



January
2026

IBEW POLICY BRIEF

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 grid-enhancing technologies (GETs) 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 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 helps preserve jobs and stabilize local economies.

Advanced nuclear technology is also key to the energy revolution, providing reliable, zero-carbon power around the clock. Unlike intermittent sources like wind and solar, this provides a critical baseload energy. 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.

Grid-enhancing technology 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 demands for electricity. In addition to the necessary work of building out new transmission lines, upgrading existing lines and improving their efficiency will also facilitate the expansion of energy generation and create more opportunities for skilled electrical workers.

Labor standards, such as prevailing wage and apprenticeship utilization requirements, as well as OSHA safety training requirements, are central to ensuring all these projects are completed safely, efficiently, and with a commitment to worker protections. Through its apprenticeship programs and safety initiatives, the IBEW meets these goals, providing employers with a reliable and highly capable workforce equipped with the skills necessary for these transformative technologies.

PRIORITIES

- **Enforce Davis–Bacon prevailing wage standards:** Prevailing wage laws ensure fair compensation, promote ethical competition, and create a level playing field for contractors who prioritize quality, safety, and expertise.
- **Expand apprenticeship utilization requirements on CCUS, advanced nuclear, and GETs:** Requiring registered apprenticeships promotes workforce development, ensuring a pipeline of skilled workers able to 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 safe and 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

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

Upgrading transmission infrastructure is urgent for energy integration, energy independence, and skyrocketing energy demand.

“Nuclear’s round-the-clock availability not only stabilizes the grid and complements 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 high-skill, long-term jobs.

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

Davis–Bacon prevailing wage laws ensure workers are fairly compensated while allowing 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 evolving 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 programs, the IBEW provides employers with a steady supply of reliable, highly skilled workers prepared for the energy transition.



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Trade Policy

Trade policy directly affects the livelihoods of IBEW members by shaping wage standards, the competitiveness of domestic industries, and the availability of high-quality jobs. For decades, trade policies prioritized low tariffs and “free trade,” sparking a race to the bottom. Companies moved production to countries with weak labor, environmental, and human rights standards, knowing they would face low tariffs when goods were imported back to the United States for sale.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is a stark example of a trade agreement that sacrificed American workers, exploited Mexican workers, and hollowed out once-thriving communities while lining the pockets of multinational corporations. In 2016, NAFTA was renegotiated and renamed the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). Despite some improvements, USMCA has not delivered on the promise of ending corporate offshoring of good union jobs. USMCA will be renegotiated again in 2026. It should not be extended without substantial changes.

China’s unfair trade practices, such as state subsidies, forced labor, and dumping, have further undercut American industries like manufacturing and renewable energy. Inside the United States, “right-to-work” laws and anti-union tax incentives in some states have exacerbated these challenges by luring businesses away from regions with union density.

To level the playing field for workers, barriers to the U.S. market such as tariffs in strategic industries should be combined with strong industrial policy (i.e., major government investments in building up the U.S. industrial base).

PRIORITIES

- **Impose tariffs strategically, not across the board:** Tariffs should target imports made under abusive labor conditions and those that otherwise unfairly disadvantage American workers and producers. Across-the-board tariffs, on the other hand, are counterproductive. They will not end the unfair practices associated with many imported goods and are likely to raise consumer prices on items that will never be produced in the United States at scale.
- **Pair strategic tariffs with strong industrial policy:** To help create American manufacturing jobs and resilient supply chains, tariffs must be combined with other industrial policy tools like tax incentives, domestic procurement preferences, and government investment.
- **Include enforceable labor standards in trade agreements:** Require trade agreements to ban forced labor, protect collective bargaining, and enforce labor standards.
- **Oppose USMCA renegotiation without fundamental changes:** Strengthen the USMCA’s Rules of Origin requirements, Rapid Response Mechanism, labor and environmental standards, and enforcement mechanisms across the agreement.
- **Reauthorize and expand Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA):** Expand TAA eligibility and increase funding to support workers displaced by foreign competition.
- **Support United States Trade Representative (USTR) cases for critical U.S. infrastructure:** Address national security risks by supporting USTR action to rebuild U.S. shipyards and supply chains in response to China’s unfair trade practices, such as the IBEW-backed USTR Section 301 trade case on shipbuilding.

