Building America Back Better
Biden's Agenda is Working for the IBEW

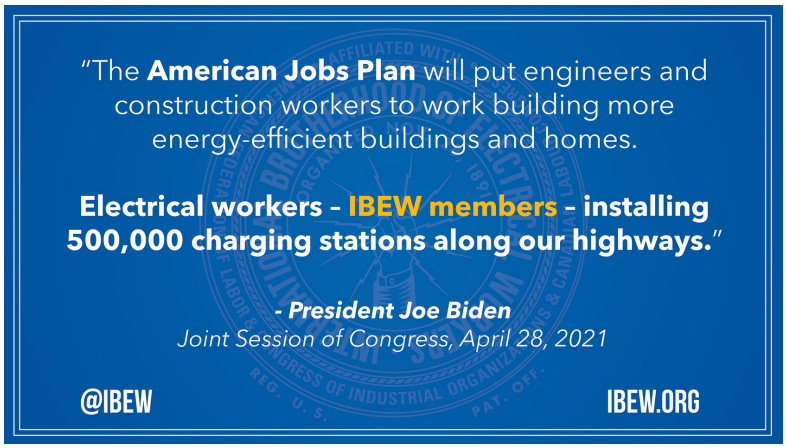
How President Biden's actions benefit working families and IBEW members

GIVING THE IBEW A SHOUTOUT IN HIS FIRST STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

It would be the first time President Biden addressed a joint session of Congress – and the vision he laid out for the future was bold: ending the coronavirus pandemic, rebuilding the country's neglected infrastructure, restarting the covid-ravaged economy.

He also made clear to 27 million at-home viewers on April 28 what he's been saying all along: unions hold the keys to the nation's recovery.

"The American Jobs Plan will put engineers and construction workers to work building more energy efficient buildings and homes," President Biden said. "Electrical workers – IBEW members – installing 500,000 charging stations along our highways."



Even without the IBEW namecheck, it was one of the most pro-worker, pro-union speeches in presidential history. President Biden called for passage of the PRO Act, bringing offshored manufacturing home to the United States and boosting taxes on corporations and the wealthy to fund his plans.

In the address, President Biden also introduced the American Families Plan, which will provide investments in education from early childhood to post-secondary level and tax cuts and direct support for children and families.

"The American Families Plan is a vital investment in working families and the middle class," said IBEW President Lonnie Stephenson. "This plan provides needed relief to working people and their children."

The American Jobs Plan, an eight-year, $2 trillion proposed investment in the country's infrastructure and transportation systems, will put hundreds of thousands of Americans to work, many in the IBEW's core sectors. The IBEW is calling on labor protections like prevailing wages, requiring the use of project labor agreements, an ABC test for independent contractors and requiring contractors to be neutral for purposes of organizing, to be included with the American Jobs Plan.

IBEW MEMBERS GET A HIGH-LEVEL WHITE HOUSE BRIEFING

Nearly 1,000 members joined President Biden's White House team for a first-ever briefing on May 4.

The America Jobs Plan and the American Families Plan were among highlights of the virtual discussion hosted by IBEW President Lonnie Stephenson, and included top advisors to President Biden: Congressman Cedric Richmond, who directs the White House Office of Public Engagement; Deputy National Climate Advisor Ali Zaidi; Office of Public Engagement Director for Labor, Erika Dinkel-Smith; and David Kamin, Deputy Director of the White House National Economic Council.

"It is nothing less than transformational change that President Biden is trying to achieve," President Stephenson said on the Zoom call. "Big change like this will mean big opportunities – but it also means there has to be true focus on rebuilding damaged communities with federal investments and good union jobs."

The White House team fielded questions about labor standards on clean energy jobs, the importance of nuclear energy as a baseload source of 24/7 electricity and emerging technologies like hydrogen and carbon capture technology to preserve existing power plant jobs.

"We need to ensure that we are not just keeping our existing nuclear fleet online but making sure that we keep our edge in new technology," Zaidi said in response to a question from Deric Wilkins, Joliet, Ill., Local 176 business agent about protecting the nation's nuclear plants from premature closure.

