



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

## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

**Michael Williams**

**Deputy Director, BlueGreen Alliance**

**Before the 116th United States Congress, House Committee on Small Business  
Subcommittee on Rural Affairs, Agriculture, Trade, and Entrepreneurship**

**The Economic Opportunities in the Clean Energy Economy**

**Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2360**

**Tuesday, September 10, 2019**

Thank you Chairwoman Finkenauer, Ranking Member Joyce, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. 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 regarding the opportunities that the clean energy economy can provide.

Small businesses are critical to our economy, and a major expansion of clean energy is vital if we are going to succeed in the fight against climate change. It's time we brought this thinking together, and in doing so we must strive to do it right and lift up American workers.

The BlueGreen Alliance unites America's largest and most influential labor unions and 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—we can and must have both. And we know that making the kinds of investments needed to grow the clean economy—done right—holds tremendous economic opportunity.

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.

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 a 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>i</sup>

Americans face the dual crises of climate change and increasing economic inequality and, for far too long, we’ve allowed the forces driving both crises to create a wedge between the need for economic security and a living environment. We know this is a false choice—we know that we can and must have both, and we need a bold plan to address both simultaneously.

That’s why this summer the BlueGreen Alliance alongside our labor and environmental partners released **Solidarity for Climate Action**, a first of its kind platform to fight climate change, reduce pollution, and create and maintain good-paying, union jobs across the nation.<sup>ii</sup>

If we do it right, innovating, manufacturing and installing the clean economy can protect the environment while creating quality jobs. Many solutions are already being put into place across the country. For example, tradespeople built the Block Island offshore wind project off the coast of Rhode Island, autoworkers are on the factory floors building cleaner cars and trucks in Michigan, and previously unemployed workers in St. Louis and Los Angeles are gaining access to high-skilled jobs in energy efficiency retrofitting, pipefitting, and transit manufacturing, while companies across the country are manufacturing methane mitigation technologies.

These are all good jobs building a clean energy and climate-resilient economy today. And many of these industries are providing key opportunities for small businesses. Let’s take two examples.

### *Methane Mitigation*

Reducing methane emissions in the United States is a key example of how tackling America’s environmental challenges can also be economic opportunities. Methane is a greenhouse gas that is many times more potent than carbon dioxide and the second largest contributor to climate change, and reducing methane emissions can reap economic benefits for workers and communities across the country.

A BlueGreen Alliance report, *Plugging the Leaks*, estimated that full and continuing adoption of leak reducing technologies and practices at new and modified oil and gas facilities would create over 50,000 jobs over the first decade of full implementation. Many of these jobs are in the methane leak detection and repair industry, a growing field of service providers that utilize technology to identify and repair leaking equipment at industrial oil and gas facilities.<sup>iii</sup>

Research has found over 130 companies, with customers in almost every state across the country, is this growing field.<sup>iv</sup> More than one-third of these businesses were founded within the last six years, and the majority of them are small businesses. And these are good jobs. The median hourly wage for the industry is \$30.88, compared to \$19.60 for all U.S. jobs.<sup>v</sup>

### *Building Clean*

Energy efficiency improvements 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.

Small businesses are not only creating the jobs to do this work, but can also reap these same cost and environmental health benefits if they make energy efficiency updates themselves. There are currently over 2.3 million jobs in the energy efficiency sector,<sup>vi</sup> and roughly 70 percent of these are in small businesses.<sup>vii</sup>

Furthermore, identifying the supply chain and moving policies to increase domestic manufacturing 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>viii</sup> Our database at BuildingClean.org lists roughly 4,500 local manufacturing facilities in nearly every state across the country.<sup>ix</sup>

In New York State, Flower City Habitat for Humanity helps build affordable housing for communities in Rochester. Through a commitment to in-state sourcing with 95 percent of parts coming from New York manufacturers, Flower City Habitat will be using windows and doors that exceed Energy Star standards at an affordable price. Many of these New York based suppliers are IUE-CWA-represented, supporting quality jobs and local businesses in these communities while reducing emissions.

These kinds of examples demonstrate the opportunity of the clean economy to revitalize American manufacturing, protect the environment, and create quality jobs across the country.

### ***Recommendations***

Fully capturing these opportunities must start with two things: 1) an aggressive agenda to regain American leadership in clean technology innovation, deployment, and manufacturing, and 2) an ambitious plan to rebuild and transform America's infrastructure.

American leadership in inventing—and manufacturing—the most advanced technology of all kinds was once a cornerstone of a strong and growing middle class and a pathway for many out of poverty. Innovating, building and installing the clean economy can be a critical pathway to revitalize American manufacturing while protecting the environment and creating quality jobs across the country. We can rebuild American competitiveness in the global economy, and secure and create a new generation of good, middle-class jobs across America through a national strategy to lead in clean and emerging technology production. This must include:

- Major new investments to spur domestic manufacturing and supply chain development in rapidly growing clean technologies, as well as increased funding for research, development, and deployment to ensure that American innovation is translated into good jobs and cutting edge manufacturing in America;
- Investments to transform our existing industries, including investing in efficient domestic materials production and energy-intensive manufacturing to both limit emissions and make them more efficient and competitive globally.
- A focus on environmentally, economically, and socially responsible mining projects, as well as reclamation and recycling initiatives to ensure we're creating the materials necessary for a clean and secure energy future here in the United States;
- Ensuring that trade agreements are enforceable, fair for all workers, and benefit the environment and the climate; and
- Using common sense tax, procurement, trade enforcement, and border adjustments policies to stop offshoring and the leakage of jobs—and pollution—overseas.

