



# LOCAL UNION No. 77

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers



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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you all today. My name is Mike Brown and I am the Assistant Business Manager of IBEW Local 77 in Spokane, WA. I am a Journeyman Lineman by trade. IBEW 77 is a labor organization that represents workers in the Utility and the Utility Construction industry. Our membership is approximately 8,300 members across all of Washington and Northern Idaho. Today, I would like to speak on the topic of the workforce regarding electrification and fossil fuel policies.

I am a Journeyman Lineman and I have been a part of the trade and the IBEW since 2005. I have worked all across the United States, building and maintaining the electric grid when it comes to Transmission and Distribution power lines. I am aware that there is a desire to move towards a more electric future and phase out of natural gas and other fossil fuels. Everyone needs to be aware of these topics and strive to be good stewards of our environment, however we need to be educated on exactly what that will take.

The trade of working on High Voltage power lines is not to be taken lightly. Please imagine working energized lines that range from 120 volts to voltages of 230,000 volts, 345,000 volts, and 500,000 volts. As Lineman, we were taught that we don't have erasers on the pencils we use, one mistake, and your dead. We take this seriously and this is not something that just anyone can do.

Part of the education piece missing is that when we start to phase into more heat pumps, more electric appliances, and equipment, and charging stations, it will require more electricity. This will need to come from a grid that is old and reaching its limits. There are parts of the transmission and substation systems that are running at nearly maxed out capacities. This will require us to build more transmission lines, substations, and even rebuild our distribution system all the way to the meter in some cases. All of this work will need to be done by Lineman and qualified substation workers.

Our trade started going into a labor shortage in or around 2015. This was because a large part of the workforce is from the baby boomer generation. Now, let's stack this new ask and demand on top of that labor shortage. We literally are seeing retirements faster than we can train and make Journeyman. Even when we do hire and train someone, after an apprentice becomes a Journeyman, they are leaving the Northwest, and heading to California for work. Similar projects are going in California, but the income in California is far greater. A Lineman in California can make anywhere

from \$200,000 per year, to \$350,000 per year. That is hard to compete with. Recently a statistic came out from California. There are approximately 200,000 Lineman in the United States. If every single one of them went to Northern California to staff all of the work scheduled, it would still take over 10 years to get all of the work done.

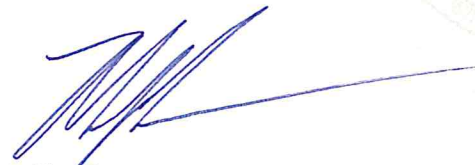
These projects just don't start tomorrow either. A lot of transmission projects can take nearly 15 years to start. This is after all of the design, engineering, permitting, is complete. For instance, there is a new transmission line from Boardman, OR to Southwestern Idaho that will begin in 2023. It will be a 290-mile line that will be energized to 500,000 volts. This project has taken over 15 years to get to the point where it is today. I think it is important that we address the issues of climate change. But I also believe we need to be educated in how we are going to do it. Knowing the current state and future challenges of the workforce is part of this education. I have witnessed some legislators on the record say that all we need is to have the political courage. I am sorry, but that approach will put us and the citizens in a compromised situation, as well as our energy system.

In all of the drafting of policy why hasn't the workforce been included? One thing is for certain, WE WILL NOT COMPROMISE OUR SAFETY AND TRAINING to accomplish arbitrary and aggressive timelines. In 1891 when the IBEW was founded, 1 out of 2 Lineman were killed on the job. We are not interested in moving backwards when it comes to our safety and training. We will not stand for policy changes that will compromise our safety in order to staff timelines.

As leaders who work on boards, committees, and the legislature, we have a duty to serve those people in our communities. They are trusting that we are accounting for everything when we make decisions on policies and legislation. We need to do a better job when it comes to our education on these topics.

Myself and IBEW 77, are available to answer any questions anyone may have at any time.

Respectfully Submitted,



Mike Brown  
Assistant Business Manager

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