



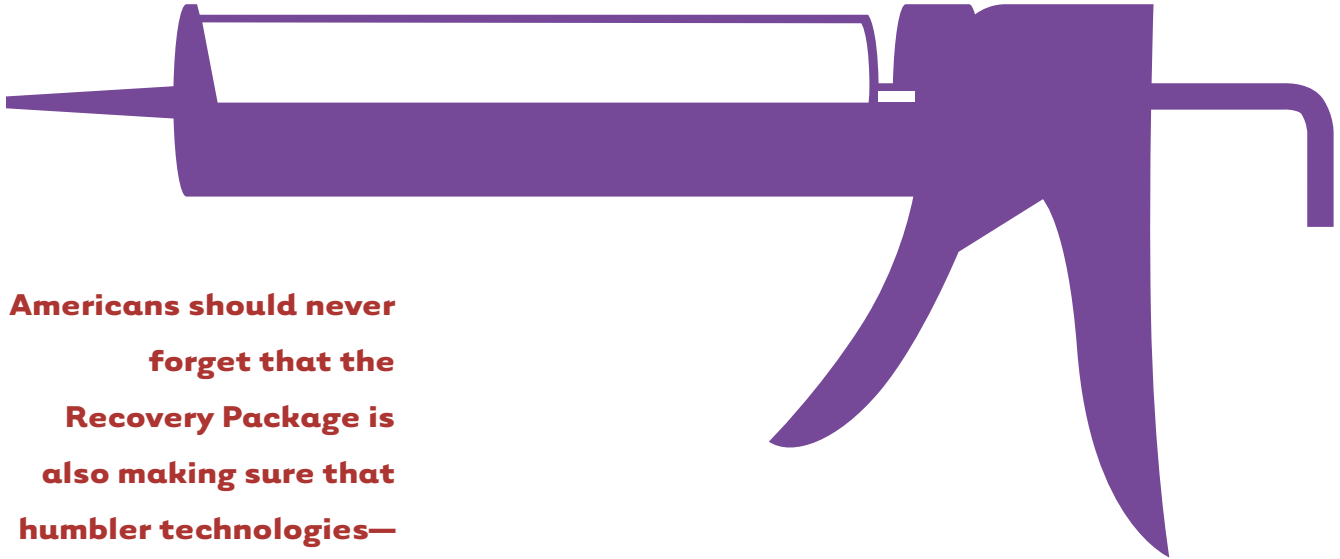
Greening the Pockets of the Poor

BY VAN JONES

The best antipoverty program in the world is a job. Low-income people want and need to be able to earn their way out of poverty. The question is, in the new century, where are jobless people going to be able to find work?

One important place where they'll find work is in new industries that aim to repower and retrofit America to use energy in a dramatically cleaner and more efficient manner. According to climate scientists, the hard work of moving America onto a low-carbon trajectory is the key to our planetary survival. At the same time, we have millions of Americans who need work, especially given our recession-plagued economy. A smart antipoverty program would deliberately connect the people who most need work to the work that most needs to be done. Such an approach would fight pollution and poverty at the same time.

Fortunately, by means of the Recovery Package (i.e., the "stimulus bill"), the Obama administration has made an \$80 billion investment in America's green and clean energy future. These dollars will help grow the green areas of the U.S. economy. And this green growth can and must lead to expanded opportunities for those who need them most. It can be very hard for newcomers to break into mature or declining economic sectors, but emerging sectors need new workers and new entrepreneurs. These sectors open doors to newcomers in the job market, getting them in on the ground floor so that they can grow with their new firms as they rise. These sectors also provide opportunities for new entrepreneurs to become established by offering new products, services, inventions, and innovations.



