



IBEW POLICY BRIEF

January 2026

Permitting Reform

Permitting reform is critical for the IBEW because it directly affects job opportunities for members in energy generation, transmission, infrastructure, and other areas. Delays in project approvals create unnecessary bottlenecks that hinder job creation and economic growth. Streamlined permitting processes at federal agencies, shorter timelines for judicial review, and adequate resources to review project permits would accelerate energy and infrastructure project development. These improvements would also facilitate much-needed energy independence and help meet the nation's rapidly growing demand for energy.

While the IBEW supports reforms to make permitting more efficient, it also understands the need for environmental protections, community involvement, and strong labor standards. A balanced approach ensures that infrastructure projects move forward without compromising environmental integrity or workers' rights.

PRIORITIES

- **Prioritize permitting for energy projects:** Energy projects should be prioritized for streamlined permitting, including projects for critical minerals, nuclear, hydrogen, fossil fuels, electric transmission, and renewables, as well as carbon capture, sequestration, storage, and removal.
- **Incentivize pro-worker policies:** Projects with labor standards (e.g., PLAs, registered apprenticeship utilization, neutrality, local hire, responsible contracting) should be prioritized.
- **Incentivize stability:** Political actors should not be able to revoke permits once issued except under extraordinary circumstances.
- **Streamline permitting:** Require interagency environmental review for standardization/coordination and establish agency review timelines to speed up the permitting process.
- **Fund the permitting process:** Increase staffing and resources at federal agencies responsible for environmental reviews.
- **Limit legal hurdles:** Provide requirements to address litigation delays to ensure projects are completed efficiently.
- **Protect procedural integrity:** Maintain processes under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other foundational environmental laws that allow for public input and transparency.

TALKING POINTS

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

As the demand for energy grows, modernizing the aging grid is becoming more urgent. Permitting reform that prioritizes labor standards ensures this vital work is performed quickly and safely by the most 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 every year.”

Efficient permitting will improve costs for projects, communities, and households.

“Permitting reforms contribute to national security by speeding up 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.



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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 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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Broadband Opportunities

Access to reliable high-speed broadband is essential for modern life. It enables education, health care, remote work, and economic opportunities for everyone. For IBEW members, broadband expansion not only promotes connectivity; it also creates good-paying union jobs that contribute to 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. The expansion of broadband infrastructure to achieve this goal guarantees steady work in construction, installation, and maintenance while fostering economic growth, often in communities left behind by the digital revolution.

The IBEW remains committed to ensuring these projects benefit both workers and their communities by requiring fair wages, strong labor protections, and high-quality fiber-optic infrastructure. This commitment is why the IBEW is opposed to the SPEED for BEAD Act, which would prohibit state boards that distribute BEAD money from considering, among other things, a bidder's (1) compliance with prevailing wage requirements on past projects, (2) history of signed project labor agreements (PLAs), or (3) commitment to union neutrality when evaluating how to award BEAD money.

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 labor standards compliance and robust oversight:** Support federal and state mandates for broadband projects to comply with labor laws and pay prevailing wages. Demand good governance and ongoing oversight to ensure program requirements and project commitments are fulfilled.
- **Demand a fiber-first approach:** Fiber-optic technology must be the standard for broadband deployment. Federal funding should not support inferior technologies, such as low-earth satellite and fixed wireless.
- **Leverage state support:** Take advantage of bipartisan state-level support for broadband funding to ensure projects are performed by high-road union employers.
- **Actively address skepticism around BEAD:** Respond to concerns raised by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) about the BEAD program to ensure continued federal support and accountability.

TALKING POINTS

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

Broadband expansion 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 needs 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 creating opportunities for employment and connection.”

Reliable broadband prevents economic stagnation in rural and other underserved areas, fostering business development and connecting communities to 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 reliable and cost-effective broadband solutions, with alternative technologies used only when necessary.