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A volunteer from Youthbuild/Service Nation at the September 27, 2008, Green Jobs Now National Day of Action, sponsored by Green for All

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Beyond Green Jobs

By Julie Quiroz-Martinez

Julie Quiroz-Martinez is a senior fellow with the Movement Strategy Center in Oakland, California.

Everyone wants to be green. Fossil fuel companies tout their commitments to the environment, with BP sporting its green and yellow flower logo and Chevron scooping up a Green Apple award for promoting public-school energy efficiency [1]. In 2009 Exxon-Mobil got itself named *Forbes* magazine's Green Company of the Year for stepping up its natural gas production [2].

Mix "green" with "jobs," and everyone ought to love you. In fact, a 2010 Harris Interactive survey found that 72 percent of respondents believed that expansion of green jobs would help

End Notes

1. ["Chevron Energy Solutions Receives Green Apple Award." Business Highbeam Website, September 2008.](#)
2. ["ExxonMobil: Green Company of the Year." Forbes.com, August 24, 2009.](#)
3. ["Poll Finds Nation Needs to Get to Work on Green Jobs." PR Newswire, May 20, 2010.](#)

preserve a higher quality environment, and 61 percent agreed that expansion of green jobs would have a positive outcome for the U.S. economy.[3] As a candidate, Barack Obama promised to create five million green jobs, arguing that “green jobs are the jobs of the future,” and that they would “help reduce our dependence on foreign oil and save this planet for our children.” As president, Obama has directed \$500 million toward green jobs training as part of the federal stimulus funding authorized in the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. (ARRA)

But organized opposition to green jobs does exist; in fact it thrives among conservative thought leaders and business groups, who view any push for an environmentally sustainable economy as simply an excuse to further regulate business. The influential Heritage Foundation, for one, claims that a green economy is a contradiction in terms, an approach that will eliminate more jobs than it would create.[4] Heritage also argues that green jobs are anti-free enterprise, propped up by government subsidies. It even pokes fun at green jobs, asking, as Peter Brookes and J. D. Foster do on the Heritage website, “What could be greener than a rickshaw?”[5]

Such levity, however, belies a well-funded strategy for manufacturing and promoting ideas that strengthen the fortress protecting the fossil-fuel economy. At the heart – and bank account – of this strategy are corporations such as Koch Industries which, according to a 2010 Greenpeace report[6], contributed \$24.9 million in funding over three years to “support organizations and front-groups opposing progressive clean energy and climate policy.” Koch Industries is hardly a household name, but Greenpeace reports that “it is a conglomerate of petroleum and chemical interests with approximately \$100 billion in annual sales, operations in nearly 60 countries and 70,000 employees.” It is currently ranked as the second-largest privately held company in the United States. Two brothers, Charles and David Koch, own the majority of the company, channeling their influence through three foundations that gave grants to forty organizations at the forefront of efforts to stop green jobs and climate legislation. Their donations included \$5 million to the Americans for Prosperity Foundation, a leading group behind the Tea Party movement; \$1 million to the Heritage Foundation; and \$360,000 to Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy. The Kochs also run a political action committee that has spent \$2.51 million on contributions to federal candidates.[7]

Right wing leaders are also going after green jobs by stirring up one of their favorite messaging cocktails, a blend of racism and anti-immigrant fear

As part of their overall effort to influence public understanding and public policy regarding pollution and climate, the Kochs have funded efforts to discredit green jobs ideas and programs. According to the Greenpeace report, their dollars supported the widely publicized “Spanish study” – 2009 research by an economics professor from Madrid arguing that Spain’s policy commitment to renewable energy development had cost the country 2.2 jobs for each clean-energy job created. With initial support from the Koch-funded Institute for Energy Research, the study gained followers in key venues such as a Heritage Foundation briefing in Washington, DC, and a Congressional Western Caucus hearing, in which Phil Kerpen, the policy director of the Koch-funded Americans for Prosperity (AFP), testified. While the Department of Energy and others have challenged the validity of the study[8], it continues to bounce on the internet and in public debate.

