

# JOIN *the* Civilian Climate Corps



## **Building The Civilian Climate Corps**

How New Deal Ambition Can Mobilize Workers For America's Clean Economy

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# Introduction

As President Franklin Delano Roosevelt entered office in 1933, the Great Depression reached its zenith and the national unemployment rate hit 25%. Meeting that moment with the urgency it deserved, President Roosevelt moved swiftly to enact a sweeping package of stimulus programs. The New Deal ran the gamut from financial reforms to direct subsidies for key industries and a minimum wage, but Roosevelt's jobs programs—the Public Works Administration, Works Progress Administration, Civil Works Administration, and Civilian Conservation Corps—have left the most lasting imprint on the American memory of that unprecedented economic recovery.

The Civilian Conservation Corps loomed especially large in the New Deal era. Recruitment posters depicted young men wielding axes and sledgehammers, taking advantage of, “A young man's opportunity to work, to live, to learn, to build—and to conserve our Natural Resources.” Alongside other New Deal programs that put Americans to work in construction and manufacturing, the Corps hired youth to plant trees, carve out national park trails, and engage in other

conservation efforts. The program enlisted 250,000 young men in just two months, and put more than 3 million to work in the span of a decade. At a time when many millions of families struggled to put food on the table, the Civilian Conservation Corps was a lifeline opportunity for good-paying work in the public interest.

To be clear, FDR's Corps was fundamentally flawed—the program perpetuated white supremacy and almost entirely excluded women, and many of the national parks in which its corpsmembers worked were formed through violent displacement of Indigenous people. These injustices cannot be repeated. But in its conception, the original CCC modeled bold, impactful governance to confront a crisis.

Amid the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country today is in similarly dire straits. Employment numbers are unstable and fluctuating, and food insecurity has skyrocketed. Carbon pollution and climate change are amplifying these impacts, triggering overlapping disasters that hit people of color the hardest. More powerful



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natural disasters are killing Americans and costing billions of dollars in property damage. These mounting crises call for ambitious action at the scale of Roosevelt's New Deal. To take up that challenge, Biden must reinvigorate Roosevelt's vision of bold governance and lead a labor mobilization at a scale unseen in 90 years.

The U.S. government has supported several corps initiatives since the Civilian Conservation Corps' dissolution in 1942. Though they all provide vitally important services in communities and environments across the country, none have come close to matching the original program's size and ambition. For the most part, corpsmember stipends pay far below a living wage—the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (AmeriCorps NCCC) offers a mere \$4,000 for a 10-12 month service term. And AmeriCorps, the largest of the existing federal corps programs, employs only 75,000 stipended volunteers a year.

Meanwhile, the National Park Service is struggling with nearly \$12 billion in backlog maintenance projects; American infrastructure in the form of roads, bridges, dams, power lines, and public transit is in deep disrepair; and climate mitigation and resilience will require a massive push to retrofit buildings, improve energy efficiency, restore ecosystem services, install new energy infrastructure, and more. The country's social infrastructure—maintained by service workers who provide resources in schools, libraries, community centers, and elsewhere—is likewise lacking the support it needs, undermining community-level resilience. American service corps already do invaluable work, but more is necessary.

A new Civilian Climate Corps (CCC) can help fill the gap. President Biden has recognized that opportunity and taken action to make

the CCC a reality. Inspired by FDR's Civilian Conservation Corps, and building on recommendations from Governor Jay Inslee's presidential campaign, the Evergreen Action Plan, and the ground-breaking report from the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, Biden's proposal seizes the moment: a new CCC is uniquely positioned to jumpstart a workforce mobilization, while also helping to strengthen the fabric of American civil society. Enrolling in the CCC will allow members to serve their communities, and their country, while gaining the skills they need to succeed in a clean energy economy. And the CCC is popular: recent polling from Data for Progress shows that 77% of likely voters support the concept, including 65% of Republicans and 87% of Democrats.

In this paper, we lay out how the new CCC can take shape. We propose an ambitious corps, designed to deploy 1.5 million new corpsmembers over the next five years, which would more than triple the number of national corpsmembers on the ground in America. The CCC must invest in pathways into good union jobs, and ensure that frontline communities and historically underserved populations are prioritized—an equitable Climate Corps should make a generational investment in leadership of color, and facilitate lasting change in marginalized communities.

Alongside these expanded national service opportunities, we recommend creating a Green Careers Network (GCN), based on Governor Inslee's proposal, to fuel growth in the long-term climate labor market while putting unemployed Americans back to work in productive and stable careers with advancement opportunities. The GCN would provide information and support to workers seeking long-term and good-paying climate careers, opening sustainable pathways to a population including recent CCC graduates,

those entering new construction and manufacturing jobs, fossil fuel workers facing industry transition, disaster responders, and those seeking to enhance climate resilience in their communities. The CCC and GCN could be effectively overseen by an interagency Climate Workforce Council to harmonize and align an all-of-government mobilization.

Below, Section I details key programmatic elements of the Civilian Climate Corps, including three pathways for how the federal government can rapidly deploy at least 1.5 million new members. Section II lays out

various workforce development initiatives that should comprise the Green Careers Network, ranging from existing programs at the Department of Labor (DOL) to new legislation supporting former fossil fuel workers. And Section III makes the case for an interagency Climate Workforce Council (CWC) that would develop and oversee the joint CCC/GCN rollout. Together, these programs can help the Biden administration spark a climate labor revolution.



## Existing Federal Corps Programs:

### AmeriCorps State and National

Provides grants and an allotment of AmeriCorps members to organizations dealing with a raft of issues including the environment, economic opportunity, and education.

### National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC)

A residential program focused on short-term projects, broken into Traditional NCCC and FEMA Corps.

- Traditional NCCC

Deploys corpsmembers to communities for service relating to infrastructure improvement, urban and rural development, resource conservation, and environmental stewardship.

- FEMA Corps

Coordinates with nonprofits and government agencies to plan response and relief efforts during disaster and conduct damage assessments in the aftermath.

### AmeriCorps VISTA

Allocates corpsmembers to public agencies and community organizations to work on poverty relief programs.

- VISTA members participated in the Obama administration's short-lived pilot of a Resilience AmeriCorps program that supported climate resiliency initiatives in low-income communities.

### AmeriCorps Disaster Response Teams (A-DRT)

Deploys members nationally to provide post-disaster relief.

### Public Lands Corps (PLC)

Administered by the Department of the Interior (DOI) and deals largely with conservation efforts on federal land. DOI and the U.S. Department of Agriculture carry out PLC projects by signing cooperative agreements with nonprofit corps organizations, which then use agency dollars to fund public lands projects and corpsmembers training.

### Job Corps

A network of more than 120 residential career centers serving disadvantaged youths and overseen by the Department of Labor. Enrollees can receive training in 78 possible professions; career path options range from health care to renewable resources and energy.

- The U.S. Forest Service manages 24 specialized Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers. Conservation Center enrollees can earn a vocational certificate in over 30 trades, including wildland firefighting, forestry, and construction trades. Enrollees in the Conservation Centers may also provide disaster assistance; all 24 Centers have a deployable wildland fire crew.

# I. Civilian Climate Corps

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**As communities across the country are uprooted and destabilized by mounting climate disasters, the CCC can spark national solidarity through recovery and restoration.**

The Civilian Climate Corps (CCC) could help lead an unprecedented national mobilization of America’s greatest resource—its people. By building a federal program through which American workers can revitalize their communities, and gain valuable skills and experience in the process, a Climate Corps would give new life to civic duty. As communities across the country are uprooted and destabilized by mounting climate disasters, the CCC can spark national solidarity through recovery and restoration.

The new CCC will expand beyond, and differ from, the original Civilian Conservation Corps. While FDR’s Corps planted billions of trees, the new CCC can install many gigawatts of clean power generation across the country. While the original Corps restored and conserved natural landscapes, the new CCC can work to make American cities and rural communities more resilient to disaster through ecosystem services and public works. And as FDR’s Corps led wildfire mitigation efforts in the 1930s, the new CCC can apply modern forestry practices to manage fires and maintain ecosystem health.

The new CCC should be grounded in a few core values. For one, the new CCC must be far more inclusive and justice-driven than its predecessor. Roosevelt’s Corps provided a financial lifeline for families struggling through an unprecedented economic collapse, but that Corps sidelined women and people of color. The modern Climate Corps must proactively advance environmental and social justice. Local hiring practices, preference for enrollees from disadvantaged backgrounds, respect for community input, and other programmatic elements can ensure that the Climate Corps corrects for its predecessor’s grave injustices.

The new CCC must also complement and feed into, rather than compete with, organized labor. Corps and organized labor have sometimes faced tension over concerns that corps compete with union membership, or displace union workers on projects. The CCC should address those concerns through pre-apprenticeship programs and other key program designs discussed in more detail below.

With these basic values in mind, Part A of this section examines several paths for building a new Civilian Climate Corps, including a new grant program to existing local corps programs, a direct federal employment program following the model of FDR’s original Corps, and the reorientation of existing federal corps programs. Part B then turns to program design elements that must be present in any new CCC. The new CCC must be built to quickly multiply the number of corpsmembers handling climate projects in communities and landscapes across the country.

## **A. Establishing the New Civilian Climate Corps**

The Civilian Climate Corps can act as a driving force behind the nationwide workforce mobilization to tackle the climate crisis even as it reinvigorates the spirit of American service. This section presents three complementary options for how to build it.

### **1. Grant Program**

Congress can establish a new grant program at the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) that would fund climate-related projects in local corp organizations. CNCS currently runs AmeriCorps, a national service program with a broad and varied mission. While the CCC grant program would ideally be separate from AmeriCorps,

CNCS already has the infrastructure to foster partnerships with local and state organizations that would receive the grants.

Under the grant program structure, local corps organizations would apply to CNCS to fund specific direct-service and capacity-building climate projects in their communities. The project grants would cover expenses relating to corpsmember stipends and benefits, operational costs for local corps organizations and host sites, and other direct costs for materials and equipment. Grant-funded corpsmembers would be formally designated as members of the Civilian Climate Corps, which would offer consistent branding indicating a shared set of experiences and skills among corps graduates.

To be eligible for a CCC grant, corps organizations should meet certain qualifications. In particular, these local corps would be required to provide vocational training and secure project buy-in from local stakeholders. To that end, grants would be preferentially distributed to established applicants that have developed their project proposals in partnership with grassroots community organizations, local employers, and state and municipal agencies. Grant administrators should also prioritize applications that engage unions in their project design and training programs. And those training programs would likewise be required to include career support services helping corpsmembers find sustainable employment after their term.

There are already more than 130 corps programs, including [NGOs](#) and [state initiatives](#), that could put grant money to good use quickly. And in underserved communities without a corps presence, the CCC would offer separate seed grants for new

climate-focused corps. Relying exclusively on existing corps organizations to put Climate Corps boots on the ground would risk leaving out regions of the country that do not already benefit from corps networks, both urban and rural; expanding corps' reach to those communities is integral to the CCC's mission and Biden's pledge to invest in disadvantaged communities.

For local corps, CCC grants would serve as just one of many funding streams. Most corps receive funding from a combination of sources, including states, municipalities, and philanthropic foundations. Receiving CCC funding would supplement, and not preclude, those other grant resources. Such a multi-track structure would allow the CCC to bolster and supplement state and local climate corps initiatives, rather than competing with them for projects.

[The Corps Network](#) (TCN) would make an invaluable partner in coordinating grant applications and disbursement. An association of 133 conservation and service corps, TCN helps member corps access funding and project opportunities. As the CCC grant program grows, TCN would provide a readymade venue for building connections with local corps interested in climate-related projects. TCN also offers support for newly founded corps in underserved communities, and could help develop strong programs to fill gaps in corps coverage. Given the Network's deep institutional knowledge on best practices for corps funding, TCN would be an important resource for Congress and the Biden administration as they develop the CCC grant program.

## **2. Direct Federal Employment Program**

Congress should also establish a direct employment Climate Corps, similar to FDR's




Civilian Conservation Corps, as a national complement to distributed local grants. Following that model, a federal Corps would directly recruit and manage members to work on discrete short-term projects, further guaranteeing deep nationwide coverage.

A direct employment program would offer a centralized, unified, and ambitious program rallying members to build America's future clean economy. Roosevelt's CCC, and his resulting popularity, showed clearly that an ambitious and high-profile mass federal employment program to conduct work in the public interest can help restore confidence in governance. Today, after decades of erosion of public services and social programs, Americans' trust in government has hit near-record lows. A high-profile national initiative putting youth to work on projects that voters care about can help restore that

faith in government action. Initiatives like the CCC, with attending public communications campaigns showing the work done to benefit communities around the country, would help to build the trust and direct understanding necessary to enact more complex and contested climate policy.

To best facilitate its growth, the direct employment program could establish campuses in some regions and provide housing vouchers in others. Shared housing would allow members who are serving in the same region to live close together, recreating the spirit of collective work promoting the nation's welfare that imbued the Conservation Corps. Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers offer a modern model for shared housing in rural environments and on public lands, where bunking corpsmembers together would facilitate work in relatively remote regions.



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Directly managing corpsmembers and their deployment would also give CCC administrators far more control over the Corps' work and public impact than a grant program. Just as the New Deal CCC sent its members to tackle federal priorities—such as creating national parks or restoring forests—the modern CCC should put its members to work on its own top-line objectives, like retrofitting 2 million homes or planting 100 million trees. Deploying corpsmembers in partnership with utilities, various federal initiatives, and state and local governments can mean helping other agencies realize their own climate goals at the same time.

To ensure that the new CCC does not repeat the harms of the past, a federally managed CCC must ensure that both its hiring and project management practices are grounded in principles of environmental justice. To the extent practicable, projects should be completed by corpsmembers from the communities in which they take place. In cases where CCC activity would affect community residents, CCC administrators should also develop project plans in partnership with local stakeholders. Community organizations, including environmental nonprofits, tenant associations, and others should be able to request corpsmembers to work on local projects. By providing that capacity, the CCC would enable more grassroots-driven climate action in under-resourced communities, and help build a more just and equitable economy.

### **3. Revamping Existing Corps Programs**

To achieve a bold, New Deal-style corps mobilization, Congress and the administration would also benefit from fully leveraging the existing national service infrastructure. AmeriCorps and the Public Lands Corps (PLC)—the country's two largest national service programs—already put corpsmembers

to work on climate-related projects. PLC members often engage in forest management, wildfire mitigation, and ecosystem restoration, while various AmeriCorps programs deal with energy conservation, environmental stewardship and natural disaster recovery. That expansive purview presents a compelling opportunity for further climate-related corps work.

The Biden administration should lead this reorientation by first developing recommendations for AmeriCorps, PLC, and others to more actively center climate projects in their work. For example, AmeriCorps sets new funding priorities each year. AmeriCorps programs are broadly authorized to tackle environmental issues, and sponsors have used that flexibility to put corpsmembers to work on climate-related projects. For the next grant cycle, CNCS could establish that projects improving energy efficiency, capturing carbon, enhancing climate resilience, and so on, will receive priority funding. CCC administrators should find similar opportunities to center climate change with PLC and other service programs.

Congress can build on President Biden's directive to reorient service programs. Civilian Climate Corps legislation should emulate Sen. Chris Coons' (D-DE) COVID-focused CORPS Act by amending every national service program's authorizing statute to formally prioritize climate-related projects for each. Congress can also facilitate agency relationships with national service programs through maneuvers like authorizing the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to work with PLC or expanding PLC's eligible service lands. See Page 5 for details on existing programs that could see a reorientation to focus on climate issues.

President Biden can also direct agencies across the federal government to harness this newfound focus. The Department of Interior (DOI), Department of Agriculture (USDA), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Army Corps of Engineers, and others can identify which of their programs are best-suited to utilize corps labor and devote requisite funding to cooperative agreements with corps organizations. They can leverage accounts set aside for various agency programs to fund corps deployment—the National Park Service, for example, partly funds its PLC cooperative agreements from its Youth Partnership Programs and Cyclic Maintenance accounts. The Biden administration should identify a full list of such accounts that can feed into climate-related corps work, including everything from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s construction fund to the Department of Health and Human Services’ funds for low-income home retrofits. By coordinating across these varied programs, the Biden administration can piece together a comprehensive national service mobilization for climate-related projects.

Participating agencies can also support rapid expansion among partner organizations who sponsor and manage corpsmembers in the field. Those agencies should work with partners—organizations ranging from local community groups to utility cooperatives—to execute community-driven climate mitigation and resilience projects. For example, HUD and the Department of Energy (DOE) should dedicate corpsmembers to support local community service agencies and State Energy Programs in expanding access to home retrofits for energy efficiency and climate resilience. Many other agencies could benefit from corpsmember labor, including DOI, USDA, NOAA, and EPA, among others.

To the extent that agencies have the authority to set their own grantmaking and cooperative agreement policies, they should also simplify funding arrangements for sponsoring organizations in order to ensure that local partners are able to fully benefit.

Congress should also play a role in supporting these efforts, as Corps organizations currently suffer from unstable funding pieced together through cooperative agreements; federal, state, and municipal grants; fee-for-service work; and private contributions. To support these corps as they carry out climate-related projects, CCC legislation should institute a “backbone” grant program offering stable, predictable, and ongoing funding for corps’ administrative and operational costs. Representative Frederica Wilson’s *Youth Corps Act of 2019* provides for Youth Corps Grants that exemplify such stable funding.

Agencies contributing to the corps expansion would also benefit from additional funding to support corpsmember projects. Rep. Joe Neguse’s *21st Century Conservation Corps for Our Health and Our Jobs Act* provides an initial list of accounts to receive additional funding and serves as a model for how the Corps bill can approach supplemental appropriations. These appropriations would both provide much-needed funding for infrastructure and conservation projects and support rapid growth in corpsmember capacity.

Existing national service infrastructure offers a solid foundation for further expansion, which was unavailable at the inception of the Civilian Conservation Corps’ in the 1930s. The bold, ambitious corps mobilization described here will take full advantage of that resource.

