



CREATING GOOD JOBS, A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT, AND A FAIR AND THRIVING ECONOMY

## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

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Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change**

***Time for Action: Addressing the Environmental and Economic Effects of Climate Change***

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Thank you Chairman Tonko, Ranking Member Shimkus, and distinguished members of the committee. My name is Mike Williams, and I am the Deputy Director of the BlueGreen Alliance, a national partnership of labor unions and environmental organizations. On behalf of my organization, our partners, and the millions of members and supporters they represent, I want to thank you for convening this hearing today.

The BlueGreen Alliance unites America's largest labor unions and its most influential environmental organizations to solve today's environmental challenges in ways that create and maintain quality jobs and build a stronger, fairer economy. Our partnership is firm in its belief that Americans don't have to choose between a good job and a clean environment—or a safe climate—we can and must have both.

The world's leading scientific organizations have been unambiguous that climate change is a dire and urgent threat and that the longer we delay, the stronger the action required. Over the last decade, we have witnessed the worsening impacts climate change is having on our communities. America's workers are often on the frontlines of these impacts—not only feeling the effects of drought or extreme weather in their own communities, but responding to these crises.

The 2017 historic hurricane season laid waste to Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Texas, and Florida, in some areas destroying critical infrastructure systems, plunging millions of Americans into darkness, and further aggravating an already desperate need for safe water. Immediately, brothers and sisters of some of the nation's largest labor unions worked to provide much-needed relief to communities in distress.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) launched Operation Agua to provide safe drinking water to families across Puerto Rico.<sup>i</sup> When flooding caused by Hurricane Harvey forced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes in Texas, members of United

Steelworkers (USW) were among those to brave the rising waters to rescue individuals and families stuck in dangerous situations.<sup>ii</sup>

Members of the Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA) were among the first to spring into action after Hurricanes Harvey and Irma left thousands of residents in Texas and Florida without electricity. Members from across the country loaded up their trucks to help get the lights back on in impacted communities.<sup>iii</sup>

The United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters (UA), International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail, and Transportation Workers (SMART), and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) launched disaster relief funds and collected and distributed supplies throughout the nation to those in need. Volunteers across the U.S. and Canada collected and delivered boxes, fans, dehumidifiers, bleach, food, diapers, and other items to members in affected communities.<sup>iv, v</sup>

America's workers were on the ground, helping to provide critical services to those in need, volunteering their time and money to those who had lost everything.

These impacts are only going to continue and worsen if we fail to adequately address the crisis of climate change. Our communities bear the burden of climate change and the wildfires, hurricanes, heat waves, droughts and sea level rise it spawns. The majority of American families are less able to deal with these problems as their wages have fallen and their economic mobility and power in the workplace has declined. As Chris Shelton, President of the Communications Workers of America (CWA), and Mary Kay Henry, President of SEIU, stated, "These forces wreak havoc on our lives and ability to provide for our families due to increased health-related calamities, financial stress and property damage. This is on top of the realities that working families already face in an economy that isn't working for us."<sup>vi</sup>

At the same time, our nation is struggling with deep and crippling economic inequality. According to the Economic Policy Institute, "the bottom 90 percent of the American workforce has seen their pay shrink radically as a share of total income," from 58 percent in 1979 to 47 percent in 2015. That is almost \$11,000 per household, or \$1.35 trillion in additional labor income. There is direct correlation with the decrease of worker power over this time, as the share of workers in a union fell from 24 percent in 1979 to under 11 percent now.<sup>vii</sup>

For too long, the debate on the economic impact of climate action has been framed as either disaster or miracle, yet neither aligns with the complicated realities in which American workers live. This flawed debate has prevented us from addressing climate change at a

level commensurate with the size of the challenge. The driving forces behind the challenges of climate change and inequality are intertwined and we must tackle them together as equal priorities. We will only overcome these twin challenges if good jobs and working families are at the center of a massive economic transformation.

Limiting global warming to the extent required by science will, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), “require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society,” and “could go hand in hand with ensuring a more sustainable and equitable society.”<sup>viii</sup> This transformation must happen at the speed and scale demanded by scientific reality and the urgent needs of our communities. If we do it right, we can not only avoid the worst impacts of climate change, but create quality, family-sustaining jobs and ensure a more equitable society.

Thankfully, we are starting to see examples across the country of the kinds of solutions needed to achieve this outcome.

First, in California, a landmark law signed by Governor Brown in 2017 known as “Buy Clean California” is beginning to be implemented.<sup>ix</sup> This bill, which passed the California state legislature with bipartisan support, is the world’s first legislative effort to address imported carbon emissions and will require state agencies to consider the embedded carbon emissions of industrial products—like steel and glass—when contracting for state-funded infrastructure projects. The law will reduce emissions associated with significant infrastructure projects while leveling the playing field for manufacturers who are investing in clean, efficient manufacturing technologies and processes and protecting good American jobs at the same time.

Second, off the coast of Rhode Island, America’s first offshore wind farm, the Block Island Wind Farm, has been fully operational since the end of 2016. This project not only reduces greenhouse gas emissions by generating carbon-free electricity, but this comparatively small demonstration project created over 300 jobs in Rhode Island alone for local unionized craftsmen in ten different Building Trades locals working for 30 unionized contractors and subcontractors. This was thanks, in large part, to the Project Labor Agreement (PLA) in place.<sup>x</sup>

This innovative new project, and even bigger projects in development in states like Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia, has the potential to dramatically expand quality job creation in a relatively untapped sector. Estimates put job creation potential off the Atlantic coast alone at between 133,000 and 212,000 per year in the United States.<sup>xi</sup> The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) cites that the Atlantic states could create \$200 billion in new economic activity, as well as

over 43,000 high-paying, permanent jobs, just by developing 54 gigawatts of their 1,283 gigawatt offshore wind energy potential.<sup>xii</sup>

In order to truly capture the full benefits and potential of these projects, it is critical that they are built and operated by skilled and properly trained workers that are paid family-sustaining wages, with Project Labor Agreements in place, and with products and components throughout the supply chain manufactured here at home.

A third example comes from the state of Illinois, where the Future Energy Jobs Act was signed into law in December 2016. The bill provides sweeping changes to the state's Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) and increases state efforts to boost energy efficiency, while protecting the jobs of workers at current energy generation facilities in the state, including existing nuclear power plants, and establishing standards for the solar industry to use a skilled and qualified workforce. The labor and the environmental movements worked hand-in-hand to push this bill over the finish line.<sup>xiii</sup>

We are also seeing great examples of how innovating, manufacturing and installing the clean economy—particularly through clean vehicles and energy efficiency—is protecting the environment while creating quality jobs. Across the country, millions of jobs in manufacturing depend on continued American leadership in clean vehicle technology, including building innovative, far more efficient cars, SUVs, and trucks. Our research finds more than 1,200 U.S. factories and engineering facilities in 48 states—and 288,000 American workers—building technologies that reduce pollution and improve fuel economy for today's innovative vehicles. Critical federal efforts—like America's landmark fuel economy and greenhouse gas standards for cars and trucks—drive investment, innovation, job growth, and help position the domestic industry as a global leader.<sup>xiv</sup>

Energy efficiency improvements for public buildings and manufacturers support existing jobs, increase the quality of jobs created, and reduce carbon pollution. Local communities can also capture the benefits of energy efficiency retrofits—including lower utility bills, improved tenant health, and increased economic development. In California, new rules adopted by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) will ensure that when utility incentives are used for certain efficiency upgrades, the workers installing the equipment are properly trained, and that efficiency programs create pathways to employment for disadvantaged workers.<sup>xv</sup> We view this as a significant development.

Furthermore, identifying the supply chain and moving policies to increase domestic production of energy efficiency retrofit products can also help to create quality manufacturing jobs. The BlueGreen Alliance Foundation's Building Clean program works to

identify these products and advance energy efficiency retrofits, particularly for multi-family housing.<sup>xvi</sup>

These are the kind of worker- and community-centric solutions that will equitably address the climate crises and create quality jobs. These are models for the federal level because we have yet to adequately take action commensurate with the challenges of climate change and inequality.

A significant transformation in public policy is needed to truly address climate change and inequality at the speed and scale demanded by scientific reality and the urgent needs of our communities. It will require bold ideas to create and retain millions of high-quality jobs, including a significant commitment to increasing union density across the country, the right to organize in clean technology sectors and throughout the economy, and mandatory labor standards.

