



COMMITTEE FOR A CONSTRUCTIVE TOMORROW

Find this article at this address:

http://www.cfact.org/site/view_article.asp?idarticle=1719&idcategory=21

Green-collar promises and realities

Government policies could create green jobs, but kill existing carbon-based jobs

Wednesday, March 04, 2009

by Paul Driessen

Creating “green-collar” jobs is a major component of President Obama’s energy and economic strategy. Opportunities for achieving realistic goals should certainly be pursued.

“Smart meters” and better insulation reduce energy expenditures, and quickly pay back investments. Better sequencing of traffic lights speeds commuters to workplaces, saves gasoline, cuts pollution, and reduces accidents. Telecommuting also saves energy.

Energy-efficient computers and servers mean big savings in power-hungry data centers that facilitate banking, Internet searches, modern business operations and YouTube. New technologies enable smelters and factories to recycle waste heat, to power turbines and generate electricity.

Such initiatives also create “green” jobs. Renewable energy and energy efficiency industries already generate 8.5 million such jobs in the United States, claims a 2007 report from the American Solar Energy Society, and could create “as many as 40 million” by 2030.

Many “green” projects represent sound economics. However, others would not survive without mandates, renewable energy standards, tariffs and taxpayer-financed subsidies that borrow money or take funds from one economic sector and transfer it to another.

Energy-efficiency efforts have been ongoing for decades. Calling the relevant positions “green-collar” is good PR, but often merely redefines previously existing jobs and doesn’t expand the actual employment base. Moreover, many of these jobs are low-paying labor jobs – and money spent on marginal initiatives isn’t available for critical problems like crime, AIDS, drug abuse, failing schools, heating bill assistance, and repairing bridges and roads.

The ASES report includes direct and indirect employment associated with retrofitting buildings, installing insulation or solar panels, constructing transmission lines from unreliable wind farms, producing biofuels and fuel-efficient vehicles, and designing and manufacturing supplies for projects. Even accountants, lawyers, salesmen, repairmen, truck drivers, landscapers, bureaucrats and lobbyists associated with these activities are included – and separating new jobs from redefined old jobs is difficult.

Of greater concern, restricting hydrocarbon energy use or imposing tough climate change rules could threaten millions of high-quality existing jobs that require carbon fuels and likely won’t be replaced by green-collar positions. So it’s important that we honestly separate hype and hope from reality, practicality and unintended consequences.

Solar panels to generate electricity have maximum 30-year lifetimes – but require a century of energy savings to equal installation costs, says the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

Ethanol requires huge amounts of land, water and natural gas, to replace a small portion of our gasoline with an expensive fuel that drives up the cost of food and gets cars 10% less mileage per tank.

Compressed natural gas vehicles represent only 120,000 of America's 235,000,000 cars and light trucks. Honda's CNG-powered Civic costs \$7000 more than the regular model, but has half the range. And opposition to drilling means fewer supplies and higher prices in the face of increasing demand.

Fossil fuels provide 85% of the energy Americans use; nuclear power an additional 8 percent. They have brought us unprecedented health, opportunity and prosperity. Wind and solar combined produce a minuscule 0.5% of total US energy.

Conservation, efficiency and renewables will not soon bridge this enormous energy gap. Hobbling the energy system we have – and claiming we can replace it with technologies that don't yet exist – puts people's livelihoods, living standards and health at risk.

Locking up the oil and gas in our Outer Continental Shelf, Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and western states would force us to continue spending \$300-500 billion a year on foreign oil – and forego up to \$3 trillion in lease bonus, royalty, and personal and corporate tax revenues.

Eliminating hydrocarbons and creating wind and solar jobs would require dismantling an existing infrastructure that provides abundant, reliable, affordable energy for homes, businesses, factories, hospitals, schools and millions of jobs – and replacing it with a largely experimental system that would require legislative mandates, cost a trillion taxpayer dollars, and likely result in net job losses.

Advocates of a carbon-free economy need to explain how we can ignore hydrocarbon revenues, spend enormous sums subsidizing renewable-energy and green-job programs, and operate homes and factories on intermittent energy. They must prove America will be able to compete with a Europe that is backing away from green-energy and CO2-reduction pledges, to protect jobs – or with China and India, which are building new coal-fired power plants every week to power expanding industries.

They need to show how they will compensate American workers, families, business owners, investors and pensioners who will be adversely affected by anti-hydrocarbon and anti-nuclear policies. They must demonstrate why draconian global warming rules are needed, when global temperatures have been stable for nearly a decade, even as carbon dioxide levels have continued to rise.

We need more green-collar jobs. But we also need to safeguard existing jobs, examine claims carefully and dispassionately – and avoid killing the energy we have, while we develop new energy for the future.

Paul Driessen is senior policy advisor for the Committee For A Constructive Tomorrow.

Copyright © CFACT. All rights reserved.