



IBEW Policy Brief

January 2025

Just Transition for Energy Workers

The transition to cleaner energy is reshaping the energy landscape, creating significant challenges for workers in the fossil fuel industry. The IBEW represents approximately 85,000 members in coal and natural gas, many of whom are now at risk of job displacement as these industries contract. Between 2011 and 2022, more than 25,000 megawatts of coal-fired generation capacity were retired, and since 2021, 37 gigawatts of coal-fired capacity have been shut down, impacting the communities that rely on these jobs.

A just transition for energy workers is vital to maintaining good-paying jobs, stabilizing local economies, and leveraging the skills of experienced energy workers in emerging sectors such as renewable energy. The IBEW advocates for federal legislation that ensures fossil fuel workers are not left behind as the future of energy evolves. This includes policies that retain workers, provide retraining opportunities, and promote long-term community investment in regions affected by plant closures.

Federal investments, such as those in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), have incentivized renewable and advanced energy projects, but additional legislation is necessary to support workers directly impacted by the changing energy landscape. With initiatives like the Inter-agency Working Group for Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization, the federal government recognized the importance of prioritizing workers displaced by the ongoing energy transition by directing public funding and incentivizing private investment to the hardest hit communities.

The IBEW continues to push for policies that prioritize workers' needs, revitalize affected areas, and promote workforce development in the renewable energy economy.

PRIORITIES

- **Pass a worker retention tax credit:** Pass legislation that provides refundable payroll tax credits to employers who retain workers displaced by plant closures or capacity reductions. This measure is essential for workforce stability and protecting families from economic harm.
- **Expand retraining programs:** Robustly fund federal and state retraining programs, including registered apprenticeship programs and labor-management training initiatives to equip displaced workers with the skills to transition into advanced manufacturing, renewable energy, and other emerging sectors.
- **Promote community investment:** Direct federal resources toward revitalizing communities impacted by fossil fuel plant closures. Investments in infrastructure, workforce development, and local businesses can provide long-term economic stability and opportunity for impacted regions.
- **Strengthen workforce protections:** Strictly enforce labor standards to ensure that new jobs in future energy sectors adhere to the prevailing wages and fair labor practices critical for sustaining middle-class careers.

TALKING POINTS FOR ADVOCACY

“Workers are the backbone of the energy transition.”

Strong labor standards like prevailing wage help to ensure new energy sectors provide long-term family-sustaining careers.

“Federal policies must put displaced workers first.”

The future of energy cannot come at the expense of the workers who powered the nation for decades. Policies like worker retention tax credits are vital to sustaining local economies as they undergo shifts in energy production.

“Experienced, highly skilled workers are community assets worth preserving.”

Federal and state investments in retraining programs like registered apprenticeships can ensure displaced workers add to their existing skills and continue to contribute to their communities as they transition to new sectors.

“Investing in communities ensures a just transition.”

By investing in small businesses and workforce development, the federal government can address the impact of plant closures and stabilize these communities with long-term solutions.

“A just transition is a bipartisan priority.”

Together, we can balance economic growth, climate goals, and labor protections so no worker or community is left behind in the energy transition.



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Permitting Reform

Permitting reform is critical for the IBEW because it directly affects job opportunities for members in energy generation, transmission, and infrastructure projects. Delays in project approvals create bottlenecks that hinder job creation and economic growth. Streamlined permitting processes, such as those proposed in the Energy Permitting Reform Act of 2024, promise to modernize U.S. infrastructure by accelerating energy project development. These projects will foster the energy independence that will address both national security needs and the nation's rapidly growing demand for energy.

For IBEW members, timely project approvals mean steady, good-paying jobs in essential areas like energy transmission, renewable energy facilities, and other energy infrastructure. While the IBEW supports reforms to make permitting more efficient, it also emphasizes the need to maintain environmental protections, community involvement, and labor standards. A balanced approach ensures that infrastructure projects move forward without compromising environmental integrity or workers' rights.

PRIORITIES

- **Address transmission bottlenecks:** Designate national interest transmission corridors, expedite interregional transmission projects, and improve interconnection processes for energy systems of the future.
- **Support worker protections:** Ensure permitting reforms require high labor standards and create good-paying union jobs on critical infrastructure projects.
- **Push for reform that prioritizes taxpayers, ratepayers, and workers:** Reductions in project delays mean price stability for ratepayers and family-sustaining wages for workers on safe, efficient worksites.
- **Balance efficiency and oversight:** Streamline permitting processes to result in responsible development that protects environmental integrity and invites meaningful public participation.

