

## Energy efficiency is American's revitalization

By Morgan Goodwin

Article Launched: 08/18/2008 10:33:01 AM EDT

Monday, August 18

One of the most iconic images of the strength of America is the World War II poster of Rosie the Riveter with the bold words, "We Can Do It!" When our nation rose to the greatest challenge it had known, mobilizing to protect democracy and the free world, our efforts brought out the best in us. As I look at the scale of the climate crisis, I have the same feeling that the poster embodies. I am ready to roll up my sleeves and say, "we can."

How do we solve the climate and energy crisis? We need as large of an investment in a clean energy economy as possible. Investment comes in many shapes and sizes. We need the federal government to invest billions in a new "Apollo Project" to find real clean energy solutions. We need massive private investments like T. Boone Pickens, the oil tycoon turned wind tycoon who is building 2,700 wind turbines in Texas. And we (you and I) need to invest in millions of homes and businesses in every community in America.

I say investment instead of spending money. Financially, money saved is the same as money earned, and the rate of return on energy efficiency is higher than you're going to get in the stock market. People complain about not having enough money to go green, but they've got it all wrong. Obviously there are green gimmicks out there, but a little common sense will show that real energy efficiency pays for itself, big time.

The recently launched Take Charge campaign will save you money by saving you energy, and the more you do, the more money you save. We're not asking everyone to just take small steps; if they're such smart investments, we should take bigger and bolder steps.

Building trades need to modernize to meet this demand. The contractors who meet our 21st-century energy challenges and excel will grow as businesses. Young people who can tap into the changing market will succeed.

Most talk about energy leaves out an important word: justice. Mobilizing to meet a challenge is a force for social justice. Obviously, the fact that the poor are more vulnerable to rising energy prices is an economic injustice. Moreover, our lack of mobilization to meet the challenge denies jobs and opportunities to those who need them most. As a result of WWII, millions of women found they had valuable skills and the ability to be financially independent. Our country needed women to work, and many became liberated and financially successful because of it.

Today, unemployment is up, we lock up millions of young people every year, and the income gap is rising to levels not seen since the 1920s. If you look at our economy, it seems like we have throw-away people to go along with our policy of throwing away energy and resources. Is there a connection between throw-away people and throw-away resources?

To put it simply, renewable energy is produced by people, whereas dirty energy only requires people to help get it out of the ground and into a furnace. The United Steel Workers are calling for massive investments in solar and wind energy to restore the strong working class with high-paying blue collar jobs. Urban groups from Oakland, Calif., to the South Bronx are transforming their local economies by Americans who have been left behind for the jobs of building a clean energy future.

Good green jobs serve an even larger purpose: They make America more secure from energy and global warming. Just like Rosie the Riveter, green jobs are respectable and valued by the people of this country. We depend on each other, and I feel like I'm in good hands.

Green jobs are the most talked about idea by the candidates and congressmen, but the Green Jobs Act, signed into law by the president last year, remains unfunded. Rhetoric doesn't build a clean energy economy; public and private investment in technology and people does.

I'm asking all of us to rise to the challenge. Whether you're a homeowner who can Take Charge and cut your energy use 50 percent or more, or a legislator like John Olver who can work to fully fund the Green Jobs act, we applaud your efforts just as we need everyone to mobilize for the challenge ahead of us. Only by meeting this challenge head-on will we see the opportunity in the just and sustainable future that awaits us.

*Morgan Goodwin is the intern spearheading the Take Charge campaign for the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition (Transcript story, Page 1, Aug. 15).*