## Projects for the Civilian Climate Corps

To tackle the full scope of the climate crisis, the new CCC will be empowered to:

- Retrofit homes and businesses to improve energy efficiency and enhance climate resilience
- Restore public lands and waterways and help mitigate natural disasters
- Support local capacity-building for climate action
- Enable carbon sequestration and long-term sustainability projects on working lands
- Install solar panels and other clean energy infrastructure
- Respond to natural disasters and provide aid to affected communities
- Build and maintain clean transportation infrastructure
- Organize communities for local climate resilience and civic engagement
- Care for community members most vulnerable to the climate crisis
- And more!



## B. Key Features of the New CCC

The following design features should define the structure and implementation of this program.

### 1. Funding and Corpsmember Benefits

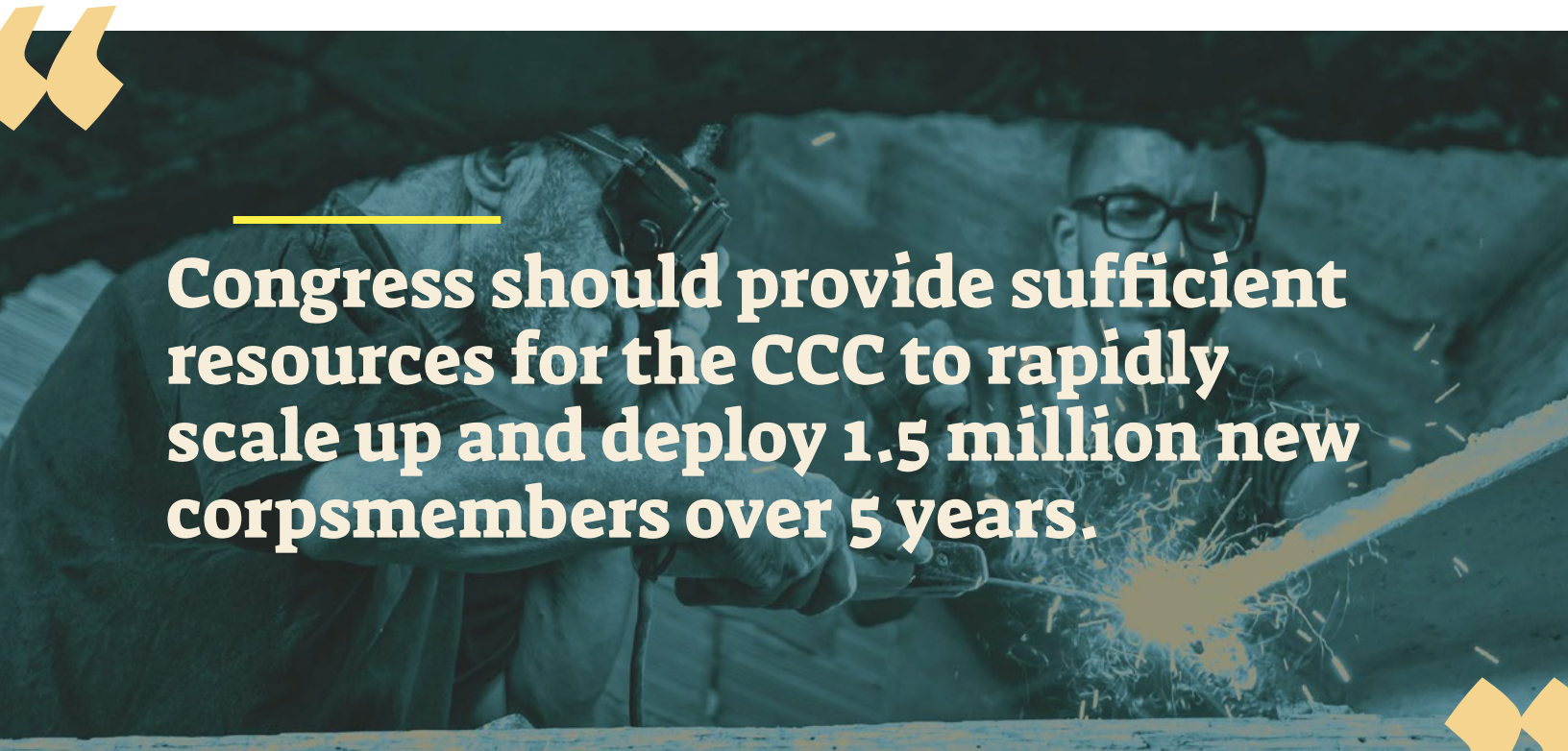
While some existing federal corps programs could be reoriented toward climate work without additional funding, the CCC would benefit from new appropriations—whether those funds go toward a CNCS grant account, a new federally managed corps, or the plussing up of existing programs. Congress should provide sufficient resources for the CCC to rapidly scale up and deploy 1.5 million new corpsmembers over 5 years, broadly aiming for 500,000 enrolled through grants and 1 million through federally directed corps programs.

The funding must account for paying corpsmembers a living wage. Corpsmembers

today are underpaid, with most stipends amounting to far less than a \$15/hour living wage. CCC legislation should ensure that corpsmembers in every national service program are able to support themselves and their families with a minimum \$15/hour wage or \$15/hour-equivalent stipend. State and local funding streams for corps should consider doing the same.

National service corps should also provide their members with substantial benefits beyond a living wage. These programs must be accessible to parents, mid-career workers, and those without generational wealth to support them. To that end, every federal corps program should also include the following elements:

- **Health and Childcare:** CCC legislation should provide all national corpsmembers and their dependents Medicare coverage for the duration of their term. AmeriCorps already



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provides a small stipend for childcare to corpsmembers, and that benefit should be expanded and standardized across national service programs.

- **Housing Support:** The direct employment Corps should provide the opportunity to live in regional federally funded campuses providing room and board for the duration of the corpsmembers' service term, or a sufficient housing stipend such that corpsmembers can live close to their project sites. For all corpsmembers living and working in their own communities, the Corps should provide supplemental stipends covering their rent costs.

- **Academic Credit and Financial Aid:** Corpsmembers should be eligible for academic credit contingent on the nature of the training they receive. Currently, AmeriCorps NCCC provides undergraduate college credit for three training courses, and can serve as a model for the CCC. Corps graduates should also be eligible for full scholarships for post-secondary education at public institutions—including community colleges and trade schools—upon finishing their term, and corpsmembers who enroll with federal student loan debt should receive loan forgiveness following the completion of their term with any national service program.