TALKING POINTS FOR ADVOCACY

“Reducing bottlenecks is essential to modernizing the grid and creating thousands of good-paying union jobs.”

As the demand for energy grows, modernizing the aging grid is increasingly urgent. Permitting reform that prioritizes labor standards ensures this vital work is performed quickly and safely by skilled workers.

“Streamlined permitting can coexist with environmental safeguards and community input.”

Permitting reform should never neglect climate, worker, or community priorities.

“Faster permitting can reduce delays that destabilize energy prices and cost ratepayers billions annually.”

Efficient permitting will have widespread economic impact, improving costs for projects, households, and communities.

“Permitting reforms contribute to national security by speeding up infrastructure projects that establish energy independence.”

National security hinges on the United States' ability to meet its own energy demand, minimizing reliance on foreign energy sources.



DID YOU KNOW?

U.S. Senate and House Rules Differ Substantially



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Powerful House Rules Committee; more challenging to circumvent committee consideration of legislation

Individual representatives have little power; no practice of “holds”

The Speaker of the House can approve non-controversial measures through the suspension of rules

The number and kinds of amendments are limited; non-germane (off-topic) amendments are not allowed unless permitted by a special rule

Motion for the previous question, which requires only a simple majority vote, ends debate and brings the vote on a measure to the floor

The presiding officer has a great deal of discretion for recognizing representatives; Members of Congress do not often challenge the presiding officer’s rulings

SENATE

No powerful committee determines rules for the body; easier to circumvent committee consideration of legislation

Individual senators have a great deal of power and can place “holds” on certain measures

The Majority Leader of the Senate often approves non-controversial measures through unanimous consent agreements

Non-germane (off-topic) amendments are allowed unless cloture is invoked or disallowed by a unanimous consent agreement

Cloture motion to end debate requires three-fifths of senators’ support; senators can filibuster most legislation, in effect necessitating a 60-vote threshold

The presiding officer has little discretion in recognizing individual senators; Senators often challenge the presiding officer’s rulings



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Energy Tax Credits and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) included transformative tax credits like the Production Tax Credit (PTC), Investment Tax Credit (ITC), and Clean Hydrogen Production Tax Credit (45V), as well as expanded credits for nuclear energy (including 45U). These credits, most of which are tied to prevailing wage and apprenticeship requirements, create significant opportunities for IBEW members by incentivizing projects across a range of technologies including hydrogen, wind, solar, geothermal, advanced nuclear, carbon capture, and other future energy infrastructure.

The inclusion of labor standards on these tax credits ensures fair compensation, robust workforce training, and equitable economic benefits for workers and their communities. Specifically, the 45V credit for hydrogen production and tax credits for nuclear energy projects hold particular promise, providing job opportunities in the building and maintaining of critical infrastructure and promoting the development of tomorrow's energy systems.

The IBEW strongly supports the expansion of these credits and advocates for their fair application across all technologies. The IBEW also calls for stringent oversight to ensure compliance with labor standards and to prevent misuse of these incentives, guaranteeing that union workers remain at the forefront of this transformation.

PRIORITIES

- **Preserve labor enhancements in the IRA:** Protect prevailing wage and apprenticeship requirements across all credits, including the PTC, ITC, 45V, and nuclear energy credits, ensuring fair pay and workforce development for union jobs.
- **Strengthen oversight and compliance for 45V:** Enforce prevailing wage and apprenticeship standards for all hydrogen production projects. Ensure developers meet emissions goals and apply 45V equitably across all eligible hydrogen technologies (e.g., blue, green, and advanced methods).
- **Level the playing field for 45U:** Establish a presumption of compliance with prevailing wage requirements for nuclear projects covered by a collective bargaining agreement or a project labor agreement.
- **Support tax credits for nuclear energy projects:** Advocate for tax incentives for advanced nuclear energy projects that create long-term, high-quality jobs for IBEW members maintaining and upgrading these facilities.
- **Expand training opportunities:** Tie tax credits to expanded workforce training programs to prepare IBEW members for hydrogen, nuclear, and other emerging energy technologies.
- **Promote equity across energy sectors:** Ensure tax credit incentives and labor standards are applied equitably to all energy technologies to create union jobs across a broad range of industries.
- **Ensure accountability across all tax credits:** Demand strict compliance with labor and environmental standards to maximize the benefits of tax credits for workers and communities while preventing misuse by developers.

