

# Roundtable Conversation: Labor, Energy and Climate

## July 24, 2015



A Conversation on Labor, Energy and Climate was organized by the Clean Energy & Jobs Oakland Campaign of the Oakland Climate Action Coalition (OCAC) to engage the broader labor movement in the East Bay regarding community-based energy. It was a follow-up to a conversation on March 5<sup>th</sup> at the Local Clean Energy Alliance's Clean Power, Healthy Communities Conference.

### Participants/Attendee

The July 24 roundtable conversation drew 25 attendees. It drew union members and officials from across organized labor, from public service workers, nurses, warehouse workers, private sector services, and building trades. Other labor organizations included staff members of: Blue Green Alliance, Emerald Cities Collaborative, and US Labor Against the War

### Purpose/Goal

The goal of the roundtable discussion was to increase union understanding and support for the goals of the OCAC's Clean Energy & Jobs Oakland Campaign to promote local clean energy development and family-sustaining, clean energy jobs through *East Bay Community Energy*—Alameda County's emerging Community Choice energy program. This advocacy is part of the OCAC's effort to strengthen community resilience (in the face of climate change) through local control of our energy system.

Union support is crucial for advancing community-based clean energy development, especially given labor's strong political influence in the East Bay.

### Partner Organizations

The Clean Energy & Jobs Oakland Campaign partnered with the Climate Workers program of Movement Generation Justice and Ecology Project, the Emerald Cities Collaborative, and activists from a number of labor organizations to plan and facilitate the roundtable conversation.

### Program

The program began with participants sharing their personal and their union's concerns on climate change. Some felt the need to create space within their unions to address climate issues. We then introduced the Oakland Climate Action Coalition's work to strengthen *community resilience*<sup>1</sup>, with a focus on community-based renewable energy as an important community resilience strategy.

This was followed by a broader discussion of how workers are impacted by a transition to renewable energy and what a *just transition*<sup>2</sup> would look like. Whether we have a just transition depends on the movement we build for a fair and sustainable shift from a fossil fuel economy to a life-supporting economy. We discussed the current fossil fuel based corporate economic model vs. the vision of a more participatory and sustainable economic model, and where the concept of *energy democracy*<sup>3</sup> fits in.

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<sup>1</sup> **Community Resilience** is the ability of a community to meet human needs and guarantee human rights, sustainably and equitably, and thrive even with the impacts of climate change.

<sup>2</sup> **Just Transition** is a transition from the extractive fossil-fuel economy to a regenerative renewable energy economy, one in which working people, low-income communities, and communities of color are the architects and beneficiaries of the transition rather than the victims of economic dislocation.

<sup>3</sup> **Energy Democracy** means taking control of energy away from the corporate energy establishment and putting it under public or community control—a key aspect of just transition to a renewable energy economy grounded in social and economic justice.

The conversation circled back to the opportunity of a *Community Choice energy*<sup>4</sup> program in the East Bay. The East Bay Clean Power Alliance is advocating for a program that emphasizes the development of local renewable energy resources and the creation of local clean energy jobs in Alameda County. Community Choice could also provide community benefits such as low and stable energy rates, reductions in greenhouse gases and local pollution, in addition to the creation of good family supporting jobs.

### Outcomes

The principle outcome of the Labor Workshop was union participants' interest in continuing the conversation and further exploring challenges and questions that came up in the discussion. We were not able to answer all questions or address all concerns in such a limited timeframe, but there was strong interest in working collectively to bring this conversation more directly to unions and providing the space to continue this conversation.

### Follow-up

Clean Energy & Jobs Oakland is seeking to build a broad constituency of union organizations who see climate change as a union issue, and more broadly as an issue for all working people. We are hoping to engage unions one-on-one, both those that were represented at the roundtable conversation, as well as those that could not participate. We hope to provide a toolkit for educating union members on these issues and collaborate with unions wanting to take action on energy and climate issues, hopefully as supporters of Clean Energy & Jobs Oakland and as members of the East Bay Clean Power Alliance.

### Currently Available Resources

- [East Bay Clean Power Alliance Brochure](#)
- [Community Choice and Union Jobs](#) (one-page handout)
- [East Bay Community Choice Energy: from Concept to Implementation](#) (in-depth 34-page report)
- [Community Choice: Economic Development Clean Energy & Jobs](#) (two-page handout)
- [Promoting a Labor Friendly Community Choice Program](#)
- [This is What Energy Democracy Looks Like](#) (video)
- [Community Choice, Community Power](#) (video)

For unions that are interested in joining the East Bay Community Choice energy initiative, we will do presentations for membership, executive boards, or other bodies within your union. Please direct any inquiries about the campaign or presentations on clean energy and labor to:

Jessica Tovar at [jessica@baylocalize.org](mailto:jessica@baylocalize.org)

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<sup>4</sup> *Community Choice Energy* provides a community-based alternative to investor-owned utilities (like PG&E) by creating a public agency that gives local communities the power to choose where our electricity comes from, who owns it, who controls it, and for whose benefit.