

October 16, 2024

Dear Presidential Candidates:

Coal mining and power plant communities across America are being re-energized with the help of new federal programs and resources designed to support us as coal production and related jobs continue to decline. In the [National Economic Transition platform](#), released in 2020, organizations representing workers, local governments, entrepreneurs, and economic development leaders in coal communities raised our voices together to call for “a big, bold investment” — which the nation is now making through provisions of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the CHIPS and Science Act, as well as continued investments in pre-existing programs.

This transformative federal commitment supports infrastructure, clean energy, workforce development, environmental remediation, economic development, broadband, and local capacity building. Wasting no time, we have rolled up our sleeves and gotten to work leveraging this new support to build a brighter future for our families and neighbors by advancing projects including renewable energy installations, new manufacturing facilities, and innovative brownfield and mine reclamation. These initiatives are building community strength, prosperity, and self-determination, creating thousands of jobs, leveraging billions in private investment, and fostering community-driven economic development.

We are writing now to strongly urge you to commit to sustaining and growing these transformative policies that coal communities are relying on to rebuild and move forward. Because these programs and investments are so new, their impacts have only just begun to address the devastating economic losses and chronic environmental, health, and social challenges faced by communities where the once-dominant coal industry has precipitously declined.

Moreover, resource and capacity constraints at the local level due to historic disinvestment have meant that some communities most in need have found it difficult to navigate the system to take advantage of the new opportunities. There is an urgent need for the next Administration and the next Congress to lean into the momentum, address the bureaucratic barriers to accessing funding, and incorporate feedback and lessons learned from the initial deployment of these resources to make them even more effective and impactful.

As society moves toward different sources of energy to meet our needs, America owes communities that powered our nation for generations sustained investment to recover and transition to new, sustainable, healthy economies. Our country cannot afford to leave coal communities and workers behind, and continuing investments now will strengthen these places, and the fabric of our nation as a whole, for decades to come. Specifically, the National Economic

Transition platform asked for federal initiatives and resources to address seven priority pillars: supporting local leadership, restorative economic development, workforce development and worker health, post-mine land reclamation, infrastructure, impacts of coal company bankruptcy, and coordination and access related to federal resources. (*The addendum below provides a summary of each of these pillars and key progress made to date under each of them since the platform's release.*)

We ask you to embrace the priorities enumerated in the National Economic Transition platform and work with us to build upon the demonstrated successes and momentum of the last several years. It is crucial that the next Administration and Congress join us in this ongoing work, and not pull the rug out from under the work coal communities are doing, with the country's support, to build a vibrant new future.

Finally, our organizations commit to being here as a resource in 2025 and beyond to help decision makers maintain and improve America's support for its traditional energy-producing communities.

Sincerely,

Tom Cormons, Executive Director, Appalachian Voices

Rebecca Shelton, Director of Policy, Appalachian Citizens' Law Center

Sarah Martik, Executive Director, Center for Coalfield Justice

Jacob Hannah, CEO, Coalfield Development Corp.

Alex Weld, Executive Director, Generation West Virginia

Heidi Binko, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Just Transition Fund

Peter Hille, CEO, Mountain Association

Charlene Johnson, Executive Director, Plenty Doors Community Development Corporation

Amanda Pankau, Director of Energy and Community Resiliency, Prairie Rivers Network

Amanda Woodrum, Executive Director, ReImagine Appalachia

Debbie Phillips, Chief Executive Officer, Rural Action

Nicole Horseherder, Executive Director, Tó Nizhóní Ání

Stephanie Tyree, Executive Director, WV Community Development Hub

Jennie Smith, Executive Director, West Virginia Rivers Coalition

Sara Kendall, Program Director, Western Organization of Resource Councils

Addendum: Examples of Progress under National Economic Transition Platform Pillars

Pillar #1 Local Leadership:

- New investments across numerous federal agencies in capacity building for local community-based leaders and in technical assistance, through programs and initiatives including the Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization (Energy Communities IWG), EPA's Environmental Justice programs, DOE technical assistance programs, the USDA's Rural Partners Network, and more. While there is room for improvement to ensure these programs are more representative and accessible, they represent significant progress toward building coal community capacity.

Pillar #2 Restorative Economic Development:

- Hundreds of billions of dollars of new investments in the clean, renewable energy sector, such as expanding and restructuring the clean energy tax credits so that local governments, nonprofits and low-income communities can take advantage of federal tax incentives, including a bonus incentive for energy communities and brownfield sites, and expanding financial assistance including grants, rebates, and tax incentives for energy efficiency.

Pillar #3 Workforce Development and Worker Health:

- The permanent extension of the black lung excise tax to help ensure miners suffering from black lung disease receive the benefits they deserve.
- The establishment of a silica dust standard to better protect miners from severe black lung disease, a disease epidemic that has devastated families across coal communities for far too long.
- The establishment of bonus tax incentives for clean energy programs utilizing apprenticeships.
- Provisions encouraging unionized labor, better wages and hiring apprentices, which not only boosts local economic impact but also fosters a skilled workforce, a key foundation for the long term economic health of the region.

Pillar #4 Reclamation:

- The reauthorization of the Abandoned Mine Land fee, new investments in abandoned mine lands to fund reclamation of historic abandoned coal mine sites, and funding for the remediation of orphan oil and gas wells.
- The allocation of funds for the remediation of acid mine drainage sites.
- Guidance encouraging collective bargaining agreements, local hiring provisions, project labor agreements, prioritized hiring of former coal workers, and other considerations that have been essential to growing a local workforce to scale to the need in our regions.

- The strengthening of federal coal ash rules to protect public health and the environment.

Pillar # 5 Infrastructure:

- Tens of billions of dollars in investments in fast-speed internet access.¹
- \$1.2 trillion investment in the nation’s physical infrastructure, including the largest ever federal investments in public transit, clean drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, clean energy transmission, and electric vehicle infrastructure through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.²
- The requirement of community benefit plans in certain federal programs such as Department of Energy grant programs.

Pillar #6 Bankruptcy:

- Draft regulations to ensure coal operators are adequately securing their black lung liabilities, to help protect the solvency of the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund.

Pillar #7 Coordination and Access:

- The establishment of the Energy Communities IWG to help energy communities across the country understand how to access and apply for transition funds, including the establishment of six regional Rapid Response Teams.
- The creation of the USDA Rural Partners Network program has added critical federal staffing capacity on the ground in the most distressed, under-resourced counties in the nation, leading to significant project investment and local capacity building.

¹ <https://www.bluegreenalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/BGA-BIL-User-Guide-012723-Update-1.pdf>

² <https://www.bluegreenalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/BGA-BIL-User-Guide-012723-Update-1.pdf>