

The Sierra Club's Michael Brune: United we stand for solutions

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Michael Brune is executive director of the Sierra Club.

When workers began protesting Governor Scott Walker's attempt to bust the public employee unions in Wisconsin, I was proud to say that the Sierra Club stands firmly behind the right to organize and bargain collectively.

By now it's obvious that Walker's anti-union efforts, like so many recent assaults on the right of people to protect their livelihoods through collective bargaining, were paid for by the same corporate interests that are bankrolling the attacks on our nation's environmental policies. In Wisconsin and beyond, people with no regard for clean water, air, or public health (including the Koch brothers) are pouring the money they made from dirty fossil fuels into an all-out attempt to put our nation permanently in the control of the privileged few.

But this isn't just a matter of standing shoulder to shoulder against a common foe. As environmentalists, we know that real solutions to our energy and environmental challenges have to include American workers. To build a robust clean-energy economy will require putting millions of people to work in new jobs, right here in the U.S. The [Blue-Green Alliance](#) [1] between "tree huggers" and "hard hats" is based on the recognition that those jobs are the key to both a prosperous middle class and a healthy environment.

When Tea Party governors (including the Wisconsin's Scott Walker) start making it a point of honor to oppose job-creating projects like high-speed rail that would help end our dependence on oil, their message couldn't be clearer: Forget about the future. Forget about innovation. And forget about generating new jobs. Ask them how we can solve the big challenges facing this country -- whether it's air pollution or unemployment -- and they either pretend the problems don't exist or demand that we double down on the same policies that created them.

Well, the problems do exist, but what's more important to acknowledge is that solutions exist, too. The green investments made by the Recovery Act created or saved nearly one million jobs in this country -- and that investment will keep paying dividends for decades as Americans reap the environmental and clean-energy benefits. Stronger air-pollution standards like the ones for industrial boilers that the EPA announced this month will prevent thousands of heart attacks and asthma cases. [Stopping 150 coal-fired power plants](#) [2] means cleaner air and safer drinking water, but it also translates into jobs for the workers who'll build and run the clean-energy power we use instead.

All these solutions have two things in common: Jobs with a future for American workers and a healthy, prosperous, clean-energy future for the American people. Standing in our way, though, are corporate polluters and their allies. They will use all the influence and power they can command to undermine essential environmental, health, and worker safeguards. The protesters in the streets of Madison and other state capitals have raised their voices to say "enough is enough."

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Links:

[1] <http://www.bluegreenalliance.org/>

[2] <http://www.sierraclub.org/coal/150plants/>