

EXECUTIVE ACTIONS FOR IMMEDIATE COVID RELIEF AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY VIA THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY

The Tennessee Valley Authority was established in the 1930s by a federal mandate to bring flood relief, economic stimulus and improved quality of life to the people of the Tennessee Valley. Today, TVA employs roughly twenty thousand annual and contract workers, serves 10 million people across seven states, and retains a unique ability to address the devastating economic hardship resulting from COVID-19. Communities in the region are suffering from unstable employment, systemic household energy burden and rapidly growing COVID infection rates that exacerbate problems like energy insecurity. TVA can be directed to implement immediate actions for COVID relief that will contribute to economic growth and shared prosperity for working people in the Tennessee Valley.

PRECEDENT FOR EXECUTIVE ORDERS

In August of 2020, President Trump [issued an Executive Order](#) to prevent TVA from outsourcing more than 200, well-paying IT jobs to an outside company in the middle of the pandemic. Along with this Executive Order, Trump removed two TVA board members and threatened to continue removing directors until the demands in the Executive Order had been met. According to TVA's federal mandate, TVA board members are nominated and can be removed by the President of the United States. The Executive Order strategy demonstrated successfully by Trump can be replicated by President-elect Biden to accomplish the recommended actions listed below.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- 1. President-elect Biden should instruct the TVA board to issue a moratorium on utility shut-offs during the pandemic, track utility bill arrears at Local Power Companies, and mandate a minimum 12-month electric bill repayment plan for ratepayers.**

Why: As a direct result of COVID-19, working families throughout the Tennessee Valley have suffered from job lay-offs, furloughs, reduced hours and reduced income, making it difficult or impossible to pay for essential utility services. [Tennessee's 211 data](#) shows that the number of calls for utility bill assistance between March 1 and December 31, 2020 were 73% higher than the same period in 2019. While TVA has taken steps to support communities during the pandemic, including the introduction of a pandemic relief bill credit for Local Power Companies (LPCs), there has been no accompanying moratorium to ensure that our region's most vulnerable populations have electricity access. The TVA Board of Directors is the primary regulator of the region's 153 local power companies and is empowered in section 10 of the [TVA Act](#) to "provide for such rules and regulations as...may be necessary or desirable for carrying out the purposes of [the] Act," purposes which include "advancing the social and economic welfare of the residents of the Tennessee Valley region." Indeed, that very justification was used by the TVA Board in 2014 to enact revisions to LPC [Service Practice Standards](#) and [Rate Review Standards](#). TVA can mandate a shutoff moratorium, arrearage reporting and a minimum 12 month debt repayment plan requirement at LPCs to protect struggling families during these unprecedented times.

2. President-elect Biden should instruct the TVA board to rapidly expand programs and incentives for residential and commercial energy efficiency as part of an economic recovery plan to support working people in the Tennessee Valley.

Why: Energy efficiency comprises only 2% of TVA's energy portfolio despite the outstanding need in the Tennessee Valley, where low-income communities live with some of the [highest energy burdens](#) in the U.S. Expanding TVA's energy efficiency portfolio would improve quality of life for Valley residents through more affordable energy bills, lower risk of shutoffs, and safer and more comfortable homes, while also [creating jobs](#) for skilled workers. The [design and implementation](#) of these programs is critical to creating high-quality jobs and ensuring low-income households can access services. Bundling together energy efficiency projects for single- and multi-family housing (especially for low-income households) and commercial sites can help create the scale and scope of work necessary to build career pathways from pre-apprenticeship to journey-level work. TVA [depends on](#) skilled tradespeople who complete rigorous apprenticeship training, and grouping contracts for different kinds of efficiency work would create jobs and training opportunities. Expanding [on-bill tariff](#) programs for residential and small commercial energy efficiency is an important way to finance these improvements and increase access to energy efficiency as part of an equitable economic recovery.

3. President-elect Biden should strengthen TVA's commitment to workers by instructing the TVA board to stop outsourcing and utilizing contractors to replace full time employees, and ensure key safety protocols to protect workers handling coal ash.

Why: In 2020, TVA initiated a plan to outsource more than 200 high-quality, public jobs, which was prevented in the final hour by an Executive Order from the current administration. TVA executives may again try to outsource these or other jobs without action from the incoming administration. In addition, TVA has greatly expanded the use of contractors with no job security or benefits to perform the work of full time union employees in direct violation of their mandate to provide secure, long term employment in the region. There are related concerns about the protections afforded to contract workers who were exposed to toxins cleaning up the 2008 Kingston coal ash disaster. Affected families and other advocates in the region are pushing for stronger requirements for personal protective equipment and site management to safeguard coal ash workers. TVA will finalize its coal ash management plan at multiple TVA fossil plants in the coming months and years. At the Allen fossil plant site in Memphis, coal ash removal is estimated to create 8 years of work for handlers. Strong health and safety standards are necessary to protect these workers.

4. The next administration should work with regional advocates to nominate board members that represent labor, economic and environmental justice communities in the Tennessee Valley and share a clear commitment to TVA's goals for economic development.

Why: TVA's federal mandate directs the President to consider recommendations from labor unions, and environmental, civic, and service organizations in making nominations

for the TVA board. Historically, advocates and other stakeholders in the region have had limited influence over TVA board nominees, and most directors have lacked adequate experience in the energy industry or in the sectors named above. President-elect Biden has made a commitment to have his cabinet and staff represent the diversity of people in the U.S. Similarly, we ask the Administration to work with regional advocates to nominate board members that represent people in the region and who can speak to the three priority areas of labor, economic, and environmental justice. President-elect Biden has the opportunity to construct and influence a representative TVA board that can model action to address climate change in a way that uplifts workers and communities.

Signed by:

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Engineering Association, IFPTE Local 1937
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