



All Sources: Safe and Reliable Electricity

WHEREAS, the UWUA supports an “all-of-the-above” energy policy that includes the cleaner production and use of traditional fuels, expansion of new clean energy technologies and that balances new and traditional resources, including base-load and intermittent resources made up of renewable, storage, and conventional fossil-fueled resources; and

WHEREAS, Technology, economics and extreme weather are rapidly transforming U.S. energy markets. A new electricity industry is emerging, one that is more decentralized and able to integrate many different sources of power into more reliable power grids. With the electricity generation mix changing dramatically in recent years, the combination of too few power plants being built and too many serviceable power plants being shuttered prematurely threatens the viability of America’s power supply; and

WHEREAS, For decades, centralized, base-load energy generators — mainly coal, nuclear, and large hydro-electric plants — dominated the industry. In the last two decades, wind and solar energy have been pushed into the electrical mix to diversify energy sources, create new jobs, and reduce emissions. Utility-scale solar costs and wind energy prices have fallen steeply. Natural gas prices have stabilized at much more affordable levels and are likely to remain so; and

WHEREAS, Many of the technologies to build the low-carbon energy systems of the future already exist, from using nuclear-fission technology to making small, modular reactors to the use of carbon capture and storage. Energy storage technologies are increasingly viable for widespread application in power grids. Every year, the efficiency of solar and wind generators improves, and the costs fall; and

WHEREAS, While technology advances our sources of low carbon energy, failing infrastructure and extreme weather batter the reliability of our electrical grid. Longer-duration power outages lead to dire public crises — not just lost business and spoiled food, but the extended loss of emergency and critical services. In longer-term outages, we have experienced the devastating impacts of failures in the water, wastewater, communications and fuel delivery systems; and

WHEREAS, Most power outages involve disruptions to the transmission and distribution system, rather than fuel supplies. We cannot develop a 21st century economy using 20th or even 19th century infrastructure. Updating and improving our electricity infrastructure systems is necessary to ensuring economic growth and environmental safety and health in our communities, workplaces and nation; and

WHEREAS, There is a continued need to preserve base-load power sources during the transition to renewable sources of energy. Recent modeling by MIT researchers shows that relying exclusively on wind, solar, and hydropower for our electricity would be prohibitively expensive. They conclude that a “zero-carbon grid” is feasible only if we keep “firm low-carbon resources” in the mix. Coal and Nuclear plants, in particular, have proven their value in providing electricity in periods of extreme cold when other power sources cannot; and

WHEREAS, The UWUA has represented workers in the energy sector for nearly a century and has successfully defended workers through dramatic changes in the industry. The growing number of workers employed in the renewable energy field will benefit through membership in our union and in turn help us to grow and remain strong; and

WHEREAS, Although the United States currently has only one operating offshore wind farm, off Rhode Island, interest in wind energy is escalating. The United States is advancing its first offshore wind utility-scale project and state solicitations of offshore wind projects are multiplying. The federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management received record-high bids for offshore wind leases last year; and

WHEREAS, All energy sources involve risks for both civilians and workers. Utilities must make it a priority to address emerging threats to safety and reliability. For example, faced with the increasing threat of wildfires, San Diego Gas & Electric SDG&E has invested in hundreds of weather stations and fire cameras, preventing deaths by creating one of the most sophisticated advanced wildfire warning systems in the world; and

WHEREAS, The UWUA joined the BlueGreen Alliance, consisting of union members and environmental activists, to find common ground and take united action on our mutual goals of creating good jobs while protecting the environment. It is vital that we keep an open dialogue with those who don't always support our positions, as one day they may be important allies. As concerns about climate change mount, some organizations are rethinking their opposition to nuclear energy and have announced support for policies that would keep embattled U.S. plants open.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, The UWUA supports energy and environmental policies and investments in renewable energy that make our communities healthier, and that create and maintain family-sustaining jobs. We support the retention of all current generating options for electric utilities, including traditional fuels, nuclear, hydro, wind, biomass, solar and other renewable energy sources; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, The UWUA calls on public officials to pursue policies and investments for renewable energy development and deployment that include: funding for carbon capture and sequestration technology (CCS) for both manufacturing facilities and clean coal; research in advanced nuclear energy technologies; enhanced oil recovery and advanced fossil fuel development; and electric grid modernization that lead us to greater energy independence; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, The UWUA supports clean energy standards that are technology-neutral, treating all zero-carbon sources of energy equally, whether renewable, nuclear or fossil fuels utilizing carbon capture technologies. Researchers have found that a system inclusive of low carbon energy will be more affordable and reliable than a system based entirely on renewables; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, The UWUA urges system operators to assign appropriate value to the resiliency properties of base-load plants and to adopt market reforms that recognize the importance of coal and nuclear plants in assuring grid resiliency and reliability. All power grids must adopt pricing mechanisms that ensure fuel diversity and an adequate reserve margin; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, Any climate change mitigation programs or actions must have a clearly defined program to protect workers and communities, including meaningful worker training and community transition assistance in the event of unintended consequences; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, The UWUA is committed to organizing workers in the renewable energy field and in training them to work safely. The P4A is expanding trainings to include more solar and wind to ensure that our newest generation of members continues the tradition of being the safest, most productive, highest-skilled workers in the world; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, The UWUA will continue to engage with labor federations, other unions, environmental groups and other organizations that share our vision of investing in energy solutions that create and sustain quality jobs while ensuring the safety and reliability of the energy grid.