



GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS NEWSLETTER



Building America Back Better Biden's Agenda is Working for the IBEW

How President Biden's actions benefit working families and IBEW members

Promoting Energy Agenda, Biden Administration Highlights IBEW Partnership



IBEW members are central to the new economy due to the future-forward policies championed by the Biden-Harris administration.

Called the Investing in America agenda, a companion high-level administration roadshow highlights recent laws like the American Rescue Plan, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the CHIPS and Science Act and the Inflation Reduction Act.

President Biden and Department of Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm reinforce how the laws promote good jobs, domestic manufacturing and economic development – and highlight their critical partnership with the IBEW.

Debating Pythagoras in Chattanooga

Granholm and Biden's senior advisor Mitch Landrieu visited Chattanooga, Tenn Local 175's training center on their Tennessee swing. They dropped into several classrooms and engaged with apprentices, said Michael Varnell, assistant training director.

“It was a great experience for the students, learning about what the Biden administration is doing for the IBEW,” Varnell said, adding that they also gave Landrieu's Ford Lightning a charge with their new EV charger. “It was a win for all of us.”



Aside from the National Electrical Code, the Pythagorean theorem and health and safety procedures, they discussed the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Training Program (EVITP), a comprehensive class on installing the EV charging network, now a standard part of the apprenticeship curriculum.

“We're going to require a million more workers per year for the next ten years in order to build out this clean energy economy, and where it all starts is here with these apprentices,” [Granholm told reporters](#) outside Local 175.

Visiting Atlanta Local for U.S. Energy Report Release

Granholm spoke earlier that day at Atlanta Local 613 about releasing a report on energy employment by the Department of Energy. It showed that jobs in the U.S. energy industry rose 3.8% last year, faster than overall employment growth and led by work in new energy technologies and renewables.

Local 613 Business Manager Kenny Mullins said due to the high labor standards and certification requirements of the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, there is growing interest in the IBEW.

“We are steadily making market share inroads in the nonunion sector, both through organizing new shops and expanding our apprenticeship training program,” Mullins said. “Locally and nationally, the IBEW appreciates the opportunity to extend the family-sustaining union membership advantages like fair wages and health and retirement benefits that are the gold standards in the industry.”

The DOE report also said employers with unionized workforces reported substantially less difficulty hiring skilled workers than nonunion employers. For instance, only 31% of union employers in construction reported it was “very difficult” to find workers compared to 59% of nonunion employers.

Charlotte Roundtable with Secretary Granholm

In Charlotte, N.C., on June 26, Local 379 Business Manager Scott Thrower attended an EV roundtable with Granholm.

Thrower said the IBEW is taking advantage of the interest in union representation.

“Unions allow not just individual families, but communities, to prosper and rebuild the middle class ‘from the bottom up and middle out’ as President Biden says,” Thrower said.

In the past two years alone, Local 379 members have installed more than 900 charging stations in the area. Today nearly 200 members are EVITP-certified, Thrower said.

“The bottom line is that building and maintaining the country’s infrastructure and electrical grid are not new to IBEW members. But we are glad these imperatives will now be required to include labor standards that translate into good jobs and great careers.”

Seeking Climate Justice in Texas Refineries

At a roundtable with Secretary Granholm in southeastern Texas on June 13, Beaumont Local 479 Business Manager Justin Cooper described how on-the-job training and classroom instruction of apprenticeships qualify graduates for the most in-demand jobs in the country in the coming years.



“More and more, IBEW members are being put to work on the energy jobs of tomorrow,” Cooper said.

He described Port Authur as home to the country's largest refineries and the birthplace of the Texas oil boom in 1901.

“Despite its reputation, the energy story doesn’t begin and end with oil,” he said. “Right now, in this area, we have a renewable gas plant and promising new carbon capture projects. Energy development is moving on to new sources, and today, Texas is the largest producer of wind generation.”

Memphis Meetup

Department of Energy officials traveled to Memphis, Tenn., to emphasize the role of IBEW’s professional workforce in a June 29 meeting with local union officers and apprentices.

At the Local 474 training center, they discussed the nearby Blue Oval battery and EV production facility currently employing 600 IBEW members. The \$5.6 billion “mega-campus,” when completed in 2025, will produce the Ford Lightning electric truck in Stanton, Tenn.

“It’s a national maintenance agreement, and the IBEW is supplying all of the manpower for the job,” said Memphis Local 474 President Glenn Greenwell.

