

IBEW Utility Labor Council of New York State

Comments:

New York State appears to be moving its energy policy towards significant public sector investment in alternative, renewable fuels and power sources. New York's regulatory policy shift over the last several years has stimulated energy innovation and has positioned the state to have significant benefits from energy technology that will transform the energy industry. My understanding is that NYSERDA is exploring how the energy industry will deal with the many factors that will produce the best results for the State's future energy needs. The challenge that IBEW Utility Labor Council of New York State would like to discuss is how private and government employers will recruit and retain a stable long term skilled workforce for the traditional and alternative energy sectors. Without a steady supply of highly skilled and educated employees, the State's efforts to create and sustain a more competitive energy industry will not be realized. In addition, as we move forward with alternative energy, it is important to continually look back at the workforce that might be left behind.

There is a rising demand for well-educated and skilled workers in the new technologies field and at the same time there is a decreasing demand for energy companies facing the challenges in energy production that is being phased out (i.e. coal, oil, nuclear). The average age of the current utility workforce continues to grow, many are near retirement age, and there has been very little in terms of investment in training and retraining. This presents two problems, one, there is not enough skilled workers to maintain the current energy systems for a sustainable period of time while investments are made on long term alternative energy needs; two the current workforce engaged in areas of the energy field that are being phased out do not have opportunities for retraining to be part of the alternative energy field. The demand for an experienced workforce in gas and electric, generation and transmission, will not be met under the current conditions. Even by investing in traditional power generation right now there will be a significant loss of institutional knowledge as the younger workforce attempts to successfully replace the aging workforce.

We would also like to see the educational divide closed. As emerging technologies take a greater hold in providing power to the state, the current workforce is not adequately prepared to step in. There are no continuing energy education requirements to stay up to date on solar, wind, hydro, and biomass technologies. The skills needed to move the current workforce into the alternative energy sector is not being addressed.

As we move away from oil, nuclear, and coal to renewable energy alternatives, IBEW asks to keep in mind we have workers in the current energy workforce that will be losing their employment to alternative energy. Given that, a first preference to be part of the alternative workforce to develop the skills necessary to sustain and maintain emerging infrastructure in generation and transmission should be discussed.

Solutions

IBEW would like you to consider the following:

- 1 Analyze the current traditional energy sectors in New York State and develop a workforce trends report to be utilized for the purpose of meeting the utility industry needs while the state develops its alternative energy program. Implement recommendations from such a report so that we do not have a short fall of experienced and skilled workers in the generation and transmission of traditional energy.
- 2 Analyze the workforce in energy sectors that are being phased out (i.e. coal, nuclear, oil). Develop a model to identify those workers and their current skill sets. Provide those workers with opportunities in the emerging energy sectors. The state could facilitate a partnership with the unions and alternative energy companies to create a curriculum that would develop new skill sets for these workers by providing them with distance learning opportunities and on the job training. On the energy companies side, a combination of tax credits and job grants could be put together to incentivize their use of these retrained workers.

Conclusion

The state's energy policy faces many challenges and we look forward to being a resource in whatever capacity you see fit.

Glen Casey
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