IBEW: LEANING INTO THE BIDEN JOBS AGENDA

Nearly 500 IBEW members virtually roamed the halls of Congress on April 12-13 in pursuit of support for IBEW priorities from elected leaders. This effort came at a critical moment in the national conversation about the need for infrastructure legislation.

Scheduled to precede the Construction & Maintenance Conference, the Zoom extravaganza included more than 250 meetings with a clear-cut agenda: infrastructure, broadband buildout, the power grid and labor standards. Members also emphasized the need to include the Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Training Program (EVITP) in any legislation that provides federal support for construction of electric vehicle charging infrastructure and the National Child ID Program, a community safety initiative dedicated to protecting the estimated 800,000 children that go missing each year.

Many participating IBEW members downloaded the popular blue IBEW Zoom screen.

The event featured hundreds of meetings with members of both parties in the House and the Senate.

"Your work always pays off," IBEW President Lonnie Stephenson told IBEW participants following the meetings. "If there is anything IBEW members have learned in the past few years, it is when members of Congress hear a strong message from their IBEW constituents back home, they can make an important difference."

The video format increased participation from members of internal groups like the Electrical Workers Minority Caucus and young workers, veterans, women's and retiree clubs.

Everyone who took part in the conversations was equipped with talking points and a list of legislative priorities that had also been sent to congressional offices, promoting specific conversations.

"It was a great learning experience for all the IBEW members in Washington state and honestly I think we had a lot of fun," said Matthew Hepner, Washington state's political coordinator.

In Washington, the push for jobs and infrastructure started in earnest with the release of President Biden's American Jobs Plan. IBEW's march on the Hill was the ideal moment to get the attention of members of Congress as they begin to draft this all-important legislation.

The volume of bipartisan outreach set a pandemic record for labor's virtual lobbying efforts, with IBEW more than tripling the number of meetings that other unions have recently reported.

"We really hit the gas pedal and the result was a hugely successful virtual fly-in for our construction sector," said Political & Legislative Affairs Director Austin Keyser. "We're planning to do the same kind of events with the other branches, so lawmakers can expect to hear much more from IBEW members."

FEATURING THE IBEW IN WHITE HOUSE AND GLOBAL EARTH WEEK EVENTS

IBEW members participated in multiple events highlighting the link between jobs and climate change around Earth Day.

New York Local 3 member Chris Erikson Jr. participated in a White House Earth week young worker event. In the virtual meeting moderated by President Biden's National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy, Erikson discussed the key role of the labor movement in promoting professionalism and safety in renewable energy jobs as well as the opportunities for stable careers with good wages, benefits, health care and secure retirements.

IBEW President Lonnie Stephenson joined heads-of-state, world leaders and global innovators for a two-day climate summit that sought to link climate change to a prime opportunity to create millions of jobs around the world.

"Fighting climate change isn't just about cutting carbon emissions but creating good jobs," President Stephenson said at President Biden's Leaders Summit on April 23. "Creating good jobs means, above all, creating union jobs."

"Keeping IBEW members at the center of the clean energy industry will require lawmakers and regulators to tie all federal clean-energy investments to strong labor protections, like prevailing wage laws, which promote higher incomes, safer worksites and increased productivity," President Stephenson said.

Buy American provisions would ensure that the push for renewable energy results in more domestic manufacturing jobs. President Biden's plan to build a massive network of electric vehicle charging stations can mean hundreds of thousands of new union manufacturing and construction jobs.

"Many existing energy jobs are good jobs for one reason, and that's because they are union jobs," President Stephenson said. "But the truth is, not enough solar, wind and other renewable power jobs are union. Changing that will go a long way in boosting confidence that the transition to clean power will leave no worker behind."

President Stephenson said the United States must invest in all forms of carbon-free energy technologies, such as carbon capture, hydrogen and nuclear, as well as support expanding the grid and investing in new transmission lines.

President Biden reiterated, to a worldwide audience, the reason for his close relationship with the IBEW. "By the way, the first person I went to was Lonnie Stephenson of the IBEW … about how we can get this this done. It was Lonnie who stepped up."

EMBRACING IBEW POLICY WITH EVITP DEBUT LEGISLATION

New York Sen. Chuck Schumer, kneeling, second from left, promoted electric buses with Local 3 members in Manhattan.

With a public event at the Tuskegee Airmen Bus Depot in Manhattan featuring New York Local 3 members, Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer announced new legislation on May 4 that targets $73 billion to electrify the nation's mass transit bus fleet.

"Today, there are approximately 70,000 mass transit buses and 85,000 cutaway vehicles and transit vans in America," said a summary document released by Schumer and his co-sponsor Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio. "Approximately 2% of those buses are zero-emission vehicles. The federal government can and should be in the business of aiding transit agencies in shifting their bus fleets to zero emissions."

Passage of the legislation would mean a victory for air quality by making significant progress against the high-emissions transportation sector, high-road labor standards, as well as recognition for the EVITP program, a national charging network certification for electricians that the IBEW and President Biden have championed with lawmakers.

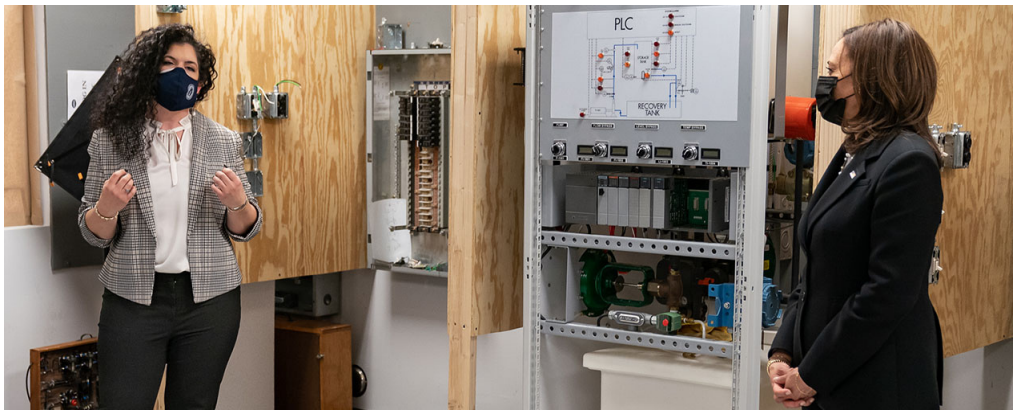
SENDING VP HARRIS TO VISIT IBEW LOCAL UNION IN NH

Vice President Kamala Harris praised the IBEW's apprenticeship programs and said they are a key part of the Biden administration's American Jobs Plan, which she promoted during a visit to Dover, N.H., Local 490 on April 23.

"I am here to hold up and highlight the important work that is being done right here at the IBEW around what we need to do to invest in the American workforce," she said.

Harris said $100 billion in the proposed jobs plan will be invested in programs to train skilled construction workers, such as the IBEW's apprenticeship instruction.

"If we're going to build back better, we have to invest in skills development of the workforce," Harris said. "To do that, if we are going to get the greatest return on our investment, let's invest in the IBEW. Let's invest in the building trades."



Vice President Harris with Boston Local 103 member Haley Kamberalis.

USING THE POWER OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO PROMOTE UNIONIZING

A new high-level White House task force is charged with making sure the federal government acts to promote unions and collective bargaining.

Flanked by Vice President Kamala Harris and Labor Secretary Marty Walsh, President Joe Biden signs an executive order Monday creating the historic White House Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment. They have 180 days to recommend ways the government can foster union growth, as prescribed by federal labor law that has been ignored for decades.

President Joe Biden launched the White House Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment on April 26. Vice President Kamala Harris will serve as the Task Force's Chair and Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh will serve as the Vice-Chair. The President assigned several members of his executive Cabinet and additional economic, domestic and climate policy advisors to serve on the task force.

"This unprecedented task force — involving almost all of the highest-ranking people in the executive branch — is President Biden's most comprehensive approach yet to lift up workers and unions," President Lonnie Stephenson said. "The magnitude of his efforts can't be overstated. We've literally never seen anything like it."

The White House is asking the task force to propose ways that the federal government can:

- Lead by example by encouraging organizing and collective bargaining among its workforce
- Facilitate public- and private-sector organizing across the country through policies and practices
- Increase worker power in underserved communities by addressing restrictive labor laws, the challenges faced by many women, people of color and other marginalized workers and barriers to organizing workers in certain industries
- Increase union membership across the United States to grow a more inclusive middle class, provide workers the opportunity to come together for the purpose of mutual advancement and fair compensation

Recommendations made by the task force will be critical to Biden's decisions about changes to federal policies.