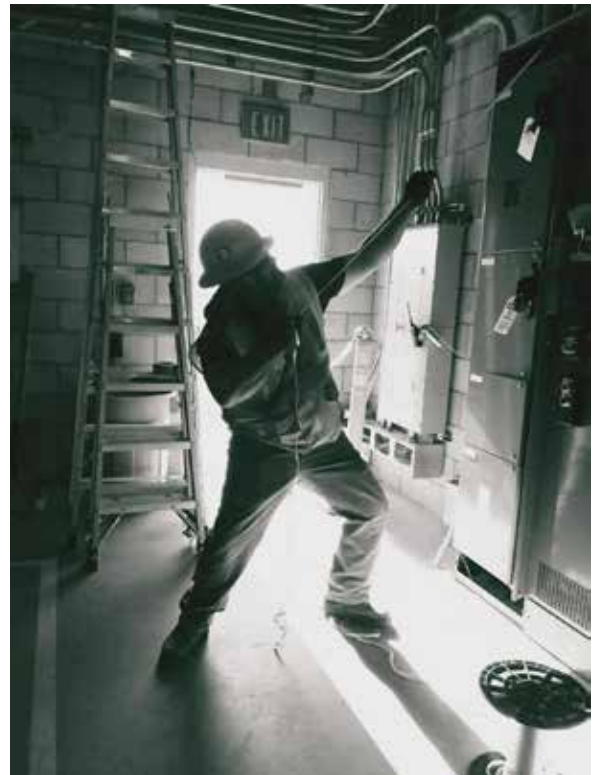
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Building Boom Turns Ohio Local into Training Model

Columbus, Ohio, Local 683’s membership is experiencing explosive growth from work at data centers, hospitals, battery plants, industrial solar and other renewable projects. The building boom is making the city’s central Ohio construction local union one of the fastest-growing in the IBEW.

“We have a dramatic need for workers,” said business manager Pat Hook, citing the area’s access to affordable property and energy. “The area is growing, and it’s a great place to do business.”

What’s happening in Columbus is symbolic of America’s ongoing economic turnaround, with the Biden-Harris administration targeting the city as one of five “[workforce hubs](#)” where recently passed legislation like the CHIPS and Science Act, Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law are using private and public investments to create good paying union jobs.



“Columbus and these hubs will be invaluable models for others, and I can’t wait to shine a light on what’s possible when we come together with education and training,” First Lady Dr. [Jill Biden said](#) at an event in Columbus on July 12.



To prepare for the more than 10,000 skilled construction trades workers to meet the demand for new projects in the region, the Biden-Harris administration has challenged Columbus Local 683 to expand its registered apprenticeship program from 600 to 1,000 in the next four years.

“You can’t drive anywhere and not look up and see cranes in the air,” said Training Director Trent Parker. “That’s a telltale sign of what’s happening.”

With more than 2,200 current members, Local 683 has doubled in size over the past few years. They are recruiting new members from the nonunion sector and high schools, all drawn by the promise of a middle-class career in the trades and on the cusp of a historic building boom.

Parker said the writing has been on the wall for years: new utility-scale solar construction projects at nearby Ohio State University, energy storage projects, several data centers and the Intel project which although located just outside their jurisdiction is expected to produce a residual need for additional members at Local 683. All of this work precipitated the need to scale up training.

“In the early 2000s, we used to average 200-250 apprentices total,” Parker said. “Our incoming first-year classes are increasing every year.”

Local 683 is increasing its ranks of inside electricians through organizing, career fairs and pre-apprenticeship programs. Parker said several two-year high school pre-apprenticeships use the IBEW/National Electrical Contractors Association curriculum, putting newly accepted apprentices well ahead in content and experience. “This year alone, 50 of our new apprentices came from those programs.”

The sheer number of new students has tested the logistical capacity of the local to accommodate the growing apprenticeship program, he said. This year for the first time, first-and second-year apprentices will attend classes during the day.

At the Fourth District progress meeting in July, Local 683 was recognized by International Vice President Gina Cooper for achieving the highest number of new members in the district. And Membership Development listed it as fourth in overall inside construction growth last year, with nearly 400 new members.

A few energy and semiconductor projects under construction and employing members of the IBEW in Central Ohio include:

- Columbus Local 683: Madison Fields Solar 180 MW
- Columbus Local 683: Fox Squirrel Solar 577 NW
- Columbus Local 683: AEUG Union Solar 325 MW
- Newark Local 1105: Intel project
- Newark Local 1105: Invenergy solar panel manufacture

On July 18, Dr. Jill Biden visited two other “workforce hubs”—Augusta, Ga. and Pittsburgh, Pa. — to highlight how the Biden-Harris Administration is delivering investments and jobs to communities nationwide. [Baltimore, Md.](#) and Phoenix, Ariz. are the other two cities with [the “workforce hub” designation.](#)

Posted July 24, 2023



Bureaucratic Speed Dating: IBEW Connects Loans with IBEW Employers, Signatories

The Department of Energy Loan Programs Office aims to put thousands of IBEW members to work.

On June 13, the IBEW Government Affairs Department convened a meeting with DOE LPO Director Jigar Shah and IBEW employers to discuss LPO's billions of dollars in loan opportunities, all with the goal of creating more IBEW jobs.

"Our goal is to move the energy industry forward," said Austin Keyser, assistant to IBEW President Kenny Cooper for Government Affairs. "No organization has a better relationship with the administration."



Long-standing good relations between the Biden-Harris administration and the IBEW prompted this first-ever matchmaking event. Utilities, signatory contractors, energy developers, manufacturing companies, and DOE loan officials considered how to facilitate future renewable energy projects, including 10-minute "pitch sessions," where project developers received feedback on their ideas from DOE staff.

DOE LPO is unlike other agencies in that LPO officials can provide this kind of hands-on assistance to entities seeking loans.

