



March 6, 2025

The Honorable Lee Zeldin

Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20460

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Cc:

The Honorable Kevin McOmber

Regional Administrator, EPA Region 4

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Ms. Jeaneanne Gettle

Deputy Regional Administrator, EPA Region 4

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Subject: Setting the Record Straight—False Attacks on Critical Clean Water Efforts

Dear Administrator Zeldin,

I write to address a series of outright fabrications published by the *Washington Free Beacon*, an obscure online publication attempting to make a name for itself through false reporting. Their misleading claims not only misrepresent Democracy Green's work but also is an attempt to jeopardize a critical, **EPA-approved** project designed to bring clean drinking water to communities in need.

It is especially troubling that these falsehoods target a **predominantly red district—one that turned out in great numbers to vote for President Donald J. Trump**—where residents are simply seeking access to safe, lead-free drinking water. This is not a partisan issue. It is a public health necessity, and efforts to undermine it with misinformation do a grave disservice to the people who stand to benefit most.

To set the record straight:

- **We are not a DEI or Clean Energy Initiative:** The *Free Beacon* falsely claimed that this project is connected to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives or clean energy efforts. **That is completely untrue.** This grant is **exclusively focused on replacing lead-contaminated water pipes and restoring a polluted wetland**—both EPA

priorities. There are no DEI-related initiatives or clean energy projects associated with this work in any way.

- **Re-piping Costs Are Based on Real Market Data:** The *Free Beacon* falsely claimed that replacing lead pipes costs only \$4,000 per household. This is a **fabrication with no basis in reality**. In fact, Democracy Green has **already** completed similar projects, working with local plumbers, and we have the **invoices to prove** that the true cost, including materials, labor, and permitting, is approximately **\$25,000 per household before taxes**. This exact figure is reflected in our **EPA-approved budget**, which allocates **\$12.8 million for 500 households**—matching documented, real-world costs.
- **Proven Experience, Not Theoretical Work:** The claim that Democracy Green has no experience with re-piping or wetlands restoration is demonstrably false. Our organization has successfully executed water infrastructure projects in North Carolina, including emergency water support and remediation efforts after natural disasters. **We own the wetland in question**- no funds from the CCG Grant are being used for land acquisition but rather this project will **restore an already contaminated creek** that runs adjacent to some communities benefiting from the pipe replacement.
- **Financial Oversight and Accountability:** Democracy Green does not manage or disburse the grant funds. A respected third-party organization with **extensive experience in government grant administration** handles all financial oversight. Additionally, **any unspent funds are returned to the EPA**, ensuring full accountability and compliance.
- **No Political Influence in Grant Approvals:** The *Free Beacon* falsely claimed that our President, Professor La'Meshia Whittington, influenced EPA grant decisions. **This is entirely untrue**. While she is a nationally recognized expert, she has never served on any EPA or White House environmental justice board. Her only EPA-related role was an **unpaid advisory position unrelated to environmental justice or grant funding**, where she provided expertise on national drinking water standards as a **state-appointed certifier of water treatment plant operators**.
- **Water Testing Claims Are False:** The *Free Beacon* falsely elevated the claim that Democracy Green provided \$10 DIY water testing kits. **This is completely untrue**. Democracy Green has only ever utilized **state-certified and private-certified laboratories** for water quality testing. This includes working with **local Health and Human Services agencies and the Environmental Health Division**. We have **receipts and documentation** confirming that all water testing conducted under our projects has met state and federal certification standards.

Democracy Green is not a political organization; we are **practitioners of this work**, with a track record of success in providing clean water solutions to underserved rural communities. Our

focus is on **infrastructure, public health, and workforce development**—not political narratives.

Given the seriousness of these false claims and their potential to hinder life-saving public health efforts, **we respectfully request your continued support for this critical, EPA-approved project.** This initiative is making a tangible impact by providing **safe drinking water, strengthening local infrastructure, and addressing environmental contamination in rural communities that need it most.**

We urge the EPA to stand by the facts and the communities it was created to serve, rather than allowing misinformation from an unqualified digital tabloid to dictate policy decisions. The residents of this district—who, again, **overwhelmingly supported President Trump** in the last election—deserve clean drinking water and an infrastructure solution based on **truth, not political gamesmanship.**

We remain open to further discussion and are happy to provide any additional information that may be helpful in ensuring the success of this project. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you or your offices have any questions or would like to discuss this initiative further.

We appreciate your time and your commitment to advancing clean water solutions for underserved communities.

Sincerely,

Sanja Whittington

Executive Director

Democracy Green

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Democracy Green staff and Board of Directors pictured alongside NC Representative Frank Iler (Republican) at US EPA Press Conference for \$20 million award to help rural unincorporated communities in Brunswick County, NC access clean drinking water and hire local contractors to build the local economy.

Supporting Documents:

EPA Announcement Highlighting Overwhelming Bipartisan Support:

[EPA Press Release](#): \$20 Million Award for Clean Water & Safe Water Community Initiative
Receives Bipartisan Support

Baseless Attack from a Bottom-Shelf Online Publication: [Washington Free Beacon: Misleading Article on EPA Grant](#)

Program Plan and Program Budget available upon request. The US EPA retains the original grant application with these materials. The US EPA reviewed and approved all documents before Democracy Green was awarded and entered into an agreement.