



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Senate must pass bill to unlock "Green Jobs" potential

GEORGE D. MAZIARZ December 6, 2010

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If there are glimmers of recovery in New York's economic outlook, Buffalonians aren't seeing them. Approximately 43,700 Buffalo Niagara residents were unemployed in September, many of them among the ranks of the long-term jobless.

But now, some hope! Recently, New York State Assembly members approved "on-bill recovery," an energy efficiency financing tool that will help create 60,000 new jobs across the state. The Senate now returns to Albany and it must act in a bipartisan fashion to pass this important legislation.

On-bill recovery would unlock the enormous promise of Green Jobs/Green NY, a program passed last year by the State Legislature and signed into law by Gov. David A. Paterson. Green Jobs/Green NY offers upfront cash for energy efficiency improvements, allowing homeowners to pay back the cost of the retrofit over a period of 15 years or less. Since the repayment schedule is calibrated to the amount of the savings, customers immediately keep more cash in their pockets.

Green Jobs/Green NY was designed to create 60,000 jobs, reduce the energy bills of hundreds of thousands of moderate income homeowners, limit greenhouse gas emissions and

revitalize struggling communities.

But the program can't reach mass scale without on-bill recovery, which allows homeowners to safely repay the cost of their retrofit on their utility bill without added risk of credit damage or utility shut off.

Crucially, on-bill recovery assures investors of repayment and therefore channels more private capital into the program. With that new capital, demand for retrofits increases, driving an expansion of the work force.

Without on-bill recovery, Green Jobs/Green NY would be accessible only to a small segment of wealthier homeowners with capital and good credit. The 1 million retrofits would shrink to tens of thousands.

And make no mistake: We are ready. Here in Buffalo, community groups, contractors, job trainers and labor unions are working together to plan for implementation.

Now is the time for action. In January, the Legislature will reconvene to grapple with a staggering budget gap, an issue that will consume Albany for the first months of 2011. Meaningful programs like Green Jobs/Green NY could easily fall by the wayside.

Those of us who championed the Green Jobs/Green NY Act in the fall of 2009 — the three authors of this article along with a broad and bipartisan coalition of business owners, labor officials and elected leaders — simply can't let this happen. The Assembly already took a huge step forward by passing on-bill recovery. Now we need our senators to follow suit.

--by State Senator George Maziarz, Jim Melius on behalf of New York State Laborers, and Fred Fellendorf on behalf of Buffalo Energy.