TALKING POINTS FOR ADVOCACY

“Labor protections in the IRA ensure the energy industries of the future are built with good-paying, long-term jobs.”

The prevailing wage and apprenticeship requirements tied to IRA tax credits ensure economic growth reaches workers by preventing wage suppression in newer industries.

“Tax incentives only work when there is accountability.”

Labor standards on tax credits create union jobs across energy sectors while meeting environmental goals, but only if applied broadly to all new technologies and strictly enforced.

“Nuclear energy creates long-term jobs that place union workers at the forefront of this vital industry.”

Tax incentives for advanced nuclear energy like 45U ensure union workers are central to maintaining and upgrading this vital infrastructure.

“Hydrogen energy in all its forms is necessary for the energy future.”

The 45V credit should support hydrogen production using diverse methods, including all advanced technologies.

“Tying tax credits to training programs ensures a reliable, well-trained, and well-paid workforce for emerging industries.”

Incentivizing workforce training helps prepare IBEW members for energy jobs of the future.



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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.



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Broadband Opportunities

Access to reliable high-speed broadband is essential for modern life, enabling education, healthcare, remote work, and economic opportunities. For IBEW members, broadband expansion not only promotes connectivity—it also creates good-paying union jobs and contributes to strong local economies. With funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), including the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program, the IBEW is leading efforts to bridge the digital divide while ensuring broadband projects uphold high-road labor standards.

The BEAD program aims to connect underserved areas, with at least 19 states already receiving \$1 billion each in grants as of mid-2023. Expanding broadband infrastructure guarantees steady union work in construction, installation, and maintenance while fostering economic growth in communities nationwide. The IBEW remains committed to ensuring these projects benefit workers and their communities by requiring fair wages, strong labor protections, and high-quality fiber-optic infrastructure.

PRIORITIES

- **Protect BEAD funding:** Oppose any reductions or repeal of funding for the BEAD program under the BIL, including the Build America, Buy America (BABA) component.
- **Ensure union compliance and robust oversight:** Support federal and state mandates for broadband projects to adhere to labor laws, pay prevailing wages, and follow collective bargaining agreements. Good governance of BEAD funding means not only unionized workers, however, but also ongoing oversight that ensures program requirements and project commitments are fulfilled.
- **Strengthen grant guidelines:** Pre-certify contractors based on labor compliance and rigorous reporting for accountability.
- **Support a fiber-first approach:** Make fiber-optic technology the standard for broadband deployment and oppose federal funding for inferior technologies, such as low-earth satellite and fixed wireless.
- **Leverage state support:** Harness bipartisan state-level support for broadband funding to align local and federal priorities with high-road union employers.
- **Counter skepticism around BEAD:** Address concerns raised by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) about the BEAD program and advocate for continued federal support and accountability to ensure the program meets its goals.

TALKING POINTS FOR ADVOCACY

“Broadband expansion creates good jobs and economic growth in every community.”

Broadband creates good-paying union jobs, supports local economies, and attracts business investment, driving economic development in communities nationwide.

“High labor standards for workers mean high standards for projects.”

Broadband infrastructure projects that adhere to prevailing wage laws and prioritize unionized workforces ensure fair compensation and sustainable high-quality networks.

“Voters agree that every community requires reliable broadband to thrive.”

Enthusiasm for BEAD on the state level is bipartisan and easily aligns with the benefits of a unionized workforce.

“Reliable broadband prevents decline in underserved areas by offering opportunities for employment and connection.”

Reliable broadband prevents economic stagnation in rural and underserved areas, fostering business development and connecting communities to each other and the modern economy.

“Taxpayer dollars should only be spent on durable and scalable solutions like fiber-optic infrastructure.”

Prioritizing fiber-optic infrastructure ensures taxpayer dollars are spent on durable, scalable, and effective broadband solutions, with alternative technologies used only when necessary.