

UTILITY WORKERS UNION OF AMERICA

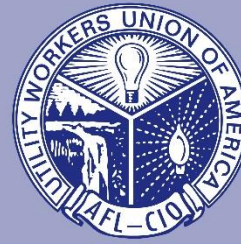
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February 18, 2022

United State Department of Commerce
U.S. Economic Development Administration

Re: Build Back Better Regional Challenge

Secretary Raimondo, Assistant Secretary Castillo, and Build Back Better Regional Challenge Staff:

Our union, the Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA), representing around 50,000 workers in the electric, gas and water utility sectors writes today to support Coalfield Development's ACT Now Coalition in its pursuit of Build Back Better Regional Challenge funding. As coal and nuclear power generation assets have been rapidly closing over the last decade, costing our members many thousands of jobs, we have learned through hard experience what investment will be needed to manage the energy transition in a manner that is truly just for legacy energy workers and their communities.

The Biden Administration's Intergovernmental Council on Energy Communities recognizes the ACT Now region as the most economically distressed in America due to changes in the coal sector. In the face of such challenges, however, ACT Now will create good quality jobs for the Appalachian region and, further, we are hopeful that this work will provide a guide for how to bring such tools to bear in legacy energy communities around the country. As our union has been through power generation closures from coast-to-coast, we recognize a need to learn from this work and transplant it wherever it can be sown.

We are pleased to learn of this innovative organization's existing labor partnerships within West Virginia and seek to add our organization's voice to learn from this work and adapt it for use elsewhere. We are committed to working with Coalfield Development and its ACT Now partners with the long-term goal of designing transition strategies which work, and which provide pathways to economic renewal for workers and communities hard-hit by plant closures.

Though every closure has been devastating for the workforces and communities involved, perhaps none were more so than in Adams County, Ohio, a rural county on the Ohio River bordering Kentucky where a simultaneous double closure of two powerplants resulted in many hundreds of direct job losses and a collapse of the local town and county budgets due to a plummeting tax base. The advice most often heard from many elected officials was that affected workers should simply move away – a disastrous approach to managing the issue which only leads to a faster and deeper hollowing out of the communities and a social diaspora that makes the task of rebuilding nearly insurmountable.

Though this was perhaps the most acute example, it is not unique. With each closure more of our union's members and their families feel the economic pain of losing some of the best blue-collar jobs in the economy, jobs which are close to impossible to replace at comparable pay and benefit levels.

Moving away to seek equivalent employment only deepens the crisis for the community and the people who are left behind. This is why we are interested in replicating Coalfield's model in those communities where our members could most directly benefit from it. In the absence of meaningful public policy to manage the energy transition at a human level, it falls to organizations such as Coalfield Development and the ACT Now Coalition to partner with workforce representatives and community groups to chart a path forward.

In closing, serious approaches to transition efforts on the ground, based in social and economic realities will need to be made real if we are going to decarbonize our economy in a responsible manner. A balanced energy transition must include options that legacy energy families and communities can use to meaningfully weather change based on their individual needs and abilities.

We are eager to deepen this partnership over the long term and we strongly encourage your support of the ACT Now Coalition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James T. Slevin".

James T. Slevin
National President
Utility Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO