



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

## ORAL TESTIMONY

**Jason Walsh**

**Executive Director, BlueGreen Alliance**

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After Coronavirus: Building a Prosperous, Environmentally Friendly Economy  
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Thank you Chairman Grijalva and distinguished members of the committee. My name is Jason Walsh, and I am the Executive 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 forum today on recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic cast a spotlight on all the parts of our society that already weren't working for people. We went into this pandemic with three ongoing and closely related crises: economic inequality, racial inequality and climate change. Limiting climate change must happen at the speed and scale demanded by scientific reality and the urgent need of our communities. That's why this past summer, the BlueGreen Alliance, alongside our labor and environmental partners, released Solidarity for Climate Action. It is an ambitious, concrete platform to address these crises simultaneously.

The events of the past few weeks and months have raised loud and clear the message that "normal" is not good enough. We must strive as a country to do better. An economic recovery must accomplish multiple things at the same time—invest to protect and create quality, family sustaining jobs, deliver public health and environmental benefits, and create a cleaner, stronger, and more equitable economy for all. Racial justice must be baked into any efforts to address the impacts of COVID-19.

How do we do this?

First, we must recognize that Americans are still reeling from the impacts of the pandemic: we have surpassed 100,000 deaths due to the coronavirus; over 40 million Americans are unemployed; state and local budgets are strained to the breaking point; and workers still lack basic protections. The House-passed HEROES Act (H.R. 6800) makes great strides to address these threats, but more is still needed to protect vulnerable communities; safeguard jobs, homes, and livelihoods; and shore up essential public services.

At the same time, we need to start talking about a long-term recovery that prioritizes investment in America's infrastructure, manufacturing sector, and social systems so that we can build a stronger, cleaner, and more inclusive economy for every American.

I would like to talk about each of those needed investments:

- **First, we must prioritize equitable rebuilding and infrastructure investments in those communities most in need**, especially low-income communities, communities of color, deindustrialized communities, and among disabled coal miners with black lung. Coronavirus has made too clear the negative impact crumbling infrastructure on public health—too many Americans are without basic necessities like access to clean water. We support building on the Moving Forward Framework, including upgrading our water systems; modernizing our schools, hospitals, buildings, and transit systems; delivering broadband to rural communities; eliminating community health hazards; modernizing our grid; and investing in natural infrastructure.

In the jurisdiction of this committee, strategic investments in public lands—such as in natural infrastructure, clean energy, and reclamation—can ensure that communities that were already hurting before this pandemic will see benefit from stimulus. The RECLAIM Act, the reauthorization of the Abandoned Mine Land Program, and the Great American Outdoors Act are perfect examples of legislation that could provide a boost for state and local economies while delivering good jobs and public health and climate benefits to communities. These must go hand in hand with measures to ensure these jobs are quality jobs and that the communities impacted have the self-determination, tools, and resources they need to emerge with stronger, fairer economies.

- **Second, we need to support and retool America’s manufacturing sector**, with a major reinvestment in fortifying and transforming heavy industry and retooling to build more of the products, materials, and technologies of the future here—all while providing pathways to good family-supporting jobs and strong domestic supply chains. We cannot cede American manufacturing jobs to our global competitors or leave our economy and communities vulnerable because we failed to be forward-thinking about boosting the sector for the short and long term.
- **Third, we must rebuild the public sector and provide long term support and protections for workers to ensure we are prepared for crises.** We need to rebuild the capacity of the public sector, the health care system, public health agencies, education, and community-based services to prepare for and respond to disasters like COVID-19 today, and to keep our communities safe and stable for the future. Workers and communities cannot deal with crises alone, whether they are disastrous hurricanes or fires or global pandemics. We also must rebuild and expand the social safety net—including pensions, healthcare, and retirement security—and ensure and enforce worker and community health and safety.

If we do it right, we can improve the health, safety, and resilience of workers and communities in the face of crises like the pandemic or climate disasters. We can reduce pollution, including the emissions driving climate change. We can create and maintain quality, family-sustaining jobs and launch an economic recovery that delivers a stronger, cleaner, and more equitable society for the long run.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today.