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Maine Labor Climate Council

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MAINE UNIONS UNITE BEHIND VISION FOR CLIMATE ACTION AND GOOD JOBS

The newly formed labor-led coalition, Maine Labor Climate Council, released a comprehensive report from Cornell University with policy recommendations to advance an equitable, pro-worker climate action in Maine.

MAINE—On March 1, union leaders and members across the state of Maine launched the Maine Labor Climate Council, a new coalition of unions united to tackle climate change and address racial and economic inequality by creating high-quality union jobs to sustain Maine’s families and communities. The coalition also unveiled a comprehensive Maine Climate Jobs report, authored by researchers at Cornell University, that outlines a suite of policy recommendations around which the coalition intends to organize. If all of the recommendations in the report are implemented it would create 10,000 to 20,000 good jobs **per year** for the next twenty years in Maine depending on the scale of implementation and duration of the projects.

“The twin crises of climate change and inequality demand bold and urgent action,” said **Maine AFL-CIO President Cynthia Phinney**. “We believe that the choice between good jobs and a livable planet is a false one, and our report lays out a path to head in the direction of both. The Maine Labor Climate Council is committed to tackling inequality and climate change together and being laser focused on creating good jobs as we develop Maine’s clean energy economy. The recommendations in our report point us in that direction.”

“There are tens of millions of dollars on the table right now in our state budget surplus thanks to federal infrastructure investments and ARPA funds, and the Maine Labor Climate Council is organizing to make sure we invest this in both our renewable energy future as well as our current and future working families,” said **Jason J. Shedlock, President of the Maine State Building and Construction Trades Council and Regional Organizer with the Laborers’ International Union of North America**. “These shouldn’t be viewed as mutually exclusive; we can and must do both.”

The report from Cornell University researchers lays out an ambitious, pro-worker climate policy roadmap to achieve four goals: quickly decarbonizing Maine’s economy; ensuring that the tens of thousands of new jobs that get created as part of Maine’s energy transition adhere to high labor standards in terms of pay, benefits, training, and job security; bringing underrepresented workers into the clean-energy workforce through well-run apprentice and pre-apprentice programs; and ensuring a just transition for workers and communities most affected by these changes.

Core climate provisions of the plan include:

- Electrifying all state and local vehicles, including school and city buses, by 2040;
- Building a high speed rail corridor from Bangor to Boston while connecting to Lewiston/Auburn;
- Doing deep energy-efficiency retrofits and installing solar on all K-12 public schools and publicly owned buildings by 2035; and
- Installing 3GW of renewable energy by 2030 and upgrading Maine’s energy transmission and storage capacity.
- Building 19,000 units of energy efficient housing in Maine by 2040
- Installing 25,000 Public Electrical Vehicle Charging Stations by 2030

The report also recommends strengthening labor and equity standards for workers in Maine’s renewable energy economy, including:

- Attaching [prevailing wage](#) and [registered apprenticeship requirements](#) to utility-scale or state-subsidized renewable energy projects;
- Expanding the pathways into unionized renewable energy careers, through apprentice and pre-apprentice programs, for Mainers most affected by environmental injustice and economic inequality, including working class, rural, people of color and indigenous communities;
- Expanding and strengthening collective bargaining through [project labor](#) and community benefit agreements; and
- Planning and funding a just transition for workers and communities most affected.

In the coming months, the coalition plans to launch a [Carbon Free and Healthy Schools campaign](#) to upgrade Maine’s public school buildings and buses, slash carbon emissions, create good union jobs, and significantly lower energy costs.

"Our research underscores what working Mainers already know to be true: climate breakdown is real, and it's hitting workers and under-resourced communities first and worst. The good news is that it doesn't have to be this way. Our report outlines a science-based roadmap for Maine that would slash carbon emissions, transition the state to an equitable renewable energy economy, and create family-sustaining union jobs in communities that need them most. This report is an ambitious vision for pro-worker climate action that meets the scale of this crisis and addresses long-standing racial and economic inequality," says **Lara Skinner, director of the Labor Leading on Climate Initiative at Cornell University's Worker Institute.**

"All of our students, no matter where they reside in Maine, deserve to learn in school buildings that are modernized, that are safe and have a healthy environment, that have HVAC systems that are up-to-date and provide spaces that support student learning," said **Grace Leavitt, President of the Maine Education Association.** "Additionally, by conducting energy audits of our schools, and doing the work needed to reduce their carbon footprint, will help to build a better future for us all, create good jobs — union jobs — and at the same time will save precious dollars that can be used instead to better support our students in their learning, and can also help attract people to our profession at a time when we are facing serious shortages."

