



# CLEAN ENERGY CORPS

*Jobs, Service, and Equal Opportunity in America's Clean Energy Economy*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2008



## OVERVIEW

Millions of Americans want to serve in the fight against global warming, but lack organized opportunities to do so. Millions of others seek pathways out of poverty or better employment in the clean energy economy, but lack the necessary skills, work experience and connections to unions or employers. Untold numbers of homeowners, businesses, local governments and schools want to reduce the energy costs of the buildings where they live, work, and learn—which would generate hundreds of thousands of “green-collar” jobs—but they lack the financing to do so. America as a whole is suffering through a deep economic recession, with job losses and extreme levels of wealth inequality, rising energy prices and energy insecurity, and an increasing scarcity of hope and common purpose. Americans are looking for solutions on climate, energy and the economy.

To address these intersecting challenges, we propose a national Clean Energy Corps (CEC). The CEC will be a combined service, training, and job creation effort to combat global warming, grow local and regional economies and demonstrate the equity and employment promise of the clean energy economy. The CEC will:

*Directly engage millions of Americans* in diverse service, service-learning, and volunteer work related to climate protection;

*Work with employers, unions, educators, and community organizations* to put more Americans, particularly the low-income and unemployed, on green-collar career pathways—providing them the training, credentials, work experience, job placement, and other essential elements for good and secure jobs in the clean energy economy;

*Preserve and enlarge green public spaces*, strengthen community defenses against climate disruption, and enlist America’s public lands in the fight against climate change by planting trees and restoring wetlands and rivers; and

*Launch a national effort* to comprehensively apply cost-effective energy efficiency measures to our nation’s building stock. This effort will generate demand for hundreds of thousands of jobs, and significantly reduce our national energy costs and contribution to global warming. It will also more than pay for itself by recovering a portion of the energy savings achieved.

The time is right for such an effort. The public urgently wants action to promote clean energy, increase energy security, and curb global warming. Our ailing economy needs a stimulus that is productive, sustainable, and focused on communities. Low-income communities, both urban and rural, are keenly aware of the economic promise of a clean energy economy, and eager to realize the opportunity it will provide to those who have historically been left behind. Blue-collar workers—including those left on the bench by a stalled construction industry—are looking for a chance to apply their skills to green-collar work that rebuilds our nation. And Americans of all political persuasions support the idea of voluntary national service: young adults of the “greenest generation” are already volunteering in record numbers, and would welcome a chance to contribute to the fight against global warming; so will retiring baby boomers looking to make meaningful contributions in their “encore” careers.

A bold visible national effort like the CEC will bring together Americans across social class, generations, background and experience, and powerfully advance the national effort to stop global warming while widening economic opportunity and promoting active citizenship. CEC’s integrated approach to climate protection, job generation, and training will speed America’s clean energy transition by demonstrating its welcome and immediate effect on our communities. The CEC is a big idea that is tangible enough to capture the imagination of America, unite key constituencies, and motivate millions to act. Helping to heal the planet, it will also help heal the nation.

*The CEC will be a combined service, training, and job creation effort to combat global warming, grow local and regional economies and demonstrate the equity and employment promise of the clean energy economy.*



## *Administration & Budget*

The CEC is intended as a high-visibility, collaborative, and cost-effective national initiative entailing minimal new bureaucracy. We propose that it be led by the next President of the United States and administered through a new Energy Security Council (ESC)—analogous to the National Security Council (NSC) in flexibility and executive coordination of relevant departments, programs, and cabinet secretaries—with regular independent oversight, evaluation and reporting to Congress on the achievement of program aims.

The real work of the CEC will occur at the state and local levels. The CEC will encourage the alignment and coordination of complementary programs and strategies to realize its ambitious goals, but without imposing new federal limits on state and local innovation consistent with those aims.

The CEC will have three interconnected parts. First, it will create “green-collar” jobs through a variety of energy programs, most ambitiously with a comprehensive application of cost-effective energy efficiency measures to our nation’s building stock. Second, it will widen service opportunities in climate mitigation and adaptation, especially those offering pre-apprenticeship type experiences for disadvantaged young people that could lead to career paths in the green economy. Third, it will provide opportunities for job seekers, especially those from disadvantaged communities, to acquire the skills to do this and other green economy work, in the form of demand-driven and credentialed occupational skills training.

These three components will be connected by state and local partnerships that create well-defined career pathways for CEC participants, moving them from the entry-point of service, to training they can access and succeed in, to placement, job retention and careers in energy efficiency, energy service other industries of the green economy. In sum, the CEC seeks no less than an integration of civic, economic and workforce development that creates value for workers, employers, communities, and the planet .

