

Green jobs help climate, boost social justice

Brenda Payton

Sunday, November 22, 2009



Jobs that not only help save the planet but usher individuals and neighborhoods out of poverty - talk about a silver bullet. If the promise of green jobs sounds too good to be true, the simplicity of the logic is difficult to resist: Train and hire people who are economically marginalized in work that is critical but has been neglected. Instead of poor people getting stuck at the back of the line, they step to the front of the new technology.

The Bay Area's Van Jones was a visionary, early recognizing the social justice potential in the green economy. Jones, you may recall, was hounded out of his job as environmental adviser to the White House by conservative talk show host Glenn Beck. Jones is the founder of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights in Oakland. In June, the Oakland Green Job Corps, launched by the Ella Baker Center and the Oakland Apollo Alliance, graduated its first class of students, previously handicapped by inadequate education or prison records.

Ian Kim, director of the center's Green-Collar Jobs Campaign, quipped: When organizers began the program three years ago, they didn't imagine that the first class would graduate during the worst global recession in decades. Still, the graduates have fared better than one might imagine. Of the 42, 26 have jobs. Twelve of those are working in traditional construction jobs but report that their green training has been an advantage. They've helped their employers identify ways to reuse materials and save the cost of dump and disposal fees.

The second job corps class is in training, on course to graduate in June. But organizers are well aware of the pitfall of training people for jobs that don't exist.

"All along, we've said that would be a waste of resources and time and it dashes people's hopes," Kim said. "We have to focus on green job creation. The corps is a great start. But before it can grow to train 400 people, you have to make sure we have 400 jobs. A lot has to be done in public policy and the private sector to generate green jobs and help businesses to grow."

In this regard, the city of Oakland has emerged as a leader. In June, the Oakland City Council adopted some of the country's highest targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Meeting those targets will require changes in everything from transportation to land use to solid waste disposal. The Oakland Climate Action Coalition, made up of businesses, labor unions and community organizations, has submitted 30 policy recommendations of needed changes to the city.

In September, 30 sophomores at Oakland Technical High School became the first students of the Oakland Tech Green Academy. The three-year program will teach "eco-literacy." So, for example, students will not only learn how to install solar panels, but they will learn why solar energy is important. In addition, Laney

College and several other Oakland groups have innovative green training programs.

"People see hope start in Oakland, and it's become a model for other cities across the state," said Emily Kirsch, Bay Area organizer for the Green-Collar Jobs Campaign. She said they have received so many inquiries about how to set up similar training programs, they are putting together a tool kit that will be published in print and on the Internet early next year.

One of the lessons learned by the job corps organizers is the importance of flexibility. Recognizing the limited number of solar energy jobs, they shifted the program's focus to energy efficiency. But they expect the federal Recovery Act's \$500 million allocation for green jobs to kick-start solar and other green construction projects.

A bill introduced by Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, would provide a \$30 billion revolving loan fund to small and midsize businesses for conversion to clean energy. Supporters say it will create 680,000 direct green jobs and an additional 2 million indirect jobs over five years; 70 percent of the clean energy systems and components in the country are currently manufactured overseas.

"Each wind turbine has 5,000 finely machined parts," Kim said. "Yet wind companies have to import the parts. The U.S. is not manufacturing them. That's nuts to me."

Brenda Payton is a Bay Area writer. Submit your comments to sfgate.com/chronicle/submissions/#1

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/11/22/ING91AM7QV.DTL>

This article appeared on page **E - 3** of the San Francisco Chronicle

© 2009 Hearst Communications Inc. | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Feedback](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Contact](#)