Let’s All #ThankALineworker

By BRIAN L. WOLFF

During EEI 2021, our virtual industry gathering, a prominent theme emerged: the road to net zero will take more than clean energy technologies and policies. Achieving even-deeper carbon emission reductions across our sector—and extending our industry’s clean energy progress to other parts of the economy, like the transportation and industrial sectors—will require a skilled, diverse, innovative, and committed workforce.

The good news is that EEI’s member companies—America’s investor-owned electric companies—are building from a position of strength. Today, our industry boasts some of the most talented, caring, and dedicated workers anywhere.

On July 10, as we do each year, EEI will join our labor partners—the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), the Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA), and the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA)—in saluting one key component of our workforce, our nation’s nearly 75,000 dedicated and highly skilled lineworkers.

National Lineworker Appreciation Day honors the life and work of Henry Miller, the first president of IBEW, and celebrates the extraordinary service and skill of the men and women who literally serve on our industry’s front lines. Each day, lineworkers risk their lives to power our cities, communities, homes, and businesses, and to keep us all connected. Their jobs are critical to our industry, and their work is essential.

Lineworkers are among the first responders when storms and other disasters strike. And, over the past year, lineworkers have responded to the most active Atlantic hurricane season on record, as well as severe wildfires, a derecho, and dangerous winter storms—all while managing the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their work is often dangerous, and safety always comes first.

Lineworkers also play a critical role in maintaining and enhancing our nation’s energy grid. As EEI member companies continue to make record capital investments—investing $132.7 billion in 2020 alone—lineworkers are focused on building a cleaner and smarter energy grid to benefit customers.

To ensure we have the workforce we need both for today and tomorrow, EEI and our member companies are working with our labor partners to train the next generation of lineworkers. Jobs in our industry provide high-paying, stable, and, at times, life-changing career opportunities. (See p. 47 to learn how one EEI member company is helping to train future workers from underrepresented communities.)

Importantly, EEI member companies agreed last year to integrate their workforce development and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) priorities into one strategic initiative. In the last issue of EP, I shared how EEI’s member companies have created powerful momentum to carry forward our vision of advancing racial and social justice and DEI across our workforce and the communities we serve. (Read more about our DEI commitment on p. 10, and find more about DEI conversations at EEI 2021 on p. 28.)

As always, we are proud of our strong partnership with IBEW, UWUA, and NECA and of our work with organized labor to advance common priorities—especially building tomorrow’s workforce and instilling them with our industry’s culture of safety.

To our lineworkers—and to every worker in our industry—we say thank you. And, even more than our gratitude, we offer our continued commitment to work together to deliver America’s clean energy future. EP

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BRIAN L. WOLFF is executive vice president of public policy and external affairs at the Edison Electric Institute. 
@TheBrianWolff

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