

**Testimony of Donnie Colston
Director, Utility Department
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers**

**Before the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, and Related
Agencies**

House Committee on Appropriations

U.S. House of Representatives

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Chairwoman Kaptur, Ranking Member Simpson, and Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, thank you for inviting me to participate in today's hearing.

Background

My name is Donnie Colston. I am the Director of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers' (IBEW) Utility Department. I have been asked by our International President, Lonnie Stephenson, to speak on behalf of the IBEW. President Stephenson sends his apologies, he is unable to be here today due to a scheduling conflict.

The topic of this hearing is vitally important to the economic health of our country and is of special interest to the IBEW. Based on data recently published in the 2019 U.S. Energy & Employment Report (USEER), the electric power generation sector employed over 875,000 Americans in 2018. The construction industry covers 33 percent of the electric power generation workforce while utility workers form 21 percent. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the jobs multiplier for the utility industry is the highest of all measured industries, with

almost 958 indirect jobs lost or gained with every 100 direct jobs lost or gained in the industry.

The IBEW, as the largest energy union in the world represents over 775,000 active members and retirees in the United States, United States' territories, and Canada, who work in a wide variety of energy related fields including utilities, construction, telecommunications, broadcasting, manufacturing, railroads, and government. To break those industries down, I want to give you a few non-exhaustive examples of employers, workplaces, occupations, and tasks within those occupations.

The IBEW represents workers employed in the manufacturing industry. These individuals manufacture electrical components like transformers at Delta Star in Virginia and nuclear fuel tubing at Westinghouse Electric Company in Pennsylvania.

The IBEW represents hundreds of thousands of workers employed in the private and public-private construction industry. These individuals wire office buildings, homes, hospitals, and construct large-scale electrical transmission lines spanning thousands of miles, across states and borders that take power from where it is generated to where it is needed.

As the Director of the IBEW Utility Department, I am most familiar with the public employees at municipal power providers, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, and private-sector employees at the vast majority of investor-owned utility companies, like Southern Company, where we represent thousands of workers under at least 12 collective bargaining agreements. Our members day-to-day duties vary by task, location, and generation source. Occupations within power plants range from plant operators, instrument and controls technicians, maintenance electricians, to security guards. Duties include

constant monitoring of voltage and adjustment of controls regulating power and moving fuel within the plant to performing janitorial services.

Over 500,000 of our members are directly responsible for making sure electricity makes it from the point of generation all the way to your light switch. To reiterate, I am most familiar with our membership in the utility industry and their job duties, but, because President Stephenson could not be here today, my remarks are going to address IBEW workforce training initiatives in the construction and manufacturing industries as well as partnerships and programs the IBEW has instituted across all industries.

Training Partnerships

Members of the IBEW are involved in every facet of energy and seek training partnerships with employers in all corners of the industry. The IBEW has always focused on education as the means to better our members, our union, and our industries. Energy generation, transmission, and delivery is our nation's most vital infrastructure. According to the same USEER data referenced above, utilities, construction, and manufacturing are three significant industrial sectors in energy efficiency, transmission, distribution, and storage, adding over 36,000 new jobs in 2018 with growth expected to continue. It is therefore critical for the safety of our members and communities that the workers charged with constructing, operating, and maintaining our energy systems have a deep understanding of applicable processes and technology. A carefully balanced system of education, training, and experience is the only method for achieving the highest level of craftsmanship. The IBEW has and always will be focused on this principle as its core. Skill, and the development of it, is the highest value we provide to our members, our employers, and our customers.

Utility Industry

The Center for Energy Workforce Development (CEWD) is one of our most significant utility industry partnerships. IBEW President Lonnie Stephenson is a proud member of the board of directors, and the IBEW is an active participant in promoting the mission of CEWD. We see clear results when our members have the opportunities use CEWD curriculum. It has become a utility industry best practice.

Applicants who have basic proficiency in STEM disciplines – a necessary foundation for success in most utility apprenticeship or training programs - do not just appear. Countless scholarly articles and hours of congressional testimony underscore this fact. This is why CEWD formed the National Energy Education Network and has launched the Get Into Energy online resource center.

For too long, a four-year degree has been promoted as the only path to a high wage career. In fact, there are many jobs, particularly in utilities, that provide solid middle-class incomes with little to no debt. These occupations are America's best kept secret. Too often, young people perceive these jobs as low or middle skill because no college is required. CEWD is making huge strides to ensure it does not stay a secret. Programs like Get Into Energy and Get Into STEM, including a Pathways Model, focus on bringing young people into high-paying utilities occupations. The IBEW and our partners are focused on helping find jobs for veterans through Troops to Energy Jobs, and diversifying the workforce through Women in Sustainable Employment (WISE).

