

## Trump's Energy Plan:

### A "Brighter Future" for American Workers?

#### Labor Network for Sustainability

The day he was inaugurated, President Donald Trump issued his "America First Energy Plan."<sup>1</sup> It presented policies it said would "stimulate our economy, ensure our security, and protect our health" and thereby provide "a brighter future." Trump has promised that his energy policy will create "many millions of high-paying jobs."<sup>2</sup>

What do American workers need in an energy policy? Does President Trump's energy plan provide it? Or does it threaten our future? Is it credible or deceptive? Does it put us on the road to good jobs in an affordable, reliable energy future? Or does it threaten to reverse a massive shift to a more secure, climate-safe, fossil-free energy system -- a clean energy revolution that will benefit American workers, and that is already under way?

Some in organized labor have been attracted by President Trump's energy plan, even echoing the claim that it will provide "a brighter future." But one thing you learn when you negotiate a contract for a union is to take a hard look at proposals you are offered—however attractive they may appear, it is best to unwrap the package and see what's really in it before you agree. Labor should conduct similar "due diligence" for Trump's America First Energy Plan. Was it designed to meet the needs of American workers, or of the global oil, gas, and coal companies whose executives have been appointed to so many top positions in the Trump administration? Will it encourage or hold up the energy revolution that is making renewable energy and energy efficiency the way of the future?

#### Trump's energy plan ignores the greatest source of new energy jobs

President Trump's plan claims to "maximize the use of American resources," utilizing the "vast untapped domestic energy reserves right here in America." But the plan ignores the greatest untapped and most job-productive American energy resources – sun power, wind power, and energy efficiency.

---

<sup>1</sup> America First Energy Plan, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/america-first-energy>

<sup>2</sup> Michelle Jamrisko and Jennifer A. Dlouhi, "Trump's Energy Job Promise to Clash With Scant Supply of Labor," *Bloomberg*, November 23, 2016 citing Trump transition video briefing November 21, 2016.

According to the U.S. Department of energy, renewable energy employment has been growing at a rate of nearly 20 percent per year. There are now more workers directly employed by the clean energy industry than by the fossil fuel industry.<sup>3</sup> Both the solar and wind industries are creating jobs twelve times faster than the rest of the U.S. economy.<sup>4</sup>

260,000 Americans now work in the solar industry. More than 51,000 solar industry jobs were added in 2016, a 25 percent increase over 2015. Solar jobs have nearly tripled since 2010.<sup>5</sup> Employment in the U.S. solar business grew 12 times faster than U.S. jobs overall. The number of U.S. jobs in solar energy now exceeds those in oil and natural gas extraction.<sup>6</sup>

A 2015 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [fastest-growing occupations report](#) projects wind turbine service technicians to see the highest rate of growth for any career in the nation. Median pay for a wind turbine service technician in 2015 was \$51,000 a year. <http://www.thegazette.com/subject/news/business/wind-technician-jobs-growing-in-iowa-and-nationally-20170220> According to the U.S. Department of Energy, offshore wind farms could produce [four times](#) the total electricity currently generated in the U.S. today.

The energy efficiency industry directly employs nearly 2,200,000 American workers. It is predicted to grow about 10 percent in 2017.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, fossil fuels, the energy source of the past, has little promise as an American job creator. Thirty percent of American oil jobs have been lost since 2014. Many of the workers who held them have migrated to jobs in wind and other renewable energy. Oil production has begun to rise in the past few months, but new technology means that increased production doesn't necessarily translate into more jobs: between a third and a half of the workers who lost their jobs are not returning.<sup>8</sup>

## Trump's energy plan will destroy the earth's climate

---

<sup>3</sup> EESI, "Jobs in Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency," February 2017.

[http://www.eesi.org/files/FactSheet\\_REEE\\_Jobs\\_021517.pdf](http://www.eesi.org/files/FactSheet_REEE_Jobs_021517.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Kate Samuelson, "Renewable Energy Is Creating Jobs 12 Times Faster than the Rest of the Economy," *Fortune*, January 27, 2017. <http://fortune.com/2017/01/27/solar-wind-renewable-jobs/>

<sup>5</sup> Solar Foundation, National Solar Jobs Census, <http://www.thesolarfoundation.org/national/>

<sup>6</sup> Anna Hirtenstein, "Clean-Energy Jobs Surpass Oil Drilling for First Time in U.S.," *Bloomberg*, May 25, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> EESI, "Jobs in Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency."

<sup>8</sup> Clifford Krauss, "Texas Oil Fields Rebound from Price Lull, but Jobs Are Left Behind," *New York Times*, February 19, 2017.

