



IBEW Policy Brief

January 2025

Federal Worker Rights and FLSA

IBEW members play a crucial role in supporting the U.S. government because their expertise is needed across nearly all federal agencies. They build and maintain critical defense infrastructure at naval and U.S. Coast Guard shipyards, ordnance plants, and other important sites, providing skilled labor as electricians, lineworkers, electronics technicians, and more. Their work extends to maintaining federal buildings and equipment, transmission lines, communications systems, locks and dams, and power generation facilities. IBEW members are also employed in various federal agencies, including the Department of Defense, General Services Administration, Bureau of Reclamation, National Park Service, and Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as the Tennessee Valley Authority, Bonneville Power Administration, and national laboratories such as Sandia and Brookhaven.

IBEW federal workers are critical to national defense, public safety, and maintaining government operations. They ensure military readiness, protect national security, and provide essential public services. Despite their importance, they face challenges under the outdated Federal Wage System (FWS) and Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

IBEW federal workers are governed by the following laws:

- **Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA):** Governs pay, overtime, and work standards for eligible federal employees
- **Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA):** Establishes merit-based hiring and promotion while preventing political interference
- **Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Statute (FSLMRS):** Protects the rights of federal employees to unionize, bargain collectively, and address workplace grievances through the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA)

Emerging threats that politicize federal jobs, like Schedule F, jeopardize the merit-based civil service system. Schedule F would allow political appointees to fill jobs previously protected by the merit system, opening the door for politically motivated hiring and firing. This undermines the principle that federal employees should serve the public based on their skills and expertise, not their political views. The IBEW opposes Schedule F and advocates for reforms to ensure fair pay and protection for federal employees.

PRIORITIES

- **Strengthen the FWS:** Align FWS and General Schedule wage areas, add locality pay, and restore prevailing wage to ensure fair compensation.
- **Modernize wage surveys:** Expand surveys to include federal contractors and high-skill private-sector employers to improve pay accuracy.
- **Pass the Locality Pay Equity Act:** Align federal pay scales, ensuring workers in the same areas are compensated equitably.
- **Oppose Schedule F:** Protect civil service workers from politically motivated dismissals by opposing Schedule F or similar policies.

- **Address pay inequities:** Add locality pay and ensure equitable annual pay adjustments for FWS employees to reduce disparities.
- **Focus on long-term solutions:** Replace temporary measures, like special pay rates, with systemic reforms for workforce stability.

TALKING POINTS FOR ADVOCACY

“Federal workers deserve fair pay for their important work.”

Aligning FWS and General Schedule wage areas will ensure equitable compensation.

“Modernizing wage surveys will ensure rates of pay are informed by accurate information.”

Including federal contractors and high-skill employers on wage surveys will provide accurate pay data.

“Enacting the Locality Pay Equity Act will prevent workers from being paid differently for the same work.”

Aligning federal pay scales will codify fair pay practices, resulting in a more equitable federal workplace with fewer pay disparities.

“The civil service operates best when it is merit-based, not politically driven.”

Schedule F threatens stability and fairness by opening the door to politically motivated hiring and firing.

“Federal workers deserve real reform, not short-term fixes.”

Systemic reforms, not temporary measures, are key to a stable federal workforce.

“Fair pay helps recruit and retain skilled workers for important jobs.”

Fair compensation attracts the high-value skilled workers that are necessary for secure national defense and principled public service.



IBEW Policy Brief

January 2025

Emerging Energy Technologies and Workforce Excellence

The United States stands at the crossroads of an energy revolution. Emerging technologies such as carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS), advanced nuclear power, and modernized transmission systems are essential for energy reliability, economic prosperity, and the nation's climate goals. These three innovative technologies are not only critical for addressing the challenges of renewable energy integration but also for ensuring the longevity of key industries that provide high-quality jobs.

CCUS technology captures carbon emissions from power plants and industrial facilities, safely storing them underground or repurposing them for commercial use. This allows traditional energy sources like coal and natural gas to remain part of the energy mix while significantly reducing emissions. For communities that rely on fossil fuel-based industries, CCUS is a lifeline that preserves jobs and stabilizes local economies.

Advanced nuclear technology is also key, providing reliable, zero-carbon power around the clock. This provides a critical baseload energy unlike sources like wind and solar that are intermittent. In this way, nuclear energy ensures grid stability, supports American manufacturing, and strengthens energy security. By extending the lifespan of existing nuclear reactors and investing in next-generation designs, the United States can continue to lead in energy innovation while creating thousands of well-paying, unionized jobs.

Modernizing transmission infrastructure is another element at the core of a responsible energy transition. A powerful and efficient grid is essential for integrating renewable energy sources, ensuring reliability, and meeting growing electricity demands. Building new transmission lines not only facilitates the expansion of energy sources but also creates opportunities for skilled workers to contribute to critical infrastructure projects, driving local economic growth.

Labor standards, such as Davis–Bacon prevailing wage laws, apprenticeship utilization, and OSHA-certified safety training, are central to ensuring all these projects are completed safely, quickly, and with a commitment to pro-worker protections. Through its apprenticeship programs and safety initiatives, the IBEW equips workers with the skills to meet the demands of these transformative projects, providing employers with a reliable and highly capable workforce.

PRIORITIES

- **Enforce Davis–Bacon prevailing wage standards:** Prevailing wage laws ensure fair compensation, promote ethical competition, and create a level playing field where contractors prioritize quality, safety, and expertise.
- **Expand apprenticeship utilization requirements:** Requiring registered apprenticeships fosters workforce development, ensuring a pipeline of skilled workers who can execute complex energy projects with precision and efficiency.
- **Mandate OSHA-certified safety training:** Comprehensive safety training reduces accidents, improves morale, and increases productivity while minimizing the costs and delays associated with workplace injuries.

- **Leverage Right-of-First-Refusal (ROFR) policies:** ROFR policies offer incumbent utilities the opportunity to build transmission projects first. These policies prioritize unionized utilities for critical projects, safeguarding labor standards and ensuring reliable, efficient energy infrastructure development.
- **Tie incentives to labor-standards compliance:** Tying labor standards to federal funding maximizes the economic benefit of energy projects by promoting fair competition, skilled labor, safe worksites, and community investment.

TALKING POINTS FOR ADVOCACY

“A modern grid is essential for the energy demands of the future.”

Upgrading transmission infrastructure is urgent for energy integration and meeting growing electricity demands.

“Nuclear’s round-the-clock availability not only stabilizes the grid and other renewables like wind and solar—it also supports good union jobs.”

Investing in nuclear’s uniquely zero-carbon capacity is how the United States remains at the forefront of this critical industry.

“We do not have to choose between reducing emissions and preserving good jobs.”

Investing in carbon capture allows fossil fuel plants to contribute to an all-of-the-above energy solution while preserving much-needed long-term jobs.

“Fair wages support fair competition, especially in new industries.”

Davis–Bacon prevailing wage laws ensure workers are fairly compensated while enabling contractors to compete based on skill and efficiency. This is key to the longevity of these newer sectors.

“Strong safety standards are the cornerstone of smart business.”

Mandating OSHA training, especially in rapidly innovating sectors, is critical to protecting workers, reducing liability, and increasing productivity.

“Current energy challenges can only be met with what unions provide: experience, efficiency, and excellence.”

Through its gold standard apprenticeship program, the IBEW provides employers with a steady supply of reliable, highly skilled workers prepared for the energy transition.