## 2. Centralizing Access

Offering a central website that can direct prospective members to various enrollment options is one of the simplest and most effective things the federal government can do to kickstart a new CCC. As a point of comparison, the current AmeriCorps website attempts to help users understand a wide variety of options, but is challenging to navigate. The CCC website should provide a clear and succinct list of those corps at the

federal, state, and local level that are part of the climate workforce mobilization, and assist users with understanding and applying to the options that best suit them.

## 3. Equitable Recruitment

AmeriCorps and Job Corps both include a requirement or preference for enrollees from disadvantaged backgrounds, including individuals from low-income families, people with disabilities, and the formerly incarcerated, among others. The CCC should likewise preference these populations, and consider tying grant funding to representation of Opportunity Youth in partner corps organizations.

As part of that effort, the Corps must prioritize recruiting members to work in their own communities. This principle serves three main purposes: 1) creating good jobs in historically underserved communities, 2) ensuring that work crews are responsive to local needs, and 3) training corpsmembers who will remain to build climate careers in their home communities. Hiring local residents may be an easier task for local corps receiving funding through the grant program, given that they have established networks in their areas of operation, but the direct employment CCC should also pursue local hiring.

There are numerous procedural choices administrators should make to pursue that goal; for example, they could follow the model of New York's Green City Force that brings on corpsmembers who live in the city's public housing, or implement Community Benefits Agreements that would stipulate a local hiring requirement for larger projects. Finding those opportunities to formally pursue local hiring should be a priority as the Corps builds its recruitment systems.

In addition, Corps programs must be available to all Americans, regardless of age. Corps have historically limited enrollment to youths in the range of 16-25, with some exceptions up to 35. But the CCC, as a pathway to a lasting climate career, should be available to unemployed and underemployed applicants of any age.

#### 4. Training for Good-Paying Careers

The CCC must serve as a bridge to stable, well-paying jobs. Two recent corps bills exemplify a strong legislative approach to achieve that aim.

First, Sen. Dick Durbin's (D-IL) [RENEW Conservation Corps Act](#) requires that corpsmembers are provided at least two weeks of training with curricula "that improve the future job prospects of Participants, including through making available... registered apprenticeships and other professional licenses or certifications." And second, Rep. Frederica Wilson's (D-FL) [Youth Corps Act of 2019](#) provides a model for ensuring proper post-service career support for corpsmembers, requiring that corps "develop pathways to subsequent enrollment in education or training" and provide 12 months of followup services and tracking to graduates.

A variety of institutions and organizations could contribute to those trainings. Within the [Job Corps](#) program, DOL is [authorized](#) to "arrange for career and technical education and training of enrollees through local public or private educational agencies, career and technical educational institutions, technical institutes, or national service providers." The CCC should pursue a similar model, which would create the opportunity for local institutional partnerships and likely expand the scope of educational opportunities available to corpsmembers.

For partner corps receiving CCC project grants, DOL should administer a separate new grant program funding training, skill certification, and career development services. Qualified corps could apply for supplemental funds to support activities and services like high school diploma/GED attainment, work-readiness skills, industry-recognized credentials, and transitional support and job readiness for corpsmembers entering the workforce. Rep. Wilson's [Youth Corps Act](#) provides an example of how to structure such a grant.

In addition to training, the CCC should look for opportunities to create real pathways to long-term employment. For example, for two years after completion of service, Public Land Corps members are eligible to use a noncompetitive hiring status for



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consideration when applying to competitive service positions. CCC legislation should standardize that benefit across all national service programs. And, as laid out in the next subsection, the CCC should build paths into union jobs.

### **5. Close Relationship with Organized Labor**

Whenever possible, the CCC should provide training that qualifies the Corps as a pre-apprenticeship program able to serve as a pathway to union membership. Pre-apprenticeships teach basic skills that prepare enrollees for apprenticeships, which in turn offer paid hands-on experience for workers entering technically complex careers. Existing national service programs already meet many of the pre-apprenticeship requirements by providing opportunities for disadvantaged individuals, access to support services that help members remain in the program, and hands-on experience. To be recognized as a pre-apprenticeship, a corps would also need to conform its training to industry standards and partner with one or more apprenticeship programs.

The appropriate pathway for the Corps to serve as a pre-apprenticeship program would vary based on the form of CCC deployment. In the federally managed Corps, Congress should stipulate that administrators must connect with relevant apprenticeship programs near each CCC campus or worksite. Under the distributed model, grants could be structured to encourage corps to provide labor- and industry-approved training and form partnerships with union apprenticeship programs. The Corps program could also provide financial incentives to those union chapters offering apprenticeships to partner with corps programs. Given its role in regulating and building apprenticeships, DOL could provide key advisory and oversight support.

As the CCC should provide clear pathways into union jobs, it must also take care not to set corpsmembers in competition with unions for contracts. The Biden administration should ensure that the CCC is focusing on additive projects and filling market gaps, instead of replacing union labor at existing worksites or in new opportunities. To achieve this, President Biden and Congress should prioritize bold investments in ambitious climate action that will put billions of dollars into funding new climate solutions around the country. Corps labor can then work alongside union labor to complete these projects, while corps also serve as an entry point for union membership.

Corps have successfully collaborated with local union partners in communities around the country. In Oakland, California, ten graduates of Civ Corps' Waste Management and Recycling Program go into apprenticeships with the Teamsters Local 70 and Machinists Local 1546 each year. Baltimore's Civic Works is working with the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) and The Corps Network to develop a pre-apprenticeship for NALP's registered apprenticeship program. Operation Fresh Start (OFS) in Madison, Wisconsin places about ten graduates each year into union jobs with their local Arborist and Carpentry unions, and union representatives provide occupational safety training to OFS members during their service term. These partnerships are still relatively rare, but with concerted program focus and increased public investment, the opportunities for scale are enormous. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to corps-union partnerships, so CCC administrators should help forge the collaboration that works best in each context with union locals and participating corps organizations.

President Biden has the opportunity to build the CCC as a complement to organized labor,



potentially engaging hundreds of thousands of new recruits on a clear path to well-paying union jobs. This is one of the ways a CCC could center organized labor's role in building the clean energy economy.