"The application process is brainstorming the art of the possible," Shah said. He also underscored the importance of companion community benefits projects that come with each application. "By signing with the IBEW, you get not just jobs but good careers that come with pensions. These are pieces many industries have forgotten."

This is due to President Biden's specific instruction that approval of grants and loans be contingent on the use of prevailing wages, labor standards, registered apprenticeship programs, and a workforce consisting of members from traditionally underserved communities.

American Electric Power's Scott Osterholt, who manages federal grants for the investor-owned utility, said their company has nearly \$8 billion of solar and wind projects on the planning board. Investigating funding opportunities like LPO's is his mandate. "As a utility, we have an obligation to bring that money in and to keep costs low."

Torie Ness, Avengrid Energy's federal government affairs manager, said she appreciated connecting with peers and hearing about loan opportunities firsthand from Energy Department officials.

Federal funds like LPO's loans are available, in part, based on Congress' passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act in the past two years. BIL, the CHIPS and Science Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, have jump-started once-languishing infrastructure, domestic manufacturing, electricity transmission, renewable energy, advanced nuclear, broadband and transportation projects. These projects represent an historic opportunity for IBEW jobs in nearly every sector.



The inaugural event with LPO, which may be the first in a series of similar meetings, reflects another example of effective cooperation across IBEW's organizing, business development, and political teams.

"It was a good demonstration of how collaboration between Government Affairs, Membership Development, and Business Development can work together to get work for IBEW members," said Danielle Eckert, director of the Government Affairs Department.

Posted July 17, 2023

'Extremely Valuable' Infrastructure Database Goes Live

A powerful new tool providing real-time updates about federal infrastructure investments will be key to IBEW's efforts to win the billions of dollars in new work opportunities approved by recent laws.

[The searchable database](#) gives users the ability to find out about project announcements. This includes loans and grant money resulting from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS and Science Act, which are disbursed through federal and state governments.

"We are always asked: how do I know what projects are coming to my community? What funding has been announced?" said IBEW Assistant to the International President Austin Keyser. "The only way this could be better is if it were a crystal ball."

The Center for American Progress said it created the Biden Administration Investment Tracker, released on June 15 as a comprehensive resource:

The passage of the Inflation Reduction Act, the CHIPS and Science Act, and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act—two of which received broad bipartisan support—unleashed an unprecedented level of [public and private](#) sector investments in America. These investments are rebuilding the country's infrastructure, bolstering American manufacturing, and cementing U.S. leadership in critical new industries such as clean energy, electric vehicles, and much more. In total, these investments hold the promise of creating, supporting and reshoring millions of well-paying jobs.

Within moments of a project award, the database is updated, said Taylor Waites, IBEW Government Affairs specialist. "The value here for local unions who may not have a relationship with a particular general contractor or developer is they will find out about it the second the contractor gets a grant. It's a way for locals to be proactive."

The database information is sortable according to keyword, recipient, state, congressional district, and type of project.





IBEW Business Development Director Ray Kasmark said the tracker complements subscriber services like [Dodge Construction Network](#) and [Industrial Information Resources](#), which provide news and analysis on construction and industrial market trends. “To have all of these resources in one spot and having it in real-time is really valuable,” Kasmark said, adding that it is one more way to “organize the work.”

The IBEW supported the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the CHIPS and Science Act and the Inflation Reduction Act for their focus on infrastructure and energy upgrades, domestic manufacturing, job creation, and labor standards. Passed by Congress in 2021 and 2022, they embody the Biden administration policy priorities that the IBEW had long been advocating.

The Government Affairs Department has circulated the [database link](#) to the Renewable Energy Government Affairs coordinators, who have been encouraged to forward it widely.

“It makes what is otherwise a daunting task of tracking how all of these investments are flowing into your communities much more manageable,” said Austin Keyser, assistant to the president for Government Affairs. “Every local in the country should have this tool bookmarked and check it frequently.”

Posted July 13, 2023

IBEW Contractor Touts EV Network with DOT Secretary Buttigieg, Gov. Whitmer



IBEW Detroit Local 58 member Bill Baisden joined Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in a May 16 press conference announcing the first U.S. Canada electric vehicle corridor.

The corridor is a critical link in the network of 500,000 charging stations that [President Biden has repeated](#) publicly that IBEW members will build.

Baisden, owner of Dynamic Electric Group and a journey-level electrician, spoke about the exploding renewable energy market after the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

“Cars have always been king here in the Motor City – and they still are,” Baisden said at the Port of Detroit event across from Windsor, Ontario. “But there has been an unmistakable shift in the kinds of cars people buy. In the past two years, we have seen exponential growth in the residential EV charging market to meet the demand for electric vehicles.”

The [new EV corridor](#) will stretch from Kalamazoo, Mich., to Quebec City, Quebec, and include 75,000 miles in the United States. Featuring fast chargers at approximately 50-mile intervals, it is part of the 500,000 public EV chargers made possible by \$7.5 billion in federal funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Baisden said electric vehicle adoption is vital to the country’s climate goals and IBEW members are on the front lines of this transition. The Departments of Transportation and Energy require Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Training Program (EVITP) certification for electricians working on EV charging infrastructure projects funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, meaning this high-quality training is mandated for those installing and maintaining the network.



