

Mobilizing for green economy

Written by Al McFarlane, Editor-in-Chief
Friday, 06 February 2009 17:04

Some 400 people attended H.I.R.E. MN's second Town Hall Meeting January 27 at Lao Family Community of Minnesota headquarters on University Avenue near the State Capitol.

State Reps. Cy Thao, DFL-65A, Jeremy Kalin, DFL-17B, and Karen Clark, DFL-61A, joined State Sen. Ellen Anderson, DFL-66, Ramsey County Commissioner Toni Carter, Former U.S. Sen. Mark Dayton, and the representatives of St. Paul City Councilmember Melvin Carter III, St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman, and U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum, MN-4, in articulating the unique and pressing challenges and opportunities for creating a green economy as a driving force in the President's economic stimulus and recovery plan.

Louis King, president of SAOIC and convener of H.I.R.E. MN said: "We look forward to the ways in which our next Town Hall Meeting on Tuesday, February 17 at the Minneapolis AmericanIndian Center will shine more light on this campaign."

H.I.R.E. MN and other workforce advocates will have a major task ahead of them in challenging Minnesota's Department of Transportation and other public agencies who've routinely thumbed their noses at Minnesota's own laws, regulations and targets for hiring minority workers and contracting with minority-owned firms.

As the new spring road construction and building season approaches, organizations responsible for training minorities for the construction trades workforce and for negotiating contract opportunities for minority businesses say it looks like Minnesota Department of Transportation is gearing up to do business as usual: locking out minority workers and minority contractors.

In fact, the Department of Transportation appears to be rewarding companies that have been in non-compliance with state laws and guidelines by excluding minorities for a long period of time.

"They are lining up right now to have another season of business as usual. Now, their cry is that the "bench is full" and they have no room for new hires," Louis King said in a letter to Transportation Department officials. "Your department is responsible for protecting the public interest, not special interests."

Rep. Karen Clark wrote the Department regarding its failure to hire minorities and use minority contractors at acceptable levels. The department responded claiming it had made "good faith efforts" to address the goals as required by law.

"We don't get to make good faith efforts when we pay the gas tax imposed on the entire state by the legislature last year," King said, explaining that while minority residents get equal opportunity to pay taxes every time they fill up at the gas pump, Department of Transportation

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policies that lock minority workers and contractors out of the construction trades workforce and contracting opportunity go against the very grain of American values of fairness and equity, and smack of taxation without representation.

King said the Department of Transportation acts like it does not understand that it operates with tax payer dollars and that it is responsible for compliance, transparency and ensuring that there is equitable access to economic opportunities that these projects present for the citizens of this state.

King was joined by Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak and other city officials last week in calling on Congress to adopt the federal economic recovery plan being promoted by President Barack Obama, saying that the creation or loss of thousands of jobs is at stake.

“Today I stand with mayors from across the country to urge members of Congress to pass President Obama’s economic stimulus plan and pass it now,” Rybak said in a press conference at Summit Academy OIC. “This plan will create jobs, stimulate the economy and rebuild our infrastructure to compete in the global economy of the 21st Century.”

“As centers for innovation and job creation, cities like Minneapolis need these resources and stand ready to implement efforts to create jobs, including jobs for a new, green economy,” Rybak said. “Because President Obama is pushing for transit investments and green jobs as part of this plan, not only can we re-build our nation’s crippling transportation infrastructure, we can also build a new green economy for the future and finally get off our addiction to oil.”

One of the goals of the President’s economic recovery plan is to prepare workers for new green jobs, including training for retrofitting buildings, green construction and production of renewable energy.

Rybak called for \$3.3 million in federal stimulus funds for a green jobs initiative that will train workers to weatherize as many as 800 homes in Minneapolis thereby reducing energy costs for low- and moderate-income residents.

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“Weatherization programs offer one of the best opportunities for job creation in Minneapolis,” City of Minneapolis Economic Development Director Cathy Polasky said. “Turning existing homes into energy-efficient homes will reduce energy consumption and emissions, create dozens of jobs, and boost local industries. At a time when many construction workers are unemployed, this effort would help many people rapidly transition back into the labor force. Due to our climate and the condition of our housing stock, Minneapolis has a tremendous need for weatherization services that could be met with this effort.”

Rybak said that, in addition to creating new jobs, federal economic recovery funds will help cities like Minneapolis improve public safety, education and other critical public services.

“Federal aid to cities would help to keep more cops on the street and teachers in the classroom,” Rybak said.

According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), the number of unemployed persons has increased by 3.6 million since the beginning of the recession in December 2007, an average of 9,091 per day. And each day without a federal stimulus, thousands more jobs are lost.

A job growth and economic recovery package was approved by the U.S. House and awaits action by the U.S. Senate this month.

Louis King and organizations that make up the H.I.R.E MN initiative want to make sure that federal stimulus funds flow all the way through to local communities and to organizations working to train people who are unemployed or underemployed for new futures in the green economy.

Summit Academy OIC (SAOIC), Environmental Justice Advocates of Minnesota (EJAM), Minnesota State Baptist Convention, Stairstep Foundation, Alliance for Metropolitan Stability, ISIAAH, Minnesota OIC State Council, African American Men Project, Green Water Energy, LVY Investments, Women's Environmental Institute, Catholic Charities Office for Social Justice,

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Will Steger Foundation, the Public Policy Project, Sabathani Community Center, Confederation of Somali Communities in Minnesota and elected officials and community members will conduct the third in a series of H.I.R.E. MN (Healthcare, Infrastructure, Renewable Energy) Town Hall Meetings at Minneapolis American Indian Center, 1530 East Franklin, Minneapolis, 6:30-8pm Tuesday, February 17, 2009.

The public policy town hall meetings are being promoted and documented by a unique ethnic media collaboration that includes MBTV, KFAI FM 90.3 Radio's "Conversations With Al McFarlane" broadcast, Asian American Press, Insight News, and the Minnesota Multicultural Media Consortium,

The town hall meetings seek to galvanize a vision that organizes and mobilizes Minnesota residents in a campaign supporting renewable energy jobs.

For further information about the Town Hall Meetings contact Alessandra Williams at (612) 278-5259. Summit Academy OIC is located at 935 Olson Memorial Hwy, Minneapolis, MN 55405 and online at www.saoic.org/.