President Trump denies the reality of climate change – he even tweeted, "The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive."<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, climate change is all-too real. According to NASA, 97 percent of climate scientists agree that greenhouse gases are now causing the temperature of the Earth to rise and that “climate-warming trends over the past century are very likely due to human activities.”<sup>10</sup> Earth has already warmed nearly 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit. Carbon already in the air will raise it another 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit. Unless we reverse current trends there will be a 4-9 degree Fahrenheit increase by the end of century. Unpredictable “tipping points” may make global warming far worse. Continuing to pour fossil fuel pollution into the atmosphere is already creating devastating threats to all of us, including American workers.

Results of climate change already include:

- Heat waves
- droughts
- wildfires
- crop failures
- floods
- hurricanes
- tornadoes
- food shortages and price spikes
- water wars
- extinction of species

Climate change is already harming American workers. For example, workplaces are frequently being closed by extreme weather events and coastal flooding. Changing climate conditions are reducing tourism and outdoor recreation. State and local government funds are being diverted to cleanup, repair, and adaptation and taxes are being increased to pay for them. As one study found, “As the costs for doing business increase, competitiveness of individual firms, entire sectors or regions may decline.” With this decline may come “a loss of employment and overall economic security.”<sup>11</sup>

Notwithstanding the overwhelming scientific evidence for climate change and its devastating effects on workers and the rest of our people, the America First Energy Plan says “President Trump is committed to eliminating harmful and unnecessary policies such as the Climate Action Plan.” He has also threatened to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement – eliminating U.S. leverage to encourage other countries to reduce

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/265895292191248385?lang=en>

<sup>10</sup> <http://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus>

<sup>11</sup> CIER, “The US Economic Impacts of Climate Change and the Costs of Inaction,” October, 2007. <http://www.cier.umd.edu/climateadaptation/index.html>

their greenhouse gas emissions. The result of gutting climate protection will be to accelerate the already severe harm being done by fossil fuel-caused climate change.

One of Trump's first acts as president has been to promote the building of fossil fuel pipelines, specifically reviving the halted Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipeline projects. The Dakota Access pipeline threatens Native American sacred sites and the safe water depended on by millions of people. The Keystone XL pipeline has been a focus of struggles against climate change because it provides access to oil from the Alberta tar sands, which contain enough carbon to increase the current level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere by more than half – enough to create more climate change than in the entire history of humanity on earth.<sup>12</sup>

These pipelines have been hailed by some as an expanded source of jobs; they have also divided organized labor and brought some unions into conflict with a wide range of groups that they otherwise depend on as allies. The jobs claims for these pipelines are highly questionable, however. While proponents have claimed tens of thousands of jobs, studies have shown that the Keystone XL pipeline would produce 2000 jobs during construction and 50-100 longer-term jobs. An alternative, proposed by the Labor Network for Sustainability, would expand water, sewer, and other infrastructure projects in the pipeline corridor and produce five times more jobs, and better jobs, than KXL.<sup>13</sup>

### **Trump's energy plan will eliminate the rules that protect our health and environment**

According to the America First Energy Plan, America has been “held back by burdensome regulations on our energy industry.” President Trump is “committed to eliminating harmful and unnecessary policies.”

But the regulations President Trump proposes to eliminate are actually protections for Americans' health, safety, and jobs. The first energy regulation he eliminated was one requiring American energy companies to report investments that they made abroad – an action that will only make it easier for corporations to move American jobs overseas without our even knowing about it.

The America First Climate Plan says “protecting clean air and clean water, conserving our natural habitats, and preserving our natural reserves and resources will remain a high priority.” However, one of President Trump's first acts was to sign a Congressional act rolling back a regulation protecting 6,000 miles of streams and 171 vulnerable species from mining pollution. His appointee for Administrator of the EPA, Scott Pruitt, has sued

---

<sup>12</sup> Kristen Sheeran, Noah Enelow, Jeremy Brecher, Brendan Smith, “The Keystone Pipeline Debate: An Alternative Job Creation Strategy,” Economics for Equity and Environment and Labor Network for Sustainability.

[http://www.labor4sustainability.org/files/\\_kxl\\_main3\\_11052013.pdf](http://www.labor4sustainability.org/files/_kxl_main3_11052013.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Sheeran, et al.

the EPA 14 times, often to overturn regulations that protect our air and water.<sup>14</sup> And he has repeatedly called for expansion of oil and gas fracking, despite their air and water pollution and their triggering of earthquakes.

### Trump's energy plan offers only false hope for coal miners

According to the America First Energy Plan, the Trump administration is committed to “reviving America’s coal industry.” The primary reason the coal industry is in decline, however, is that natural gas is cheaper and cleaner, so fossil fuel users have been switching from coal to natural gas. If Trump policies in fact expand production and reduce the price of natural gas as he has promised, the result will be further devastation of the coal industry – and of American coal miners.