Another excellent example of training partnerships in the utility industry is the strong relationship between IBEW System Council U-19, Alabama Power/Southern Company, and the National Utility Industry Training Fund (NUIITF). The recently upgraded Varnons Training Center is the most modern, specialized facility of its type in the United States. The IBEW, at the invitation of

Alabama Power, heavily contributed to curriculum development and provides skilled and seasoned craftsmen to deliver hands-on and classroom instruction. New IBEW members, and already experienced members who seek knowledge and skill upgrades now receive training in a facility that provides them with the opportunity to become the highest skilled workers in the utility industry.

Construction Industry

IBEW members in the construction industry also complete extensive training. Our members employed in the construction industry complete up to 10,000 hours of on-the-job and classroom training in privately funded, nationwide apprenticeship programs - earning while they learn. These programs are sponsored by the electrical training ALLIANCE, a joint effort between the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA) and the IBEW and are designated as Registered Apprenticeships through the United States Department of Labor. The electrical training ALLIANCE program is the largest apprenticeship of its kind. Two hundred million dollars is invested annually to equip students with the skills necessary to meet market demands. The knowledge and skills obtained through this world-class training gives IBEW members the ability to perform at the highest level for our NECA contractor partners to satisfy the needs of customers on each and every project. The IBEW is proud to have the highest standards for energy workforce training in the industry.

An inside journeyman, who focuses on commercial and industrial electrical work, is required to complete 1,000 hours of classroom education and 8,000 hours of on-the-job training, taking five years in total. An outside journeyman, who will work on electrical transmission and distribution, is required to receive 450 hours of classroom education and have 7,000 hours of on-the-job training, normally taking three-and-a-half years to complete.

I encourage each of you to visit one of our training centers in your Congressional District. There are over 300 facilities located across the United States. It is important to note that the continuation of this successful training partnership is dependent upon opportunities for continuous employment from the private and public sectors alike. Our training programs guarantee a steady stream of skilled electrical workers. We take pride in our market analysis and the fact that we do not waste funding or applicants' time by training apprentices for jobs that do not exist. We thrive off stability and market predictability just like any other industry.

Manufacturing Industry

In the modern advanced manufacturing economy, most production workers, need more than the basic skills that were required in previous decades. To meet demand for quality and safety in a workforce where experienced employees are aging out and new talent is hard to find, employers need to attract and train skilled workers who will grow this critical sector of the U.S. economy – particularly in the energy supply chain.

The Industrial Manufacturing Technician (IMT) Apprenticeship meets these needs by helping employers and unions fulfill the growing need for skilled advanced manufacturing production workers. The IMT is a nationally-recognized apprenticeship registered with the U.S. Department of Labor that trains manufacturing production workers in skills manufacturers look for.

The AFL-CIO Working for America Institute (WAI), in partnership with the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership/BIG STEP and Jobs for the Future developed the IMT Apprenticeship with grant funds from a U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. A second Labor Department grant through the American Apprenticeship Initiative supports the expansion of the IMT apprenticeship to employers and unions in eight states.

A broad coalition of labor unions and manufacturing employers specified the job tasks, skills, performance standards, and helped to design supporting curriculum. Related instruction for the IMT apprenticeship is based upon the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council (MSSC) Certified Production Technician national industry standards.

The Code of Excellence (COE)

The COE is a commitment from our leadership, members, and contractors to customers that the IBEW will consistently provide the best value product. The COE began over 10 years ago and has allowed the IBEW to meet or exceed our customers' needs by ensuring the highest quality of work as a return on the customers' investment. This program began as a construction industry initiative and has now been instituted across all IBEW-represented industries. The COE has played a part in creation of employment opportunities for IBEW members because of improved relationships with customers and employers alike. The concepts embodied by the COE have led to other labor unions implementing COE partnerships of their own. The IBEW has many successful COE partnerships with employers nationwide. One that is often highlighted is between IBEW Local 245 and Toledo Edison in Northwest Ohio. The IBEW's COE program is an example of the IBEW's full commitment to working with our employer partners to provide on-the-job excellence every working day.

Conclusion

I will leave you with one final thought. The motto inscribed on the wall at the Varnons Training Center is: *“With hands-on practice, knowledge becomes a skill. With time and dedication, skill becomes a craft, and a laborer becomes a craftsman.”*

Thank you for your interest in this important topic and the opportunity to testify today. The IBEW looks forward to answering your questions.