CHOOSING IBEW MEMBERS, FRIENDS FOR KEY APPOINTMENTS

Retired Tenth District International Vice President Bobby Klein is a member of Chattanooga, Tenn., Local 175.

President Joe Biden announced his intent to nominate retired Tenth District International Vice President Robert P. "Bobby" Klein to serve as a member of the board of directors for the Tennessee Valley Authority.

The TVA is the nation's largest government-owned power provider, a self-sustaining utility supported by the revenues it collects from its 10 million ratepayers in Tennessee and parts of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina and Virginia.

The TVA employs about 2,500 IBEW members as permanent employees at nearly 60 nuclear, oil, gas, hydroelectric and solar worksites, with thousands more members performing contract work for the utility each year upgrading infrastructure and performing regular maintenance.

"For so many years, Bobby served with distinction as this union's caretaker of our partnership with the TVA," said IBEW President Lonnie Stephenson. "As far as anyone can tell, if he's confirmed, he'll be the first union member to hold a seat on the TVA's board."

NAMING CELESTE DRAKE WHITE HOUSE MADE IN AMERICA DIRECTOR

President Biden tapped a longtime voice for good jobs and American manufacturing, Celeste Drake, as the first-ever Made in America director at the Office of Management and Budget. Drake brings years of experience fighting on behalf of unions for fair trade and labor rights to the job.

"This administration has made it clear that it takes rejuvenating domestic manufacturing seriously and the creation of a new Made in America director position in the OMB is another indication that for President Biden made in America is not just a campaign slogan but a top policy priority," IBEW President Lonnie Stephenson said.

Most recently, Drake worked as head of government affairs for the Directors Guild of America, which has more than 18,000 members. From 2011 to 2019, she was the trade and globalization policy specialist at the AFL-CIO. She was also a former legislative aide to IBEW member Rep. Linda Sanchez (Calif.) and Rep. Lloyd Doggett of Texas.

APPOINTING DIERDRE HAMILTON TO THE NATIONAL MEDIATION BOARD

President Biden has appointed longtime labor lawyer and former IAM legal fellow Deirdre Hamilton to the National Mediation Board. The NMB helps smooth out disputes in the rail and airline industries. This is a very important position for the thousands of IBEW members who work under the Railway Labor Act.

SELECTING AFL-CIO ALUM AS POLICY HEAD AT THE SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

Securities and Exchange Commission Chair Gary Gensler chose Heather Slavkin Corzo as policy director at the agency with a mission to protect investors and maintain fair, orderly and efficient markets. Corzo formerly worked as director of capital markets at the AFL-CIO and head of U.S. policy at Principles for Responsible Investment, a global network of investors committed to socially responsible, sustainable investments.

ANNOUNCING $110 MILLION FOR POWER PLANT COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION

One of President Biden's first executive orders created the Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization. Last month the group released its initial report of currently available resources to help reindustrialize and revitalize communities hit by coal plant closures. The same day, the U.S. Department of Energy released over $100 million in funds to support coal plant communities, including:

- $75 million to engineer carbon capture projects
- $19 million for critical mineral extraction from coal to electric vehicles and other clean energy technologies
- $15 million for geothermal energy research on power production

The working group also identified specific communities that are in the most need of resources. One of those identified is Alaska, a region with a high number of fossil energy jobs and as a result, susceptible to the impacts of coal-specific job losses.

"We need investments that put union members to work," said Anchorage Local 1547 Business Manager Marcie Obremski. "Local 1547 has an apprenticeship program that allows us to equip new workers and retrain current workers with necessary skills to take advantage of these new opportunities and new technologies. We can partner with our community members and expand the skilled high-quality workforce this country needs."

The interagency working group will now put together proposals to create significant, new funding streams and support for Congress to consider in its FY2022 budget.

RAISING WAGES FOR THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE

President Biden ordered the minimum wage for federal contractors working on government contracts to increase from $10.95 to $15 an hour. The executive order, signed on April 27, will take effect in January.