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It is important to note that clean-energy jobs can be created here and now—and for people with only modest skills. Sometimes, enthusiasm for tomorrow's technologies leads us to overlook practical solutions being deployed today. Too often, talk of a new, clean-energy economy conjures images of high-end solar or other renewable energy technology—the products of the future. Of course, the Obama administration is investing in those kinds of clean-energy breakthroughs and will continue to help them flourish. But Americans should never forget that the Recovery Package is also making sure that humbler technologies—such as caulking guns, insulation, high-performance boilers, and high-performance windows—are being deployed across America.

In fact, the Obama administration is using ecologically smart solutions to put money back in people's pockets. Out of the \$80 billion investment in clean and green sectors, \$5 billion is on the table for energy efficiency and weatherization, so people can spend less money on their energy bills every month. These humble, hardworking energy efficiency dollars are fiscally conservative outlays of government money.

Energy efficiency dollars work double time, triple time, and overtime—cutting unemployment, cutting energy bills, cutting pollution, increasing air quality, and adding value to people's homes. Here's how it works: Imagine someone who is not working right now—maybe a home builder, a construction worker, someone in the trades. Because of the current global economic state, he or she may not be able to build a home for another 12 months or longer. However, that worker *can* help rebuild homes and make them more energy efficient right now.

The recovery dollar that goes to employ that worker produces multiple benefits. A firm gives that dollar to a worker and sends him or her across the street to weatherize someone's home. That one dollar just cut unemployment. Now the worker is blowing in clean, nontoxic insulation, replacing ill-fitting windows and doors, attacking the cracks with a caulking gun, and replacing the old, inefficient boiler or furnace with one that is new and more efficient. Now that same dollar has just cut the energy bill of an American home. That's a double benefit. Additionally, retrofitting American homes enhances their comfort and value; energy-efficient homes should be more valuable than drafty ones. So that same dollar just increased property values and increased that homeowner's asset wealth. That's a triple benefit.

Down the street, there's a coal-fired power plant producing the energy for that house, keeping it warm in the winter and cool in the summer. But it is also belching pollution, including greenhouse gas pollution. If you reduce the energy use of that home by 30 percent, you can cut the home's energy bill by 30 percent. And you also can cut the pol-

lution and global warming emissions that would have been a by-product of that home's energy use by that same 30 percent. Call that a quadruple benefit.

And there's more. When you reduce air pollution, you increase air quality and cut the number of those affected by asthma. So that same dollar has now helped to disrupt a vicious cycle in low-income neighborhoods; in the past, low property values attracted industries and utilities with high emissions, which led to poor air quality and high rates of asthma. Cutting energy demand cuts pollution, which should also cut the rate of respiratory diseases. The money saved on future health care costs constitutes a quintuple benefit.

In just a few years, the money spent weatherizing that home will have already paid for itself in energy cost savings, meaning that those dollars can now be used elsewhere. In this way, investments in green jobs multiply benefits throughout the economy.

Energy efficiency represents an ecological solution that is not about spending more money, but about helping Americans earn and save more money. Investing in energy efficiency demonstrates concretely how meeting the highest environmental standards can lead to greater economic performance. And much of this increased economic performance is being met by getting Americans, particularly low-income Americans, back to work.

The modern environmental agenda is not just about recycling cans; it's about recycling dollars. In the past, we've too often thought of environmental issues in terms of purchasing eco-chic products—items unaffordable to someone who is fighting simply to keep food on the table. But now we have an “everybody environmental” agenda: an agenda in which everybody can participate and from which everybody can benefit.

The Recovery Act designates \$500 million for projects that prepare workers for careers in the energy efficiency and renewable energy industries and that teach workers the necessary and required skills for those industries. These are green solutions that will help fight poverty right here and right now.

The old debate between high environmental performance and high economic performance is outdated. Since the first industrial revolution, conventional wisdom has equated progress with pollution. But we do not have to choose between giving our children a livable planet or a viable economy; they can now have both. We stand at the beginning of a new clean-energy revolution—a revolution that can and will benefit all, not just the rich, not just the middle class, but truly everyone.

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