Workers in the Transition to a Clean Energy Economy

WORKING TOGETHER FOR POLICIES THAT WORK
to a clean energy economy in a way that makes workers wide solution that helps our country make the transition groups recognize,1 we are going to need an economy-
approaches that include measures like those proposed by the UWUA and the BGA. Ultimately, however, as both regions or state-by-region contributions to that discussion, informed by our years of participation in these conversations, and the experiences of our members and supporters who work and live in affected communities.

Some of the specific measures that the labor movement and its environmental movement allies should fight for together to ensure that the clean energy economy is worker-friendly include:

- Comprehensive federal legislation that reaps the benefits and pays the costs of transitioning from a climate disruptive to a clean energy economy, including worker and community transition benefits.

We can make progress towards addressing the cost of carbon through state-by-state or region-by-region approaches that include measures like those proposed by the UWUA and the BGA. Ultimately, however, as both groups recognize,2 we are going to need an economy-


2. We should be cautious about dedicating the limited funds raised for workers in transition to carbon capture and sequestration for electricity generation plants (CCS), as CCS could consume all the funds available for workers and the development of renewable energy. For example, a “wires charge” charge of $0.01 to $0.15 per kilowatt-hour could be completely consumed by the $0.09 to $0.15 per kilowatt-hour the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates a new coal plant with CCS would cost. CBO, “Federal Efforts to Reduce the Cost of Capturing and Storing Carbon Dioxide” (2012), Table A-1. Available online at http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/attachments/43357-06-28CarbonCapture.pdf. The Department of Energy has over $6 billion already allocated to CCS, three times the $2 billion BGA says a wires charge could generate annually. Moreover, a wires charge large enough to pay for both CCS and worker transition, if not properly structured, could allocate ratepayers and consumer advocates if it causes a significant increase in utility rates.

- Project labor agreements, living wage laws, neutrality agreements, licensing and training standards and opportunities, and labor law reform that genuinely protects workers’ rights to organize, to make sure the clean energy future provides decent, safe, healthy and well-paid work.

The public and private financing mechanisms we propose to fund these vital programs should be on a scale suited to the magnitude of the crisis. These potential mechanisms are numerous and complex, requiring discussion and debate beyond the scope of this paper. They could include a tax or fee on carbon emissions, climate and clean energy infrastructure banks, assessments on fossil fuel companies like those levied on the tobacco industry via the Tobacco Transition and Payment Program of 2004, a revolving fund, and leveraging the power of union pension funds, to name a few.

In developing and advocating for policy solutions, we should be guided by the articulation of need by representatives of the affected communities, like the UWUA and the United Mine Workers of America, AFL-CIO (UMWA), and we must also pursue transition solutions that build our movement. As an alliance, we need to build momentum for a major funding stream to help workers and communities in Appalachia and other hard-pressed regions to heal their land and water, have real family-supporting jobs, and force elected leaders from affected regions to take votes that they are on the side of workers and communities or the anti-union climate deniers funded by the fossil fuel industry.

ENDNOTES