"Taxpayer money should be used to support living wage jobs," President Lonnie Stephenson said in a statement. "A higher minimum wage means more money going to local businesses, encouraging further job creation," Stephenson said. "This order will also push competitors to raise wages, creating a race-to-the-top scenario where workers will be the winners."

INCLUDING IBEW MEMBERS IN CONVERSATION ON EQUITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE SOLAR INDUSTRY

Too many jobs in wind and solar are not good jobs – and the IBEW and the Biden administration are aiming to change that.

The solar industry has one of the lowest rates of unionization – just 4 percent – in the energy sector. A May 5 U.S. Department of Energy panel featured IBEW members who are working toward improving the quality of the workforce through increasing union participation in solar.

In “A Force for Change: Justice, Equity and Diversity in the Solar Industry,” hosted by Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, one DOE staffer quoted President Biden, who says, “When I think about climate change, I think about jobs.”

“This is about putting people to work,” said Kelly Speakes-Backman, acting assistant secretary of the office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

The IBEW and the Biden administration aim to improve the quality of jobs in the renewable energy industry.

St. Louis Local 1 IBEW member Sylvester Taylor said IBEW members bring value into the solar industry, with the well-rounded skillset of journeyman wiremen, as well as the strong wages, health benefits and retirement that make membership less of a job than a fulfilling career. Taylor leads diversity efforts at Local 1, recruiting women and people of color to the IBEW.

“If employers or local unions were diverse, we wouldn’t be having this conversation,” Taylor said, adding the necessity that the labor movement reflect the kaleidoscope of ethnicities and genders of the population.

Los Angeles Local 11 member Jen Kropke, who is the director of energy jobs at the Department of Energy, also spoke about the necessity of creating pipelines to help guide underserved communities into good careers in clean energy.

ANNOUNCING AMBITIOUS OFFSHORE WIND DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Biden administration plans to jumpstart offshore wind energy, strengthen the domestic supply chain, and create good-paying union jobs, it announced in a virtual event with cabinet secretaries and Political & Legislative Affairs Director Austin Keyser.

“This announcement is yet another opportunity the Biden administration is taking to make sure emerging industries create good-paying union jobs. The President is aware of the low union density in renewables and is steadfast in his promise to us that he will push these companies to adopt the highest labor standards if they want federal support,” Keyser said.

National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg met March 29 with state officials, industry executives and labor leaders to announce new leasing, funding, and goals that employ President Biden’s whole-of-government approach, to position America to lead a clean energy revolution, and create thousands of jobs across the country with the choice to join a union.

“President Biden believes this a chance to fuel America’s economic recovery, rebuild the middle class, and make sure we bounce back from the crises we face,” McCarthy said. “Nowhere is the scale of that opportunity clearer than for offshore wind. This commitment to a new, untapped industry will create pathways to the middle class for people from all backgrounds and communities.”

IBEW ON CAPITOL HILL: TESTIFYING IN SUPPORT OF BIDEN’S ‘SECOND GREAT RAILROAD REVOLUTION’

Protecting the high quality of jobs in the railroad industry even as the Biden administration gears up to launch the country into a renaissance was the theme of IBEW testimony on Capitol Hill May 6.

Altoona, Pa., Local 2273 member Danielle Eckert, a locomotive electrician and international representative in the Political & Legislative Affairs Department, told members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials that the highly unionized railroad industry provides America's workforce with a pathway better way of life that should be maintained.

"Congress must ensure that we continue to create good paying jobs by upholding hard-fought labor protections that have been in place for almost a century by designating providers as rail carriers with a workforce covered under railroad labor laws, ensuring that contractors will compete for work based on who can best train, equip and manage a construction crew by requiring prevailing wages, upholding Buy America standards, establishing strong regulatory regimes and safety cultures in new operations and technology and fostering innovative strategies to deliver economic benefits to local communities," Eckert said.

The IBEW is seeking to protect strong labor standards in the railroad industry.

Contact Us

IBEW Political/Legislative Affairs Department | p: (202) 728-6046 | e: political@ibew.org
www.ibew.org/political

Produced by OPEIU Local 2