

## The Myth of Job Loss and Fossil Fuel Divestment

### Introduction:

Many caring people express concern that fossil fuel divestment might cause the loss of jobs. It is right to be concerned if an action you are involved in could cause the loss of jobs. There are three things you should know about this:

First, fossil fuel divestment will not directly lead to the loss of jobs. Divestment is an important symbolic act to align our investments with our values. It also helps to shape public debate on energy policy and climate change.

Second, as the world decarbonizes – as it must, to address climate change – the fossil fuel industry itself is eliminating jobs. At the same time, many more new jobs are being created in renewable energy that are safer and pay more.

Third, failure to cut carbon emissions now will cause the loss of millions more jobs, as well as homes, and farms, and entire communities all over the world. Events in Syria have shown us that climate change can contribute to crop failures, civil unrest, terrorism, and the massive movement of people. And, even though these events are far away, they are costing each of us as we invest more and more in fighting terrorism and respond to the refugee crisis.

### Background on Fossil Fuel and Renewable Energy Jobs:

Let's begin with the perspective of a person of faith, named Robin who lives and works in coal country.

“The truth here is that the coal industry - by using primarily mountaintop removal coal mining - is actually in job reduction mode and has been for a decade or more. “

“The jobs argument - coming from fossil fuel moguls - is a false one; it started as a very effective PR campaign, and has spread to the point where nearly the whole country is brainwashed into thinking it is true. It's very similar to the argument some people make about immigrants coming to this country and "taking our jobs". Take it from someone who not only lives in West Virginia but also works with people who are directly affected by fossil fuel extraction, what we need in Central Appalachia, (and the whole country) is “job” and economic diversification with a focus on maintaining the clean air, water and soil that we still have.”

Robin goes on to talk about the heavy toll both coal and gas mining have taken and her fear of the devastation spreading to where she lives.

“Gas & Coal extraction are destroying the water, air and soil of this region; we fear increased devastation from the impending development of the

"Rogersville" shale field which is a very deep, but potentially an oil and gas rich source rock extending from approximately Berea, KY (south of Lexington), to Charleston, WV, intersecting many other rural areas, and towns, such as Huntington, WV - where I live and primarily work."

She also appeals to leaders to switch to "just" and renewable energy jobs.

"We need "just" jobs here in Central Appalachia, which do not include fossil fuel industry jobs. I think this might be true in many other parts of the country where fossil fuel extraction is dominating economies. The transition from fossil fuel economic and energy control to an economy based on renewable energy production and economic diversity may have its challenges, but it is not only possible, but necessary and urgent that we embark on that transition as soon as possible."

We have an industry that is already losing jobs because of its chosen method of extraction, competition from natural gas and regulation of its emissions. This is what experts predict will also happen with oil and natural gas. As their carbon emissions are taxed and regulated their use will decline and jobs will be lost.

There is *good news about renewable energy jobs* according to research compiled by the Citizens Climate Lobby. There are already more green jobs, which includes renewable energy jobs than in the fossil fuel industry and more are predicted to be created that will pay better and be safer.

"In 2012, there were a total of 137,650 permanent coal-related jobs nationwide<sup>1</sup>, and 806,831 oil and gas jobs as of 2011<sup>2</sup>. By contrast, there were 3,401,279 green jobs in 2011<sup>3</sup>. The Department of Energy predicts using conservative estimates that by 2030 there will be over half a million wind jobs alone<sup>4</sup>."

"The overall job story is that renewable energy will provide more and higher paying jobs, with more diverse opportunities<sup>5</sup>. This is because \$1 million dollars worth of oil and natural gas output directly creates 0.8 jobs, and \$1 million of coal produces 1.9 jobs. Compare that to building retrofits for energy efficiency (7 jobs per million), mass transit services (11 jobs), building the smart grid (4.3), wind (4.6), solar (5.4), and biomass power generation (7.4)<sup>6</sup>."

"The green economy already supports more jobs than the fossil fuel economy, and has for years, even though renewable energy accounts for only 11.98% of our domestically produced energy<sup>7</sup>."

According to Citizens Climate Lobby, "The writing is on the wall: the key to creating American jobs now and in the future is not investment in fossil fuels, but it is investment in the green economy."

And there is more good news according to Robin, which highlights that the job transition has begun.

“There is so much demand for solar panels in West Virginia that there aren’t enough installers to keep up. The Coalfield Development Corporation has a solar installation trainer that actively recruits and trains solar installers, hoping to double the number in West Virginia by the end of October.”

**Conclusion:**

The jobs transition away from fossil fuel jobs to renewable energy and green jobs has already started, and displaced workers are getting better paying and safer jobs. This is occurring because the world is decarbonizing in response to climate change impacts; fossil fuel emissions are being regulated; and natural gas is cheap.

In spite of this, the loss of any job is painful and affects family and others in the community. Many of us have had this awful experience and know that even the opportunity to start another job is not easy and the pain is not quickly forgotten. We as a church must be sympathetic and caring, and help people in the industry in our communities to make the transition. We care deeply about all our neighbors, those already suffering from climate disruption and all those that will in the future as well as for our neighbors who lose their jobs as the world transitions to a cleaner smarter and safer ways of producing energy. We pray for wisdom and justice for all involved in this transition.

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- 1 US Department of Labor: [Mine Safety and Health at a Glance](#). June 30, 2013.
  - 2 Josh Wright. [“A Broader Look at America’s Fossil Fuels Jobs Boom”](#). Mar 16, 2012. Blog Post. Economic Modeling Specialists International. Last accessed: 7-21-14.
  - 3 US Department of Labor: [Bureau of Labor Statistics. Employment in Green Goods and Services 2011](#). March 19, 2013.
  - 4 [“20% Wind Energy by 2030: Increasing Wind Energy’s Contribution to U.S. Electricity Supply.”](#) July, 2008. US Department of Energy. p. 209.
  - 5 Martin, Scott. [“Green jobs pay better as clean-tech sector booms”](#). Published: 7/13/2011. USA Today. Last accessed 7-21-14.
  - 6 Robertson, Joseph. [“Building a Green Economy”](#) 2010. The Citizens Climate Lobby. p. 18.
  - 7 US Energy Information Administration. [“Electric Power Monthly”](#). April 2013. Last Accessed: 7-21-14.