-action plans and the commitment of additional air monitoring resources for the Houston communities of Pleasantville and Fifth Ward. After Hurricane Harvey, Dr. Craft spearheaded a program to bring air monitoring resources from California that was sampling air pollution on the ground before either TCEQ or EPA arrived on the scene. Her work uncovered an active benzene leak at the Valero Refinery in Manchester and led to a federal investigation of the Hurricane Harvey Response. Dr. Craft's work after Hurricane Harvey also led to the launch of the Texas Flood Registry which has registered more than 20,000 community members to date.

Dr. Craft believes that EPA should provide communities, especially environmental justice communities, with access to scientific data and technical assistance. She suggests that EPA Region VI should be more inclusive of grassroots organizations and tribes and seek guidance from them about what issues are most important to them. We believe that Dr. Craft's technical background and career bringing scientific data to bear on issues that impact environmental justice communities in Texas make her well suited to serve as the EPA Region VI Regional Administrator.

### **Earthea Nance, Ph.D.**

Dr. Nance has a Ph.D. from Stanford and is an Associate Professor in the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs at Texas Southern University in Houston. Previously she was an assistant professor at the University of New Orleans. She is an expert in disaster response and mitigation across multiple Region VI states and has authored numerous influential reports aimed at directing the Houston area towards a more resilient future. Additionally, she is a strong community advocate, and participates on multiple stakeholder groups and coalitions aimed at making policies and infrastructure projects more equitable.

In addition, Dr. Nance is a certified floodplain manager and a board-licensed civil engineer. She has focused much of her work on environmental justice concerns and community engagement.

Region VI is faced with multiple hazards due to the concentration of industry and exposure to extreme weather events in the region. All too often this results in greater exposure in communities of color and low-income communities in our region. Because of this, it is imperative that the Regional Administrator for Region VI has an acute focus on equity. We have full confidence that Dr. Nance will make it a priority of the region to study the disparate effects of environmental harms on communities, develop comprehensive plans (both regulatory and incentives-based) to address those effects, and to bring enforcement actions when necessary to ensure the health and safety of communities in Region VI. We also appreciate that Dr. Nance has pledged to participate in “deep engagement” to develop a bottom-up agenda appropriate for the region.

We believe Dr. Nance has the technical background necessary to direct the region and will ensure that equity, transparency, and accountability are priorities for Region VI. We also believe that the capable staff at region six will support Dr. Nance as she familiarizes herself with environmental and administrative law. As such, Dr. Nance is well-suited for the position of Regional Administrator for EPA Region VI.

### **Deborah Trejo, J.D.**

Deborah Trejo J.D. is an experienced and effective environmental attorney with a long-time commitment to environmental and human rights issues. Ms. Trejo, a Spanish speaker, has worked and lived in three states in EPA Region VI – Texas, Louisiana and New Mexico. She is deeply familiar with the issues facing EPA Region VI and with serving in administrative agencies. Deborah has the ability to set goals and accomplish objectives, work with diverse communities, and lead and help others in a team to succeed. She is energetic, passionate and driven, with a sense of humor and a commitment to protect public health and the environment across Region VI.

Born in Texas, Ms. Trejo grew up in Louisiana’s “Cancer Alley,” in view of an aluminum plant and refineries. Ms. Trejo was a bilingual teacher in largely migrant communities in Oregon and New Mexico before attending law school at Tulane, where she studied Pollution Control, Toxic Substances, Natural Resources, and Endangered Species law and served as a student attorney in the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic. Following law school, Ms. Trejo was part of an official U.S. delegation to Cuba to translate its Law on the Environment.

She then worked on the Texas-Mexico border as an assistant district attorney in Cameron County. As a partner at the KempSmith law firm, Ms. Trejo represents governmental entities and private clients, specializing in groundwater issues, open government, regulatory takings, endangered species, elections, water quality, constitutional issues, enforcement, permitting and litigation. Ms. Trejo has for nearly twenty years led enforcement and litigation efforts for the Edwards Aquifer Authority while also representing other governmental entities, including the General Land Office/State of Texas, cities, counties and other special entities.

We feel confident that this Administration is truly dedicated to including the voices of the environmental and environmental justice community in the decision-making process and returning the EPA to its rightful place as protector of American air, water and soil. We thank you for considering the views of the environmental community and look forward to working with you, the EPA and our new Region VI Administrator.

Sincerely,

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(PACAN)

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