It will require a revitalization of U.S. manufacturing with a national commitment to leading the world in building the clean technologies and materials of the future in the U.S. and doing so with clean, efficient industrial processes and products. A new generation of advanced manufacturing growth can help rebuild the middle class and at the same time decarbonize our industrial sector, which has received relatively less attention from policymakers while becoming a large source of recent U.S. emission increases.<sup>xvii</sup> It can also help U.S. manufacturers capture market share in a changing global economy where clean products and processes will represent an essential competitive advantage.

It will require that we dramatically increase the capacity of our public sector, our health care system, and the community based non-profit sector to prepare for and respond to the demands of a changing climate. And it will go hand in hand with ensuring that no worker or community is left behind and that all workers and communities have access to safe, high-quality, union jobs—as well as clean air and water.

To truly be transformative, this economic mobilization must tackle the economic and racial inequity that exposes low-income workers, communities of color, and others to low wages, toxic pollution, and climate threats. We must inject justice into our nation's economy by ensuring that the economic and environmental benefits of this transformation support first and foremost those workers and communities that have been hardest hit by the unjust status quo.

This is a big task. But there are concrete steps this Congress and this Committee can take to put us on this path, some of which have been described above. Bold ideas have been put forth—and more will be coming—but I cannot stress firmly enough that no solution to

climate change or inequality will be complete if Congress does not move forward with an ambitious plan to rebuild and transform America's infrastructure so that it is ready for the significant transformation we need.

American infrastructure systems are in dire need of repair and modernization. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)'s latest 2017 Report Card for America's Infrastructure gave the nation's infrastructure a grade of "D+," and estimated that getting to a grade of "B" would require significant federal investment over the next 10 years.<sup>xviii</sup>

Congress must move forward a plan to meet this need, including boosting revenue to support the public sectors' ability to meet the challenge. A robust and ambitious infrastructure plan should address all aspects of our infrastructure needs, from strengthening the electric grid and modernizing our water systems to reducing methane leaks in the natural gas distribution sector, improving surface transportation, and making our schools, hospitals, and other buildings safer, healthier, and more energy efficient.

Just rebuilding our schools can have an impact that reverberates across the economy. As James Boland, President of the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (BAC), noted, "It is critically important that we rebuild our crumbling school facilities now so that our students are able to attend schools that are conducive to learning and that our teachers can do their important work in safe and healthy environment."<sup>xix</sup>

All of these investments can reduce air and water pollution—including the emissions driving climate change—and make our communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change. Natural infrastructure can also improve climate resilience through natural defenses that act as carbon sinks like wetlands, forests, dunes, and grasslands.

Making these smart investments will also pay dividends for workers and our economy. Our research has found that investing an estimated \$2.2 trillion in these sectors to improve them from a "D+" grade overall to a "B" grade has the potential to support or create an additional 14.5 million job-years across the U.S. economy and add a cumulative \$1.66 trillion to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over 10 years, versus a business as-usual approach.<sup>xx</sup>

We will accrue these benefits only if we tackle this challenge the right way. To ensure we maximize the benefits of our infrastructure investments for communities, the environment, and workers, any infrastructure package must:

- Ensure all projects built with public resources are subject to Buy America standards that maximize the return to taxpayers, workers and the American economy;
- Enforce Davis-Bacon provisions that ensure workers are paid prevailing wages;

- Utilize project labor agreements (PLAs), community benefit agreements, local hire, and other provisions and practices that prioritize improving training, working conditions, and project benefits;
- Drive forward-looking planning and investments that meet environmental standards and build resilient infrastructure systems and communities;
- Prioritize use of the most efficient, resilient, and cleanest materials and products with the lowest carbon and toxicity footprints;
- Enhance workforce training and development programs to expand the number of skilled workers in new and existing industries;
- Increase pathways to economic opportunities for communities and local workers, especially for people of color and low-income communities;
- Prioritize public funding and financing for infrastructure investment. All financing methods should be held to strong public interest standards.

Repairing America’s infrastructure systems is both urgently needed and an enormous opportunity; it should be a bipartisan legislative priority in the 116th Congress. We urge you to develop and put forward an infrastructure package that meets the above criteria.

In closing, I want to reiterate that tackling the crisis of climate change—if done right—is a significant opportunity to ensure a more equitable society, increase U.S. global competitiveness, and create quality, family-sustaining jobs across the country. Given the scale of the problem, numerous solutions will be needed. We encourage the committee to use every tool at its disposal to make progress now.

We look forward to working with this Committee as you move forward your agenda for the 116th Congress. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

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