

Subcommittee on Energy
Hearing on
“Clean Energy Infrastructure and the Workforce to Build It”
February 27, 2019

Ms. Michelle Romero, National Director of Green For All, Dream Corps

Additional Question from The Honorable Joseph P. Kennedy, III (D-MA)

- 1. The transition to a green economy presents the U.S. with incredible workforce opportunity but also, of course, workforce disruption.**
 - a. How should Congress be proactively thinking about support for workers, families, and communities that have depended on the fossil fuel industry for jobs and economic development for generations?**

RESPONSE:

In 2017, coal companies took advantage of loopholes in our laws to throw away benefit obligations to retirees, putting thousands of retired miners and their families at risk of losing their healthcare and pensions.

The same companies that have poisoned our water and devastated our environment were trying to walk away from their responsibilities to the people who worked for them -- and the Dream Corps could not let that happen.

We joined forces with the United Mine Workers of America to urge Congress to sign The Miners Protection Act, a piece of bipartisan legislation that permanently extends health benefits to an estimated 24,000 retirees.

The transition to a clean energy economy must address the needs of both impacted workers, and low-income communities and communities of color disproportionately impacted by pollution.

At the Dream Corps, we believe protecting our people and the planet go hand in hand. Congress must put individuals and communities first and demonstrate our people are at the center of our policies.

Specifically, Congress should consider the following to support workers, families, and communities in the transition to a clean economy:

- **Ensure clean energy and green economy jobs are accessible and available to those who need them most.**

A criticism of clean energy jobs, although they are growing in number, is that they may not be

readily available to coal miners or workers impacted by a transition away from fossil fuel jobs.

Congress should support workers, families, and communities that have depended on fossil fuel jobs by investing in bringing clean economy jobs to communities most reliant on the fossil fuel economy -- and those most impacted by pollution -- to replace old jobs with new opportunities.

Congress must also prioritize building public confidence in the clean energy sector as a secure, well-paying, and growth-oriented career path. Incentives, subsidies and public investments should be tied to strong workforce and labor standards that ensure we do not replace quality union jobs with low paying jobs that leave workers unprotected. Green jobs should be good jobs.

- **Invest in workforce education**

Workers, families, and communities who have been a part of a fossil-fuel driven economy should not suffer an unfair burden for changes to a clean energy economy. Congress should ensure the availability of and access to well-paying, high-benefit clean energy jobs by investing not only in immediate employment but also in the development of long-term career pathways, including pre-employment education and growth opportunities within the workforce. Workforce education programs should extend to formerly incarcerated people and chronically underemployed communities to ensure fair access to good jobs for everyone.

- **Involve communities in decision making**

The voices of those directly impacted by the transition to a green economy must be included by developing communication pathways for impacted communities to voice concerns, ask questions, and have a real impact on policy. By including the voices of those dependent on the fossil fuel economy in decision-making processes, Congress can work to build trust from communities in the clean energy economy and invest in the success of job transition programs.

- b. How do we ensure a ‘just transition’ for those communities and workers as well?**

RESPONSE:

A just transition is the process of changing from an unsustainable to a sustainable economy, relying on strategies and solutions that prioritize economic opportunity, self-determination, and a safe and healthy environment for all people and communities.

A just transition must include the involvement of impacted workers, companies and legislative bodies, in addition to low-income communities and communities of color disproportionately impacted by pollution. **No decision should be agreed upon without the direct involvement, consultation, and meaningful participation of workers directly impacted by the transition, and those communities disproportionately impacted by pollution. Solutions must respond to the needs of both communities.**

We can ensure a just transition for impacted workers by adhering to the following:

Energy sector companies:

- Give advanced notice of closures with available government assistance for transitioning employees.
- For companies that include a clean energy sector: provide preferential consideration for current employees to make the transition before considering outside hires.
- Extend unemployment compensation and continue healthcare and pension payments for dislocated workers.
- Provide additional income supplement or early pension options as part of a pathway to retirement for workers over 50.
- Support health and retirement fund security to ensure workers who have spent their careers in industries affected by coal's decline can receive the benefits that they have already earned.
- Provide career counseling services to interested workers.

Legislative bodies:

- Invest in transition assistance programs that provide educational and job pathways into a clean energy economy.
- Fund job training, re-training, or education that leads to job placement and retention in family-supporting jobs.
- Offer job search and relocation stipends for dislocated workers and their families.
- Fund economic re-development and diversification.
- Monitor and evaluate program outcomes to ensure assistance reaches all eligible workers and affected areas.
- Include accountability mechanisms such as an oversight task force with decision-making authority that includes relevant state agencies and community representatives who work directly with low-income communities and communities of color overburdened by pollution.

Communities:

- Actively participate in the conversations around decision making with decision makers.
- Proactively make meetings with lawmakers to lay the framework for policy language.
- Prepare and support fellow community members to take full advantage of presented resources to succeed in this transition.

For more information, please refer to the [Just Transition Toolkit](#).