The IBEW is the world's largest electrical union, with more than 400,000 journey-level electricians, including 23,000 who are EVITP-certified in the United States and 2,000 in Canada. Since President Biden traveled to the Canadian capital of Ottawa in March, IBEW members are intensifying efforts to convince officials to require EVITP certification for EV charger installations in Canada.

The May 16 event with Canadian Minister of Transport Omar Alghabra sought to celebrate the continued collaboration between the United States and Canada to lead the world in electric vehicle jobs, manufacturing and supply chains.

“With historic investments in EV infrastructure from the Biden-Harris administration and the Canadian government, we are creating a new generation of good-paying manufacturing jobs, making it possible for drivers everywhere to reap the benefits and savings of these vehicles while helping us fight climate change,” Buttigieg said.

Detroit Local 58 was among the first local unions in the IBEW to adopt EVITP in 2011. Today Local 58 boasts 600 EVITP-certified members. This nationally recognized certification means chargers will be installed safely by highly-qualified journey-level electricians.

“With all of the automakers coming out with RVs, and GM saying it’s going to be producing 100 percent electric by 2035, cars,, as we have known them in the last 100 years,, are going to be phasing out,” Baisden said. “Gas stations will eventually start drying up, and EV chargers will be everywhere.”

Also in Detroit, Local 58 Business Representative Andre Crook participated in a conversation at the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting, discussing the importance of ensuring that the benefits of an EV future reach all communities, including where federally funded chargers are sited to how they are financed.

NEVI Program funding is available for up to 5 years.

Business managers and local contractors who are interested in working on NEVI projects should reach out to their [state NEVI Planning Office](#).

Posted July 10, 2023

Hard Fought Success on Rail Sick Days

After months of negotiations, the IBEW’s Railroad members at four of the largest U.S. freight carriers finally have what they’ve long sought but that many working people take for granted: paid sick days.

This is a big deal, said [Railroad Department Director Al Russo](#), because the paid-sick-days issue, which nearly caused a nationwide shutdown of freight rail just before Christmas, had consistently been rejected by the carriers. It was not part of last December’s congressionally implemented update of the national collective bargaining agreement between the freight lines and the IBEW and 11 other railroad-related unions.

“We’re thankful that the Biden administration played the long game on sick days and stuck with us for months after Congress imposed our updated national agreement,” Russo said. “Without making a big show of it, Joe Biden and members of his administration in the Transportation and Labor departments have been working continuously to get guaranteed paid sick days for all railroad workers.



“We know that many of our members weren’t happy with our original agreement,” Russo said, “but through it all, we had faith that our friends in the White House and Congress would keep up the pressure on our railroad employers to get us the sick day benefits we deserve. Until we negotiated these new individual agreements with these carriers, an IBEW member who called out sick was not compensated.”

While [President Joe Biden was calling on Congress in November](#) to pass legislation to implement the agreement, he stressed that he would continue to encourage the railroads to guarantee paid sick time for their employees.



“I share workers’ concern about the inability to take leave to recover from illness or care for a sick family member,” Biden said. “I have pressed legislation and proposals to advance the cause of paid leave in my two years in office and will continue to do so.”

That pressure, plus the IBEW’s ongoing efforts, is paying off at last. The [IBEW and BNSF Railway](#) reached an agreement April 20 to grant members four short-notice, paid sick days, with the ability to also convert up to three personal days to sick days. The union reached similar understandings with [CSX](#) and [Union Pacific](#) on March 22, and with [Norfolk Southern](#) on March 10. Unused sick time at the end of a year can be paid out or rolled into a worker’s 401(k) retirement account.

Under the [Railway Labor Act](#), national railroad labor agreements don’t expire. Instead, the parties enter a “status quo” position: Workers remain on the job with no changes to their pay and benefits until a replacement contract is approved. The current national pact was first reached last summer by negotiators from the railroad unions, the railroads, the Labor Department and the White House.

“We’ve been playing the long game on this, too,” Russo said. “We never stopped applying pressure on the companies or on Congress.”

On Feb. 8, [Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont](#), chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, wrote a letter to the leaders of six Class I railroads, urging them to guarantee at least seven paid sick days for all of their workers.

“Last year, the companies you lead made over \$22 billion in profits,” Sanders wrote, noting that they had cut 30% of the workforce over the last six years. “Guaranteeing seven paid sick days to rail workers would cost your industry just \$321 million.”

Russo is grateful that Sanders stepped in. “We truly compliment his effort to bring dignity to workers in the rail industry,” he said. “Without it, we very likely would not have gotten what we have gained today.”

[Sick leave had always been a sticking point](#) in negotiations toward a national rail contract update, which began in late 2019.



After almost 2½ years of ongoing refusal by the Class I rail carriers to accept the unions’ good-faith settlement offers or to offer their own, the IBEW and the other unions sought help from the National Mediation Board in early 2022. By July, the carriers still hadn’t budged.

Once the mediators determined that negotiations were at an impasse, Biden appointed a Presidential Emergency Board to hear testimony from both camps. While this board made a number of positive recommendations in its proposal — including improved health care benefits and one additional personal day — guaranteed paid sick days still was not among them.

