

**Testimony of
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers member
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**Before the Pennsylvania Senate Democratic Committee
Addressing Energy Reliability & Costs for Consumers**

Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

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615 Waterfront Drive, Suite 201, Allentown, Pa.

Chairman Miller. Members of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee. Thank you for inviting me here to share the IBEW perspective on the subject of today's hearing. Building and maintaining the electrical grid, including transmitting and generating energy to supply Americans with safe, reliable electricity is one of the most important responsibilities of IBEW members.

Introduction

My name is Paul Anthony. I am the business manager of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 375 here in Allentown. I represent over 900 IBEW members in Lehigh, Carbon, and Northampton counties. In addition, I represent sixteen distinct union construction trades in my role as president of the Lehigh Valley Building Trades. I am a member of the Lehigh-Northampton Airport Authority and chair Northampton County's General-Purpose Authority.

Additionally, I have the privilege of serving as the building trades representative on the board of directors for the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation and the Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Today, I am here on behalf of the 31,000 IBEW members across the state, the majority of whom play a large role in the state's energy industry. This includes those employed by investor-owned and municipal utilities and co-ops who generate and distribute electricity. And those working for utility and construction contractors who build and maintain transmission lines, utility substations, and other crucial electrical grid infrastructure. Local 375 members built the Calpine Energy Center in Bethlehem, a power plant fueled primarily by natural gas, and we represent the workers who operate and maintain the plant.

Overall, the IBEW represents more than 840,000 active and retired members in the United States, U.S. territories, and Canada, who work in a variety of energy related fields including utilities, construction, telecommunications, broadcasting, manufacturing, railroads, and government.

I know that one of the most meaningful responsibilities of a public official is to ensure that high-quality employment exists in their community. This hearing's topic is vital to everyone in the commonwealth, and I commend the chairman for organizing this forum.

We are the IBEW

The IBEW is the largest energy union in the United States. Members of the IBEW have testified before Congress many times on the subject of the country's generation, transmission and distribution needs. Our members have also been honored to testify before the Pennsylvania State House in recent years.

The IBEW is considered an authority on regulations and legislative proposals and their effect on IBEW members and the general public.

We represent a critical voice from the perspective of the professionals who are already managing the country's renewable energy transformation. Our trained, highly skilled union workers are well suited for the recent public investment in advanced nuclear technologies and the deployment of renewable power and storage to advance climate goals.

We in the IBEW are the best trained, most professional workforce in the electrical industry. It's our outside construction members who build the high voltage lines and our utility members who maintain them. It was our members who built the first electrical grid and have kept it running safely and reliably for more than 100 years.

IBEW's competitive wages and health and retirement benefits mean high-quality employment that is the foundation of healthy communities. And strong labor standards ensure that state and federal investments support family-sustaining jobs capable of lifting people into the middle class and keeping them there.

Demand and reliability

Today one of the many challenges facing our electrical system is the increasing demand for power by AI. In the United States by 2030 – only five years from now, data centers are expected to draw 11% of the country's total power demand.

System reliability goes hand in hand with adequate generation capacity. Recent shutdowns of coal plants represent not just lost sources of electricity but the decline of communities where plant personnel are frequently unionized. Often these facilities are the best-paying jobs locally. As many of you know, you can draw a bright line between industrial plants shuttering and the economic decline of a community, where the tax base shrinks, unemployment rises and families suffer.

A fair transition for fossil workers

In Pennsylvania and throughout the United States, the energy transition is changing the energy landscape and is creating significant challenges for workers in the fossil fuel industry

Today, the IBEW represents approximately 85,000 members nationwide employed in coal and natural gas plants, many of whom are at risk of job displacement as these industries contract.

Between 2011 and 2022, over 25,000 megawatts of coal-fired generation capacity were retired, and since 2021, 37 gigawatts of coal-fired capacity have been shut down, impacting workers and communities that rely on these jobs. State and federal policies must prioritize workers who are being displaced by this transition in their regions.

A just transition for energy workers is vital to maintaining good-paying jobs, stabilizing local economies, and leveraging the skills of experienced energy workers in emerging renewable energy sectors. The IBEW urges you to consider meaningful legislation that ensures fossil fuel workers are not left behind as the future of energy is realized. This includes policies that retain workers, provide retraining opportunities, and promote long-term community investment in regions affected by plant closures.

The IBEW's commitment to a just transition means ensuring workers have access to the training, support, and opportunities necessary to transition into new energy sectors without sacrificing their livelihoods or the stability of their communities. The IBEW continues to push for policies that prioritize workers' needs, revitalize affected areas, and promote workforce development in the clean energy economy.

