

Testimony Before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
in a hearing entitled
21st Century Communities: Capitalizing on Opportunities in the Clean Energy Economy

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Chairman Brown and Ranking Member Toomey, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I live near Texarkana, Arkansas and I am a member of Pipeliners Local Union 798. Local 798 is a trade union with more than 7,000 members, including skilled welders. I have been a welder for 25 years and have traveled throughout the United States to work on energy pipeline infrastructure. Being from a rural area of our country, opportunities are limited. I spent 2 Honorable years in the U.S. Army and after that I've been serving my country providing the energy that has built us into the super power we are today.

Although it's an honor to speak with you, I have to admit, I'd rather be working. This time of year is the beginning of pipeline construction season. Like other industries in this country, pipeline construction suffered through 2020 because of COVID. Many projects were cancelled so we were looking forward to 2021 and the chance to be back working. Right now, over 88% of my Local Union members are out of work and have been for some time now.

I was lucky enough to be involved in the early stages of Keystone XL oil pipeline and had been working on the pipeline in Nebraska at the start of this year. But all that ended on January 20th when President Biden shut it down. His decision caused more than 1,000 union workers to lose their jobs and prevented thousands more from getting jobs this year. These are good union jobs. To have a project of this magnitude canceled is devastating. It's hurting a lot of workers, a lot of families, and a lot of communities. We've got members of my Local Union who have been out of work for months, many of them for over a year now. They could have benefitted from the jobs created by Keystone XL, matter of fact, the environment would have benefitted from Keystone XL. The members of my Union feel like pawns in a chess game. We delivered the low energy prices that the public wanted, now it seems we're being sacrificed for a Green Experiment at the taxpayers' expense.

In my case, I was laid off three hours after President Biden took office. I never dreamed my own President would put me out of work building a pipeline that would've transported oil that's already coming into the country by rail. And to make matters worse he proclaimed that doing so was some major environmental victory when, in fact, it was just the opposite. What do I mean by that? It's simply safer, cleaner, and more environmentally friendly to transport oil by pipeline than it is by rail.

The Biden administration seems to think these Keystone pipeline jobs were just “temporary jobs” and so the impact of destroying them is not that bad. They don’t seem to understand that a lot of careers in this country rely on temporary projects, especially careers in pipeline construction. A carpenter doesn’t spend his whole career on the same house. A lawyer doesn’t spend his whole career with the same client. The Keystone XL was our house to build this year, it was our client. The effects of cancelling this project will be far reaching, not only for the workers but I also believe it will have negative effects on future projects that provide the reliable energy this country needs. I am very concerned by the Biden Administration’s attacks on the energy industry as a whole. In addition to cancelling Keystone, President Biden has banned new oil and gas leases on federal lands, both onshore and offshore. That’s going to kill tens of thousands of jobs, not just in the energy industry, but in other sectors indirectly supported by the energy industry.

According to John Kerry, workers who lose their jobs because of the Biden administration’s policies should just go find jobs in Green Energy. Mr. Kerry and others seem to think construction workers don’t have a particular set of skills and that if you work construction then you can do any construction job, like building wind farms and installing solar panels. That’s an insult to me and every other blue collar worker in this country. My fellow Union members and I didn’t go to college to learn to do what we do, but that doesn’t mean we didn’t spend years and years training on the job to advance ourselves to earn the wages that we do today.

Telling us to go find entirely new Green Energy jobs is like telling a lawyer there aren’t going to be any more attorneys in this country, so you go be a dentist. Just because you’re a professional doesn’t mean you can work in any profession. What Mr. Kerry and others are telling us is that we’ve got to start all over in something we know absolutely nothing about. I’ve spent 25 years in my trade and when jobs are available, I’m compensated accordingly. Starting over in another field means you’ll start at entry level positions with entry level pay. That’s not an option for someone with mortgage payments, kids to raise, and health coverage to provide.

You’ll never hear me complain about a private company’s right to develop Green Energy. But I don’t believe the government should be destroying the right of a private company, like a pipeline developer, to upgrade our reliable energy infrastructure and putting Americans out of work in the process. In my view, there’s just no justification for that.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my experience and perspective. I look forward to answering any questions you have, matter of fact, I want my elected leaders to give me the tough questions and I beg you to. It’s the only way to find solutions and perhaps some common ground.