Even so, the IBEW said Sept. 1 that it had reached a tentative agreement with the rail carriers that included the board’s recommendations. Negotiations with the other labor coalition unions continued toward a Sept. 15 deadline, but when it became obvious that the bargaining parties would not reach consensus by then, Biden asked then-Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh to assemble the sides and reach an acceptable agreement that would head off a national freight rail strike.

On deadline day, the parties reached an agreement on an updated contract that included the biggest wage increases in 47 years. Over the next several weeks, while acknowledging that the agreement was less than perfect, the IBEW and several of its fellow coalition unions voted to ratify the agreement. A handful of others, however, did not, instead threatening a December freight rail strike.

Biden, citing the potential economic impact of a national freight rail strike during the winter holidays, on Nov. 28 called on Congress to impose the emergency board’s agreement.

Since then, several other railroad-related unions have also seen success in negotiating for similar sick-day benefits. These 12 unions represent more than 105,000 railroad workers.

“Biden deserves a lot of the credit for achieving this goal for us,” Russo said. “He and his team continued to work behind the scenes to get all of rail labor a fair agreement for paid sick leave.”

Russo said talks are continuing toward reaching a sick-days agreements with Canadian Pacific and Kansas City, recently designated a Class I rail carrier by the Surface Transportation Board.

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New Initiative Targets Investments, Workforce Growth in Key Cities

With a \$2 million grant from the Biden administration and a new state law promoting wind development, Baltimore Local 24 is on the leading edge of the growth potential of offshore wind power.

The Biden administration sees offshore wind development as critical in decarbonizing the electric grid — and the grant is among billions of dollars available to unions, private companies, colleges, and other organizations training workers nationwide to build renewable energy projects and repair aging infrastructure.

The emphasis on training and connecting workers to jobs is critical to the Biden-Harris agenda and key to recently enacted laws like the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act, the CHIPS and Science Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act.



Maryland's state legislature [approved a bill](#) in April to increase its offshore wind capacity to 8.5 gigawatts by 2031, which is enough to power 6.3 million homes. Energy developers Orsted and US Wind plan to build offshore turbines 20 miles off the coast of Ocean City [by 2026](#).



The grant will help beef up training for building offshore wind turbines, like water safety, CPR, and working correctly over heights. Although IBEW apprenticeships include training in many subjects, “we don't typically work over water,” said Local 24 Membership Development Specialist Rico Albacarys.

IBEW apprentices already complete several years of supervised work experience and up to 1,000 hours of classroom training to achieve journey-level status. This global wind organization training will be a required add-on certification for the trades.

“Everyone that works on the turbines will need it,” Albacarys said. “Offshore wind is a big deal for us locally.”

Now is the time for workforce training, said Baltimore Electrical JATC Training Director Neil Wilford.

The Biden administration designated Baltimore a workforce hub to provide more significant opportunities for residents and underrepresented communities to advance in good jobs and careers in growth industries. Wilford said the IBEW is among several training providers to receive federal grants through the state, including ironworkers, operating engineers, and carpenters.

To capitalize on this moment, Local 24 hired an organizer whose primary responsibility is increasing outreach to city residents, channeling those interested in pre-apprenticeships that give participants exposure to the trades and special consideration for apprenticeships, Albacarys said.

Crews are retrofitting the former [Bethlehem Steel plant](#) at Sparrows Point to produce “monopiles,” the ocean-floor bases to which the turbine towers will be secured. Production is set to start in 2025, US Wind said. The site will also stage towers and blades before moving to the offshore construction site.

As funding made available by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the CHIPS and Science Act moves through government channels, the Biden administration selected 16 cities for similar workforce development initiatives.

The Good Jobs, Great Cities program, in partnership with the National League of Cities, seeks to bring together local and state governments, community organizations, employers, and training providers like unions to develop career pathways for underrepresented communities, beef up the union workforce and improve the pipeline of workers for the good jobs of the future. The [Good Jobs, Great Cities Academy](#) cities include:

- Frederick, Md.
- Birmingham, Ala.
- Chattanooga, Tenn.
- Duluth, Minn.
- Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
- Jamestown, NY
- Kokomo, Ind.
- Lansing, Mich.
- Missoula, Mont.
- Monroe, NC
- Newark, NJ
- San Antonio, Texas
- Santa Fe, NM
- Saint Louis, Mo.
- Tacoma, Wash.
- Tempe, Ariz.



Cities participating in the Good Jobs, Great Cities Academy will benefit from the opportunity to engage with state and local organizations, federal agencies, national thought leaders and their peer cities. These advantages include addressing structural issues to link workers to good jobs, allocating resources to support workforce needs and strengthening connections between supportive services and workforce needs.

IBEW Government Affairs Department Director Danielle Eckert said she encourages local unions to coordinate with state and federal agencies to determine whether funding is available to meet their needs.

Posted June 12, 2023

Permit Reform Urged on Capitol Hill

An 18-year wait for a permit on a construction project sounds like a long time. But at least the Trans-West Express Transmission project was finally approved last month – and 700 IBEW members will soon be on the ground building its high voltage transmission lines across four states.

