



R.I. legislation would spur 'green' industries

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By Timothy C. Barmann, Journal Staff Writer

A coalition of labor unions, environmental advocates and antipoverty groups are collaborating to promote legislation that would help spark new renewable-energy industries in Rhode Island.

The group, which calls itself the Green Jobs Alliance, says it has come together to promote a "green economy" that improves the environment while at the same time creates middle-class jobs.

Leaders of the alliance, along with a group of legislators, held a news conference at the State House on Tuesday to announce the coalition's formation and to promote a series of bills that the legislators said would help further the alliance's goals.

Members include: George Nee, secretary-treasurer of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO; Sheila Dormody, of Clean Water Action; Chris Wilhite, of the Sierra Club; and Aden Van Noppen, of the Rhode Island Student Climate Coalition.

At the news conference were: Rep. David A. Segal, D-Providence; Rep. Raymond J. Sullivan Jr., D-Coventry; Sen. Paul E. Moura, D-East Providence; and Sen. Joshua Miller D-Cranston.

"For the last several years, Rhode Islanders and all Americans have expressed tremendous and increasing concern about our environmental and energy policies," said Segal, in a statement. "Even so, there's been little concrete progress made. The package of bills supported by the Green Jobs Alliance represents the change that our constituents are calling for."

The group said it hopes to attract renewable-energy technology manufacturers and to provide incentives to develop renewable-electricity installations across the state. It also said the state should invest more in public transportation systems and encourage college students, government employees and others to take the bus.

"As we face an economic downturn, green jobs present one of the best ways to secure our economic future," Miller said in a statement. "If we advance this agenda now, we'll be at the fore of the new energy economy. If we don't act quickly, other states surely will."

The alliance said it supports these pending bills:

- Net Metering for Renewable Electricity (H7809-Segal, S2594-Miller), which would make it more economically feasible for individuals, cities and towns to produce their own electricity with solar, wind or other means by increasing the amount of excess power that can be sold back to the power grid.
- Renewable Energy System Tax Credit (H7381-Segal, S2469-Miller), which would eliminate tax-credit caps on residential renewable-energy systems and make it easier for people to afford to put up solar panels, solar hot-water systems and small wind turbines.
- Municipal Wind Bill (H7806-Rice), which would provide funding for the construction of wind turbines by municipalities.
- Act to Advance Bus Rapid Transit (S2077-Connors, H7264-Pacheco), which would allow RIPTA buses to extend green lights at intersections, speeding up bus trips.
- State Employee Commuter Act (H7377-Segal), which would create a committee to study alternative methods for state employees to travel to work.
- UPass Act (S2158-Miller, H7857-Handy), which would allow students and faculty to use their campus IDs as bus passes.

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