Additionally, our nation must move forward with an ambitious plan to rebuild and transform America's infrastructure. If we do it right, this will boost our economy, create millions of jobs, strengthen the resilience of our communities while also reducing pollution and combating climate change. This must include:

- Ambitious and strategic public investments to rebuild and modernize America's infrastructure and make our communities more resilient—repairing our failing roads and bridges, replacing lead pipes and upgrading our water systems, stopping fugitive emissions from existing natural gas distribution pipelines, modernizing our schools, increasing the energy efficiency of new and existing buildings in all sectors from commercial to residential to hospitals and universities, expanding and modernizing our electric grid, building clean and affordable transportation systems, and redeveloping brownfields and cleaning up hazardous waste sites;
- Investment in the revitalization and expansion of the public sector workforce and ensuring staffing levels are sufficient to accomplish clean energy, resilience, adaptation, and crisis response objectives;
- Robust investments in natural infrastructure, including improving climate resilience through natural defenses that act as carbon sinks, recovering America's wildlife, restoring forests and wildlands, reclaiming mines, and addressing the public lands maintenance backlog;
- Vigorous investment in broadband networks to close the digital divide, achieve universal access to high-speed Internet, and full utilization of the federally backed FirstNet network for first responders;
- Adaptation, resilience, and pre-disaster mitigation policies and investments, including sustainable land-use, housing, transportation, and natural infrastructure investments that are equitable, community-driven, and designed to uplift rather than uproot communities;
- Targeted policies and investments to communities with the most need and engaging local organizations to advocate, plan, and sustain positive development outcomes; and
- Prioritization of the use of the most efficient, resilient, and cleanest materials and products with the lowest carbon and toxicity footprints.

### ***Ensuring Quality Job Creation***

At the same time, we must ensure that these investments result in quality, family-sustaining jobs. While many clean economy jobs are good, union jobs, too many still are not. Too many companies are offshoring jobs, offering substandard wages, conditions and benefits, or failing to provide safe, healthy workplaces. We cannot rebuild prosperity if working people and the communities they live in fail to see the gains from innovation and a cleaner economy.

Therefore, in addition to investments in innovation, manufacturing, and infrastructure, we need an ironclad commitment to *high-quality* job creation across all sectors of the economy—but especially related to clean energy, adaptation, and resilience. That means a commitment to:

- Increasing union density across the country through strong support of the right to organize throughout the economy, including in the clean technology sectors;
- Applying mandatory labor standards that include prevailing wages, safety and health protections, project labor agreements, community benefit agreements, local hire, and other provisions and practices that prioritize improving training, working conditions, and project benefits. This includes respect for collective bargaining agreements and workers' organizing rights such as neutrality, majority sign-up, and first contract arbitration for construction, operations, and maintenance;
- Raising labor standards in the non-construction sectors through improved wages and benefits and the prioritization of full-time work that eliminates the misclassification of employees and misuse of temporary labor;
- Investing in training, equipment, preparedness, plan development, and other tools including through registered apprenticeship programs to ensure a robust, skilled, and well-prepared workforce to address the extreme weather events and other impacts caused by climate change; and
- Utilizing community benefit, workforce, and other similar agreements that improve access to jobs and career paths, and identify and implement mechanisms to ameliorate and improve local economic and environmental impacts, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color.

In closing, I want to reiterate that growing the clean economy—if done right—is a significant opportunity to ensure a more equitable society, increase U.S. global competitiveness, support and grow small businesses, and create quality, good-paying, union jobs across the country.

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.

---

<sup>i</sup> Economic Policy Institute, "What labor market changes have generated inequality and wage suppression?" December 12, 2018. Available online: <https://www.epi.org/publication/what-labor-market-changes-have-generated-inequality-and-wage-suppression-employer-power-is-significant-but-largely-constant-whereas-workers-power-has-been-eroded-by-policy-actions/>

<sup>ii</sup> BlueGreen Alliance, "Solidarity for Climate Action," June 2019. Available online: <https://www.bluegreenalliance.org/solidarity>

<sup>iii</sup> Environmental Defense Fund, "How Reducing Methane Emissions Creates Jobs," March 2017. Available online: <https://www.edf.org/how-reducing-methane-emissions-creates-jobs>

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> BlueGreen Alliance, *Plugging the Leaks: Protecting Workers, Reducing Pollution, And Creating Quality Jobs By Reducing Methane Waste In The U.S. Oil And Gas Industry*, September 2016. Available online:

<https://www.bluegreenalliance.org/pluggingtheleaks>

<sup>vi</sup> National Association of State Energy Officials, The 2019 U.S. Energy and Employment Report. Available online:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a98cf80ec4eb7c5cd928c61/t/5c7f3708fa0d6036d7120d8f/1551849054549/USEER+2019+US+Energy+Employment+Report.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> Environmental Entrepreneurs, *Energy Efficiency Jobs in America*, December 2016. Available online: [https://e4thefuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/EnergyEfficiencyJobsInAmerica\\_FINAL.pdf](https://e4thefuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/EnergyEfficiencyJobsInAmerica_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>viii</sup> BlueGreen Alliance Foundation, "Building Clean." Available online: <http://www.buildingclean.org>

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid.