



November 22, 2021

STATEMENT: RISE ST. JAMES

**Thank You to the EPA Director for including
Rise St. James in your recent visit to Louisiana**

"I remember sitting on the porch, watching the blossoming flowers sway back and forth. I remember how birds would chirp chasing a butterfly and now, there are little to none, due to the influx of petrochemical emissions and pollutants along Highway 18, my community, a town called Welcome, Louisiana." Stephanie Cooper, Vice President of Rise St. James

ST. JAMES, LA - This past Tuesday, November 17th Rise St. James hosted the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Director Michael S. Reagan as part of the "Journey to Justice" Tour through Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. The purpose of EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan's trip was to support environmental justice efforts and connect with historically marginalized communities disparately impacted by pollution including residents, advocates, and various stakeholders. The discussion included solutions to these deep-rooted problems, the urgent need for progress, and the commitment to action by the EPA and the Biden-Harris Administration.

"It's way past time for our concerns to be taken seriously. Outside help has finally come, and the help is much appreciated. It's also way past time for some of the local elected officials to pick up their public servant hat - we have been left to our own devices." Sharon Lavigne, President, Rise St. James

The EPA Director walked the streets with various stakeholders and was able to get a first-hand account of their everyday experiences such as on Burton Lane in St. James, Louisiana. In the Burton Lane community, residents are locked-in without an evacuation route for emergencies and catastrophic events due to a recent industrial development. In addition to air pollution, the Burton Lane community now has critical drainage issues attributed to the gargantuan industrial site and 24-hour noise pollution causing sleepless nights - exacerbating underlying health issues. Burton Lane residents Brenda Bryant and Celestine Miller walked along side Director Reagan and were given an opportunity to share their frustrations.

“Today was an impactful day for me as I saw firsthand how the families in St. James and St. John Parishes are affected by pollution. I am committed to working with these communities to provide justice — because we all need access to clean air and water.” Michael S. Reagan, EPA Director

The same communities plagued by pollution and infrastructure problems are also hardest hit by the climate crisis i.e. Hurricane Ida. In a Thank You note to Mr. Reagan, we reiterated what we need the most help with:

- Public health and local government infrastructure
- Reinforce the importance of democracy in local government
- Modern infrastructure resilient to climate change
- Climate change adaptation and education
- Transit funding and reconnecting neighborhoods
- Solar energy in public and emergency spaces
- Protect cultural and national heritage

"As a little girl, I remember being surrounded by fig trees, light bugs, and gardens everywhere. Now our plants hardly bear fruit and all are no longer thriving due to climate change and pollutants in air, water, and soil. This is such a loss and saddens my heart." Ophella Williams, Resident of Convent, Louisiana.

Michael S. Regan was sworn in as the 16th Administrator of the United States Environmental Protection Agency on March 11, 2021, becoming the first Black man and second person of color to lead the U.S. EPA.

Administrator Regan is a native of Goldsboro, North Carolina, where he developed a passion for the environment while hunting and fishing with his father and grandfather, and exploring the vast lands, waters, and inner Coastal Plain of North Carolina.

Sharon Lavigne,
President, Rise St. James, 2021 Goldman Prize Recipient