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Editor's Cut



Van Jones and the Green Revolution

posted by **KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL** on 01/16/2009 @ 5:37pm

Van Jones, President of **Green for All** and a *Nation* **contributor**, came to DC on Thursday to talk to the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming about a **Green (and fair) New Deal**. Testifying along with Jones were Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter and Trenton Mayor Douglas Palmer.

Jones spoke of the "new tools...new training...and new technology" that would "begin to put some green rungs on America's ladder of opportunity." He took on the "falsehoods and confusion" spread by "vocal opponents and naysayers" who oppose investing in a new green economy and breaking our dependence on fossil fuels.

Jones set the record straight on the notion that green jobs are a fantasy--"Buck Rogers jobs, or science fiction jobs, or George Jetson jobs"--and pointed to the section of the Green Jobs Act (passed in 2007, but not funded--evidence he said of the need to "move aggressively from inspiration to implementation") that spells out the exact kinds of job-training programs and industries eligible for support, some of which are: energy efficient and retro-fitting construction jobs; renewable power industry; biofuels industry; and manufacturing of sustainable products using environmentally sustainable materials.

He addressed the myth that for every green job created a gray job will be lost--"the zero sum critique." He pointed to the report **Green Recovery** by the Center for American Progress and the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI), which suggests that investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy "creates four times as many jobs as the same money invested in the oil industry."

And then there is the myth that the green economy will hurt the poor by driving up energy prices. Jones spoke to the jobs created and costs saved through energy efficiency; and the economies of scale achieved through investment which will drive down the prices of technologies. "A well thought out shift to a clean energy economy offers more work, more wealth, and better health to disadvantaged communities than does any plausible business-as-usual scenario," he said.

In terms of making this shift to a new economy, both Mayors talked about "ready-to-go projects", some of which--such as certain weatherization projects -- would require as little as two weeks training. Mayor Nutter said Philadelphia hires high school graduates for its weatherization staff at a starting rate of \$12 per hour plus benefits. The average salary of the staff is \$35,000-40,000 per year, with salaries and promotions tied to a standard industry certification process. Mayor Palmer spoke of 427 cities that have already identified 942 projects for potential Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant funding, for an investment of \$6.2 billion that would create 38,732 jobs. He said the **US Conference of Mayors** will be updating that survey this weekend based on responses from 779 cities. (It will be important to watch how recovery funds are allocated--through governors or mayors--and the tensions around that.)

After the hearing Jones spoke to *The Nation* about this issue of who the green jobs will go to--if the market will ensure that lower-income communities get a stake in the new green economy as *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman and others have **suggested**.

"Number one, there's nothing natural about a green economy, that will produce justice, equity, or opportunity. The gray economy didn't do it, and the green economy won't do it on its own," Jones said. "Solar panels do not have embedded within them equal opportunity. That's something that we have to as a community--working through government--insist upon.... If we fail to do that we have no excuse. Because this is not our great grandmother's economy, or our great grandfather's economy we're trying to fix and integrate. We're about to build an economy... and we need to do it in a way Dr. King would be proud of. If the market would take care of these things there would have been no civil rights movement. If the market would take care of these things we wouldn't have the suffragette movement. If the market would take care of these things we wouldn't have the labor movement. You need more than market to have an inclusive, green economy. And, if it's not inclusive, it will not be sustainable politically or economically.... If you don't build in economic and political sustainability, i.e. spread the risk and the reward, share the burden and the benefits, then all you're doing is setting this up for a populist, anti-green backlash--an alliance between polluters and poor people. So when the poor say, 'You're just trying to impose green taxes on me,' the whole thing will become a house of cards. It's not just the moral thing to do--though that would be enough. It's also the only intelligent political and long-term sustainable economic thing to do."



So how are we doing in terms of the current recovery proposal?

"We have a way to go [for this]...It's hard in the age of Obama when we're not supposed to talk about race anymore, to keep telling the truth," he said. "But here's the thing that I take my hope in: this is a new day. If you look at most of the people who are in the clean energy sector, politically they tend to lean more in a liberal direction.... There's an opening. This is not the kind of thing where in the past you had to just lay down in the streets, protest, picket, call folks racist and stuff like that. There is at least a hope and an opportunity that we can have a dialogue, and remind people that that Dr. King picture on their wall--should have something to do with who you're hiring."

There you have it--speaking truth to power about the green revolution.

With reporting from Capitol Hill by Greg Kaufmann, a freelance writer living in his disenfranchised hometown of Washington, DC.

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