



Van Jones, J.D.  
President, Green For All  
Oakland, California

Testimony before the Select Committee on  
Energy Independence and Global Warming

Thursday, January 13, 2009

***Opportunities For Green Growth: Myths & Realities About Green Jobs***

Chairman Markey and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today.

I am here representing Green For All, a national organization dedicated to helping to build an inclusive, green economy – strong enough to lift millions of people out of poverty.

I first testified before this esteemed committee in May 2007. At that time, the term “green collar job” only rarely had been heard in the halls of Congress. The term had seldom – if ever – appeared in the mainstream political press.

Today the concept is everywhere. The term resonates because it speaks to a deep and abiding hunger in our society for big, practical answers to big, tough challenges. Citizens and community members everywhere are seeking smart solutions to our two biggest problems – the economic downturn and the ecological collapse.

The nation is finally realizing that the solutions to these twin crises are linked. That is because nearly everything that is good for the environment – and practically everything that is good in the fight against global warming – is a job.

Solar panels don't install themselves. Wind turbines don't manufacture themselves. Homes and buildings don't retrofit or weatherize themselves. In our industrial society, trees don't even PLANT themselves, anymore. Real people must do all of that work.

To be successful, American workers need some new tools, some new training and access to some new technology. They also need a policy environment that supports employers who are trying to bring low-carbon prosperity to our country. With those things in place, we can begin to put some green rungs on America's ladder of opportunity.

If we are smart, we will make the invention, manufacturing and deploying of clean energy technology a cornerstone of the next American economy – and create green pathways out of poverty, while we do it.

The realization that we can simultaneously restore the Earth and revive our economy has inspired millions. Increasingly, federal, state and local elected officials, labor and business leaders, social justice champions, environmentalists and youth see great economic opportunities in advancing green solutions to our climate and energy crises.

And yet confusion reigns. Every day, someone asks me: "Oh, yes, we are very excited about all you are doing. But what exactly IS a green job?"

Also, some vocal opponents and naysayers have begun spreading falsehoods and confusion about what is in fact a very simple and practical concept. It must be said that even proponents of the idea have missed important opportunities to move the green jobs concept from rhetoric to reality. So we are all still finding our way in this journey toward a clean and green economy.

I want to address a few of those issues here. First of all, what is a "green collar job"? The simplest definition is that it is a traditional,

family-supporting, blue collar job – that has been upgraded and upskilled to better respect the environment. In other words, we are not talking about anything revolutionary. We are not talking Buck Rogers jobs, or science fiction jobs, or George Jetson jobs. These are very familiar jobs in familiar trades – roofers, metal workers, electricians, carpenters, etc. But they have been repurposed and upskilled to meet the challenges of a carbon-constrained era.

Congress already spelled out critical skill-building supports and specific, eligible industries in the Green Jobs Act which passed into law as part of comprehensive energy legislation in December 2007 (P.L. 110-140):

- (1) energy-efficient building, construction, and retrofits industries; (construction)
- (2) renewable electric power industry; (energy)
- (3) energy efficient and advanced drive train vehicle industry; (transportation)
- (4) biofuels industry; (energy)
- (5) deconstruction and materials use industries; (recycling)
- (6) energy efficiency assessment industry serving the residential, commercial, or industrial sectors; and (construction/energy)
- (7) manufacturers that produce sustainable products using environmentally sustainable processes and materials (manufacturing).

Therefore, it is not true that these green jobs are strictly a term of art or a piece of political rhetoric, impossible to meaningfully define or precisely categorize. Also, it is not true that these are just hypothetical jobs or mythical jobs.

But while we are on the topic of mythology, let me address three actual myths about green jobs.

The first is that smart support for renewable energy and energy efficiency will not create a NET increase in jobs. The popular “zero sum” critique is that every green job actually will just represent the loss of a gray job, somewhere. In this view, it is impossible for a green economy to actually increase the total number of jobs in the United States.

Thankfully, the Green Recovery report (commissioned by PERI and the Center for American Progress) thoroughly debunked this myth last year. That landmark study shows that the same amount of money invested in energy efficiency and renewable energy actually creates **FOUR TIMES** as many jobs as the same money invested in the oil industry.

