

# APPALACHIA'S BRIGHT FUTURE



## WORKING TOGETHER TO SHAPE A JUST TRANSITION >>>>

**Eastern Kentucky's economy is changing fast, and our future is unwritten.** We believe we have the opportunity to move forward together, to build a new economy here in the mountains—a diverse, homegrown economy good for all people.

For more than 100 years, Appalachian coal fueled America: the steel mills, auto plants and growing cities that birthed the country we have today. For decades, our region's workers and communities have both benefitted from and borne the costs of being one of the largest coal producers in the country.

The Appalachian region is now experiencing a dramatic transition. Changes in the economics of Appalachian coal and other fossil fuels cast a spotlight on an economy in trouble. Coal production and employment are in steep decline and will continue to drop for years to come. In the last 18 months alone, 6,000 coal jobs have been lost.

**Yet we can and must shape our story and the transition toward a brighter future.**

We believe it's essential that the transition to the new economy is a just transition—one that celebrates our culture and invests in communities and workers who depended on the old economy. We have many assets here. Our goal is to develop opportunities for our people, for eastern Kentucky, to thrive.

We can generate new jobs, new businesses, and new opportunities for the workers, families and young people of eastern Kentucky. It won't be easy, but we can have a bright future here, if we build it.

“I was excited to hear our elected leaders so eager to listen and learn from the vision and ideas expressed by people living in eastern Kentucky. I sincerely hope that this process will welcome the participation of people of all ages and generations. My generation right now is already showing leadership and vision. We are the folks who will be at the forefront of this region for decades to come. We need to be included from the very beginning.”



—Elizabeth Sanders, Letcher County

## PRINCIPLES OF A JUST ECONOMIC TRANSITION FOR APPALACHIA >>>>

KFTC members believe that a just transition is possible, even in the midst of rapid changes in the coal industry, and that such a transition must:

- Improve the quality of life for people and communities affected by economic disruption, environmental damage, and inequality
- Foster inclusion, participation and collaboration
- Generate good, stable, meaningful jobs & broad access to opportunities & benefits
- Promote innovation, self-reliance, and broadly held local wealth
- Protect and restore public health and our environment
- Respect the past while also strengthening communities and culture
- Consider the effects of decisions on future generations

A bright future depends on strong community and political involvement: grassroots leaders, local residents, workers, public officials, and enterprises willing to envision another way forward.

**In the following pages, we offer pathways & voices for a just transition.**

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# TOWARD AN APPALACHIAN TRANSITION POLICY PLATFORM > > >

A just transition for workers and communities in eastern Kentucky will take leadership, long-term investment, and the efforts of many determined, creative people working together. Government won't solve every problem; all of us have important roles to play. But public policies and investments are a powerful tool, and effective leadership from elected officials and community leaders will be an essential part of our success as a region.

Below are a set of public policies and positions that can be a part of building a bright future in eastern Kentucky, and across our commonwealth.

- 1 Create a new eastern Kentucky planning and development body that is inclusive and diverse to gather public input**, shape regional development strategies, and make investment decisions.
- 2 Establish a long-term fund to invest in regional economic development strategies by setting aside a portion of annual severance tax revenues.** Empower the regional planning body to invest these funds in key strategies and projects.
- 3 Evaluate development ideas and proposals based on key criteria, and turn away ideas that worsen inequality, environmental conditions, or perceptions of cronyism.** For example: does it create broad public benefit & opportunities, does it reduce leakage from our local economy & build on local assets, does it build local capacity & wealth, does it improve local economic & environmental conditions, does it create jobs for local residents rather than those outside the region, does it reduce inequality, does it promote innovation?

- 4 Increase investment in training and support for laid-off coal miners and their families** and support the growth of worker co-ops and worker-owned small businesses.
- 5 Invest money from the Abandoned Mine Lands Fund in a large-scale effort to create hundreds of good jobs by restoring eastern Kentucky's degraded land and streams.**
- 6 Accelerate the growth of promising sectors (including local food systems, energy-efficient affordable housing, land and stream restoration, arts and culture, tourism, and renewable energy)** by adopting public policies needed to grow those efforts to scale.

