

The Promise of the Green Economy: Strengthening the Economy While Protecting the Environment

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The author of an [article](#) posted yesterday on CNN couldn't be further embedded in the spin zone he arguably says he's trying to debunk. In his opening line, the author, Steve Hargreaves, wrote, "The tactic du jour for environmentalists trying to sell a skeptical public on tighter regulations is this: spin the thing as a job creator."

If you want to substantively get into a discussion on driving job creation, it won't be long before you're talking about green jobs. Green building is Exhibit A. In hundreds of communities across the country, green building is strengthening the local economy and creating jobs. Unfortunately, Hargreaves, with his clear predisposition, and others, work tirelessly to further politicize the established economic benefit of clean energy solutions. Interestingly, these economic opportunities, and green building in particular, are rooted in energy conservation and fiscal responsibility—basically prudent spending of taxpayer dollars to build healthy schools for our children or energy-conserving hospitals that provide a significant return on investment through significant energy and water savings. And from Kentucky to Ohio, Florida to California, we are seeing very diverse political stakeholders advance these opportunities simply because they are smart financial decisions (and wholly apolitical).

For starters, let's look at a study by the [Pew Charitable Trust](#) which reports that the clean energy and green economy sector is the fastest growing job sector, producing twice as many jobs as the sectoral average between 1998 and 2007. A 2009 [Booz Allen Hamilton study](#) estimates that by 2013, the green building industry will create 8 million jobs in a range of occupations including construction managers, carpenters, electricians, architects, truck drivers and cost estimators, among many others. Today, [McGraw Hill Construction](#) estimates that green construction supports 660,000 jobs, which represents a third of the green design and construction industry. The McGraw Hill Construction study uses a very narrow definition of green jobs which is limited to workers who spend more than 50 percent of their time on green projects or designing and installing green systems, this excludes administrative professionals and manufacturing, production or transportation-related services. This sector only has potential to grow. And this number is only likely to grow with support and investment from both the public and private sectors. A prominent [report from McKinsey & Company](#) reveals that energy efficiency improvements in the residential and commercial sectors could create 600,000 to 900,000 stable and on-going jobs. The job creation potential of building energy efficiency could be increased by 114,000 jobs through the President's Better Buildings Initiative, with the greatest proportion of jobs (over 77,000) coming from a revised tax incentive for commercial retrofits, also known as 179D (see joint report "[A New Retrofit Industry](#)").

Simply, green jobs are win-win. The green building retrofit jobs that President Obama and President Clinton have worked to encourage are new jobs that can't be outsourced. And in addition, green jobs have the added benefit of creating healthier communities, protecting the planet, and fostering a globally competitive workforce. Thus, the CNN article, which compares the jobs created by the potential Keystone XL pipeline to environmental jobs, sets up a false choice. We have long shown unequivocally that we can advance our economic prosperity without compromising the protection of our environment.

Ultimately, we shouldn't allow green jobs to be a political punching bag (like Congressman Issa's hearings as Chair of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform). We need to fight back against the slander. Get involved in advocacy for green buildings and green jobs. Tell Congress what we want, because, after all, they're supposed to represent us, right?

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