



## What the Economy Needs Now Are Good, Green Jobs

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If a coalition of clean energy and social justice groups has its way, renewable energy will be something of a modern day gold rush, providing both clean energy and scores of stable living-wage jobs for urban and rural Americans. Climate change and declining fossil fuel deposits are igniting interest in renewable energy, and many see the possibility of an economic boom in the building and installation of wind turbines, solar panels and geothermal energy systems along with a blossoming industry in green buildings and retrofits.

Leaders of this new vision are calling for a "green economy" and are sponsoring a national day of action on Sept. 27 called "Green Jobs Now: A Day to Build the New Economy," which will feature events and grassroots actions in more than 500 cities in 48 states. Events range from community gardening and a "green and sexy extravaganza" in Chicago to "fruit gleaning" in Mount Shasta, Calif., and a sunflower harvest on former brownfields in Pittsburgh. Petitions collected at the events calling for federal investment in green jobs will be presented to legislators and both presidential candidates.

"Green jobs" are typically defined as "well-paid, career-track jobs that contribute directly to preserving or enhancing environmental quality," as Green For All's Web site says. "Like traditional blue-collar jobs, green-collar jobs range from low-skill, entry-level positions to high-skill, higher-paid jobs, and include opportunities for advancement in both skills and wages."

Movement leaders have great reason to be optimistic. One of the best things about green jobs is that they're domestic: Green jobs like installing solar panels, assembling wind turbines, cleaning up brownfields and weatherizing buildings can't be outsourced overseas or to Latin America. And rising fuel prices could make the manufacturing of solar panels, wind turbines and other renewable energy technology even more attractive in the United States.

"Right now we are importing wind turbines, which doesn't make sense," said Jeremy Hays, field director of the group Green For All, one of the organizers of the day of action. "They'd be cheaper and higher-quality if they were made in the U.S. With concentrated solar facilities, where you have lots of concrete and steel mirrors out in the desert, the cost-efficient strategy is actually building the manufacturing facility right next to where the plant will be because of the difficulty of transporting these huge half-pipe mirrors."

Hays noted that advocates lobby for labor provisions to be included in renewable energy and other "green" legislation on state and federal levels. In this way, green

jobs could potentially strengthen the United States' ailing organized labor movement and bring together union laborers and environmentalists -- historically often at odds in debates about logging, mining, power plants, heavy industry and the like.

This movement also provides an avenue for environmental justice tied with job creation in the nation's poorest and often most environmentally beleaguered communities. Green For All was co-founded in 2007 by [Majora Carter](#) of Sustainable South Bronx and celebrated Oakland activist and author [Van Jones](#) for just this purpose. The national group aims to replicate state-level efforts for green job training programs on the federal level, focusing on youth in minority and low-income communities. For example, in a Pittsburgh program run by the company Green Tech, low-income youth work clearing and cleaning brownfields and planting them with sunflowers, which are then harvested for biodiesel production.

Brownfield cleanup has also created many green jobs in Wisconsin, where an innovative nationally recognized initiative under the state Department of Natural Resources helps communities identify, test and clean up brownfields, in many cases building environmentally friendly structures, soccer fields, trails or community centers on the sites. About 13,000 sites have been cleaned up.

"These communities are doing infill; instead of going to the outskirts of suburbs and tearing up new land, this is re-using and cleaning up (already developed) land," said Andrew Savagian, outreach specialist for the department's remediation and redevelopment program. "They consider that part of their green effort. And more and more communities are looking at [LEED](#) certification, and trying to recycle materials, and trying to incorporate greener methods of cleanup -- like solar power to run instruments."

Green-collar enthusiasts aren't stopping there -- they are also calling on the federal government to help ignite change. Investing \$100 billion in green technologies and industries "would create four times more jobs than spending the same amount of money within the oil industry, and would reduce the unemployment rate to 4.4 percent over two years," according to a study released in September by the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst under commission by the Center for American Progress.

The report calls for \$50 billion in tax breaks, \$46 billion in direct government investment and \$4 billion in federal loan guarantees for private funders of green projects.

At least half the nation's states have laws requiring that a certain percent of energy be produced from renewable sources. And if or when the United States institutes federal greenhouse gas limits likely including a carbon cap and trade system, industry and municipalities will be forced to turn more to renewable energy.

"It's something that's been building for a while. Folks have been talking about the need to transition to a more stable economy," said Adi Nochur, an organizer with [1Sky](#), a national campaign to push for federal action on climate and green investment. "With the energy crisis it's not a matter of if we transition to a green economy; it's a matter of when."

The Renewable Energy Policy Project breaks down roughly how many jobs could be created per megawatt of different types of renewable energy. Solar could provide the most at 22 jobs per megawatt; manufacturing could provide 15; geothermal could provide 15 as well. Construction and installation of solar panels would be next at seven, followed by wind at six. A large wind turbine produces one to three megawatts, for example, so a large wind farm of such turbines could produce up to several hundred megawatts. Nationwide, the United States has about 4,000 megawatts of geothermal in development.