## 6. Support for Local Corps

Local corps across the country are already taking the lead on this work. As the federal government builds out its corps programs, it must be attuned to how best to support these partners. While these programs should be supported under any structure for implementing the CCC, the grant program model in particular would rely on partner corps' capacity to quickly grow to scale and build the market for new projects. But byzantine and ungenerous funding streams currently limit corps organizations' capacity to handle new members at the scale needed. To address those constraints, Congress should incorporate feedback from corps organizations on how federal funding programs can be streamlined and made more effective.

For example, corps often have difficulty growing and taking on new members because federal grants do not cover all—or, in many cases, even the majority—of the cost of hosting national service program members. The CCC must make real changes to how corps grants operate in terms of matching requirements, limits against partnering with the private sector for fee-for-service contracts, inadequate funding to cover living wages for corpsmembers, and other considerations. Otherwise, efforts to expand national service will be hamstrung by fundraising issues for the groups actually putting boots on the ground. These reforms should both inform the new CCC's design and lead to greater flexibility within existing programs.

## 7. Working with Communities

The CCC program also provides a great opportunity to invest in community-level capacity building. The local organizations and agencies in low-income communities hardest hit by climate disasters and most in need of mitigation measures don't always have the staff capacity or expertise to develop climate-related project proposals. In order to ensure corps resources are equitably distributed, the CCC must empower these community stakeholders.

To develop a plan for addressing these gaps, Congress should look to the Obama administration's short-lived Resilience AmeriCorps. The program targeted communities that had recently been hit by a natural disaster and, in [partnership](#) with the Rockefeller Foundation, offered trainings to build resiliency expertise among those who would then receive AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers. Resources like the [Resilience AmeriCorps Academy](#) should be expanded, updated, and widely disseminated in hard-hit areas. Congress can set aside funding for these trainings and leverage other such programs from across the federal government to identify and reach out to low-resource, high-need areas.

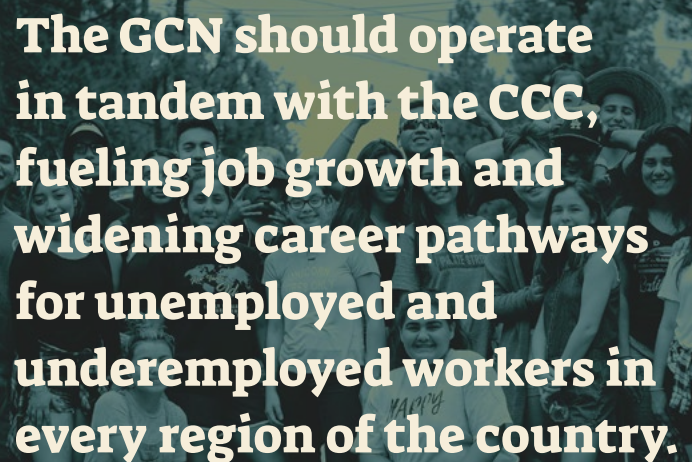
A new CCC must also acknowledge the [long history](#) of governmental projects in low-income communities of color carried out against residents' wishes; these injustices cannot be repeated. The CCC must prioritize projects developed in partnership with local stakeholders and it must be built centrally around a process through which community members can raise concerns as projects are conducted. Accountability and inclusion are key, and proactively pursuing justice can ensure that the CCC is an unalloyed good for every community it touches.

## II. Green Careers Network

The Civilian Climate Corps will mobilize a surge in the short-term labor supply for climate solutions throughout the country. But the transition to a clean energy economy will require many millions of stable, long-term careers. In both job creation and climate impact, the CCC is therefore necessarily only the tip of the iceberg. Establishing a Green Careers Network (GCN) offers an approach to linking a Climate Corps to the intentional creation of permanent jobs. The GCN should operate in tandem with the CCC, fueling job growth and widening career pathways for unemployed and underemployed workers in every region of the country. Recent Civilian Climate Corps graduates should be presented with clear career ladders into professions relating to their work as corpsmembers. And a strong organized labor presence can cut across all of these initiatives, connecting prospective apprentices and union members with the networks that will secure long-term job security.

The GCN as articulated here is meant to open pathways into climate jobs for workers at any stage of their career. For youth and recent college graduates, the GCN would make accessible the technical training courses needed to work in climate-relevant industries. Ambitious job creation and retention initiatives, tied to training programs where appropriate, should benefit mid-career workers and the unemployed. While many of these programs will be geared toward deploying clean energy, tackling the climate crisis will also require more care workers, disaster responders, and emergency managers. The GCN should support all of these paths.

The GCN should be built from a combination of new and existing workforce development programs. Given that distributed design, the Network's primary function should be to provide a central hub, collecting resources for unemployed and underemployed Americans interested in climate-relevant industries. The two-step path to launching a robust GCN, therefore, is 1) a comprehensive push for expanded workforce development programs and 2) the creation of a user-friendly clearinghouse backed by robust staffing to support workers and recent graduates in navigating those resources. DOL should be responsible for building that site and managing the support team that will ensure the GCN's accessibility. The remainder of this section describes how President Biden and Congress can build this comprehensive push through a combination of existing and new workforce development initiatives.



**The GCN should operate in tandem with the CCC, fueling job growth and widening career pathways for unemployed and underemployed workers in every region of the country.**

## A. Boosting Existing Workforce Development Programs

The Biden administration could build much of the GCN from existing programs that support and train new workers. The White House should identify those initiatives that can best help workers enter climate careers, and the agencies running those programs should then determine how they can prioritize support for climate-related jobs. DOL and the Department of Education (DOEd) will be critical here.

The DOL is especially well-suited to carry out GCN's mission—the agency's Employment and Training Administration oversees apprenticeship programs, runs the Job Corps, and administers a variety of other training and grant programs that can steer workers toward climate careers. The Department of Indian and Native American Programs, Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities Initiative, and layoff/major closure grants should also support employment and training activities for vulnerable and underserved communities in need of aid.

DOEd runs a similarly diverse set of programs geared toward workforce development. For example, the Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program, the Traditionally Underserved Populations grant program, and the Projects with Industry program provide vocational training and career readiness services. These can all supplement the spectrum of DOL programs comprising the GCN's offerings.