TALKING POINTS

“When trade policy includes labor standards, the American workforce grows in strength and numbers.”

Trade agreements must include enforceable labor standards to level the playing field and prevent worker exploitation.

“TAA is the responsible way to address the loss of jobs to foreign competitors like China.”

Reauthorizing this law ensures more displaced workers receive the training and support they need to secure new high-quality jobs.

“Investing in manufacturing while raising tariffs in strategically targeted areas means more than good jobs. It means restoring dignity to forgotten communities while increasing national security.”

Domestic manufacturing is a top priority because it addresses multiple economic issues on the national and local level.

“Combating China’s inhumane and unfair trade practices with stricter rules is an economic and moral necessity.”

Enforce more severe trade rules to counteract dumping, forced labor, and subsidized industries that harm U.S. workers.



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IBEW POLICY BRIEF

Revitalizing U.S. Manufacturing and Union Jobs

The IBEW plays a vital role in North America's manufacturing sector, representing workers who produce a wide array of essential goods including batteries, semiconductors, transformers, electric motors, control panels, wire and cable, and advanced energy components. These industries are critical to economic growth and provide reliable, high-quality union jobs.

For decades, policies that offshored manufacturing to low-cost markets have devastated domestic production and union jobs. These policies contributed to a decline in IBEW members in manufacturing, from 400,000 in the 1980s to 30,000 today. While the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), and CHIPS and Science Act aimed to revitalize U.S. manufacturing in electric vehicles, semiconductors, and renewable energy components, the Trump administration's rollback of the IRA's clean energy tax credits and the cancelation of hundreds of energy infrastructure projects have stalled the predicted recovery.

Manufacturing is central to the IBEW's mission to protect family-supporting union jobs. Policies that incentivize domestic production while maintaining labor standards can reverse decades of decline in this sector. These efforts enable the IBEW to regain market share in U.S. factories, secure stable employment for members, and support the transition to a clean energy economy.

PRIORITIES

- **Ensure federal investments in manufacturing include labor standards:** Pass legislation that requires federal grants, loans, and tax credits for manufacturing projects to incentivize or mandate prevailing wages, union labor, and robust worker protections. Agencies overseeing these programs should commit manufacturers to training, equity, and union labor throughout supply chains.
- **Update the Walsh–Healey Public Contracts Act:** Modernizing this law would establish a national prevailing wage for all federal manufacturing contracts, creating a level playing field for union workers.
- **Pass the PRO Act:** Enacting the PRO Act would protect workers' rights to organize and bargain collectively, ensuring manufacturing jobs remain high-road opportunities.
- **Support Build America, Buy America (BABA):** Ensure all federally funded infrastructure projects are built with American-produced iron, steel, manufactured products, and construction materials. This generates domestic jobs and strengthens U.S. manufacturing, particularly in industries critical to the IBEW.

TALKING POINTS

“The fastest way to invest in manufacturing is by supporting union jobs.”

Federal manufacturing incentives should require strong labor standards that prioritize domestic production with family-sustaining union jobs.

“Reworking outdated labor protections will promote equity in a growing sector.”

Modernizing the Walsh–Healey Public Contracts Act ensures fair wages and protections for workers on federal manufacturing contracts, promoting equity in this important sector.

“Manufacturing workers deserve policies that lead to high-road employment.”

Laws like the PRO Act ensure manufacturing workers have the right to organize and negotiate better wages, benefits, and protections.

“Federal investments in manufacturing must prioritize union labor to truly foster opportunity.”

Government incentives should tie funding to meaningful collaboration with unions, ensuring that new manufacturing jobs are high-quality, long-term opportunities.

“Build America, Buy America is a manufacturing policy that puts workers first.”

The Build America, Buy America Act strengthens U.S. manufacturing and supports union jobs by requiring federal infrastructure projects to use domestically made materials.

“Union labor can quickly strengthen supply chains that the growing renewable energy economy relies on.”

Support policies that drive domestic production of renewable energy components with union jobs.