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Changing Red to Green

Sometimes it feels like we're drowning in a flood of red ink. Every budget – from the federal government to the states to municipalities to families – has less income and more expenses. More than one in 10 Americans are out of work. And bad news seems to be the order of the day.

But if you look beyond the headlines, you'll see that, here at home, some of that red flood is turning green – both in terms of money, and in terms of the environment. Pennsylvania is doing better than our nation is. And we have our embrace of the new clean energy economy to thank, in great part.

So, how much better are we doing? Our state added 10,600 jobs in October. That's right – we added jobs. And our unemployment rate was 1.4 percent lower than the national rate. We are out-competing many Sunbelt states, including South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida and Nevada. *Forbes Magazine* just named Pittsburgh the fourth fastest recovering city in the nation, stating: "Diversified industry and relatively stable housing give residents ... a measure of economic security."

This good news for Pennsylvania isn't accidental. When times were better, our lawmakers planned for the future, passing clean energy laws to spur development. These laws, which brought billions in private investment into the state, helped create great green jobs. We've built wind farms and solar power plants, and we are installing energy savings technologies in homes and businesses statewide.

Again, the numbers tell the tale. Wind farms dot the state, providing fuel-free, non-polluting energy throughout the Commonwealth. We were second in the nation in wind power growth for the last two quarters this year. We have 1000 solar projects in various stages of development including Crayola Crayons' 1.9 MW solar farm in Easton and Aqua's 1 MW solar just outside Philadelphia. To help meet the demand for solar, a thin-film solar panel producer, Heliosphera US, announced last week that it will open a manufacturing facility in Philadelphia's Navy Yard, creating 400 jobs.

Because our clean energy policies were in place, Pennsylvania was ready to go with projects to be funded with federal stimulus dollars. And we've taken advantage of that readiness, investing in projects large and small. Since April, Pennsylvania has awarded four times the normal amount in grants to communities for water and sewer work -- \$1.4 billion. Our transportation dollars are going into "fix it first,"

investing in repairing our bridges and roads instead of building new.

But, despite our good news, we still have a long way to go to get our economy working for everyone. While we are turning our red ink to great green jobs, too many families in our state are barely holding on, and we need to focus like a laser beam on our future.

In 2004, our legislature focused on the future and passed the landmark Alternative Energy Portfolio Standard (AEPS) law, which required clean energy as part of the state's electricity supply. That enabled us to leap frog to the front of the line of states seeking clean energy investors.

Now many other states have passed or expanded their own renewable energy requirements, leaving us behind. But again, far-sighted legislators have solutions -- HB 80, sponsored by Rep. Greg Vitali (D-Delaware) and Rep. Chris Ross (R-Chester), and its companion in the Senate, SB 92, sponsored by Senator Ted Erickson (R-Delaware), the Green Jobs/Clean Energy bills, will increase Pennsylvania's supply of solar and wind energy, and move the state to the fore in significantly reducing carbon pollution from coal-fired power plants.

This legislation is another great leap forward in our drive to make energy cleaner and safer. It will more than double the amount of wind power produced, reduce carbon dioxide pollution by more than 13 million tons a year, and increase the amount of solar power by a factor of six. That means 438,000 homes in Pennsylvania could be powered by the sun.

The legislation will also propel Pennsylvania into a national and international leadership position in the capture and geologic storage of carbon emissions from coal-fired power plants that cause global warming. It would require that increasing percentages of energy come from coal-fired plants that don't release global warming pollution.

HB 80 has passed the House Environmental and Energy Committee and is ready for a floor vote, and SB 92 is now before the Senate Environmental and Energy Committee. Both houses still have time before the end of the year to pass Green Jobs/Clean Energy legislation.

That would be a great holiday present to Pennsylvania's economy, accelerating our drive to turn our red ink into great green jobs and investment, now and in the future.

PennFuture Facts is available for reprint; authors are available for print or broadcast interviews.