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W.Va. lags in fostering green jobs

Across the country, states are taking action to create growth in the green economy. Governors are establishing task forces and commissions, developing action plans and policies, and making direct investments in green economic development. With almost 60,000 jobless workers, the state cannot afford to miss out on the growing green economy.

The term "green jobs" simply means jobs that can support families, as well as improve environmental quality by reducing carbon emissions through proven methods. This would include jobs in industries such as renewable energy, green services and products, and energy conservation.

Many states, including North Carolina, Massachusetts, and Washington, have created green job or green business funds. These funds provide grants for workforce training and pathways out of poverty programs, research and analysis, and funding for businesses to support green innovation, job creation and economic development.

Just recently, Gov. Perdue of North Carolina invested \$5 million in federal recovery money for its Green Business Fund and \$7 million for green workforce development programs. New York is using federal recovery money to create a new "Green Jobs Corp" program that provides public assistance and job training to low-income individuals for employment opportunities in "green" jobs.

Last year, Massachusetts passed a Green Jobs Act that invests \$68 million in advancing its green economy. The Act also set up a trust fund that provides seed money for clean energy companies, a workforce development grant program for universities and technical colleges, and a pathways out of poverty initiative that provides grants to community-based groups, non-profits, and labor organizations for workforce training. Massachusetts has linked these programs to a mandated reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Michigan, another state that has relied heavily on one industry for its economic fortunes, is wasting no time. As part of her No Worker Left Behind program, Michigan Gov. Granholm launched a green jobs initiative to accelerate workers' transition into new jobs and to diversify the state's economy. Earlier this year, Michigan released one of the most comprehensive scientific surveys of green jobs ever produced.

While other states are moving forward, West Virginia remains behind and out of step. We have no green economic strategy, no studies on the feasibility of green jobs in our state, no direct public investment. Our state's lack of commitment is highly unfortunate because green jobs typically pay about 10 to 20 percent more than other jobs and are one of the fastest growing sectors in the economy. Over the next decade, the federal government will invest billions in green industries. West Virginia will need a long-term strategy and action plan if we expect to take advantage of this job creation opportunity.

West Virginia must set up its own green jobs task force to explore the state's potential and possibilities in the green economy. A green jobs task force should include members of the business and faith communities, labor organizations, non-profits, government officials, and representatives from the state's universities and technical and community colleges. This task force should be charged with developing a set of concrete policies aimed at increasing the supply of green jobs along with measures to increase the demand for green products and services.

One strategy would be to conduct energy efficiency retrofits of housing units on a mass scale in West Virginia. This would save families hundreds of dollars a year in energy costs and create thousands of jobs. It would also save us money, increase real estate values, and reduce our carbon

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footprint. The State Assembly of New York recently passed such legislation to perform energy-efficiency retrofits to one million homes in five years. The legislation aims to create 30,000 jobs and pay for itself over time.

Emmaia Gelman, the director of Green Policy at the Center for Working Families, is one of the driving forces behind this legislation and will be speaking on October 18 at the Create West Virginia conference in Huntington.

With one of the country's least diverse economies, now is the time to rebuild our economy and plan for the future. We need leadership, we need vision, and we need action.

To learn more about green jobs, register for the Create West Virginia Conference at createwv.org.

Boettner is the executive director of the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy.