Comments for EPA hearing on the proposed Clean Power Plan, 
Atlanta, Georgia, July 29, 2014 
on behalf of the Alabama Environmental Council

My name is Michael Churchman, and I’m Executive Director of the Alabama Environmental Council. Anybody that knows me knows that I wear many hats. I want to share with you today some of the things I think of when I wear those hats.

In my work, the Alabama Environmental Council has worked on land-use and waste reduction issues for many years. We do a lot of work on recycling and with that hat on, we teach people to reduce waste, reuse as much as possible, and then recycle to conserve as many of our natural resources as possible. I’m encouraged everyday by people that want to reduce their negative impacts on our environment and leave the planet better than they found it. The Clean Power Plan would help reduce waste.

The Clean Power Plan would also help to reduce the unaccounted for carbon pollution that is being emitted into the air. When we work with businesses to recycle, they have to pay for the trash that get’s hauled away. They can’t just go to the edge of their property and dump onto their neighbors’ property. For decades, dirty power plants -- the largest sources of carbon pollution -- have been allowed to dump unlimited amounts of carbon into our air. These power plants are currently emitting huge amounts of carbon pollution as if it just goes away. Away really means into our air and our communities. Exactly where is away? And, there are huge costs that we currently pay - to our health and our wallets – that will only grow, unless we act. The health of our children and future generations is on the line.

As we have expanded our work on energy policy in Alabama, I often wear another hat. I’ve had conversations with business owners that are trying to help be as energy efficient as possible and grow the clean energy economy. Small businesses have shared that they can save home-owners an average of 26% on their energy bills monthly, and this makes their homes much more comfortable through energy efficiency. When people talk about electricity rates, we should remember that energy efficiency is the thing that can help all of us to lower bills and should be pursued heavily! I also talk to a lot of people that see that renewable energy, especially solar, is the future. However, the rates paid to distributed producers along with the tariff charged by utilities in Alabama are restrictive and do not incentivize this new technology that is growing across the rest of the Southeast. Alabama is behind many states including Georgia. The Clean Power Plan would spur innovation, accelerate the clean energy economy, and create good American jobs.

Another hat that I wear is a Boy Scout hat. I’m Scoutmaster for my son’s Troop and am an Eagle Scout. As such, I learned the importance of leaving no trace when we venture out into nature. One of the very important lessons that I am trying to teach to our Scouts is to leave a place better than we found it. When we hike along a beautiful hiking trail, it’s discouraging to see someone else’s trash. We make sure to clean that up and certainly don’t add to it. How can we teach our children this lesson if our businesses and government regulations don’t reflect this. The Clean Power Plan helps us move toward leaving the planet as good or better than we found it.
I hope people that know me also know about the hat that I wear relating to my faith. I belong to a denomination that places a high importance on care of creation. Old testament teachings record God as placing the responsibility for humans to care for the earth, similar to tending a garden. Anyone that has done any gardening knows that it is a delicate system. I never realized the connectedness of everything until I wanted to grow vegetables for my family. Too much rain or not enough, too much fertilizer or plantings too close had huge impacts on the whole garden. The same goes for our planet. There are a limited number of resources and we must be mindful of our impacts on others. My faith teaches me that acting on the climate is a moral imperative and to put off acting is abdicating our responsibility.

Lastly, a hat that I love to wear is that of dad and husband. In our family, it is very important to acknowledge the climate is changing and recognize our responsibility to act in such a way that my children and theirs will have a comfortable place to live. My 11-year-old daughter and my 13-year-old son have a right to inherit a livable planet. If we don’t act soon, their world will be vastly different than the one we live in today. That’s not fair. Climate disruptions are the greatest challenge facing our generation. As I’m sure everyone in this room would say, I want better for my children. And that is perhaps the most important reason why I support the EPA’s proposed Clean Power Plan.

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