New energy investments in Pennsylvania

Some of this region's underutilized power plants are being repurposed like the Panther Creek Power Plant located in Carbon County that processes a coal waste byproduct into electricity that provides the power for a bitcoin mining operation. Others have the potential for new uses that should be considered. In all cases, when it comes to generation plants that are closing or not operating at capacity, key electrical lines are running to the plants that carry the possibility for new installations like advanced nuclear. Currently, a data center is under construction that is directly connected to the Susquehanna Nuclear Power Plant. We shouldn't overlook the opportunity to reuse the infrastructure that is already there. This puts more Local 375 members to work.

Zero-carbon generation, IBEW employment

Today, IBEW members outside Harrisburg are assisting in a \$1.6 billion plan to restore unit 1 at the 3 Mile Island nuclear power plant, a massive undertaking that will produce power for Microsoft artificial intelligence. And other shuttered nuclear plants across the country, in Michigan and California, are rising again as the carbon-free, baseload power generated by nuclear is getting a second look.

The IBEW already represents 10,000 members employed full time in the nuclear industry at more than 55 facilities across the United States. Thousands more IBEW members rotate through nuclear plants with the contractor workforce as needed for maintenance and refueling. The nuclear industry has supplied some of the highest quality jobs for IBEW members, typically paying one-third more than the average jobs in their community.

More than ten nuclear plants have closed since 2012. But recent federal policies and high demand for electricity are bringing people back around to zero-emission electricity like nuclear.

The [Department of Energy](#) estimates that the U.S. must bring 600 gigawatts of nuclear capacity online before 2050 in order to meet increasing demand and cut emissions at the same time.

Indeed, nuclear energy in America produces nearly 20 percent of our nation's electricity and accounts for over 50 percent of all zero-carbon emission generation in the country. As the United States moves towards increasing reliance on renewable energy, such as solar and wind, the need for nuclear energy's reliability, the country's only carbon-free source that can ensure around-the-clock generation, even during inclement weather, has become even greater.

By extending the lifespan of existing reactors and investing in next-generation designs, the U.S. can maintain its leadership in energy innovation while creating thousands of well-paying, unionized jobs.

Permit reform: an IBEW priority

Permitting reform is also critical for the IBEW, as it directly affects job opportunities for members working in energy generation, transmission, and infrastructure projects. Delays in project approvals create bottlenecks that hinder job creation and economic growth. Streamlined permitting processes promise to modernize U.S. infrastructure and accelerate energy project development while addressing the nation's growing energy needs.

For IBEW members, timely project approvals mean steady, good-paying union jobs in essential sectors like transmission, renewable energy facilities, and other energy infrastructure.

While the IBEW supports reforms to make permitting more efficient, it also emphasizes the need to maintain environmental protections, community involvement, and labor standards. A balanced approach ensures that infrastructure projects move forward without compromising environmental integrity or workers' rights.

Training for the future

A robust, efficient grid is essential for integrating renewable energy sources, meeting growing electricity demands, and ensuring reliability. Building transmission lines not only facilitates the expansion of energy sources but also creates opportunities for skilled workers to contribute to critical infrastructure projects, driving local economic growth.

Labor standards, such as prevailing wage laws, apprenticeship utilization, and OSHA-certified safety training, are central to ensuring these projects are completed safely, efficiently, and with a commitment to worker protections.

Through its apprenticeship programs and safety initiatives, the IBEW equips workers with the skills needed to meet the demands of these transformative projects, providing employers with a reliable and highly capable workforce.

Not only do we have the technical and practical expertise to help manage the grid, but IBEW apprenticeship and training programs are second to none and guarantee a steady stream of skilled electrical workers.

The IBEW is always reaching out to extend the family-sustaining union membership advantages like fair wages and health and retirement benefits that are the gold standards in the industry.

We also team with community workforce readiness programs and Local 375 has a state certified pre-apprenticeship program right here in Allentown to promote our industry and prepare applicants with an interest in our programs for registered apprenticeships.

Heeding the call for more electricians

Along with our construction employers, the IBEW operates training centers for one of the most in-demand job titles forecast in the coming years: electricians. In fact, we have trained electrical workers at no cost to participants – or taxpayers – for more than 100 years.

America needs more skilled tradesmen and women to meet the extraordinary demand of this moment. The IBEW and our employer partners at the National Electrical Contractors Association are taking aggressive steps to recruit and train the industry's best electricians.

This has been fueled by apprenticeship utilization requirements incorporated into law and project labor agreement mandates. Registered apprenticeships are the most reliable, time-tested and effective means of educating the next generation of skilled construction workers. Research shows that registered apprenticeships are much better than nonunion programs at filling job vacancies, recruiting a more diverse workforce in terms of race and gender, decreasing error and accident rates and ensuring that knowledge and experience is transferred to the new generation.

Conclusion

In closing, I thank you all again for this opportunity to discuss these important issues with this committee. It is my honor to be here on behalf of the members of the IBEW. And I look forward to working with all of you to uplift our communities as we work to construct a cleaner future.

I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.