A great place to start would be to establish a revolving loan fund to expand access to energy-efficient upgrades that can pay for themselves and create good jobs across the region.

- 7 Support state and federal energy efficiency and renewable energy standards** that have a proven record of driving private investment, creating new jobs, saving customers money and energy, and creating positive economic ripple effects in 30 states, including Ohio and North Carolina.

“ I'm more excited about the future than I have been since I got back home. I believe that right now, we have the best chance we've had in decades to build a new economy here in eastern Kentucky. We have the chance to create thousands of new jobs in energy efficiency, in renewable energy production, in land restoration, and a rebirth of small-scale agriculture. ”

—Bev May, nurse practitioner from Floyd County



“ I'm working every day—along with thousands of other Kentuckians—to build a better future here in eastern Kentucky and across Appalachia so that my grandchildren and their children can make a future here. We believe we can have a bright future here with more and better jobs, safe and affordable energy, healthy communities and opportunities for our kids. Of course, we know it won't be easy. It will take hard work, creativity, and investment in new ideas and real solutions. More than anything, it will require honest leadership with vision and courage. ”

—Carl Shoupe, retired coal miner from Harlan County



- 8 **Develop and support local leadership (including programs for youth, entrepreneurs, education and nonprofit leaders)** by providing high-quality training programs, fellowships and other leadership experiences, access to capital, marketing and networking assistance, and more.
- 9 **Support and enforce policies to protect the quality of our air, land and water, and improve public health.** It's time to recognize the economic and health benefits of clean air and water and support passage of environmental rules aimed at protecting our most precious asset – our health.
- 10 **Restore civic trust by eliminating corruption,** cronyism and the tendency by those in power to use their public positions to benefit themselves and other well-connected individuals.
- 11 **Support progressive tax reform** at the state and national levels to increase investment in education, infrastructure, worker training, health care and other programs that make our communities good places to live and work
- 12 **Reweave our social safety net** by increasing support for programs that sustain people and families in times of need (including food stamps, health care and housing support) and programs that make it possible for people to improve their quality of life (including increased minimum wage, Pell Grants, child care assistance, early childhood programs, and access to affordable health care).
- 13 **Commit to ongoing, rigorous improvements to K-12 education in Kentucky,** including increased funding, renewed efforts to address inequality in funding, funding for quality preschool, wrap-around services for students in need, curriculum reform, and upgrades to teacher training and professional development.
- 14 **Support and invest in efforts to improve public health and address the many serious health conditions facing Kentuckians.** This includes supporting implementation of the Affordable Care Act in Kentucky, expanding access to high quality substance abuse and mental health treatment, investing in wellness programs and health education, and fully enforcing laws aimed at improving workplace safety and reducing toxic pollution.

“Folks, I’ll just tell you, for me, transition doesn’t start from the outside and work its way in. It starts in my community of Hippo. It starts in Lynch, starts in Harlan, starts in all these small communities...We’ve got to get back to where we’re supporting our neighbors for who they are, not what industry they work for, not what they’re doing. Once we unify our voice, then we can start going to our city governments or county governments, state, federal, and we can say, ‘Hey, look at what we’re doing. You can either get on board or get out of the way, because we’re moving.’”



—Todd Howard, Floyd County farmer

## PROCESS MATTERS >>>>

To build a bright future in eastern Kentucky, we need public leaders who encourage collaboration, reduce polarization, and create a process that allows for meaningful public participation from people from all walks of life and perspectives. It’s especially important to encourage the leadership of young people, women, the unemployed and underemployed in this conversation. We can’t afford for their voices to go unheard when decisions are being made about the future of our region.

To have a lasting impact, we need more than a one-time opportunity for the public to express our hopes and concerns. We need an ongoing, meaningful and inclusive public process aimed at shaping a shared vision, identifying key strategies, and informing investment decisions.

“In times of economic transition, process really, really matters.”

