
LAS VEGAS SUN

COMMENTARY:

Small steps on energy will add up

Van Jones

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Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Obama administration is investing \$80 billion to support clean energy solutions. This is the largest single investment in clean energy in American history.

This commitment usually conjures images of high-end solar farms and high-tech wind turbines — the jobs and products of the future. The administration is proud to be investing in those kinds of clean energy breakthroughs and will continue to help them flourish.

The enthusiasm for tomorrow's technologies sometimes overlooks the practical solutions being deployed today, but the recovery package is also making sure humbler technologies — such as caulking guns, insulation, high-performance boilers and high-performance windows — are being deployed across America. These humble and hardworking solutions create jobs and save money for Americans, right now.

A quiet yet powerful energy efficiency revolution is well under way. The president's central insight is straightforward: By retrofitting and improving American buildings to waste less energy, we can save Americans billions of dollars in energy costs. At the same time, we can create jobs and reduce the strain on our nation's power grid. Reducing the load on our coal-fired power plants would, in turn, cut air pollution — letting our kids and seniors breathe a little easier.

Additionally, retrofitting American homes will enhance their value — energy-efficient homes should be more valuable than drafty ones. In other words, an aggressive program to retrofit America will create more work, more wealth and better health for many Americans.

In fact, Americans stand to gain so much from these efficiency upgrades that Vice President Joe Biden made them a focus of a Middle Class Task Force meeting in late May, where he focused on the need for an administration-wide initiative to begin weatherizing and retrofitting our nation's building stock.

Fortunately, we're already off to a very good start. Through the Recovery Act, the administration made a \$5 billion investment in making America's homes more energy-efficient.

And last week top administration officials highlighted some of the incredible work their agencies are doing to retrofit America.

On Monday Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood visited Seattle for an event showcasing Sound Transit's University Link project, which received \$44 million in recovery funding. The University Link expansion is Sound Transit's first major project to be designed and built in conformance with its Sustainability Initiative, and will extend light rail from downtown Seattle to the University of Washington.

On Wednesday in Las Vegas, Ron Sims, Deputy Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, awarded a grant to retrofit carports at three public facilities with solar panels. These carports will then be able to generate power for the attached facilities. That means less conventional electricity used and a smaller bill for Las Vegas' taxpayers.

On Friday HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan headed to Minneapolis, where renovations to four public housing

high rises will include cost-saving energy efficiency upgrades. These upgrades will improve the quality of life for residents of the more than 500 units — while putting local people to work.

And, noting the large amounts of energy used by hospitals, Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki announced that his department will direct hundreds of millions of dollars to investments in clean energy generation and energy conservation. That money will go to renewable sources, including solar, wind and geothermal, as well as to retrofitting existing buildings to use energy and water more efficiently.

Each of these efforts is important. And combined they add up. Consider: Completely weatherizing a home saves an average of \$350 a year. Imagine the total savings if we weatherized every home in America. And that's without even mentioning the jobs it would create or the pollution it would eliminate.

As President Obama often reminds us, real change is never easy, but it is always possible and it usually starts from the bottom. If we each do our part we can accomplish anything. Nowhere is that reminder more relevant — or urgent — than when it comes to energy.

Van Jones is the special adviser for green jobs at the White House Council on Environmental Quality. Previously, Jones was founding president of Green For All, a national organization that promotes an inclusive green economy.

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