These initiatives constituting GCN should reorient their missions to emphasize climate-related career pathways. For example, only three Job Corps career centers—in New York, New Mexico, and Puerto Rico—offer training for solar PV and thermal system installers.

Local Workforce Councils guide curriculum development for each career center; Job Corps leaders can encourage those administrators to pursue PV and thermal system trainings in regions where solar power is especially widespread. At the same time, DOEd may be able to target grant and scholarship resources like the Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program to financially support students training for careers in environmental sciences and engineering. The Biden administration should closely oversee this reorientation, coordinating agency action to build a robust Green Careers Network and climate jobs pipeline.

While legislative action is not essential to using these initiatives for climate-related work, Congress could also more fundamentally modify these programs to center climate change in their work. For example, the eligibility threshold for layoff/major closure grants could be lowered for former fossil fuel workers, and the fossil fuel industry could be subject to a more flexible interpretation of the industry-wide layoffs option. GCN legislation should also tailor financial aid offerings for students preparing for climate-related careers. Congress should find more opportunities to incorporate a broad scope of reforms, including increased appropriations where needed, to build a robust support system from programs with a proven track record.

## B. Creating New Workforce Development Programs

In addition to refocusing and expanding existing programs, the White House should work with Congress on a comprehensive package of new climate workforce development initiatives. Numerous public policy proposals already call for robust climate-led investment in

green jobs, including the [THRIVE Agenda](#), the BlueGreen Alliance’s [Solidarity for Climate Action](#), and the [Evergreen Action Plan](#). The full scope of climate workforce development policies can be broadly grouped into three categories: investing in job creation, strengthening labor standards, and training workers for sustainable careers.

### 1. Investing in Job Creation

President Biden’s pledged \$2 trillion investment in climate action will help create millions of jobs in the clean energy economy. [The Evergreen Action Plan](#) lays out an economy-wide agenda for climate investments, and in March 2021, Evergreen Action and DFP released a ‘Clean Jumpstart 2021’ [report](#) detailing where federal lawmakers should invest in clean energy economic recovery. A few highlights include:

- **Clean Energy**

[Expanding federal incentives](#) for clean energy generation, including the long-term extension of the Renewable Energy Investment Tax Credit and Renewable Energy Production Tax Credit, tied with labor standards, to drive the ambitious deployment of clean energy and support the technological innovations driving ongoing cost reductions.

- **Advanced Infrastructure & Buildings**

Implementing a suite of policies to bring American infrastructure into the 21st century, including [rebuilding and maintaining](#) drinking water systems, [upgrading](#) public transit offerings nationwide, and [retrofitting](#) the national housing stock to increase energy efficiency and cut down on household emissions.

- **Manufacturing**

[Establishing](#) a new Advanced Energy Manufacturing Tax Credit to incentivize

investment and growth in domestic manufacturing capacity for clean energy industries, such as wind turbines, electric vehicles, and advanced batteries. Boosting subsidies for low-carbon manufactured products, including electric vehicles - such as through a ‘[Clean Cars for Clunkers](#)’ program - would support that initiative.


- **Conservation**

[Preserving and restoring](#) federal lands by directing funds to the massive backlog of public lands projects, including a \$12 billion maintenance shortfall for the National Parks Service.

- **Environmental Remediation**

Creating a [Re-Power Fund](#) to invest in bottom-up, locally-driven economic diversification and workforce development, and a [Restoration Fund](#) to direct investment towards activities including orphan well clean-up and pollution remediation. And increasing investment in [Superfund cleanup and brownfield redevelopment](#) to help especially revitalize polluted urban environments.

In addition to providing opportunities to workers just beginning their green careers, these programs will also create jobs for mid-career unemployed and underemployed workers. DOL Secretary Marty Walsh [has noted](#) that the clean energy economic transition will increase demand for skilled union labor, saying of a dislocated pipefitter, “That pipefitter will be connecting steam. That pipefitter will have opportunities in that economy.” Federal investments can create millions of new jobs for union workers, so that “that laborer, that operator, that teamster, that carpenter, that plumber, all of those different trades and skills that people have in this country will have great opportunity in this new economy as we move forward.”



# Any plan to create millions of stable, good-paying jobs must include provisions strengthening labor standards.

## 2. Strengthening Labor Standards

Any plan to create millions of stable, good-paying jobs must include provisions strengthening labor standards. The BlueGreen Alliance has [called for](#) a comprehensive package of such standards, including “prevailing wages, safety and health protections, project labor agreements, community benefit agreements, local hire, and other provisions and practices that prioritize improving training, working conditions, and project benefits.”

President Biden can make immediate progress by rolling back the Trump administration’s assaults on workers’ rights. DOL should prioritize [raising the threshold](#) below which workers are automatically entitled to overtime pay, ensuring that [employers are accountable](#) for workplace protections, and directing the Occupational Health and Safety Administration to [protect essential workers](#) from COVID-19. The National Labor Relations Board must take further action, [restoring workers’ rights](#) to form unions and engage in collective bargaining.

Congress should likewise move to bolster labor standards and worker protections. Lawmakers recently introduced several proposals on both a sector-specific and economy-wide basis. Sen. Tammy Duckworth introduced a policy package in the [Marshall Plan for Coal Country Act](#), which strengthens the social safety net for former coal miners and aims to stabilize coal communities’ economies. Sen. Jeff Merkley’s [Good Jobs for 21st Century Energy Act](#) provides significant financial incentives to firms that end mandatory arbitration, establish prevailing wage requirements, and more. At a much broader scale, the [PRO Act](#) would lower barriers to labor organizing and collective bargaining, a critical step to ensure that workers are able to effectively organize in clean energy sectors with [low unionization rates](#). Securing accessible pathways to good-paying, stable climate careers must mean implementing such standards for workers throughout the economy.

### 3. Training for Sustainable Careers

Because the Green Careers Network is designed for workers at every stage of their career, it should include robust provisions for job training programs. Crucially, such training opportunities must also be tied to work opportunities; it would do little good to train a class of photovoltaic panel installers without backing that training with a plan to boost demand for solar jobs. Again, a great number of such programs have been proposed. These include:

- A partnership between federal lawmakers, labor unions, building owners and managers, and the U.S. Green Building Council to create a national energy efficiency training program for building operations and maintenance staff.
- Former Rep. Susan Davis' (D-CA) National Apprenticeship Act, which would dramatically expand federal authority to support and promote apprenticeship programs.