Of course, the most visible story of the right and green jobs is the 2009 resignation of Van Jones, President Obama’s special adviser for green jobs, enterprise, and innovation. As the *New York Times* reported in September 2009, Jones’s resignation was “a victory for Republicans and the Obama administration’s conservative critics.”[9] *While FOX television talk-show host Glenn Beck enjoyed the spotlight in the attack on Jones, organizations such as AFP played a crucial role in the ambush. Days after Jones’s resignation, Kerpen commented that the campaign against Jones was “one of the most significant things I’ve ever had the honor of being involved in.”*[10]

Racism + Xenophobia = Opposition to Green Jobs

Right wing leaders are also going after green jobs by stirring up one of their favorite messaging cocktails, a blend of racism and anti-immigrant fear. Indeed, an Internet search of “illegal immigrants and green jobs” turns up a multitude of hits, including a 2008 *New York Times* Green Blog article summarizing local newspaper reports that “illegal aliens” are employed in green jobs. The article concludes, “[J]ust as the ‘green jobs’ machine starts revving up, another hot political issue is arriving at its doorstep: illegal immigration.”[11] And

4. [See, for example, “Obama’s Green Jobs Plan Will Do More Harm Than Good,” Nicolas Loris, Heritage Foundation blog, January 8th, 2010.](#)
5. [“Better Green Jobs: The One-Word Solution,” Peter Brookes and J.D. Foster, Heritage Foundation website, March 20, 2009.](#)
6. [“Koch Industries Secretly Funding the Climate Denial Machine,” Greenpeace USA, Washington, DC, March 2010.](#)
7. Greenpeace report
8. “NREL Response to the Report Study of the Effects on Employment of Public Aid to Renewable Energy Sources from King Juan Carlos University (Spain)”, Eric Lantz and Suzanne Tegen, National Renewable Energy, U.S. Department of Energy Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Operated by the Alliance for Sustainable Energy, White Paper NREL/TP-6A2-46261 August 2009.
9. [“White House Adviser on ‘Green Jobs’ Resigns,” The New York Times online, September 6, 2009.](#)
10. [Fox News Report.](#)
11. [“Green Jobs and Illegal Immigration,” Kate Galbraith, New York Times Green Blog, November 3, 2008.](#)
12. “Immigration to the United States and World-Wide Greenhouse Gas Emissions,” Steven A. Camarota and [Leon Kolankiewicz, Center for Immigration Studies](#), August 2008.
13. [10th National Conference on Science, Policy, and the Environment: The New Green Economy.](#)
14. National Council for Science and the Environment [website](#).
15. Letter from Cathy Calfo, Executive Director, Apollo Alliance, to Peter Saundry, National Council for Science and the Environment, January 20, 2009.
16. [See, for example, “Earth Day’s Population Vision vs. Reality,” NumbersUSA website.](#)
17. [“Breakout Session Recommendations,”](#) National Council for Science and the Environment, 10th National Conference on Science, Policy, and the Environment: The New Green Economy, [NCSE website](#).
18. “House Passes Solis’ Green Jobs Bill: Legislation Provides

while the argument that Mexican immigrants generate more carbon dioxide (CO2) when they come across the border may seem laughable, the Right can nonetheless wave a scholarly article in the faces of those eager to hear such claims.[12] As Colin Rajah of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights explains, the Center for Immigration Studies, a right-wing think tank, “started talking about climate about eight years ago”:

They put out “scientific” studies showing that immigrants have higher birth rates and that immigrants from Mexico increase their CO2 emissions when they migrate to the U.S. They argue that sending immigrants home is a way to cut global CO2 emissions. Basically they are preserving overconsumption for the U.S. while feeding racist notions.

Roy Beck, head of the anti-immigrant policy center Numbers USA, even managed to get himself invited to speak at the Tenth National Conference on Science, Policy, and the Environment: The New Green Economy, an annual gathering whose 2010 aim was to explore “how investment in green education, research and jobs can help solve both the economic and environmental crises.”[13] The conference is sponsored by the National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE), which seeks “to improve the scientific basis of environmental decision making,” [14] and has hundreds of university affiliates including Yale, Brown, and Duke. To the shock of progressives who know Beck, the NCSE invited him to present his views on a panel about “greening the tax code.” Despite letters of protest – including one from the Apollo Alliance [15], a national leader on green jobs – Beck remained a speaker. According to one workshop attendee, Beck framed his usual assertion that immigration is causing overpopulation [16] as part of a commitment to a green economy, as well as suggesting that tax incentives be offered to encourage families to have fewer children. Beck leveraged his role as a conference panelist for significant impact: his call for a Bureau on Population and Consumption was adopted by the workshop attendees and incorporated into the conference’s list of recommendations.[17]

What’s the Fight About?

Most people understand a “green job” to be one that benefits both the economy and the environment. Yet, interpretations and arguments over the meaning of “green jobs” abound.

“Decisions are being made all the time,” she argues. “Progressives’ response needs to be more than ‘Oh my gosh!’

The term “green jobs” was first written into law in the title of the Green Jobs Act of 2007, legislation signed by George W. Bush. According to the bill’s co-author, former Congresswoman (and current Secretary of Labor) Hilda Solis, the bill was designed “to establish national and state job training programs, administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, to help address job shortages that are impairing growth in green industries, such as energy efficient buildings and construction, renewable electric power, energy efficient vehicles, and biofuels development.”[18] According to the bill, a job was considered green if it was located in one of these industries.

Green for All, the organization co-founded by Van Jones, had a different take. Green for All emerged in 2007 as one of many players seeking to take control of the green-economy agenda. First in line were the wide array of corporations who define themselves as “clean energy” and who seek to expand that sector with more profits, subsidies, and workers. Next came organized labor and its economic-justice allies, such as the Apollo Alliance, who had long advocated for family-wage green jobs as part of a strategy to revive the devastated U.S. manufacturing sector. A range of social-justice organizations such as the NAACP have also entered the debate, seeking to ensure that green jobs benefit traditionally marginalized people of color and women.

Within this constellation, Green for All has carved out a role as a champion of green equity, seeking to “build an inclusive green economy strong enough to lift people out of poverty” and hold “the most vulnerable people at the center of our agenda.”[19] Green for All is guided by Jones’s 2008 book, *The Green Collar Economy*, in which he advocates harnessing green-business energy and channeling it toward support for “family-supporting, career-track, vocational, or trade-level employment in environmentally friendly fields.” [20]

Green for All also sought to establish itself as an important political player willing to work with allies outside the progressive infrastructure. “Green for All sits in a broader political

Workforce Training for the ‘Green Economy,” press release, [Office of Hilda Solis, U.S. House of Representatives](#), August 4, 2007.

19. “Our Mission”, Green for All [website](#).
20. Van Jones, *Green Collar Jobs: How One Solution Can Fix Our Two Biggest Problems*, New York: HarperCollins, 2008.
21. Phone interview, June 7, 2010.
22. Phone interview, July 15, 2010.
23. “[Fighting for Green Justice: In the Race For Green Jobs, Environmental Justice Advocates Don’t Want Urban Communities To Get Left Behind.](#)” Brentin Mock, *AmericanProspect.org*, March 23, 2009.
24. Phone interview, July 26, 2010.
25. Interview, July 20, 2010.
26. Phone interview, July 26, 2010.
27. Phone interview, July 21, 2010.
28. Yvonne Yen Liu and Terry Keleher, *Green Equity Toolkit, Standards and Strategies for Advancing Race, Gender, and Economic Equity in the Green Economy*. Oakland, CA: Applied Research Center, 2009.
29. Jason Reece, Matt Martin, Christy Rogers and Stephen Menendian, *ARRA and the Economic Crisis - One Year Later: Has Stimulus Helped Communities in Crisis?*, Columbus, OH: Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2010.
30. “Fair Game: A Strategy Guide for Racial Justice Communications in the Obama Era.” The Praxis Project, May 2010.
31. Jones was, of course, the first of many, including the National Endowment for the Arts Communications Director Yosi Sergeant, the White House Communications Director Anita Dunn, the Federal Communications Commission Chief Diversity Officer Mark Lloyd, and of course more recently the Georgia Director of Rural Development at the Department of Agriculture, Shirley Sherrod.
32. Phone interview, May 25, 2010.
33. Phone interview, July 22, 2010.
34. Phone interview, July 15, 2010.
35. Mary Jo Connelly, *The Green Justice Solution: a Win-Win Plan to Prevent Climate Crisis and Jumpstart an Equitable and Sustainable Economic Recovery*, Boston, MA: Community Labor

landscape than just social-justice organizations,” explains Vivian Chang, Green for All’s director of state and local initiatives. “Green businesses may not care about equity, but we are building relationships with them that we can leverage,” she says. The alternative, believes Chang, is a progressive sector that watches from the sidelines. “Decisions are being made all the time,” she argues. “Progressives’ response needs to be more than ‘Oh my gosh!’” [21]

The new green jobs framing was powerful, says Penn Loh, a Tufts University Urban and Environmental Planning professor and the former director of Alternatives for Community and Environment in Boston. “We were inspired by Van,” reflects Loh. “He put out an opportunity framing on how fundamental shifts are coming, and we need to take leadership on the issue and decide our own opportunities within that. Van framed something positive to work for.” [22] Loh and others point out, though, that while the term “green jobs” is relatively new, the idea of linking the needs of communities of color with the pursuit of a greener economy is not.

Shrinking from Racial Justice

“Long before the green-development movement became trendy,” writes Brentin Mock in a 2009 *American Prospect* article, [23] “environmental-justice groups had a significant history with federal employment programs related to the environment, even before they were labeled as ‘green jobs.’” Mock points to programs such as the 1995 Minority Worker Training Program, which targeted minority youth for work in environmental fields and included a program in which they were trained in the cleanup of brownfields, or polluted properties.

“When the Green for All conception of ‘green jobs’ was rolled out in 2007 it was framed in a way that would not ruffle feathers and trigger an outcry from the Right,” says Robert Bullard, the director of the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University. “In its inception, in order for ‘green jobs’ to move forward politically and strategically, its scope needed to be limited,” observes Bullard. [24]

“‘Green jobs’ was a great reframing of a good environmental justice idea,” argues Karlos Gauna-Schmieder, communications strategist with the Center for Media Justice. “But pulling out only the ‘jobs’ piece diluted the analysis of racism that environmental justice brought to it.” [25]

“Progressives were framing green jobs as ‘race neutral,’” agrees Bullard. “Green jobs came at a time when antidiscrimination measures like set-asides and affirmative action had been dismantled. Without those how do you mandate that people of color have access to green jobs? Very few communities have sat down and written out antidiscrimination protections. Everyone’s skittish due to concerns from the Right.” [26]

The Right’s attack on Van Jones was part of a larger strategy of “using race to take mainstream concepts and make them seem marginal and scary.”

“If you pay attention to history,” asserts Makani Themba-Nixon, executive director of the Praxis Project, a nonprofit organization that helps community groups organize around issues of public health,

“you find that things like green retrofitting and weatherization and federal initiatives going on now were going on in the nineties. There were subsidies, but once they disappeared folks were subject to the same market racism as before. Without addressing how race structures opportunities and outcomes, people get lifted up then dropped.” [27]

In the Green Jobs Equity Toolkit, the Applied Research Center, a leading racial-justice advocacy organization, makes a similar point:

Although there are dramatic differences between the gray and green economies, there are too many instances where so-called green jobs are low-wage and dead-end, where women and people of color are excluded, and where working conditions are unsafe and workers’ rights are ignored. When policy makers and green firms don’t consciously weave equity into a strategy for developing the green economy, green jobs are not guaranteed to be any more equitable or sustainable than jobs in the gray economy. [28]

Indeed, the challenge of targeting green jobs to low-income communities of color remains formidable. In a 2010 report, *ARRA One Year Later: Failing to Address Joblessness for Marginalized Racial Populations*, the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity

United, 2010.

36. Summary of Green Justice Solution on Apollo Alliance [website](#).
37. Phone interview, July 14, 2010.
38. “Environmental Justice and the Green Economy: A Vision Statement and Case Studies for Just and Sustainable Solutions,” Roxbury, MA: Alternatives for Community & Environment, Inc., 2010.
39. Phone interview, July 14, 2010.
40. “[Translating Green Into Navajo: Alternatives to Coal Mining and The Campaign for a Navajo Green Economy](#),” Oakland, CA: Applied Research Center, 2010.
41. Phone interview, July 12, 2010.
42. Phone interview, June 3, 2010.
43. [Communities Against Prop 23](#)
44. “The Brothers Koch and AB 32,” *The New York Times*, September 20, 2010.
45. [San Francisco Chronicle on line, November 3, 2010.](#)
46. “How California Can Set a Better Example on Jobs and Environment,” Julie Kaszton, *San Francisco Examiner*, October 6, 2010.
47. [Tea party activists back Prop. 23 in Sacramento protest. Sacramento Bee. Friday, October, 15.](#)
48. Voter Opposition To Prop. 19 (Marijuana) Has Grown. Strong Opposition To Prop. 23 (Suspending Ab32). Continuing Support For Prop. 25 (Majority Vote For State Budgets). The Field Poll. Release 2365. Field Research Corporation, San Francisco. October 31, 2010.
49. Phone interview, October 18, 2010.
50. [Communities United Against the Dirty Energy Prop website](#), November 1, 2010.
51. Letter to Van Jones, Special Advisor for Green Jobs, Enterprise, and Innovation, White House Council on Environmental Quality, signed by 11 environmental justice leaders representing organizations such as WE ACT for Environmental Justice, Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, and People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources, on letterhead listing 22 organizations, March 13, 2009.

concluded that “the scale and scope of the [economic] crisis has overwhelmed the federal response. The Administration should now consider more significant actions” including “an equitable jobs bill” that “would ideally support community development in urban and minority-majority areas, which have been damaged most severely by the recession and credit crises.” [29] The report calls for renewed efforts to “ensure that marginalized communities are brought fully into the green economy, as “green job” initiatives begin to take shape in both federal and state policy.”

The irony, maintains Bullard, is that “the Right has been willing to focus on race even if progressives aren’t. That’s what happened to Van.” Themba-Nixon agrees: “The attack on Jones was a test case for America’s right wing,” she writes in *Fair Game: A Strategy Guide for Racial Justice Communications in the Obama Era* (2010). [30]

[The Right] easily leveraged racial stereotypes and long-time phobia of Black men and left-thinking progressives to gain his ouster. More casualties followed as the Right used this potent combination of racism, anti-Jewish sentiment, and fear of left ideas to frame other appointees as un-American. [31]

While the Right’s attack on Jones was part of a larger strategy of “using race to take mainstream concepts and make them seem marginal and scary,” observes Themba-Nixon, undermining the popularity of green jobs was also an aim. “The Right uses race in subtle ways: their message is ‘These aren’t jobs, they’re regulations. You are being fooled by people who want to give something to ‘undeserving’ people of color.’” Shying away from racial justice, it seems, has both weakened the effectiveness of green jobs efforts and made the green jobs agenda vulnerable to right-wing assault.

Progressive Visions for the Future

A growing number of progressive organizations are pushing to expand the idea of green jobs beyond what has been politically possible thus far. “The way green jobs are defined suggests that we can continue to have expanding growth if we have an economy that is based on clean energy and solar panels,” maintains Gopal Dayaneni of Movement Generation, an organization that works on environmental justice issues in the San Francisco Bay Area. “It’s not challenging who controls those jobs. It legitimizes overconsumption.” [32]

“Green jobs’ isn’t the right framework,” says Loh, “It’s too narrow. If the shifts coming are really that big, then ‘green the economy’ is not just about capitalism fixing itself. It’s also about shifting who benefits from and who controls the economy.” Dennis Rhoden, head of the Energy Democracy Program for the Center for Social Inclusion, asserts, “We have an opportunity to think about green jobs *and beyond*. Even working in a traditional market structure, we still need to try to turn the market idea on its head.” [33]

“We have to make more of a distinction between corporate-led greening and community-led greening,” agrees Loh. “There are certain elements that really do think all we have to do is put competitive economic markets to work to solve all our problems.” Loh describes how “community-led greening” is beginning to work in his liberal state of Massachusetts.

During the 2008 Green Jobs Act we saw green venture-capital and high-tech start-ups going for the bulk of the subsidies in the bill. The speaker of the House [Sal DiMasi, now under indictment for corruption] was with them but the legislators pushed back and really questioned those companies on how they were creating jobs for the inner city. Their arguments for a green, Ph.D.-based innovation economy backfired with committee members from economically depressed communities. [34]

We need to reframe green jobs to be not just jobs but collective power and community building in a green economy

Darlene Lombos, co-director of Community Labor United (CLU) in Massachusetts, was one of the authors of *The Green Justice Solution* (2008) [35], which asserts that the bottom line for success is “building community capacity and ownership for greening.” She says,

We must start from the question: “What does it take for a community to develop the capacity to green its own economy and environment?” Although the public sector and businesses have major roles to play in creating new energy and

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efficiency opportunities, greening our communities is not something that can come from outside, something that can be “done to” or “done for” us. Each family, each work group, each neighborhood and congregation has a critical role to play.[36]

Like Loh, Lombos believes, “We need to reframe green jobs to be not just jobs but collective power and community building in a green economy.”[37] This could, of course, mean many things. For Dayaneni it includes immediate choices, such as using federal stimulus funds “to incubate local worker-owned collectives, not just jobs for local residents.”

The 2010 report, “Environmental Justice and the Green Economy,[38],” which Loh co-edited, offers three key principles to guide the building of a just and sustainable economy: full and meaningful participation of all communities in spending decisions; investment only in truly sustainable infrastructure and economic development; and creation of economic alternatives that can generate shared green wealth.

A Green Economy from the Bottom Up

Lombos points to her work with the Boston Green Justice Coalition on the federally mandated increases in energy efficiency for utilities. The Coalition ran a campaign to ensure that these mandates would result in low-income communities’ access to rebates and incentives as well as “high road” green jobs. “Cost effectiveness,” Lombos points out, “is usually defined only in terms of energy reduction, not in terms of social and economic benefits.” For example, utility companies often offer rebates for homeowners who weatherize—but this doesn’t help low-income families who cannot put up the initial investment. Moreover, says Lombos, utilities are creating weatherization jobs that are intermittent and not concentrated in one geographic area; they are temporary and often out of reach for low-income communities. Utility companies “use market-based solutions for what [they see as] market-based problems,” concludes Lombos. “The result is green-economy marginalization of communities of color who have been systematically marginalized by the fossil-fuel economy.”[39]

Recognizing this, the Green Justice Coalition ran a successful campaign to establish a publicly funded pilot project to make energy-efficiency resources available to low-income communities and create real employment opportunities for residents. The project establishes neighborhood-based weatherization programs, through which resources can be accessed collectively. Weatherization projects get “bundled” in time and location in an effort to create steady employment. A union partnership seeks to ensure that the weatherization jobs will be high quality. While the coalition continues to struggle with the utility company, Lombos believes “this campaign helped us break apart the market-based ideology while we were pushing for real impacts. We need to find more opportunities like this, to really shape what a community-defined green economy looks like.”

Native communities are leading some of the most innovative work on the green economy. “Our definition of green jobs challenges every aspect of the mainstream green jobs definition,” says Nikke Alex, director of the Black Mesa Water Coalition in Flagstaff, Arizona, the organization that launched the Navajo Green Economy Coalition.[40] In 2009 this coalition won the enactment of the Navajo Green Economic Plan, which created a structure through which tribes control the influx and use of green jobs funding, directing it toward local economy project such as wool mills and farmers markets. “For us, green jobs means revitalizing tradition that has been lost,” maintains Alex. “White environmentalists’ definition of green jobs is at large, regional scale. It doesn’t work. Every community needs to define green jobs for itself, neighborhood to neighborhood, around cultures and lifestyles.”[41]

Alex describes the difference between the coalition’s green-jobs efforts and the interests of wind and solar companies seeking access to Indian land. “Renewal energy companies are really interested in tribal lands. There were two wind-energy companies trying to come in; one was approaching one part of tribal government and the other was approaching another. Both were promising jobs. It was a big diversion from the Navajo Green Economy Plan,” she says.

“Renewable energy companies come in and give tribes horrible deals,” continues Alex. “They’re just as bad as coal.” Alex believes that without grassroots-directed energy policies, marginalized people are vulnerable to exploitation. “Tribes need strong energy policies that focus on helping grassroots people rather than on having huge renewable-energy companies come here.”

In the face of right-wing attacks, expanding the green-jobs agenda may seem unwise. Some argue, however, that now is the time. Progressives must put forth “a coherent alternative vision that people can get behind,” argues Loh. “We can’t win that much without challenging market-based ideology.” Dayaneni, too, urges green-jobs advocates to openly challenge corporate-defined “green” solutions. “Green venture- and renewable-energy capital—usually thought of as wind or solar—is getting into crazier things like synthetic biology and novel microbial life forms,” he says. “These are not only false solutions, they are also scary.”

We need a loud voice making it clear that the drive for growth is at the heart of the problem

Colin Rajah, at the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR) agrees, noting, for example, that the “green corporations want cheap immigrant labor. They want expansion of a guest-worker program for green jobs. Guest workers are needed for seasonal jobs, some of which could be classified as ‘green.’” Rajah points to the construction of solar panels as an example of seasonal work “creating a temporary demand for exploitable labor.” [42]

“We need a loud voice making it clear that the drive for growth is at the heart of the problem,” maintains Dayaneni. Progressives, he adds, should challenge the policies and ideas of the Right directly, in order to widen the spectrum of political debate. “Progressives need to say ‘we won’t solar power our way out of this’ so the Right will attack *us*, not the center, and the debate will shift toward real solutions rather than just what is politically possible at this time.”

Ultimately, says Loh, progressives need to develop a deeper long-term strategy. “We are doing incremental work,” he says, “but we need to answer, ‘What is the framework that should undergird the work?’” Bullard agrees. “The green economy cuts across a lot of policies, programs, and ideas. We on the Left haven’t done a lot of thinking across all those sectors. We need to roll out initiatives that see the connections across areas.”

We’re not being bold enough,” says Lombos. “We’re too careful, too worried about making moderates look bad.” She believes it’s crucial “to build coalitions with communities of color as decision makers. These create a path to a deeper analysis of what a green economy means.”

Reuniting Green Jobs and Environmental Justice

In early October, Van Jones joined longtime environmental-justice leader Pam Tau Lee and farmworker organizing legend Delores Huerta to throw their support behind a new effort, Communities United Against the Dirty Energy Prop., [43] a grassroots campaign to defeat Proposition 23 in California’s November election. Funded by big oil companies – including a \$1 million contribution from Koch Industries [44] – Proposition 23 sought to suspend the state’s [2006 Global Warming Solutions Act](#) until the state’s unemployment rate fell to 5.5% for at least a year; in other words, indefinitely.

