

A Summary of EPN's All-Hands Meeting  
“Opportunities for Collaboration Between Unions and EPA in the Just Transition  
to a Clean Energy Economy”  
Friday, December 18, 2020

Former BlueGreen Alliance Executive Directors David Foster and Kim Glas led a conversation on how collaboration between Unions and EPA could pave a just transition to a clean energy economy. Bios for David, Kim, and EPN member Ellen Kurlansky, who provided introductions, are below.

With the incoming Biden administration committed to addressing climate change by investing in clean energy infrastructure, there is an opportunity to increase green union jobs. To prevent this opportunity from coming at the expense of workers in communities reliant on fossil fuel employment, it is crucial for the labor unions and career staff in federal agencies to work together.

At the Department of Energy (DOE), David Foster worked within the agency to create a DOE-Labor Working Group that addressed how evolving energy markets impacted the energy labor market. DOE's partnership was built off of the work of Foster and Kim Glas at BlueGreen Alliance, where they facilitated dialogue between environmental stakeholders, union leaders, and policymakers. The Working Group used DOE's technical expertise to assist labor training organizations and prepare them for jobs in burgeoning energy markets. This model can be copied by EPA, as it tightens regulations on polluting technologies and expedites the job shift from conventional to clean energy sources.

Although EPA's work inherently protects workers from pollution and toxic exposure, the agency is often portrayed as a deterrent to a healthy job market. More intentional collaboration with labor groups can dispel such theories while building support for various EPA regulations. EPA can also use this opportunity to localize the benefits of its rules, including potential job creation in specific regions. These will flow from water infrastructure (drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater management systems), energy-efficiency or Energy Star, green technology manufacturing, as well as Superfund site reclamation and clean/green transportation. Many of these will need a redesign to address climate change—creating more opportunities for greener infrastructure and new jobs. Kim Glas stressed the importance of valuing communications as well as data. She stressed communicating with affected communities about both the work being done and jobs created—an example being the linkage between Iron Range workers in Minnesota and replacing pipes in Pittsburgh.

When the Biden administration takes office on January 20, it will need a large coalition of support to successfully pursue its climate agenda. This coalition will undoubtedly have to include the labor groups that will most likely benefit from clean energy infrastructure and be harmed by regulations on polluting industries. DOE's Labor Working Group provides insight into how EPA and other federal agencies can repair relationships with workers while simultaneously strengthening vital regulations and drawing down carbon emissions on the way to a clean energy future.

The impetus of realizing this vision will fall to Gina McCarthy, Biden's choice for domestic climate czar. David and Kim emphasized the importance of her new political team and the heads of the relevant agencies working with career staff to be successful.

## **Presenters**

**David Foster** is currently a Distinguished Associate at the Energy Futures Initiative. He formerly served as Senior Advisor to U.S. Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz from 2014-2017 on energy, environment, climate, economic development, workforce development, and labor relations issues. Prior to the Department of Energy, Foster served as the founding Executive Director of the BlueGreen Alliance (BGA), a strategic partnership of 14 of America's most important unions and environmental organizations, with a combined membership of 14.5 million. Before joining BGA, he worked with the 13-state Midwest Region of the United States Steelworkers Union.

**Kim Glas** has over 20 years of experience in government policy development and advocacy. Her multi-faceted career includes spearheading manufacturing and trade policy efforts on Capitol Hill, serving as a key leader on behalf of the textile industry in the Obama administration, and leading a non-profit organization working to advance critical policies to grow quality U.S. jobs in the clean energy economy. Most recently, she served as Executive Director of the BlueGreen Alliance, a non-profit partnership of labor unions and environmental organizations.

**Ellen Kurlansky** is a former Air Policy Analyst and Advisor at EPA's Office of Air and Radiation, and acted as senior leadership on the development of the Obama administration's MATS rule and the Clean Power Plan. At EPN, she has been a leading contributor to the Economics Team.