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April 2008 | On Our Radar

Green For All

By Jessica Kraft

Since we reported on the idea in last year's Earth Day issue, "**green collar**" jobs, have generated quite the buzz. After cycling through the mainstream media and the blogosphere, the term is now common parlance among business leaders and community organizers who want to bring about a **New Green Deal**. It even got some play during the presidential campaign, with contenders on both sides of the aisle citing it as a way to end dependency on foreign oil, protect natural resources and reduce carbon emissions.



Green for All, a new advocacy group out of Oakland, CA, is the organization driving the discussion. According to director and environmental visionary Van Jones (author of last Earth Day's cover story), green collar workers are the labor force of the future — they'll be the ones weatherizing buildings, installing solar panels, servicing electric vehicles and building green rooftops. They'll be the local union members getting livable wages in positions that can't be outsourced to India. And if Green for All succeeds, this first generation of workers will come from today's impoverished inner cities. Their message is that the legacy of American inequality can be reversed through environmental innovation. "The green economy will simultaneously address our economic, ecological and moral crises," said Jones at a recent conference of green builders.

While serving as director of the **Ella Baker Center for Human Rights**, Jones, along with a coalition of groups including the **Apollo Alliance** and the **Center for American Progress**, lobbied congress and the Oakland City Council to establish a green jobs corps. Their efforts paid off. Last summer's massive federal energy bill included the **Green Jobs Act** providing \$125 million to train veterans, formerly incarcerated workers, at-risk youth and the urban poor for clean-tech occupations. Now Jones and his new organization need to hold Washington to its promise. Field director **Jeremy Hays** said that the Green Jobs Act has yet to be cemented into the 2009 federal budget. "We're going to keep on top of them until congress gives us a clear signal of an actual allocation."

But federal procrastination hasn't deterred the Green for All vision. Now that one act has passed, they're pressing lawmakers to fund another \$1 billion in national green jobs training by 2012 that will bring 250,000 workers out of poverty and boost green industries. In preparation, they're building a national network of green entrepreneurs, educators, union workers and government officials who are sharing best practices and getting technical assistance for the job training programs.

Since opening in March, Green for All has been responding to a deluge of

interest. "One minute we plugged in the fax machine," said Hays, "and the next minute we're standing in a pile of messages from community leaders and activists all wanting to work with us."

Early this month, Green for All is putting on "**The Dream Reborn**," a conference in Memphis commemorating the 40th anniversary of Martin Luther King's assassination. One of the conference's goals is to facilitate partnerships between labor, activists and communities of color. "The green economy is a complicated puzzle," remarked Hays. "Some people are banging away on job creation strategies and others are doing training programs, so we want to develop ways for people to talk to each other and create a community of practice that brings the green economy to the next level."

When the federal funds become available next year, Green for All will help manage a competitive grant process to determine allocations to various training programs. To stay informed and find out how you can get involved, visit greenforall.org.



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