"As we expand transit systems we've also got a huge opportunity to electrify our buses, including Maine's 3,000 school buses, which travel more than 31 million miles every year," said **Portland bus operator Mike Frager, Vice President of the Amalgamated Transit Union 714.** "Alongside our union brothers and sisters who will build all this infrastructure, our unionized bus drivers, dispatchers, and mechanics are critical to making this transition happen. We're the eyes and ears on the ground who will keep these new electric buses running smoothly in Maine's cold winters and on our salty roads. We know best how to expand our transit systems so that they work for our most underserved communities. And we have a track record of making high-quality jobs that will keep our kids in Maine and take care of our families and communities."

"I take great pride in my work, but there's an added layer of accomplishment when I become part of renewable energy projects. Not only do I get to work with my hands each day and learn from some of the best electricians in the state, but I also get to be a part of the global transition from fossil fuels to renewable energies. For me, building up our labor standards goes hand in hand with building our renewable infrastructure. We need a well-trained and highly skilled workforce to complete all of these coming clean energy jobs," says **Kilton Webb, a 4th year electrical apprentice with IBEW Local 567**

The coalition is also supporting State Rep. Scott Cuddy's (D-Winterport) bill, LD 1969, which attaches labor and equity standards, including [prevailing wage requirements](#), to all state-assisted renewable energy projects over 2 MW in size. The bill also encourages renewable energy contractors to use registered [apprenticeship](#) and pre-apprenticeship

programs when constructing these utility-scale projects as a way to build the workforce Maine needs and advance equity.

“When Maine taxpayers invest in clean energy, we must do so with the values of Mainers at the forefront,” said Shedlock. “Those values include equal opportunities and fair pay for an honest day’s work. We must never miss the opportunity to ensure we are not only securing our environment’s future, but also that of Maine’s working class.”

In the past year, as more unions have shown interest in climate jobs work, the Maine State Building and Construction Trades Council led a successful campaign to win a [Project Labor Agreement in law \(LD 336\)](#) on an upcoming Offshore Wind research array. The bill was part of a legislative package around offshore wind that included a provision important to Maine’s fishing communities that will guarantee them a seat at the table and in setting benchmarks the state must hit to proceed with the project. A broader coalition of labor and community partners passed legislation ([LD 1656](#)) to create climate resilient energy efficient affordable housing in Maine that would be built under a Project Labor Agreement. [\\$20 million dollars of this work](#) will be done under a PLA and was funded through LD 1733, the Maine Jobs and Recovery Act, state implementation legislation of the American Rescue Plan.

To date the quality of jobs in the renewable energy economy have been uneven and mediocre at best. In 2020, in Maine the median wage for a [weatherization installer and technician was \\$14.05](#); for [floor, ceiling and wall insulation workers in Maine it was \\$16.14](#) and the median wage in Maine [for solar photovoltaic installers it was \\$19.09](#). When you factor in often mediocre benefits – and that median wage rates inherently mean lots of jobs pay significantly less than the median – its clear that we can and should do better.

“Working people need a plan to address climate change in a way that supports workers and creates good quality jobs in the clean energy economy. The Maine Labor Climate Council is putting forward a pro-worker, climate action plan to ensure the highest quality jobs for Maine workers,” said **Matt Schlobohm, Executive Director of the Maine AFL-CIO**.

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The Maine Labor Climate Council is a growing coalition of labor unions advocating for a just transition to a pro-worker and pro-climate renewable economy in Maine. The coalition of unions includes workers from a variety of sectors—building and construction trades, transportation and logistics, education, and state and local government—whose work is critical to building a worker-centered renewable economy. Learn more at www.mainelaborclimate.org