

Clean Energy Corps

A Proposal for Building a Strong and Inclusive Green Economy

Millions of Americans want to serve in the fight against global warming, but lack organized opportunities to do so. Millions of others seek pathways out of poverty or better employment in the clean energy economy, but lack the necessary skills and connections to unions and employers. Untold numbers of cities, businesses, schools and homeowners want to retrofit their buildings, infrastructures and homes — work that would create hundreds of thousands of jobs — but lack the financing to do so. America as a whole is suffering through an economic recession, rising energy prices and energy insecurity, job losses, and an increasing scarcity of hope and common purpose. Americans are looking for solutions.

In order to meet this unprecedented intersection of challenges, we propose a national Clean Energy Corps (CEC). The CEC would be a combined service, training, and job creation effort, concentrated in cities and struggling communities, to combat global warming, grow local and regional economies and demonstrate the equity and employment promise of the clean energy economy. The CEC would:

- Invest in the energy efficiency in buildings — the source of 2/5 of national energy consumption — by creating financing mechanisms that would put public and private capital to work, covering up-front costs and capturing the energy savings. This part of the CEC program is largely self-financing and would create local jobs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions on a vast scale;
- Work with a wide array of employers, national and community organizations, educational institutions and unions to connect workers to high-quality, career track green-collar jobs;
- Specifically seek to develop “green pathways out of poverty” for low-income and unemployed people, providing them the training, work experience, job placement, and other services needed to gain family-supporting jobs in the green economy;
- Preserve and enlarge green public spaces, strengthen community defenses against climate disruption, and enlist America’s public lands in the fight against climate change by planting trees and restoring wetlands and rivers as never before; and
- Directly engage millions of Americans in diverse service, service learning, and volunteer work related to climate protection.

We believe the time is right for such an effort. Our ailing economy needs a stimulus that is long-term, sustainable and focused on communities. The

public urgently wants action to promote clean energy, increase energy security and curb global warming. Americans overwhelmingly support the idea of voluntary national service and support a stronger national effort in this area. Young adults of the “greenest generation” are already volunteering in record numbers and would welcome the opportunity to serve the nation in combating climate change; so will a generation of skilled baby boomers looking for useful activities in their retirement. Blue-collar workers — particularly those left on the bench by a stalled construction industry — are looking for a chance to apply their skills to green-collar work that rebuilds our nation. Low-income communities are keenly aware of the economic promise of a clean energy economy, and are eager to realize the opportunities and second chances it will provide to people and communities that have historically been left behind. A bold visible national effort like the CEC would bring together Americans across social class, background and experience, and powerfully advance the national effort to stop global warming while widening economic opportunity and active citizenship. Helping to heal the planet, it would also help heal the nation.

A working group of individuals from key organizations has developed the CEC proposal and had early success promoting the concept and encouraging public figures to adopt versions of it as their own. The final CEC proposal will be amenable to adaptation in a number of federal policy environments. It can be a stand-alone bill and program or an integrated part of several policies including cap and trade.

The Clean Energy Corps’ integrated approach to climate protection builds support for that effort by demonstrating its immediate benefit to our communities and offering all citizens opportunities for meaningful service to it. It is a big idea that is tangible enough to capture the imagination of America, unite key constituencies, and motivate millions to act.

The CEC is a proposal of the Clean Energy Corps Working Group, a unique collaboration of a number of individuals from around the country that began in January 2007. Core members of the CEC working group are (institutional affiliations for identification purposes only): Kate Gordon (Apollo Alliance), Jeremy Hays (Green For All), Bracken Hendricks (Center for American Progress Action Fund), Van Jones (Green For All), Billy Parish (Energy Action Coalition, Green For All), Sally Prouty (The Corps Network), Joel Rogers (Center on Wisconsin Strategy, Center for State Innovation), Gene Sofer (The Susquehanna Group), Lisbeth Shepherd (Green For All), Susan Stroud (Innovations in Civic Participation), and Jason Walsh (Green For All).

For more information, contact Billy Parish (billyparish@gmail.com) or Lisbeth Shepherd (lisbethshepherd@yahoo.com).