Brendan Smith, former cod fisherman, at KFTC’s Appalachia’s Bright Future conference, April 2013



# TRANSITION STORIES > > > >

Martin Richards, Community Farm Alliance executive director & former tobacco farmer:



“By the 1990s, Kentucky’s tobacco farming families were coming to a real crisis point as tobacco’s future and profitability were increasingly uncertain. Tensions were

running high. Fear was leading people to blame the FDA, the federal government, the tobacco industry, outsiders. The general public and politicians, even in Kentucky, were labeling tobacco as environmentally bad and bad for people’s health, all of which is true. And yet, even when the whole world seemed against us, tobacco farmers and their communities still clung to tobacco. It was that culture of tobacco that created their communities. I think people were more afraid of losing their communities than losing their tobacco. There is something about, whether it is tobacco farming or coal mining, there is a bond between people who are working hard side by side in harsh conditions.... Making great change, especially in public policy, often happens incrementally. But there are many times when there is a moment when change can happen dramatically. For Kentucky’s tobacco communities, that occurred in 1998 when the tobacco companies were forced to repay the states for Medicare costs associated with smoking.... One of the things that CFA members and others advocated for was that a significant portion of the money, in this case 35 percent, go directly to communities, and.... county councils were actually able to plan and use that money for the best way possible within that community. The state board was able to use a similar pot of money to work across county lines that would benefit multiple counties. Since 2001, there has been almost \$400 million spent creating a future beyond tobacco.”

Wahleah Johns, a member of the Navajo tribe and a leader in the Black Mesa Water Coalition in Arizona:



“In my backyard we’ve seen two large coal strip mines provide electricity and water for the entire Southwest, such as Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Tucson. These are big cities that my lands have helped build. And has it really benefited us? That’s the question that we talk about a lot. And we’re trying to bring justice and fairness to our communities.... So when you have an infrastructure like that

and you’re talking about just transition, something that will impact everybody... what does that look like?... Right now we’re looking at some of the lands that have gone through mining, reclamation lands, to do a demonstration solar project.... A lot of times with these projects, people just lease their land, that’s it, and they get funds back. But we’re trying to restructure so that our communities and families are benefiting and that, in the long run, they can sell green power.... I think those are the opportunities that communities within the energy system that are so connected to the gridlines – those are the solutions that aren’t coming from anywhere else.”

Oysterman & former cod fisherman Brendan Smith on the Atlantic fisheries:



“If it swam, I fished it. And I loved the job. It was great money. I loved being at sea for three months at a time. Being in the belly of a boat with 13 guys on 30-hour shifts. There was just nothing like it.... I loved feeding the country – it was a big part of the identity. And I loved being grounded in this long history of generations, this fabric of maritime history. I loved the stories, I loved the

songs. And it just gave me a sense of meaning.... Then it all started to unravel. The cod stocks collapsed back in my home off the coast of Newfoundland.... And that was the beginning of the long-term fishing crisis.... Thousands of boats left beached. We were all thrown out of work. Mass migration of young people out of our villages. Drug use. The whole thing.... The failure of the transition wasn’t even on the economics and stuff like that. It was a political war. It became a class war, a cultural war, and it was ugly. So how do we avoid that?... This jobs versus the environment discussion, debate and frame is completely a false choice. We don’t have to do it that way.... In times of transition, process really, really matters. So many of the vicious breakdowns in my community had to do with the fact that so many decisions were made elsewhere.... and shoved down our throats.... Folks misunderstand the nature of the work.... Work has to be about so much more than making a paycheck.... Fishermen, coal miners, ironworkers – we’re just proud of building, feeding, powering this country, so just transition plans have to help us feed our family but also feed our souls.”

## GET INVOLVED > > > >

- Sign up to stay in the conversation about shaping a just transition at [www.kftc.org/eky](http://www.kftc.org/eky)
- Get involved in efforts across eastern Kentucky to strengthen our local economy. Contact KFTC organizer [sara@kftc.org](mailto:sara@kftc.org) or 606-276-9933 to learn more.
- Join Kentuckians For The Commonwealth at [www.kftc.org](http://www.kftc.org)



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