The Plan says the Trump Administration is committed to “clean coal technology.” Government and industry have already spent billions of dollars on research and testing of “clean coal.” But most of that research has been abandoned because the results have shown that removing carbon from coal emissions is and will continue to be too costly, especially if coal is competing with cheaper natural gas. If some version of “clean coal” technology were actually implemented, that would just make burning coal more expensive and therefore less competitive.

Our hard-hit coal miners and communities deserve a plan that will enable them to find decent livelihoods in the future, not one that lures them with illusions that it will bring the coal industry back.<sup>15</sup>

### There is a better way

The America First Energy Plan would be more aptly named the Global Oil and Gas Industry Loot-the-Planet Plan. Fortunately, there is a far better way to create new jobs and raise incomes for American workers. It is called the clean energy revolution and it is already happening. It will not only protect us from climate change, it will also provide more and better jobs for American workers.

Fighting climate change is not a preference or an option – it is a necessity for the future of humanity, and that emphatically includes American workers. It is a big task, but it is not impossible. If we sharply cut the carbon and other greenhouse gases we put in the

---

<sup>14</sup> Nicholas Kusnetz, “Trump’s Repeal of Stream Rules Helps Coal at the Expense of Climate and Species,” *insideclimatenews*, February 16, 2017.

<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/16022017/coal-mining-environment-stream-rule-donald-trump-mussels-species>

<sup>15</sup> For the elements of such a plan see Jeremy Brecher, “A Superfund for Workers: How to Promote a Just Transition and Break Out of the Jobs vs. Environment Trap,”

*Dollars&Sense*, November/December 2015.

<http://www.dollarsandsense.org/archives/2015/1115brecher.html>

atmosphere, the pace of climate change will slow down. We need to limit carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases to a safe level. Using the latest climate science, governments meeting in Paris for the 2015 global climate summit agreed to keep global warming “well below” 2C above pre-industrial levels, and we should strive to limit it to 1.5C. This means global carbon dioxide emissions need to reach zero by some time between 2050 and 2070.<sup>16</sup>

The Oil Change International study “The Sky’s Limit” indicates that just burning the oil, gas, and coal in the world’s currently operating fields and mines would take us beyond 2 degrees C of warming. It recommends a “managed transition” that freezes new fossil fuel expansion while scaling up clean energy at a corresponding pace.<sup>17</sup> According to leading climate scientist James Hansen, reaching 350 ppm by the end of the century will require reducing fossil fuel emissions by six percent a year.<sup>18</sup> That can be done by changing electricity, transportation, and buildings:

- Make electricity with solar and wind power instead of fossil fuels.
- Use electricity more efficiently through new transmission lines, storage, and conservation.
- Use more renewable energy, public transportation, and rail transport.
- Make buildings more efficient through insulation, weatherization, cogeneration, and solar and geothermal heating, cooling, and hot water.

And that transition will, of course, require millions of jobs for American workers.

There are a variety of practical plans for making the transition to a climate-safe, worker-friendly economy. For example, *The Clean Energy Future: Protecting the Climate, Creating Jobs and Saving Money*<sup>19</sup> by the Labor Network for Sustainability and Synapse Energy Economics lays out an aggressive strategy for energy efficiency and renewable energy that will:

---

<sup>16</sup> IPCC, 2014: Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, R.K. Pachauri and L.A. Meyer (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, p.57.

<sup>17</sup> “The Sky’s Limit: Why the Paris Climate Goals Require a Managed Decline of Fossil Fuel Production,” Oil Change International, September, 2016.

[http://priceofoil.org/content/uploads/2016/09/OCI\\_the\\_skys\\_limit\\_2016\\_FINAL\\_2.pdf](http://priceofoil.org/content/uploads/2016/09/OCI_the_skys_limit_2016_FINAL_2.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> James Hansen et al, “The Case for Young People and Nature: The Path to a Healthy, Natural, Prosperous Future,” available at [http://science.the-environmentalist.org/2011/05/case-for-young-people-and-nature-path\\_05.html](http://science.the-environmentalist.org/2011/05/case-for-young-people-and-nature-path_05.html).

<sup>19</sup> Labor Network for Sustainability and Synapse Energy Economics, “The Clean Energy Future: Protecting the Climate, Creating Jobs, Saving Money” <http://climatejobs.labor4sustainability.org/national-report/>

- Transform the electric system, cutting coal-fired power in half by 2030 and eliminating it by 2050; building no new nuclear plants; and reducing the use of natural gas far below business-as-usual levels.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions 85 percent below 1990 levels by 2050, in the sectors analyzed.
- Save money – the cost of electricity, heating, and transportation under this plan is \$78 billion less than current projections from now through 2050.
- Create new jobs – more than 500,000 per year over business as usual projections through 2050.

That of the kind of program that will truly offer a “brighter future” to American workers.