Energy Policy

North America's Building Trades Unions believe a modern U.S. energy policy should embrace an “all of the above” power production strategy - one that does not pick winners and losers. The policy should also promote self-reliant North American oil and gas production capacity and utilization. This approach will result in economic prosperity, enhanced domestic energy security, and robust job creation. Our dependence on foreign supplies of oil and gas, along with the threat of global climate change, exemplifies the need for a comprehensive U.S. energy policy which benefits our domestic economy.

Our nation must promote cutting edge, domestically-developed, and domestically-sourced clean energy technologies. We should embrace the utilization of our natural resources through support of environmentally-friendly innovation.

Historically, energy legislation is ushered through Congress as a bipartisan, comprehensive bill built on compromise. But with the current hyper-partisanship on Capitol Hill, the prospect of a comprehensive bill is dim. Rather, it is more probable smaller energy bills, which package together a limited number of issues by a narrow veto proof majority, will pass through Congress and be sent to the White House.

Given the possibility of such wide-ranging legislation moving through Congress, representatives of North America’s Building Trades Unions met in 2014, and approved an Energy Policy Statement aimed at addressing the numerous energy issues affecting Building Trades’ members. Many of those issues are addressed below, along with current proposals NABTU is supporting.

Building Trades members are urged to contact their elected officials and ask them to:

CONTINUE TO SUPPORT KEYSTONE XL – North America’s Building Trades Unions believe the time for study and deliberation is over. We support the Keystone XL pipeline, which will be constructed under a project labor agreement, and we call for its immediate permit approval. On September 19, 2008, TransCanada submitted its permit application to the U.S. State Department to build the pipeline. Despite years of environmental and economic study and review, legal proceedings, the project has not yet been approved. Over 40,000 jobs will be created while infusing approximately $2.053 billion[1] in wages into the economy.

HYDRAULIC FRACTURING – As we develop our natural resources, production must be done safely and in an environmentally responsible manner. This should include the strategic deployment of a highly-skilled workforce and the utilization of project labor agreements, which provide the best opportunities to train local workers through our joint apprenticeship and training committees. In addition to the local employment benefits associated with hydraulic fracturing, we believe there needs to be strong regional regulation and transparency of the chemical ingredients used in the fracking process as well as well thought out standards related to well site construction and activities.

[1] Department of State, Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, Appendix O – Socioeconomics, pp. 25

SUPPORT CARBON CAPTURE AND SEQUESTRATION – Carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) is the only known way for Carbon Dioxide (CO2) emitting power plants to remove carbon from the flue stream. The Building Trades supports legislation and government support of efforts to promote research, development and deployment of CCS technology. Equally important, is the need for fair and expedient permitting of projects, proper insurance underwriting and domestic sourcing of technology and materials needed to make CCS a reality.

SUPPORT COAL ASH REUSE – The final coal combustion residuals (CCRs or coal ash) rule was finalized in December 2014. The rule regulates CCRs as a non-hazardous waste. It is possible that the EPA may still decide to revise the new CCR rule and attempt to regulate coal ash as hazardous waste. This uncertainty and its potential to undermine the beneficial reuse industry and adversely affect coal-fired power plants, continues to be a major concern on Capitol Hill. Further, a legislative solution will give more certainty for the hundreds of thousands whose jobs depend on this industry.

Although passed by the House of Representatives in the last Congress, coal ash legislation authorizing states to adopt and implement coal combustion residual CCR permit programs and requiring the inspection of surface impoundment structures was not considered in the United States Senate.

It is expected that the 114th Congress will consider coal ash legislation. Although the legislation has not been formally introduced, it is expected to be similar to the House-passed version championed by Congressman David McKinley. The Building Trades have been supportive of these legislation efforts. We must address the need to ensure coal ash is stored and disposed of in an environmentally responsible manner, while also allowing for beneficial reuse, and safeguarding jobs. Such legislation would allow for states to move forward with their regulatory mechanisms while the federal government provides a backstop.

SUPPORT NUCLEAR POWER – The Building Trades will continue to work with Congress and the administration to resolve our nation's long-term nuclear waste storage issues. We echo the urgency expressed by the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future that a long term storage facility for high level radioactive waste must be developed. The Building Trades also believes there needs to be a functioning Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), coupled with thoughtful legislation and regulations which support the expansion of nuclear power.

SUPPORT RENEWABLES AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY – In today's construction sector, skilled craft workers are constructing new energy-efficient buildings while retrofitting older, less efficient ones. Many Building Trades affiliates are investing their own private monies in new training modules associated with alternative energy and energy efficiency in order to prepare the next generation of skilled craft workers.

MECHANICAL INSULATION – The Building Trades support incentives for increased mechanical insulation as part of an all-of-the-above energy policy. Mechanical insulation is a proven energy efficiency technology that saves energy, and generates environmental and economic benefits.

Greater utilization of mechanical insulation will generate significant energy savings for industrial and commercial facilities, which in turn makes our economy more competitive and creates jobs for our skilled craft professionals. The most cost-effective and cleanest energy source is energy that is conserved, and congressional tax reform efforts should include tax incentives for mechanical insulation.