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June 2, 2014

STATEMENT OF UTILITY WORKERS UNION OF AMERICA, AFL-CIO CONCERNING PROPOSED EPA RULES ON CARBON EMISSIONS FROM EXISTING POWER PLANTS

The roughly 50,000 members of the Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA)—including thousands of employees at coal-fired power plants—have a vital interest in the proposed rules announced today by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) addressing carbon emissions from existing power plants.

Whatever form they ultimately take, EPA's rules must ensure that grid reliability is maintained, and that displaced workers and affected communities are not left stranded in the wake of this sea change in national energy policy.

As last winter's polar vortex proved, the only way to ensure there is enough reliable power to fuel the nation is to follow President Obama's "all of the above" energy strategy. That means cost-effective, environmentally efficient and much needed coal-fired facilities must continue to play a key role in keeping the lights on in every American home and business.

EPA and other federal agencies must also make certain that these rules are not seized upon as an opportunity to manipulate markets and put reliability at risk through unnecessary and rushed plant retirements.

All state implementation plans under these rules must include funding mechanisms to assist workers adversely affected by the shift to a lower carbon energy economy; to expand economic development programs to assist communities responding to plant closures or downsizing; and to support other elements of the clean energy transition, such as deployment of carbon capture and sequestration technologies.

"The bottom line is that America's workers must come out ahead and the electric grid must be strengthened," said D. Michael Langford, National President of the Utility Workers Union of America. "The steps we take today and over the next few months must ensure that workers and communities are able to navigate this transition as smoothly as possible, and the infrastructure is put in place to ensure reliability of the grid. That means investing in infrastructure, minimizing disruption, and that affected workers and their communities receive direct support through wages, benefits, training, and education. Transitional assistance for stranded workers and communities is fair and smart, as it will foster new economic development strategies to replace lost tax revenues, and help to ensure that good jobs and the skills needed to compete in a 21st Century economy are readily available."