But the Grain Belt Express, a proposed 800-mile project in the Midwest that [IBEW members and project developers](#) publicly teamed up to support back in 2015, still awaits its go-ahead.

The problem? Gaining the necessary approvals to build transmission lines is so tricky that projects that would employ thousands of IBEW members have languished in a broken process for decades, despite the need for new high-voltage electricity.

Now Washington appears poised to act on permitting reform. President Biden [announced a plan](#) on May 10, the day before AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler testified before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee in a hearing on reforming the permitting process for energy and mineral projects.



The Biden administration is proposing to use existing authority under the Federal Power Act that allows the Department of Energy to accelerate the permitting of transmission capacity.

Trans-West, Grain Belt, and countless other sidelined projects represent the additional capacity the electrical grid requires to support new domestic manufacturing and upgrades to the electric grid – all investments made possible by recently enacted legislation.

But long standing regulatory red tape, due to overlapping federal, state, and local approval processes, environmental impact reviews, and lawsuits, have practically brought new transmission projects to a standstill, fueling growing concerns about grid resiliency and stability.

“Thanks to the Biden administration and this Congress, we have a historic opportunity to create millions of good union jobs, make our infrastructure world-leading and resilient to climate impacts, and set our country on track for secure, domestic supply chains in mining, energy and manufacturing,” Shuler said on Capitol Hill.



In her remarks, Shuler advocated for certainty that allows communities and companies to commit to a project, a speedier path to approval, and a consistent, standardized process for permitting.

The federal government is releasing billions of dollars in federal funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act to incentivize the construction of regionally significant infrastructure projects. Without a straightforward and reliable federal permitting process to ensure the permits are processed promptly, delays cost thousands of IBEW jobs and cost customers billions of dollars annually.

Posted May 25, 2023

IBEW to Congress: Don't Bankrupt the U.S. Over Debt Limit

Congressional leaders and President Biden continue negotiations to break through a deadlock over spending priorities and policy changes demanded by House Republicans over the debt ceiling, as time runs out before a June 1 government default.

The IBEW urges Congress to lift the U.S. debt limit as the high-stakes standoff threatens to upend the economy only days before the federal government runs out of money.



Failing to suspend or increase the debt limit would have dire effects on IBEW members' livelihoods and all working Americans, IBEW President Kenneth W. Cooper said [in a letter to members of Congress](#) in which he detailed the catastrophic outcomes for IBEW members.

The jobs of IBEW members, like most Americans, are premised on market certainty, which includes the federal government upholding its debt obligations, Cooper said. Therefore, in addition to shrinking IBEW members' pensions and 401(k) accounts, failing to raise the debt limit could create significant economic fallout, costing IBEW jobs and causing undue financial harm to members and their loved ones. While the stalemate continues, the IBEW Government Affairs is reiterating this message.

President Biden is holding the line against proposed spending cuts he has characterized as unacceptable.

Cooper also said that "failure to lift or suspend the debt limit would likely imperil critical federal obligations, including Social Security and Medicare payments, funding for infrastructure, servicemember salaries and more."



The U.S. hit its debt ceiling in January, and the Treasury Department has taken extraordinary measures to avoid default.

Since 1960, Congress has acted 78 times to raise, extend, or revise the definition of the debt limit. This occurred 49 times under Republican presidents and 29 times under Democratic presidents, the [Treasury Department](#) says. If Congress does not do so, U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that the federal government would begin to default on its financial obligations on June 1.

The Republican-led House and Democrat-controlled Senate must agree on legislation increasing the debt limit by the end of May. To become law, it also needs to be signed by President Biden.

In his letter, Cooper said that the U.S. defaulting on its debt would cost the economy up to 6 million jobs, wipe out as much as \$15 trillion in household wealth and send the unemployment rate surging to 9 percent.

“Playing politics and gambling with the livelihoods of American workers is irresponsible,” Cooper said. “I urge Congress to immediately increase or suspend the debt limit and avoid significant and irreparable damage to hard-working American families.”

A debt limit increase would allow the government to finance its existing legal obligations that Congresses and presidents of both parties have made in the past. The U.S. has never defaulted on its legal obligations, and doing so would result in economic catastrophe, the [Treasury Department](#) said.

In April, the House passed the [Limit, Save and Grow Act](#) that would, in part, raise the debt limit while rescinding tax credits meant to boost labor standards and union employment in the renewable energy sector, jeopardizing multiemployer pension benefits, slashing funding for veterans’ health care and wiping out food assistance to Medicaid recipients. President Biden has vowed to veto it.

Meanwhile, Democrats are circulating legislation that would trigger a debt ceiling vote if it reaches the 218-signature threshold. This procedural move, a [discharge petition](#), is currently five votes shy of 218.

Posted May 24, 2023

Seeking IBEW Input into Rebuilding Puerto Rico’s Grid

IBEW's skill and experience are critical to the Biden administration’s efforts to remake the electric grid in Puerto Rico.



Department of Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm has visited Puerto Rico four times, most recently in late March. She met with IBEW members, including Orlando, Fla. Local 222 Business Manager Bill Hitt and Local 787 Business Manager Joel Flores Cruz, who represent hundreds of members, including lineworkers working to modernize the island’s transmission and distribution system, which has been devastated by hurricanes in recent years.



