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PRO Act, Build Back Better will help build Alaska's future

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Alaska is approaching a once in a generation opportunity to create long-term job growth and a sustainable economy while making historical strides towards climate justice. We need jobs that align with community needs, are informed by local knowledge, and expand skill sets to create a stronger, more diversified economy. As we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, now is the time to focus on generating good, clean jobs that will ensure a healthy and prosperous future for our state.

Climate change is an existential crisis. We know that all too well in Alaska. The United States has set ambitious yet attainable goals in addressing climate change, and Alaska is uniquely positioned to lead in this effort.

Tackling climate change and creating jobs are inextricably linked. We need local workers who will build critical infrastructure that supports local communities and creates a stronger economy for generations to come. Alaska's workers will lay thousands of miles of transmission lines for a clean, modern, efficient, and resilient grid. They will cap abandoned wells, reclaim mines and stop methane leaks. They will build the charging infrastructure to support electric vehicles and marine vessels. They will design and create systems to capture green hydrogen to forge cleaner materials. And finally, our working people will upgrade and revitalize our airports, ports, highways and bridges, and water and sewage systems.

These jobs must be clean, good-paying, safe, middle-class, union jobs that can comfortably support a family. The Alaskans who fill these vital roles will be diverse and well-trained. Communities that are underserved by our current economy will benefit from these new sustainable jobs. The expansion of good, clean jobs will contribute to a more sustainable, equitable economy and a highly-skilled Alaskan workforce.

Recently, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal passed the House, leading to an enormous investment in Alaska. Now, the Build Back Better Bill sits before Congress, containing billions of dollars for Alaska. This is an unprecedented and much-needed investment in our future economy. In the

coming days, our elected leaders can play a vital role in the passage of this legislation.

According to a Data for Progress Poll conducted from Sept. 24 to Sept. 29, 66% of Alaskans support government investments in the public and private sector to promote the research and development of new technologies that reduce pollution and combat climate change. That poll also concluded that 81% of Alaskans said that it is very important to them that bills to address climate change create good middle-class jobs that can support a family. But like any other work, clean jobs are not inherently good jobs. Unionization rates in the solar and wind energy production industries are lower than utility workers. Employers in the industry routinely misclassify their workers as independent contractors, depriving workers of fair wages and benefits, saving costs at the workers' expense. Many of these jobs also come with an increased risk of exposure to on-the-job risks, such as natural disasters or biological hazards.

To make clean jobs good jobs, Alaska needs the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act. The PRO Act would remove the many stringent barriers workers face when organizing a union in the workplace. Unions are key to higher wages, safer working conditions, and a diverse, well-trained, and sustainable workforce. That Data for Progress poll also found that 55% of Alaskans have a favorable opinion of labor unions and 56% of Alaskans support the PRO Act.

As we transition into the post-pandemic period and our economy shifts, we know that we must seize this opportunity. Now is not the time to return to the status quo. We must make sure that Alaskans have a voice in the kind of jobs our communities need and that they have a continued voice in how those jobs will be sustained and grow. Alaskans have a unique perspective on what works for us, for our families, and for our climate. Let's make sure our voices are never silenced. Protect our ability to make clean energy jobs sustainable and protect our climate. Good, clean jobs are the path to a prosperous and vibrant future for Alaska. Importantly, high wages would remain in our economy — in restaurants, car and snowmachine dealerships, local tourism, and other small businesses that complement our most prominent industries. Simply put, it's a win-win for Alaska.

We thank our senators for their leadership on these issues and their service to Alaska, and we respectfully request they support the Build Back Better Bill and the PRO Act to ensure good, clean jobs for future generations of Alaskans.

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