



PRESS RELEASE

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Four-state coalition unveils blueprint to “reimagine Appalachia” with a new deal that works for us

50+ groups outline policies to create a 21st century economy that's good for workers, communities, and the environment

Policy Matters Ohio joined a broad and diverse coalition of thought leaders and organizations from West Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Ohio today to [release a policy blueprint](#). By expanding economic opportunity while reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the blueprint outlines a vision for vibrant Appalachian communities where everyone is paid enough to support themselves and their family, where future generations can put down roots, where they have clean air to breathe and water to drink, whether they are white, Black, Brown or Indigenous.

“The economy comes down to people working, buying and selling. People are the economy. What’s good for people is good for the economy,” said Hannah Halbert, executive director of Policy Matters Ohio. “Right now, our nation is facing unprecedented challenges with the COVID epidemic, a deep economic downturn, extreme inequality, racism, police brutality and the consequences of a changing climate. We’re seeing what happens when powerful corporations use their wealth and influence to direct our public resources into their pockets through tax breaks and tax cuts, depriving our communities of important assets, like the public health infrastructure we need to stay safe and healthy.”

The “New Deal that Works for Us” is built on three pillars:

1. Expanding opportunity through public investments: Creating good jobs that provide a future for all working people, including former coal workers, and regardless of the color of their skin, ethnic background or gender.
2. Building a 21st century sustainable economy: Putting people to work modernizing the electric grid, growing clean and efficient manufacturing, building a sustainable transportation system, repairing damage from the last century, and relaunching the Civilian Conservation Corps for “carbon farming” purposes.
3. Making sure all working people share in prosperity by growing unions and raising wages throughout the economy, ensuring universal health and child care, and promoting local ownership in the region

Halbert said the blueprint can present opportunities for Ohioans working in extraction industries, which have been hit hard by the downturn. The most recent data show the number of Ohio jobs in mining and logging has declined nearly 16% over the year, to about 10,000.

Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institute with offices in Cleveland and Columbus.

The jobs projected to grow fastest in Southeast Ohio -- and statewide -- are in the service sector, according to the Ohio Department of Job and Family services. The top employer seeking workers in the region was Dollar General, according to the state job posting site, OhioMeansJobs.gov. Many of these jobs don't pay people enough to make ends meet, Halbert said.

"In 2017, during the longest period of economic expansion in our nation's history, the poverty rate in Appalachian Ohio was 17.2%, 17.8% in Appalachian W.VA., 13.3% in Appalachian Pennsylvania and 25.6% in Appalachian Kentucky," she said. "Despite some improvement, last Friday's state-level June jobs report showed that our region has lost more than one out every 10 jobs since February. The federal government needs to jumpstart our economy with federal infrastructure investments."

The coalition to Reimagine Appalachia, was born out of a broad recognition that years of policies pushed by absentee corporations and their politicians have created an economy that doesn't work for most people living in the Ohio River Valley. There continues to be a desperate need for family-sustaining jobs in communities of all sizes. This is especially true because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has hamstrung already-struggling local economies in the region, while limited federal assistance to families is set to run out. However, COVID adds to existing economic pain in the region.

Appalachia has long provided the raw materials for the prosperity of the nation, while the region itself has suffered high rates of poverty and unemployment, and low wages. Bad actors in the extractive industries have also left our land scarred, and our workers and neighbors sick, particularly our neighbors of color.

In response, a group of economic, environmental, and community leaders, along with grassroots organizations came together to brainstorm the best pathway to a 21st century economy that's good for workers, communities, and the environment.

"By gathering ideas and input from groups around the region, we're building a vision for where we want to go and identifying the steps necessary to get us from here to there," said Ashley Spalding, research director for Kentucky Center for Economic Policy. "We just need to get federal policymakers to commit the resources."

Endorsements for the blueprint come from a diverse array of organizations representing the voices of residents across four states in the Ohio River Valley, and are listed in the blueprint itself.

"Federal policymakers are designing stimulus packages and we are on the brink of an election. Now is the time to amplify our voices to ensure the people of Appalachia have a say in how our region rebuilds," said Stephen Herzenberg, economist and executive director of the Keystone Research Center. "Appalachia needs to be at the table for national climate change conversations, or we'll be on the menu."

In the coming months, the coalition will roll out a series of white papers fleshing out the details of the framework. During that period, it continues to seek additional input and support from interested stakeholders, union leaders, grassroots and grassroots organizations, thought leaders, and elected officials. The Reimagine Appalachia coalition will build the vision of a 21st century Appalachia and then work together to make that vision a reality.

Get more information on the coalition website here:

<https://reimagineappalachia.org/>