It turns out that there are more effective and less effective ways for the federal government to spend money, if spurring job creation and creating economic opportunity is a goal. The Green Recovery report shows how \$100 billion of smartly invested and leveraged federal dollars can create two million new jobs, in the next two years. The time has come to shift our priorities in a new direction.

The second myth is that public spending on expensive green energy is just going to drive up energy prices for working people and poor people. Therefore, disadvantaged people would be better off languishing in the present, pollution-based “gray economy” – rather than supporting a shift to a greener and cleaner economy.

Again, this is not true. A significant amount of the investment in the economic recovery bill likely will be in energy efficiency – such as in the Weatherization Assistance Program and the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant. These investments actually reduce energy costs and they create thousands of community jobs.

A recent study by Professor David Roland-Holst at the University of California at Berkley shows that the systematic multi-decade effort to promote “innovative energy efficiency policies in California created 1.5 million additional full-time jobs with a total payroll of over \$45 billion. Furthermore, investments in renewable energy will help create economies of scale, which will drive down the price of these technologies – and they will level the playing field with the subsidized fossil fuel industry. In the long run, smart policy and investment will drive down prices for clean, renewable, homegrown energy sources. But if we cling to the old, carbon-intensive energy technologies, then the price we all pay – in volatile economic costs, in climate disruption and in threats to our national security – will continue to climb. And the poor will be hit – first and worst – by every one of those rising costs. 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.

The last myth seems to afflict green job boosters, more so than green job detractors. That final myth is the notion that “talking” about green jobs somehow magically creates them. While maintaining our enthusiasm and evangelism for a new economic direction, the time has come for all of us to move even more aggressively from inspiration to implementation.

It pains me to point out that politicians and advocates (like myself) made countless speeches referencing green jobs last year. But in the end, Congress failed to appropriate the funds necessary for the one piece of federal legislation that would have made money available for green job training across the country: the Green Jobs Act of 2007, Title X of the Energy Independence and Security Act. We must do better.

When it comes to rhetoric about green jobs, we are experiencing a bubble. But when it comes to advancing meaningful, federal legislation for green jobs, we are still in a bowl. As someone who gives a lot of speeches, myself, let me say: messages and inspiration are important. But the American people cannot eat political sound-bites. They cannot take shelter under slogans.

People need real job training, real service opportunities and real jobs – right now, desperately. As you consider the upcoming economic recovery package, I urge you and your colleagues to seek full funding – and more – for the Green Jobs Act.

Furthermore, I urge you to go beyond that basic program to create something bolder. Now is the time for the United States to create a Clean Energy Corps to retrofit millions of buildings – while giving community service opportunities, job training and employment to hundreds of thousands of people. (Green For All and our allies are developing a proposal for just such an initiative, which we will submit next month for the committee’s review.)

These are the kinds of concrete, practical actions that would represent important steps forward in making America’s green dreams come true.

Our national leaders this year can move on from changing the rhetoric to changing the lived reality for millions of Americans. That will be the great work for the new Administration, for the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress – and for all of us.

In a time of economic peril, let us never forget that everything that is required to make America's economy cleaner, greener and more resilient is a career pathway for someone. Or a business contract. Or an entrepreneurial opportunity. We can power America through this recession by repowering America with clean energy. We can create millions of jobs that will make our people wealthier and the Earth healthier. Let us begin.

In closing, let me thank you for your courage and your fortitude in these difficult times ... When a fire breaks out, there are only two kinds of people: the majority who wisely rush out – and the few who bravely rush in. For those who have prepared themselves to be in the latter category, we have a word: that word is “heroes.”

Our country is facing multiple disasters and crises. Now is the time for heroines and heroes. Wiser people – seeing these difficulties on the horizon – might have chosen this moment to rush out of public service and to run away from the tough and controversial committees.

But you are braver people. And you have chosen to rush in – just when your country needs you the most. I thank you for that. We all do.

The next Congress can be a Congress of heroines and heroes. If you resolve to turn this economic breakdown into a genuine breakthrough for our planet and our people, it certainly will be.

I thank you for your time and attention.