Unidentified Speaker: The program is about to begin, please make your way to a seat. (Music) (Applause)

Unidentified Speaker: Welcome to today's event, it is with great honor that I announce today's first speaker to the stage Dr. Anthony K. Wutoh, Provost at Howard University. (Applause)

Dr. Anthony Wutoh: Good morning, welcome to Howard University. I'm honored to welcome EPA Administrator Michael Reagan and other guests to Howard University, a beacon of academic excellence and social justice since our founding in 1867. Our storied history is deeply rooted in the pursuit of equality, empowerment, and advocacy. We have a history of educating trailblazers and scholars, many of whom have gone on to leave indelible marks on our country from Thurgood Marshall to Tony Morrison and including Vice President Kamala Harris. I want to highlight the legacy of all HBCUs in nurturing and propelling top scholars into the world. These institutions forged in the crucible of racial segregation, have been sanctuaries of education, fostering academic excellence and resilience, and so we're particularly proud to host you the first HBCU graduate to lead the EPA, even though you are an Aggie. We understand that communities disproportionately impacted by pollution and climate change are often those already marginalized by systemic inequalities. Under your leadership Administrator Regan, the EPA has prioritized actions that will safeguard public health, combat climate change, and protect vulnerable communities. We aim to partner with the EPA to ensure that our students have a pathway to join the environmental workforce. This is critically important now more so than ever as climate change threatens to increase environmental hazards, such as urban flooding, wildfires and extreme weather, with disproportionate impacts on marginalized communities. So it is with great pride that I'll introduce one of our rising stars, Kennedy Williams. (Applause) Kennedy is majoring in environmental studies as part of our interdisciplinary studies program and is minoring in political science and she serves as a Cohost (inaudible) for College of Arts and Sciences Flagship Student Ambassador, is a member of the Howard University Water and Environment Association and has consistently been awarded Dean’s List. Kennedy has served as a White House intern for the Council on Environmental Quality, conducted summer research in California, just recently returned from South Africa, and has plans to study energy equity. With a passion for environmental justice, agriculture and environmental policy, Kennedy has plans to pursue an advanced degree upon graduation, as well as continue her advocacy and activism with low-income black communities who are disproportionately impacted by climate change. Please join me in welcoming Kennedy to the stage. (Applause)

Kennedy Williams: Good morning, everyone. My name is Kennedy Williams, and I am a graduating senior from Greenville South Carolina. Next month I'll be receiving my Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies, with a Minor in Political Science (applause) thank you. After graduation I have plans to enter the workforce and work with communities that look like me to help them mitigate the disproportionate impacts of climate change. I also plan to receive a master’s degree in sustainability so I can better advocate for our planet on a state, federal and international level. Back in July of last year, I had the privilege of participating in the EPA Youth Round Table where I had engaging conversations with Administrator Regan and other young professionals and students about various environmental challenges. We explored ways to combat these challenges and it was during that time that I witnessed Administrator Regan's passion for empowering the youth voices in this environmental movement. So, I'm extremely honored to be able to introduce EPA Administrator Michael Regan this morning. Administrator Regan is originally from Goldsboro, North Carolina, where he developed his passion for the environment. Michael Regan is a graduate of the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, making him the first EPA Administrator to have graduated from a historically black college university. Once he began his career with the US Environmental Protection Agency, he became a National Program Manager responsible for designing strategic solutions with industry and corporate stakeholders to reduce air pollution, improving energy efficiency, and addressing climate change. Administrator Regan was sworn in as the 16th Administrator of the United States Environmental Protection Agency in 2021 becoming the first black man and second person of color to lead the U.S. EPA. He is truly such an inspiration and I hope to have his job one day (applause) and with that being said, I'm very happy to present EPA Administrator Michael Regan.

