



“IN A TOUGH ECONOMY, IT’S A REALLY BAD IDEA TO SET FIRE TO MONEY. THAT’S PRETTY MUCH WHAT WE DO WHEN WE WASTE ENERGY.”

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The Role of Energy Efficiency

Now that I have your attention, I will admit that this metaphor is not an original of my own, but rather a provocative and common sense remark made by Peter Molinaro, Vice President of U.S. Government Affairs at the Dow Chemical Company, during a Capitol Hill briefing yesterday on energy efficiency jobs.

Monday, the Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI) and Northeast-Midwest Senate Coalition hosted a Congressional briefing on the "Economic Impacts of Energy Efficiency Policies and Investments." An expert panel, including the aforementioned **Peter Molinaro**; **Harvey Bernstein**, Vice President of Industry Insights and Alliances at McGraw Hill Construction; **Kevin Crawford**, Senior Vice President of Orion Energy Systems; **Malcolm Woolf**, Director of the Maryland Energy Administration and Chair of the National Association of State Energy Officials (NASEO); and **Paul Hamilton**, Vice President of Government Affairs, addressed a full room about the role of energy efficiency in job creation and economic recovery.

In an economy where construction activities, and consequently jobs, are at an all time low, green construction has maintained its level of economic activity and has even increased in many sectors from 2008 levels. These figures come from the findings of McGraw Hill Construction's latest [research venture](#) on the green building construction, which revealed that the green building market supports 661,000 jobs in the U.S. and represents a third of the design and construction workforce.

In addition to the employment benefits of green building and energy efficiency, let's think about its effect on American consumers: "The average American household spends \$2175 a year on home heating, cooling and electricity. Over \$5000 if you add the cost of transportation," according to Molinaro. He continued, "If we can get every household in America to save 10%, that's \$25 billion available for other things...If we can save 30%, eminently doable with existing technology, that's \$74 billion in additional discretionary spending."

The facts and figures are clear and real. Energy efficiency is a growing industry with astronomical potential. Energy efficiency supports both job creation and workforce transformation within a rapidly globalizing economy, allowing the U.S. to maintain international competitiveness. Paul Hamilton of Schneider Electric included a graph in his presentation with the caveat that energy management and the goals of energy efficiency support a "food chain of jobs." And Molinaro reminded us of how this discussion is more timely and pertinent than ever. The "Occupy Movement" nationwide is concerned with the ever-widening income disparity between classes in the U.S. Energy efficiency is an opportunity to rebuild the middle class and put Americans back to work.

The speakers add that the low-hanging fruit of energy efficiency is often overlooked as a financial opportunity by consumers. Government policies and incentives are critical to supporting this sector, and no, that does not mean subsidies!! We need policies that remove barriers for innovative private sector finance, such as Property Assessed Clean Energy or PACE, and policies that facilitate data access and transparency. Training and certification programs are also essential to transforming the existing workforce and assisting our students and recent graduates to find a competitive job.

Harvey Bernstein had a final remark that resonated with me, "We are on the verge of another Industrial Revolution." If the prospect of continued rapid global population growth and resource scarcity is not enough to prompt you to action, how about something closer to home? In a tough economy, why are we setting fire to money when energy efficiency can help alleviate unemployment, rebuild the U.S. economy and restore our global competitiveness?

[More information on the briefing and the individual presentations can be found on EESI's website](#)



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