

Green-collar jobs vital to sustainable N.S. economy

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Susan Bone of Ellora Natural and Organic Foods holds a bowl of organic apples at her business in La Have, which maintains the co-op concept and employs sound management principles. (Peter Parsons / Staff)

The provincial government has invited citizens to give advice to help Nova Scotia get back into financial balance. The province is faced with the serious economic challenges of increasing budgetary deficits and mounting debt.

However, it must also deal with other difficult social and environmental problems, including rising energy costs, unemployment, climate change and poverty. If we do not address these challenges simultaneously, our province will never truly prosper.

In the consultations, *Back to Balance*, one of the four questions that the government has asked is: What investments should be made today that will help grow the economy in the long term?

We believe a green-collar job strategy is a critical investment to stimulate the economy, reduce poverty and protect the environment.

A green-collar job has been defined as blue-collar employment that has been upgraded to better respect the environment. These jobs are also career-track and family-supporting. Examples of such jobs include electricians who install solar panels, farmers involved in organic agriculture, foresters in quality-improvement silviculture, service providers in sustainable tourism, and construction workers who build energy-efficient buildings and mass transportation systems.

Last year, Blue Green Canada was established by an alliance of two national labour and environmental organizations: the United Steelworkers and Environmental Defence. They are jointly advocating for the creation of a green manufacturing strategy that addresses climate change and reduces toxic chemicals in commercial activity across the country (www.bluegreencanada.ca).

In December, the Council of Canadians and the Canadian Labour Congress released a report, *Green Decent and Public*, that examined green job potential in Canada. The report focused on the important role of governments and the public sector and found that with targeted investments, thousands of decent jobs can be created in energy efficiency and renewable energy. It also emphasizes the distinct advantages of public and community ownership of needed renewable energy expansion.

The report cites the impressive Home Retrofit program by the German Alliance for Work and the Environment. Since 2001, 11 billion euros of public investment led to 342,000 homes renovated, 140,000 jobs created or saved, and two million tonnes per year of greenhouse gas emissions reduced in Germany.

In the United States, almost 1,500 mayors have signed on to the Green Jobs Pledge to create a thriving green-collar workforce. Van Jones, the author of the book *The Green Collar Economy* and founder of Green

For All in the U.S., has documented many successful examples of poor communities being positively transformed by going green (www.greenforall.org).

The government of Ontario has taken up the green-collar challenge with the recent passing of the Green Energy Act. The act has given Ontario the potential to create and sustain 90,000 good-paying jobs over the next 10 years, according to the study entitled Building the Green Economy: Employment Effects of Green Energy Investments for Ontario.

Nova Scotia can be a leader in the clean-energy economy with a green-collar job strategy. The strategy would harness the full potential and power of the provincial Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act and the climate-change strategy.

A Nova Scotia green-collar job strategy would require an integrated government approach that collaborates with our academic, labour, private and non-profit sectors. It should also draw on the environmental and energy efficiency expertise of community groups like Clean Nova Scotia, the Ecology Action Centre, Solar Nova Scotia, and Clean Annapolis River Project among others. As well, the strategy should support home-grown businesses like Thermal Dynamics and link with initiatives like the Nova Scotia Business Alliance for Local Living Economies.

A green-collar job strategy for Nova Scotia would get the province on a new path of economic, social and environmental prosperity and bring us into real balance.

The public is invited to a free talk, entitled A Green Collar Economy: Innovative Ideas for Social Change in Nova Scotia, today, 7:30-9 p.m. in Room 104, Dalhousie Law School, 6061 University Ave. in Halifax. The event is organized by the Nova Scotia Environmental Network and the Council of Canadians. For more information, please phone 902-454-6846 or visit us online at www.nsen.ca.

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