Administrator Michael Regan: Thank you, thank you. This is an awesome crowd; I could get the day started every day like this. You know first of all I want to say thank you to Kennedy for such a wonderful introduction and you know all across the country and all across the globe young people are leading this fight against climate change, and Kennedy I want to say I'm grateful for the time we spent, I'm grateful for your leadership and want to let you know that you and your cohort always have a seat at EPA's table. And to all the young people who are here today always remember how vital your role is in helping us create and demanding a cleaner, healthier, and fairer world. To EPA's career staff in the Office of Air and Radiation, Office of Water, Office of Land and Emergency Management, Office of Policy and the Office of General Counsel, I want to let you know that, yes, the lawyers didn't think I was going to include them, but I want to let you all know that you all are the reason that we're here today. You know some people have asked me what took you so long and I’ve had to remind them that when President Biden took office EPA was in a hole. You know not too long ago some tried to silence our career scientists, some tried to silence our career environmental justice leaders, some tried to convince us to demere on EPA’s mission but guess what, it didn't work. Not only is the patient revived but the patient has returned as a mighty warrior, the mighty warrior that has always been fighting to protect public health and fighting to protect the environment for every single person in this country. The people at EPA are unique, they come to work every single day because they know their hearts and minds and voices will be heard and that they're making a difference in the world. So, I want to say to our EPA colleagues thank you for your spirit, thank you for your fight, and thank you for believing so strongly in the reach and in the impact of the work that you do. You all are changing lives and making history every single day, so thank you. (Applause) Thank you. I'm grateful to Harold Wimmer and from the American Lung Association and Jason Walsh from BlueGreen Alliance for being here today. Thank you all for your leadership and for your advocacy, you're helping us to create a safer and healthier world, and to all the environmental advocates, the environmental justice advocates, thank you all for being here today, thank you all for fighting the good fight, thank you all for fighting when our career staff had one hand tied behind their backs. We would not be here without you and the work that you're doing is make a difference in every single life in this country. I also want to thank Dr. Wutoh and Howard University for hosting us, even though he's a Bison. I wasn't going to share this, but I will. We were talking in the elevator and the provost has an academically inclined daughter who's a senior this year and she has a tough decision on which college she wants to go to. She's down to two choices, I can't make this up, Howard and A&T so if she needs some advice, I can level the playing field a little bit. Listen folks when President Biden came into office, he came into office with a promise to build a cleaner and healthier future for all Americans. He promised that he wouldn't turn a blind eye to the environmental challenges that threaten our Nation's security, our economic stability and the health and safety of our communities. One of the biggest environmental challenges facing our nation is man-made pollution, pollution that damages our air, our water, our land, pollution that has a disastrous impact on the health and the vitality of people all across this country. Not only is this pollution a major threat to public health but it's pushing our planet to the brink. We've seen how severe storms and flooding on the East Coast can cause catastrophic damage to thousands of homes and businesses, ravaging local economies and leaving business owners and community members shattered and confused. We've seen the impact of coal ash and what it can do and the toll it can take on communities, increasing the risk of cancer, respiratory illness, and skin conditions in too many families. We've seen how mercury, pollution in our lakes and rivers and streams contaminate our fish, causing serious developmental delays in our children and year after year after year we surpass record-breaking temperatures, leading to a vicious cycle of drought, water shortages and decrease agricultural production. Folks President Biden recognized this urgency immediately, the urgency of the moment, but he also knows that there is nothing bigger than the spirit, the fight, and the will of the American people. As he often says, we are the United States of America and together there is no challenge too great, but the key word there is “together”. We must stand firmly and stand united from the federal level all the way down to the grassroots, from industry to community organizers, from tribal leaders to environmental justice advocates, we must work side by side to tackle the greatest environmental challenges of our time and by working together we can and we will build a cleaner stronger nation, now and for generations to come. We have the opportunity to protect the planet while we reinvigorate our economy. We have the opportunity to dramatically cut pollution from our energy sector. We have an opportunity to build stronger infrastructure that is more resilient and more sustainable. We have an opportunity to focus on solutions that communities have had for far too long. We have an opportunity to focus on solutions that have been there for overburdened communities and underserved communities for far too long, and folks this is my favorite part, we are not waiting. EPA is central to tackling the President's most ambitious climate goals and for that reason we're seizing the opportunity and we at EPA are firmly planted in the driver’s seat. Under President Biden's leadership, EPA has driven forward a historic environmental agenda aimed at tackling pollution, advancing climate resiliency, and protecting public health. Coal and natural gas power plants operated by our power sector are some of the largest sources of air, water, and land pollution and more than 70% of the Nation's coal and natural gas plants are located in communities of color or