

Small businesses using clean energy

Karen G. Mills, SBA Administrator

Portland Press Herald Op-ed – July 12, 2010

BRUNSWICK - Across the country, entrepreneurs and small business owners play a critical role in guiding our nation toward a new, clean energy future.

It's their innovation and ideas that develop next-generation technologies, create new green jobs, and drive economic growth while positioning the United States as a leader in this emerging industry.

Here in Maine, more than 700 businesses are finding new ways to harness the power of solar, wind, hydro, biomass and other renewable forms of energy.

These firms are hiring Mainers at a quick pace: Clean energy jobs grew more than 20 percent in our state from 1998 to 2007 -- nearly seven times the overall growth rate of jobs in Maine, according to the Pew Charitable Trusts. To accelerate that growth, the Recovery Act included more than \$80 billion for energy efficiency and clean energy programs.

Here in Maine, the Recovery Act is creating hundreds of jobs to weatherize about 4,000 low-income homes. Also, wind energy companies have formed a consortium with the University of Maine to help design, test and develop floating wind turbine platforms over the next 10 years.

Today, Congress is working on a comprehensive energy and climate bill that will create an environment for small firms to drive innovation and create even more good jobs. Members from all sides are contributing ideas, including investments in cleaner and more efficient energy sources and technologies.

And, small businesses in the clean energy sector are in a prime position to take advantage of these investments. They generate 15 times more patents-per-dollar in research and development than large firms. They also employ more scientists and engineers than our universities and federal laboratories combined.

In recent years, these innovative small firms have worked tirelessly to plant the seeds for a green energy economy in America.

They've invented some of the world's most cutting-edge technologies, and they've also begun to install, maintain and update these technologies.

In short, they are creating a new, homegrown industry while providing good new jobs in places like Maine.

Comprehensive energy legislation will allow these small businesses to do even more by building on the commitments that this administration has already made.

For example, the Small Business Administration's recovery loans have already helped hundreds of entrepreneurs and small business owners who are working to install solar panels, wind turbines and more.

We know that this transformation to clean, renewable energy isn't going to be easy, but -- as the human, environmental and economic tragedy currently taking place along our nation's Gulf Coast reminds us -- it is absolutely necessary.

Small businesses that specialize in green energy can and should play a leading role in moving us forward. If we give them the right tools and incentives, they will ensure that the next generation is not held hostage to energy sources from the 20th century.

This is our chance to reduce America's dependence on fossil fuels and put us on a path toward energy security and a clean energy future.

And, if we seize this moment, we will not only reduce threats to our environment, but we will also help more American small-business owners achieve their dream and create good-paying, 21st-century jobs in communities across the country.

Karen Mills of Brunswick is the administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration.