Wanted: Green Collar Workers

While policy makers have given a lot of attention to the issue of climate change, they have said far less about what needs to happen behind the scenes to make proposed solutions work.

Ensuring that there are enough skilled workers to fill the green jobs of the future will require an enormous workforce development effort. It will not be easy.

Let's take a look at one area – conservation.

New Jersey's draft Energy Master Plan proposes conducting energy efficiency upgrades on every building in the state by the year 2020. This is more than 3.5 million homes, offices and factories. This will require a small army of workers to conduct energy audits, replace lights, insulate walls, caulk windows, upgrade furnaces and perform countless other tasks that the audits recommend.

Add to this the large demand for workers needed to build, install and maintain solar panels and wind turbines to help meet the state's requirement that 20 percent of our energy needs come from renewable energy in just 12 years.

Given the magnitude of the tasks ahead and the short time frame in which New Jersey must meet its goals, actions are required now. We must begin mapping strategies for developing a green workforce today if we are to achieve the state's energy goals.

The complexity of this challenge demands thoughtful collaboration among the interested parties – government, industry, labor, non-profits and educational institutions – to establish workforce development programs that can address the evolving needs of the green economy.

We must identify the specific skills the green economy will require and invest in retooling existing training programs and creating new ones to help meet the demand.

Green collar jobs have the potential to transform our economy, bringing job growth and economic development to communities all over New Jersey. Green industries are labor intensive and local. Retrofitting homes and installing solar panels aren't the kinds of jobs that can be done from overseas. These are jobs well within reach for many of the state's residents.

PSEG has just published a white paper on green jobs. It is entitled *Developing New Jersey's Green Energy Workforce* and can be found at www.pseg.com/workforce. We encourage you to read the paper and think about the issue…and offer your ideas as well.

What's your view? Please let us know at Opinion@PSEG.com

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