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## **Stimulating conversations**

Last week, Vice President Joseph Biden came to Philadelphia to launch the White House Middle Class Task Force, with the main topic being jobs – green jobs – and how creating great green jobs will build our economy, enhance our security, fight global warming, and restore the middle class.

The vice president couldn't have come to a better place. The entire Keystone State has been having such stimulating conversations – and turning those conversations into jobs – for years.

In Philadelphia, Mayor Michael Nutter and internationally recognized green jobs advocate Van Jones discussed their plans to use green jobs training and recruitment as an economic development strategy for low income neighborhoods. On the same day as the vice president's visit, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation announced more than \$1.3 million in grants to the City of Philadelphia, Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia, and the Energy Coordinating Agency, to turn the second floor of a former textile factory in Kensington into a school to teach skills for green jobs.

In the west, the Green Innovators are working together to create a major, world class, one-stop shop for green entrepreneurs, job training, and environmental education and advocacy, located in the heart of Pittsburgh. Partners include local universities, the Pittsburgh Board of Public Education; Community College of Allegheny County; labor unions; environmental and other public interest organizations; local, state and federal elected officials; government agencies; green investors; architects; and local green industries.

In Erie, Ebsenburg and beyond, thousands of green jobs are already filled, with more to come. We are rebuilding our industrial sector with factories making wind energy and solar components, and creating local neighborhood jobs conducting energy audits, retrofitting homes and businesses, and helping all our families and businesses use energy smarter, with less waste. And we are helping new energy technologies develop and come to market through our universities and smart energy incubators.

Pennsylvanians were among the first to recognize that growing the clean energy and energy conservation industries creates jobs and grows the economy. Our Alternative

Energy Portfolio Standard, passed in 2004, helped jump-start clean energy production in the state by requiring that an increasing amount of our electricity must come from wind and solar power. The market for green energy was already in place and growing as our state government, colleges and universities and businesses and households across the Commonwealth voluntarily bought green power. And this is no small potatoes – under Governor Rendell, the state government is committed to filling at least 30 percent of its electricity need with renewable energy.

Other policies, coupled with grants and loans, are driving our green economy. Last fall, we adopted a robust energy savings law, creating a triple win that will deliver relief from high electricity bills for Pennsylvania's families and businesses; a guaranteed reduction in pollution through smarter use of energy; and the creation of thousands of great green jobs. Just this week, Gov. Rendell announced \$16 million in low-interest loans and \$1 million in rebates through Keystone HELP, a state home-energy loan program primarily for households with combined incomes of \$150,000 or less.

Pennsylvania's new \$650 million Alternative Energy Investment Fund will create a billion dollar energy market across the state. Pennsylvania is clearly one big "shovel ready" state. We are in great shape to take advantage of the federal stimulus package.

Overall, the federal stimulus plan contains more than \$22 billion for renewable energy and energy conservation programs. And while all the details have yet to be worked out, Pennsylvania's share of that money includes \$258 million for weatherizing houses to lower energy costs for low income families, and tax credits up to \$1,500 for moderate income families for windows, roofs, insulation, water heaters, heating and cooling systems, and more. There are also tax credits for buying or leasing hybrid vehicles, and there is a 30 percent tax credit for installing solar or small wind energy systems, with no cap on the amount.

These combined state and federal programs will create a huge demand for energy audits, installation of new energy savings measures and green energy systems, like solar panels and small wind turbines. That will drive job growth throughout the state. And that will go a long way to turning our economy around.

Altogether, it's pretty stimulating.

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