In a remarkable victory on an otherwise dark day for progressives, California voters rejected Proposition 23 on November 2, with over 60% voting against the proposed initiative. [45]

Some had feared a tight race as advocates such as the Koch-funded Pacific Research Institute once again trotted out the Spanish study to stir up fears of job loss. [46] California Tea Party activists had turned out to support Proposition 23, even organizing a protest at the state headquarters of the California Air Resources Board waving “Save Jobs” placards. [47] Not surprisingly, an election eve field poll found that voters who identify strongly with the Tea Party movement favored Prop. 23 by 61% to 28%. Voters who identified somewhat with the Tea Party supported the initiative by nine points. [48] Against this backdrop, Communities United, representing more than 130 community organizations and renewable energy businesses, launched to galvanize voters in low income communities of color. “If we don’t jump in,” explained Mari Rose Taruc, the state coordinator, who is based at the Asian-Pacific Environmental Network, in an interview prior to the election, “this would be the usual fight between white environmentalists and industry. That’s not okay, because low income communities of color are the most impacted by pollution and climate change. Our leadership needs to be central in this fight.” [49] According to Taruc, the campaign focused on “talking directly to voters, doing field work, not ad campaigns, taking interaction with voters to a deeper level that turns people around and gets them fired up to go to the polls.” With Jones, Lee, and Huerta co-chairing, Communities United sought to inspire and educate African

American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Latino voters around a bottom up vision of community health and green jobs. Over the course of the campaign, Communities United held over 250,000 one-on-one conversations with voters through door-knocking and phone-banking and sent direct mail pieces in English, Spanish and Chinese to over 280,000 households of color. [50]

Remarkably, less than a year has passed since a cross-section of environmental justice leaders from across the country signed an open letter to Jones criticizing him for his published comments that environmental justice groups were too focused on gaining “equal protection from bad stuff” while his green jobs allies sought “equal access to good stuff.” [51] Today the threat of Proposition 23 created an opportunity for collaboration between environmental justice and green jobs leaders.

“The work against Proposition 23 is one of the most exciting and aligned places between environmental justice and green jobs in a long, long time,” observes Taruc. “Because Proposition 23 has two clear sides it has made it easy to lift up environmental justice concerns around the negative health effects of pollution and climate, as well as the new opportunities that good green jobs can offer.”

But the campaign against Prop 23 is more than just a united front, maintains Taruc. Through Communities United, environmental justice organizers and green jobs advocates forged a direct working relationship, with space for dialogue and creative tension. “Because environment justice folks are working alongside green jobs folks,” explained Taruc, “the [environmental justice] people are reminded that we have ideas for green jobs too. We’re allowing ourselves to articulate those ideas, to imagine alternatives.” Neither fighting against each other nor compromising their principles, both sectors are seeing and hearing other points of view. For example, said Taruc, “When we’ve brought the green jobs folks to a community next to a refinery they have been really moved. They’ve gotten a better sense of the urgent problems we’re fighting against, and seeing how these are the same communities they’re trying to work with on green jobs.”

The defeat of Proposition 23 is cause for celebration. At the same time, larger questions loom as to how progressives can win on offense as well as defense. Answering these questions will be neither quick nor easy. It will require deep leadership from communities most harmed by a fossil fuel economy. It will require bold articulation of a green economy agenda that challenges the confines the Right has successfully imposed. It will require candid reflection on recent history and development of strategy that starts immediately but spans decades. The Communities United experience, Taruc concludes, offers a glimpse of possibility, a moment in which progressives came together “not just about green jobs but about what green jobs are for.”

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Political Research Associates • 1310 Broadway, Suite 201 • Somerville, MA 02144
Voice: 617.666.5300 • Fax: 617.666.6622 • pra@publiceye.org