

ECONOMY

Green jobs key to Alberta's future: report

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Today staff

Two environmental groups and the Alberta Federation of Labour have joined forces to highlight the need to create green jobs and their role in strengthening Alberta's economic future.

According to a report the coalition released in April, *Green Jobs: It's Time to Build Alberta's Future*, Alberta can create more than 200,000 green jobs and build a strong economic future. Not only was the green report tabled on Earth Day, the press conference was held at the Mill Creek NetZero Home in Edmonton.

"We're certainly not suggesting Alberta abandon its traditional industries like oil and gas, but what we're saying is that a green job strategy could help diversity our economy and create jobs which we desperately need at a time the economy is in a recession," Gil McGowan, president of the Alberta Federation of Labour, told *Today*. "Not only could the green job strategy create literally thousands of jobs in Alberta but they would be good jobs and jobs less accessible to the ups and downs of the resource industry, which is exactly what we need."

The federation is joined in the coalition by Greenpeace and Sierra Club Prairie Chapter.

Green jobs and the role they play in Alberta are important because Alberta, like the rest of the world, is facing two crises: an economic crisis and a global climate crisis, said Mike Hudema of Greenpeace. "Alberta has seen just how vulnerable our economy is to the price of oil, where we've gone from billion-dollar budget surpluses to billion-dollar budget deficits."

More significantly, said Hudema, Alberta has lost more than 130,000 full-time jobs

since August.

"We need to do something to put those people back to work," he added. "We need something that helps get our economy moving again, that helps diversify it so that it's more stable in the future and at the same time we need to be reducing our environmental impact."

He said this report shows that both crisis can be addressed at the same time by investing in green jobs. He described that investment as the most efficient and most effective use of dollars and will quickly put the most people back to work while the environment is being cleaned up.

The report's recommendations are categorized into three sections: energy efficiency upgrades, transit and high speed rail, and renewable energy.

"We've tried to go past general statements of principle about the importance of protecting the environment and focus instead on concrete policies that the government could implement today that could either create new jobs for people who have lost them or keep Albertans who currently have jobs working," he added.

With an estimated 500,000 Alberta houses in need of upgrades to improve energy efficiency, a subsidy program of between \$1 billion to \$2 billion over two years as an incentive for home and business owners to for such work to be done. McGowan says that money is less than what the province has been paying for the natural gas rebate, and the upgrades would pay for themselves in terms of efficiency. This initiative could create as many as 14,000 jobs, he said.

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Coalition proposes \$7B plan

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Alberta should follow the lead of other jurisdictions around the world that are dramatically ramping up investment in public transit because of demand and because it can be a big component in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, added McGowan.

The coalition is proposing \$3.5 billion over the next two years be invested in public transit followed by another \$3.5 billion for the subsequent five years. The program would start with municipal transit such as upgrading existing "rolling stock" (buses) and expanding light rail transit in Calgary and Edmonton. In years three to seven, the coalition wants the government to invest in a high speed rail link between Edmonton and Calgary because "study after study has shown that kind of service would be economically viable and would actually make the Edmonton-Red Deer-Calgary corridor more productive and more competitive. So it would have long-term positive economic benefits."

These mass transit upgrades could result in an estimated 28,000 jobs.

Though no studies have been done for similar high speed rail links to Fort McMurray, McGowan says it's a reasonable idea for the future.

On the renewable energy side, the coalition wants the government use its regulatory authority to give preference to energy produced through sustainable means including solar and wind which would help encourage investment in the sector. McGowan said it would come at no cost to the province and would give sustainable energy producers "a leg up." This process has been introduced in other jurisdictions, including Ontario, Germany and the U.K. with great success, said McGowan.



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“It’s providing a market incentive for companies to invest in sustainable power and we think that over the medium-term, seven years or so, we could create about 6,000 jobs.”

Add all three together, and that equals some 48,000 new jobs — good paying careers, not minimum wage jobs.

Hudema told **Today** post-secondary institutions also have a role to play in driving green jobs forward. A section of *Green Jobs: It’s Time to Build Alberta’s Future* deals with need for retraining and retooling so there is a hope that post-secondary and technical institutes can start offering more resources so “people can develop the skills to work in what I think is rapidly becoming the new energy economy.” At the same time, he added, a lot of the jobs discussed in the report are existing jobs such as machinists, plumbing, pipefitting and electricians. “Jobs that we already have the skill sets to know what to do, but we’re just applying them to a different purpose and to a purpose that instead of increasing our environmental impact in some cases, is reducing it.”

He acknowledged there has been a shift as a growing number of people are interested in a green economy and moving into green jobs particularly in green industries.

“What we’re not seeing is a real shift in government policy to create those type of sectors to give incentives to build renewable energy within this province, and potentially put over 20,000 people to work in the long term,” said Hudema. He added the three groups came together to also help show the traditional divide between economy and environment. Instead, there is a way of improving the economy while improving the environment, and that’s the direction and vision needed for this province.

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