- Sen. Ed Markey's (D-MA) Offshore Wind Jobs and Opportunity Act, which exemplifies a form of workforce development grants that would build out the climate workforce while supporting organized labor.
- Rep. Bobby Rush's (D-IL) Blue Collar to Green Collar Jobs Development Act of 2019, which seeks to improve training for jobs in clean energy-related industries and provide grants to pay the wages of employees receiving mid-career training for those jobs.

Each of these efforts offers a prototype for truly scaled national initiatives. The clean energy economy will engage the labor of millions of Americans in every economic sector. Through a sweeping set of workforce development programs, the Green Careers Network will ensure that those workers are engaged quickly and fairly.



# III. Climate Workforce Council

Every federal agency will have a role to play in decarbonizing the American economy. To fully meet the challenges of the clean economy transition, President Biden must proactively engage these agencies within a nationwide mobilization. An interagency Climate Workforce Council (CWC) directed under the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) should coordinate partners at every level of government, serving as a hub for the Biden White House to direct the nationwide deployment of the CCC and GCN.

Interagency cooperation for corps initiatives has already proven effective. The New Deal's CCC brought DOI, USDA, DOL, and the Army into partnership with local governments to recruit, train, and deploy corpsmembers. More recently, the Obama administration briefly ran Resilience AmeriCorps as a collaboration between DOE, NOAA, EPA, and CEQ. Though the initiative was cut short when President Obama left office, Resilience AmeriCorps successfully placed AmeriCorps VISTA members in 30 communities around the country.

Similarly, the Climate Workforce Council should oversee and guide the implementation of the Civilian Climate Corps and Green Careers Network. President Biden could direct CEQ to convene the CWC. Alternatively, Congress can create a more durable council enshrined in law—Sen. Durbin's RENEW Conservation Corps Act offers an example of how such a council could be established through a memorandum of understanding among its member agencies.

The new Council would include representation from national service programs, departments that support community and economic development, and every agency with initiatives relating to climate mitigation and resilience. A CWC would bring together explicitly environmental agencies, including the DOI, DOE, and EPA, with departments well-positioned to guide and benefit from the CCC, like the Army Corps of Engineers, HUD, and DOI's Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Council should also engage key stakeholders, including organized labor leaders, for their input in guiding the CCC and GCN's deployment.

The Council should first be tasked with developing a roadmap for federal mobilization of a national climate workforce. That work necessarily includes targeting key funding streams that can feed into the CCC and GCN, identifying federal programs that can engage corps labor (e.g. deploying corpsmembers to perform retrofits under DOE's Weatherization Assistance Program), compiling a set of existing workforce development programs able to support climate career transitions, and setting ambitious goals—around resiliency projects, renewable energy generation, building electrification, habitat restoration, and much more—to define success for a future initiative. Following an initial development stage, the Council would support effective implementation of this roadmap for the CCC and GCN by assisting in the identification and funding of project-level work, helping to develop career pathways to good union jobs, engaging local community stakeholders, and tracking and reporting on participant and project outcomes.

The CWC must center equity and justice at every stage of the labor mobilization's development and deployment. During the roadmapping phase, the Council would further build on the progress made in recent decades by establishing formal principles of inclusion and equity to guide the initiative. As an overseeing authority, this Council can also consistently maintain system-wide compliance with the core principles outlined within this paper, to effectively realize the public values at the heart of this new program. Constructively engaging underrepresented and underserved communities must also be a guiding priority throughout program design and implementation.

Climate jobs are already proliferating at a rapid clip. The Climate Workforce Council would further focus these efforts to accelerate this emerging boom in sustainable careers, while also broadening access to ensure that historically underserved and vulnerable populations can access these good-paying jobs. President Biden has called for an all-of-government mobilization to address the climate crisis, and a CWC can serve as the administration's coordinating hub to advance that core goal.





# Conclusion

Even as climate change poses an existential challenge to the U.S. economy, it also represents an unprecedented opportunity to rebuild the fabric of our communities, creating millions of family-sustaining jobs in the work of eliminating carbon pollution. This unifying national priority can also lift up underserved communities and support new pathways into stable middle class employment for those historically denied access and opportunity. By kickstarting a national climate labor mobilization, President Biden can help ensure that the clean energy economy achieves climate sustainability, social equity, and inclusion.

Launching a Civilian Climate Corps should be a signature initiative of the Biden administration's climate plan. Building on the strong precedent of the highly successful and enduringly popular programs of the New Deal era, a new CCC would demonstrate tangibly how government can work for people by putting 1.5 million corpsmembers to work on decarbonization and resilience. Further, by paying a living wage and providing healthcare, child support stipends, and other benefits to its members, the Corps could support hundreds of thousands of households in need during this time of economic dislocation and transition. And through the implementation of three complementary initiatives—a grant program, a direct employment program, and more robust offerings in existing national service corps—President Biden can ensure that the Corps reaches the ambitious scale laid out here.

Building on the CCC's momentum, a new Green Careers Network would take an economy-wide approach to building stable and long-term

careers in climate-related industries. Workers in many economic sectors, in every region of the country, and at every stage of their career should see opportunities for work in the emerging clean economy. By investing in job creation, strengthening labor standards, and building workforce training opportunities, this GCN would holistically support workers and local communities. Navigating America's sustained progress toward a zero-carbon economy will hinge on the type of pro-worker policies offered by an effective GCN.

Finally, President Biden can convene a Climate Workforce Council to effectively coordinate these many initiatives in an all-of-government mobilization. Interagency cooperation is critical to the success of both the CCC and the GCN, and the Biden administration should play an active role in overseeing the rollout of their component pieces, backed by the full support of the White House's bully pulpit and the unwavering political support of the Office of the President.

Ambitious climate action can create millions of good-paying jobs across the country. The Biden administration will have the opportunity to drive that growth by training and deploying the next generation of climate workers. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, a national effort to train and employ climate labor can meaningfully reshape the American economy for the better. Through the proposals laid out within this paper, President Biden and Congress can ensure that a 100% clean energy economy offers new pathways into stable middle class jobs for all American families. This is the time to come together as a nation and get to work building a better future.

