

Las Vegas Sun

Report: Las Vegas could be magnet for green jobs

Clean energy emphasis could produce 5,000 new jobs, says report

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Las Vegas could become a hub of green jobs aimed at putting the less educated to work, according to a report released today.

By shifting \$882 million from fossil fuels to clean energy, Las Vegas could produce almost 5,000 new jobs with the bulk of them employing high school-educated workers, according to the report, produced by the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

More than 3,700 of those jobs would create opportunity for higher earnings, the report said.

The bulk of the jobs -- 40 percent -- would retrofit Las Vegas homes and businesses, said Jeannette Wicks-Lim, an author of the report.

Another 20 percent would go to improving public transportation, such as buses and high-speed rail, Wicks-Lim said. The remaining 40 percent would provide work in solar, biofuels and wind energy at 30 percent and the last 10 percent to improve the electrical grid, she said.

With the Las Vegas unemployment rate at 11.3 percent, the idea of creating jobs in renewable energy is "a common sense solution to today's real-life problems," said Alex Garza, an executive board member of the Las Vegas Latin Chamber of Commerce.

The unemployment rate would drop 0.7 percent, from 6.6 percent based on 2008 numbers to 5.9 percent, Garza said.

The report does not take into account the job growth already under way with solar power. Two solar generating plants operate in Boulder City and more are planned.

And it did not include geothermal development, which is especially strong in Northern Nevada.

As a new Pew Charitable Trust report found, more than 3,600 Nevadans are already working in clean energy jobs. While Nevada's jobs grew between 1998 to 2007, the clean energy sector grew fastest.

The way to green prosperity also needs passage of the American Clean Energy and Security Act, a bill proposed by Reps. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., and Edward Markey, D-Mass. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act signed by President Barack Obama in February offers some clean energy funding.

The Nevada Legislature also gave solar power a boost by increasing tax abatements this year.

However, Nevada lags in the race to the green future. Experts told lawmakers that Nevada's climate, geology and neighboring California with its massive energy demand places the state in a favorable position to attract clean energy jobs.

The experts said that manufacturing clean energy technology is the way to go and so far Nevada has attracted only one solar equipment manufacturer.

Nevada trails other states in attracting such industries because it doesn't offer competitive incentives such as tax breaks.

The state offers property and sales tax rebates for renewable energy projects that generate 10 kilowatts of power or more and some of the benefits have been extended.

Other obstacles keeping Nevada from leading the race for the green jobs include the federal government owning most of the state's land, lack of transmission lines to export energy from rural areas, frozen capital markets keeping companies from getting loans to buy equipment and an educated workforce.

No matter what the issue, Nevada and the United States are competing in a global economy, said Monica Brett of Las Vegas with the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project, a non-profit that works toward energy efficiency and greener fuels.

Clean energy projects can create three times the jobs as those in the fossil fuel industry, Brett said. Germany in the 1980s created a blueprint that allows businesses to profit from clean energy and it has become a model for energy projects around the world, she said.

"Nevada can use these successful models and use them as a catalyst," Brett said.