The Energy Department is allocating \$1 billion to address aging infrastructure and improve resilience for the electric grid, to achieve 100 percent renewable electricity by 2050. IBEW members are at the forefront of the transition to renewable energy, with training that allows them to work on various projects, including wind, solar, and battery storage.

“Secretary Granholm wanted our perspective on how to make the process easier for contractors to receive the funding,” said Lorraine Llauger, IBEW Fifth District international representative, who attended the small group discussion with Hitt and Cruz.

IBEW members said they are intensifying efforts to organize and train a high-quality workforce, giving thousands of Puerto Ricans a pathway to the middle class while raising wage and benefit standards for workers throughout the island.

Local 222 represents more than half of the lineworkers at LUMA, Puerto Rico’s utility, and is actively recruiting more. Membership in the IBEW has more than doubled the wages and benefits for its members and significantly raised the bar on professional skills standards there.

In the year following IBEW’s partnership with LUMA, the citizens of Puerto Rico have experienced 30 percent fewer power outages.

IBEW Fifth District Vice President Brian Thompson has actively organized efforts in Puerto Rico.

“We have the chance to change millions of lives and reset the future,” Thompson said. “It’s worth any difficulty to make this work. And we are not done yet.”

Posted May 19, 2023

Celebrating Tech Plant Groundbreaking in Upstate N.Y.

Syracuse Local 43 member and contractor Shawni Davis featured prominently in the presidential announcement on constructing a massive Micron computer chip plant in upstate New York.

“Because of the commitment to domestic microchip manufacturing in the CHIPS Act, this plan represents rebirth,” [Davis said in her introduction of President Biden](#). “Rebirth of American innovation, of American-made silicon chips that are the heart of so many devices we use daily. It means hope for the future and good paying construction and manufacturing jobs for years.”

Micron Technology’s announcement it would spend \$100 billion on a Syracuse-area computer chip campus was years in the making, involving [Local 43](#), building trades leaders, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), among others. Micron’s investment, spurred by the passage of the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, will usher in an estimated 9,000 jobs in an area decimated by decades of shutdowns. The legislation provides \$52 billion in federal investment to help revive the U.S. semiconductor industry across the supply chain.

“This is part of a broader story about the economy we’re building — one that works for everyone that positions America to win the economic competition of the 21st century,” President Biden said. “And by the way, it’s the largest investment in American history governed by a project labor agreement.”



Davis cited Biden’s promise to manufacture goods in the United States again — and his commitment to reaching across the aisle to invest in rebuilding and modernizing the country’s infrastructure.

“Thanks to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, just like the rest of the country today, central New York is rebuilding,” Davis said. “These projects also come with some of the strongest worker protections we’ve ever seen -- because President Biden knows that we don’t just need more jobs. We need more middle-class, union jobs.”



In New York, one-time household names like General Electric (GE), Alcoa, General Motors (GM), and Kodak shuttered plants in recent decades, leaving the area with high unemployment and a shrinking population. The Biden administration is ramping up efforts to produce more in America, with plans to send goods – not jobs – overseas.

“I am exceptionally proud that Micron noticed our history and chose Central New York as the best place to make such a globally relevant investment,” said Local 43 Business Manager Alan Marzullo. “I am also incredibly proud of the work of our local, county, state, and federal partners, who came together to land this monumental project.”

Posted May 18, 2023

At the White House, Highlighting an Empowered Labor Movement

Arlington, Texas, Local 220 member Samran Khampeth, a Siemens breaker plant foreman, attended a high-level White House meeting.

Vice President Kamala Harris convened the small event on March 10 with former Labor Secretary Marty Walsh, IBEW President Kenny Cooper and Assistant to the IBEW President for Government Affairs Austin Keyser. It marked two years since the Biden-Harris administration created the workforce organizing task force and also marked Walsh’s last official appearance as labor secretary.





Co-chaired by Harris and Walsh, the White House Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment interviewed workers nationwide, producing a 43-page report of recommendation and underlining its whole-of-government approach to making the protections of labor unions more accessible to workers.

Under the Biden administration, the Department of Labor has continually emphasized protecting workers' ability to organize and engage in collective bargaining. In addition, the Biden DOL has recovered more than \$520 million in back pay and protected the pensions of millions of workers and retirees.

Biden administration officials have also highlighted employers like Siemens, which is ramping up domestic manufacturing to feed the growing demand for electric switchgear used in data centers, electric vehicles, and semiconductor manufacturing.

"President Biden and Vice President Harris have always stressed the importance of building things in America again," Khampeth said. "Siemens has been leading the way, investing millions of dollars in American worker training and hiring. That includes new plants to fill the need for the infrastructure components we make."

"I am proud to work for Siemens, a company playing such a big role in bringing good union manufacturing jobs back home," she said.

Siemens has two IBEW-represented plants, the Texas breaker facility and one outside Los Angeles, where the company will break ground June 9 on a \$94 million hub that will replace the Pomona plant. The expansion will add 100,000 square feet of production capacity and create over 120 new local union jobs.