low-income communities, making their health impacts and outcomes disproportionately worse. Folks this is simply unacceptable and that's why today I'm proud to announce that EPA is finalizing four separate rules that rely on their own authorities to reduce pollution from coal and natural gas power plants (applause) and despite what you will hear and what they will say, we can do it all while ensuring the power sector can provide affordable, reliable, electricity to consumers for the long term by finalizing these standards. On the same day we're ensuring that the power sector can confidently prepare for the future by enabling strategic long-term investment and establishing an informed multi-year planning strategy. First, we're finalizing carbon pollution standards for existing coal and new natural gas power plants, eliminating nearly 1.4 billion metric tons. Not only are we protecting public health and the environment but our analysis projects that these stronger carbon pollution standards will spur up to $370 billion dollar, that's billion with a “b”, in climate and public health net benefits over the next two decades. In 2035 alone, that means preventing approximately 1,200 premature deaths, 870 hospital visits, 360,000 avoided cases of asthma symptoms, 48,000 avoided school absences and 57,000 lost workdays. Second, we're finalizing our Mercury Air Toxic Standards for Coal Plants which will reduce mercury and other toxic chemicals by over 66,000 tons. Third, we're tackling dangerous wastewater pollution from coal power plants. Our final rule will reduce these pollutants by approximately 660 million pounds per year and which will significantly improve the quality and the safety of our water. And fourth, we are ensuring that polluters are held accountable for the contamination that they've created by their disposal of coal ash. Our Coal Ash Rule will protect the health of over 300,000 people who live near coal waste disposal sites. And for the nearby communities who are most impacted by these facilities, each of these rules contain transparency requirements so that the emissions, the discharges, and the compliance data are made available to the public ensuring that power plants are held responsible and accountable for their activities. Folks protecting the environment and protecting communities will always be the North Star at EPA. This is our most fundamental and most important responsibility. But protecting public health never has to come at the expense of a strong and durable economy. We understand just how important the role of our power sector plays in our nation's economic growth and competitiveness, so we haven't done this in secrecy. In 2022 at CERA Week, one of the largest international energy conferences in the world, I stood in front of that industry, and I set out a clear vision for EPA’s approach to address the harmful pollution from the power sector. Then I committed to transparency and maintaining an open dialogue. I vowed to protect all communities and never lose sight of those most vulnerable among us. I promised to ensure that power producers could continue to provide reliable and affordable electricity and I'm proud to say thanks to President Biden's leadership we're making good on every single one of those promises (applause) promises made, promises kept and this is a defining moment in history, a defining moment for EPA. One day we'll all look at our grandkids square in the eyes and we'll tell them that we all fought the good fight for them. We'll talk about a President who stood up and fought the good fight for them. We'll talk about how we all worked together united to build a cleaner and healthier future for all of us and I'm proud of the work that we've all done together, I'm proud of the fight that we're fighting and we at EPA will simply not rest until the job is completely done. With that it's now my pleasure to turn it over to Harold Wimmer of the American Lung Association. Thank you all. (Applause)

Harold Wimmer: Thank you all, good morning, everyone, thank you Administrator Regan. Now doesn't he have a contagious smile? I mean that's just naturally that you have Administrator. Good morning I'm Harold Wimmer, President and CEO of the American Lung Association and I'm honored to be here today to help highlight the health benefits of this tremendous announcement. Cleaning up power plants is a health imperative. Simply put, burning fossil fuels in power plants harms people's lungs, makes kids sick, and accelerates the climate crisis. The stronger protections Administrator Regan is announcing today will save lives. Thank you, Howard University, for hosting today. To the students in the audience, it is because you are raising your voices to address the climate crisis, that we are seeing these important steps move forward. Yesterday the American Lung Association released our 2024 State-of the Air Report, it's our 25th Annual Report card on air quality, nationwide. We found that 131 million people who live in the U.S., live in an area that received a failing grade for at least one measure of air pollution; that's nearly four in ten people in this country. Washington, D.C., earned a “d “ for ozone and a “c “ for daily particle pollution and it barely passed on annual particle pollution. While these grades are better than many communities across the country, I really doubt any Howard student would be satisfied with such low marks. We know the burden of air pollution is not equally shared, it falls more on low-income communities and people of color. Our report finds that a person of color in the United States is 2.3 times more likely than a white individual to live in a community with a failing grade on all three measures of air pollution. Our new report also shows that wildfires, which are made worse by climate change, are increasing pollution. Dangerous spikes and particle pollution are the most severe that we have seen now in 25 years since releasing our report. Over the past 12 months, every corner of our country from Maine to Maui has been impacted by heat, floods, air pollution and fires. Climate change is a health emergency. The health impacts are present now and immediate action is necessary. Today's new Power Plant Standards will help curb the climate crisis and reduce dangerous pollution at the same time. We're pleased to hear that together the updated Mercury