### The CEC will primarily require:

- 1 Full appropriation of authorized funding** for the Green Jobs Act, the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program, and the Weatherization Assistance Program as authorized by the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007;
- 2 Increased funding** for the Corporation for National and Community Service to support the Clean Energy Service Corps Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve programs and for the Department of Labor to support CEC-directed training;
- 3 New funding** at an estimated cost of less than \$3 billion per year over 5 years to underwrite the financing for a \$50 billion public revolving loan fund—with tax exemption, credit guarantees, and the ability to package loans for sale to secondary markets—to make investments and leverage private money in the national building retrofit effort. The fund would be replenished both by its proceeds from projects approved for direct investment and through its sale of packaged loans via private investors.



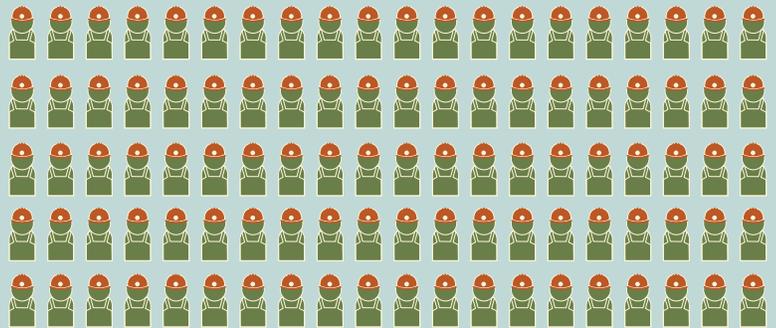


*The Clean Energy Corps* will create numerous green-collar jobs in a variety of occupations. Green-collar jobs, as we and others have defined them, are family-supporting jobs that contribute significantly to preserving or enhancing environmental quality. Most are middle-skill jobs requiring more than high school, but less than a four-year degree. Clearly many PhDs, architects, and engineers hold green jobs and directly contribute to the building of a green economy. But publically-funded workforce development efforts should promote green-collar jobs accessible to those with less than a four-year college degree. These jobs represent the bulk of employer demand and range from entry-level to high-wage jobs in a multitude of industries. In the renewable energy and energy efficiency industries, for example, green-collar work includes construction, assembly, installation, operation, maintenance, transportation, and manufacturing.

What's particularly important to note about these jobs is that they are familiar occupations. Building a green economy will involve some brand new industries and occupations, but it will primarily require transforming industries and jobs that already exist. A case in point is the construction industry, which is central to the large-scale program of energy efficient retrofits envisioned by the CEC. Employers in this industry are not demanding 'green construction workers'; but they are demanding workers with traditional building trades skills—for example, pipefitters, electricians and carpenters—who also have the most up-to-date training on energy efficient construction techniques.

How many construction jobs can we reasonably expect to be created by the CEC? A number of studies show that every \$1 million invested in retrofits creates approximately 12 jobs. By this estimate, investing on the order of \$10 billion a year in retrofits, as proposed here, can be expected to lead to close to 120,000 jobs a year, and 600,000 over five. With a disproportionate share of these jobs in relatively high-paying occupations, many of them union jobs, this program would provide substantial employment opportunities to workers who might otherwise be forced to accept much lower-paying jobs with fewer opportunities for advancement.

**Projected outcomes: 600,000 jobs in five years**



represents 600 workers

In the short-term, creating jobs in the construction sector is especially desirable because of the fallout from the housing crash. Housing starts nationwide have already fallen by almost 50 percent compared with their peaks in 2005. It is likely that they will fall somewhat further before bottoming out. There are few economists that expect this sector to begin to revive before the end of 2009 and most think that it will be well into 2010 before there is any substantial pick-up in housing construction. Employment in construction fell to 7.1 million in October 2008, down from 7.7 million in July 2006. As a result, there are a large number of unemployed construction workers who could be quickly re-employed in an ambitious program promoting building retrofits, just as there are large numbers of jobseekers who are looking to enter construction careers.



The Clean Energy Corps is a proposal of the Clean Energy Corps Working Group, first convened in January 2007, which includes representatives of the Apollo Alliance, the Center for American Progress Action Fund, the Center on Wisconsin Strategy, Energy Action Coalition, Green For All, Innovations in Civic Participation, 1sky, and The Corps Network. For more information, contact Billy Parish (billyparish@gmail.com).

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