The new Pomona facility will serve as a key U.S. manufacturing hub for electrical products that support critical infrastructure markets, including data centers, electric vehicle charging, semiconductors, and more.

IBEW and Siemens officials joined President Biden last March to announce the investment to support infrastructure modernization and EV deployment thanks to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Posted May 16, 2023

The White House Hosts IBEW Members for Policy Talks

The White House has been hosting IBEW members at events highlighting how the Biden-Harris administration's policies positively impact their communities. Key participants included Minneapolis Local 292 Legislative Director Andy Snope, Milwaukee Local 494 Business Manager Dean Warsh, Local 494 apprentice Jess Berndt, and most recently, IBEW Second District Lead Organizer Steve Smith.

The *Communities in Action* forums are half-day meetings spotlighting the administration's work with states and local governments, labor leaders, businesses, and other stakeholders, to leverage historic investments to create and expand opportunities for working families. At the events, IBEW members shared how the union plays a vital role in their lives.

A second-generation Local 494 member, Berndt told the Wisconsin group how the IBEW represents the key to a new career after working as a hairdresser, for the postal service, and as a probation and parole officer.



“The beauty of being in the trades is there are a gazillion opportunities out there,” Berndt said. “I could be a foreman, project manager, or on the local staff, or become an inspector or an instructor. All of these things are possible. In addition, in this day and age, the pension and benefits give you a sense of freedom.”

Berndt also discussed working on a public housing project being built with federal funds by the Milwaukee Housing Authority. As a kid, she lived near the new housing project, but her family moved to the suburbs as crime rates increased. “Today, there is new hope at Westlawn, and I am helping to rebuild it.”

Smith, a member of Boston Local 2222, said the IBEW is partnering with several utilities and public power associations in Massachusetts to maximize the benefits of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. These include building a community-owned grid resilience project in Littleton and a microgrid project with Eversource Energy to deploy new technology and integrate additional solar generation in the state.



Snope described the impact of the Inflation Reduction Act on Minnesota's renewable energy industry. Nonunion developers who pay low wages have dominated the renewable energy industry in the state. The low wages effectively priced out Minneapolis Local 292's contractors. However, a new law signed by President Biden includes targeted tax incentives for renewable energy projects that utilize apprenticeship programs and high-road labor standards. As a result, Minnesota regulators approved a plan to build the largest solar project in the Midwest with union labor.

“The Sherco solar project will be one of the largest in the country,” Snope said in prepared remarks. “It will be built on the site of three coal-fired power plants that will soon be retired, creating 900 union construction jobs, reusing the land, and replacing the electricity with renewable power.”

Snope and Warsh spoke about the critical role of the IBEW in building out the electric vehicle charging infrastructure that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds throughout the states.

“Electric vehicle adoption is key to the country's climate goals, and IBEW members in Minnesota are on the front lines of this transition,” Snope said. “Now that the Transportation Department requires the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Training Program (EVITP) certification for electricians working on these projects, this high-quality training is mandated for those installing and maintaining the network.”

The IBEW has close to 400 EVITP-certified members in Minnesota with more in the pipeline, Snope said.

Milwaukee Local 494 estimates they have 100 journey-level electricians who are EVITP-certified, Warsh said. He has implemented the training into its fifth-year apprenticeship curriculum.

Smith credited a Biden appointee, National Labor Board General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo, for her efforts targeting captive audience meetings as violating the National Labor Relations Act.



“I truly appreciate General Counsel Abruzzo’s interpretation that they violate employees’ right to free speech because it’s a restriction on the right to a union,” Smith said. “We are trying to build a case on how often that happens. Clearly, she is committed to protecting workers’ rights to organize and bargain collectively.”

The Biden administration periodically invites IBEW members to the White House for events, which are disseminated through the network of Government Affairs coordinators.

Posted May 11, 2023

Biden Calls Out the IBEW, This Time in Canada

President Biden commonly name-checks the IBEW in speeches, often going off his prepared remarks to call out one of his favorite labor unions.

On March 24, during an address to the Canadian Parliament and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in Ottawa, Ontario, he mentioned the IBEW again.

“For example, I met with the IBEW and pointed out we will build 500,000 electric charging stations. Guess who builds them? Union workers,” Biden said in his speech on Parliament Hill.

Vancouver, British Columbia, Local 213 Business Manager Jim Lofty was in the House of Commons during the Biden speech. Canada’s political leadership immediately noted the IBEW reference from the U.S. president, said IBEW First District International Representative Matt Wayland.



The IBEW has approximately 65,000 members in Canada.

Wayland said Biden’s statements moved the needle in favor of adopting federal regulations in Canada mandating the charging network be installed only by highly skilled electricians certified by the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Training Program (EVITP). Canada currently has 2,000 EVITP-certified members, and that number is growing.

“We’re using Biden’s address to argue in favor of EVITP,” Wayland said. “I think it will push it over the finish line.”

In [his speech](#), Biden also spoke of the close relationship between the United States and Canada, noting the cultural, familial, democratic, and commercial ties that bind the two countries. In addition, the [countries committed to increased cooperation](#) on the North American manufacturing supply chain.

Posted May 10, 2023



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