and Air Toxic Standards and the Carbon Pollution Standards for Power Plants will cut more than 1,000 pounds of toxic mercury and other dangerous metals from our air, as well as 1.4 billion tons of carbon pollution. The rules will also lead to 1,200 premature deaths being avoided and 360,000 asthma attacks avoided in the year 2035 alone. I know Administrator Regan shared these important data points, but we really feel it's important to restate them in terms of the health impact. The 2012 Mercury and Air Toxic Rule is a clean air success story, slashing mercury pollution by nearly 90%. This new mercury rule builds on this success and will require continuous emission monitors on coal plants. Communities have a right to know about pollution that threatens their health. This requirement will increase transparency and increase emission reductions by improving compliance, that's good news for everyone who breathes. It is especially good news if you have a power plant near where you live, work, or study, if you have asthma or another lung disease or if you're young or older or pregnant or like to exercise outside, these rules are not just a new set of numbers, they will really help protect all of us. We are pleased that the Final Carbon Pollution Standards for Power Plants include some key improvements with respect to new gas plants and improve timelines for coal plants. We appreciate EPA listening to public health and community voices. We also know that there is still work to be done to address existing gas plants. The American Lung Association and our health and medical partners have already rolled up their sleeves and are engaging with EPA to close this gap. The Lung Association released a poll just a few weeks ago that found that nationwide 82% of voters support setting stricter limits on mercury and other toxic emissions from power plants, and 76% support setting stricter limits on carbon emissions from new and existing power plants. Now being the Lung Association, we asked about the air rules but I'm confident that if we had asked about the effluent limitation guidelines or the coal ash rule that are also being announced today, that there would be overwhelming majorities of public support. Today's action gets the nation closer to delivering on the promise of the Clean Air Act, healthy air for all to breathe. I want to thank President Biden, Administrator Regan, and his entire EPA staff for their relentless work on these new rules and for your commitment to public health and to lung health. thank you so much. Now it is my pleasure to introduce Jason Walsh, Executive Director for the BlueGreen Alliance, Jason. (Applause)

Jason Walsh: Good morning, is everybody fired up? I see a lot of faces out there that have been fighting the good fight that Administrator Regan was talking about for a long time and it's a pleasure and a privilege to be here. My name is Jason Walsh, I'm the Executive Director of the BlueGreen Alliance. We are a national partnership of labor unions and environmental organizations united, to solve today's environmental challenges in ways that create quality jobs and build a stronger fair and cleaner economy. The EPA is announcing four rules today that will improve the health of workers and communities and save lives, as my colleagues have explained. But I'm going to focus my remarks on the power plant rules and how they connect to our country's transition to a clean energy economy. The United States is already in the middle of an energy transition. In the power sector the shift to cleaner and cheaper sources of electricity has been ongoing for well over a decade led by the private sector. But let's be clear this transition has not been fair for the workers and communities who've powered our country and kept the lights on for generations. These energy workers and communities have borne the economic pain of the transitioning into clean energy, while not fully sharing in the economic gain, that's unacceptable, we cannot leave workers or communities behind as we make these fundamental changes in our energy economy, which are also the changes necessary to fight off the worst impacts of climate change. A fair and equitable transition is not something that will just happen by itself. We must choose to keep workers and communities whole, to revitalize and diversify local economies whole to add address deep economic and racial inequality, and to build accessible pathways and good union jobs. The power plant rules recognize that energy workers and communities deserve to know years, not months, years in advance when a power plant is going to close. Planning for life after a plant closure takes time, time for a community to reimagine their local economy, time for new businesses to grow, time for energy communities and workers to plan and invest in their future, and for policymakers to step up in support of that future, instead of being left to deal with the sudden crisis of a plant retirement completely by themselves. These rules call on utilities and states to be full partners in making this transition fair to those who have the most on the line. And perhaps most importantly these rules will not be implemented in isolation. Thanks to the leadership and vision of the Biden Harris Administration and the previous Congress we have in the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law a broad range of critical Investments targeted to the workers and communities experiencing the economic impacts of energy transition. These laws will drive tens of billions of dollars into energy communities for manufacturing, for clean energy deployment, for the reclamation of abandoned mine lands and for critical infrastructure. And for the first time, the IRA attaches labor standards tole clean energy tax credits, and to the work that will go into building and retrofitting our clean energy infrastructure nationwide. Here's the bottom line, the EPA Power Plant Rules will provide essential tools to help energy workers and communities plan for their future and will join a bigger toolbox of federal Investments provided by these new laws to build an equitable and union clean energy economy for all. Our country, our communities, our workers, deserve nothing less so let's go out there and fight like hell to win it. Thank you, thank you, thank you for joining us that concludes today's program. (Applause)