Various states and cities already have significant green job training programs and green building plans in the works. The sponsors of the Sept. 27 day of action and other environmental groups want a comprehensive green strategy on the federal level.

"There's definitely a lot of really great local initiatives happening around the country, but we need to see some accelerated attention from the federal government," said Nochur. "Until recently there hasn't really been a constituency that has been pushing for this in an organized way. Now there is really a lot of scope to take this issue forward and start connecting the dots."

The 1Sky campaign was launched in spring 2007 to bring together existing environmental, business, labor and policy groups along with scientists and community leaders to force the federal government to take "bold action by 2010," including: a moratorium on coal-fired power plants, freezing and then ratcheting down greenhouse gas emissions levels, and creating 5 million green jobs.

These groups were instrumental in pushing for the federal Green Jobs Act as part of the 2007 Energy Bill. The act authorized Congress to allocate \$125 million to train 35,000 young people a year in green jobs, though it is still in the appropriations process and funding has not been allocated yet. Green For All's ultimate goal is \$1 billion in federal funding by 2012 for "green-collar" programs.

The American Solar Energy Society estimates that renewable energy and energy efficiency were responsible for \$970 billion in industry revenues and 8.5 million jobs in 2006. But a 2006 report by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, a division of the U.S. Department of Energy, identified multiple "nontechnical barriers to solar energy use," which could be addressed by governmental attention and investment. These included inadequate workforce skills and training; lack of government policy supporting renewable energy and energy efficiency; lack of consumer awareness about renewable energy; and inadequate financing of renewable energy projects.

Federal, state and municipal programs and policies could help remedy all of these issues. Proponents say results in the private sector and in individual cities show the promise and possibility of such efforts on a federal level. Multnomah County, Ore., and the cities of Washington, D.C., Oakland, Chicago, Richmond, Calif., and Los Angeles, among others, have already created what the report refers to as "green pathways out of poverty" in the form of job training and opportunities for low-income residents.

Last year another group founded by Jones, the Oakland Apollo Alliance, along with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, secured \$250,000 from the city of Oakland for a program that trains youth in jobs including installing solar panels and weatherizing buildings.

Richmond's program, a joint effort between the city and two nonprofit organizations, placed 27 low-income trainees in jobs constructing or installing solar panels. One of the nonprofits, GRID Alternatives, provides solar panels to low-income homeowners along with solar energy job training.

Los Angeles established a Green Career Ladder Training Program to link low-income people with jobs from green investment by the city.

In Milwaukee, a private program known as Milwaukee Energy Efficiency, or Me2, aims to funnel up to \$500 million of private capital into residential and commercial building retrofits. The funds will be paid back over 10 years in energy savings, split between lenders and program participants (i.e., building owners).

In Chicago, a Greencorps program trains participants, including ex-offenders, in four tracks: landscaping and urban gardening, computer refurbishing and recycling, household hazardous waste handling and home weatherization. The city has promised to hire 5,000 to 10,000 people in positions constructing, designing and auditing green buildings. And with two megawatts of solar power generation, city officials say they have the most municipal solar power outside the Southwest. With "green-washing" rampant among corporations and politicians in this day and age, it is worth reserving some skepticism until these programs actually show significant results.

At this point most of the green jobs training programs are still in the early stages, and it remains to be seen to what extent permanent jobs are created and how much savings are actually generated and how those savings are used. Some skeptics say such programs and promises, especially without revised building codes or binding local ordinances to back them up, are a low-cost way for cities to bolster their green credentials while much more challenging environmental issues are slow to be addressed.

That's where federal policy comes in.

"There are a lot of reasons green jobs will continue to grow," said Hays, noting that private investment in the green sector is "vertical" -- escalating rapidly. "However, the growth probably won't happen fast enough on its own to save us from baking the planet -- so we need a smart carbon reduction policy."

Green For All and other advocates are pushing for a "cap, collect and invest" strategy.

"That would not only create a market for clean energy technology, it could also create a huge revenue stream that could finance and support the growth of these things," said Hays. "You make polluters pay for the right to emit under the cap, and take that money and invest it into supporting both the technology and enterprises as

well as training programs."

Meanwhile, one of the silver linings to sky-high fuel prices is that they do create a free market incentive for renewable and alternative energy sources and hence a green job market. For example Flint, Mich., is among several U.S. cities following Sweden's example in fueling vehicles with clean-burning biogas. With gas prices more than double those in the United States, Sweden has pioneered technology to make biogas from decomposing household waste, slaughtered cow carcasses and even human sewage. A project under way in Flint, funded by the company Swedish Biogas, will use biogas from waste from the city's municipal wastewater treatment agency to fuel city buses and other vehicles.

"The Swedish technique has been advanced because we have been forced to come up with alternative sources," said Stig Berglind, press counselor at the Swedish Embassy. "In Flint, they're trying to find alternative energy sources, which could take care of some of the thousands of jobs lost in the auto economy. You get away from foreign energy dependence, you can produce energy with your own waste -- isn't that a marvelous thing!"

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