

Renewable energy has both environmental and business dividends, EPA administrator says at Stockton symposium

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GALLOWAY TOWNSHIP — Renewable energy is not only important for the country's environmental future but the nation's economic recovery as well, said U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson.

Jackson, a former commissioner of the state Department of Environmental Protection, was the keynote speaker Wednesday at the energy symposium sponsored by the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at The Richard Stockton College.

She focused her speech on new types of energy and the impact they will have on the future. Instead of highlighting the environmental aspects of the projects she spoke mostly about the benefits they will have on spurring the economy. With growth in the population, Jackson said, the public must find clean, efficient ways to deliver energy to more people.

"Things that are happening today were science fiction when the EPA started (40 years ago)," she said. "There has been a historic investment of clean energy technology in the private and public sector."

Jackson said development of energy will be a key component in the four areas President Barack Obama said are necessary to improve the economy: manufacturing, efficient education for American workers, return to American values, and a new era of American energy production and innovation.

She said more efficient manufacturing will be necessary to keep production jobs competitive in the country, and workers need to be educated in the new energy fields.

"If we're going to have an innovative energy sector we must make sure we are producing the best innovators in our schools," she said.

Renewable energy also fits American values because the clean form of energy creates a good environment for people to live, Jackson said. Companies should have restrictions on pollution to preserve the neighborhoods, she said.

"A bad environmental site can be a drag on a community," she said. "Investment in a good environment sparks more investment."

The nation's production of renewable energy has doubled in the past four years and the country needs to continue to work to maintain its position as the top producer in the world, Jackson said.

"An economy built around the new challenge of going further on a smaller tank of gas is an example of how a good investment in the economy can be a pillar of future growth," she said. "We can have a middle class built around the possibilities of renewable energy."

Through the advancement of renewable energy sources and the industry's recent growth, science and the private business sector have become more intertwined, and Stockton officials are preparing their students for the adjustment.

Stockton created a new "sustainability" degree program this year that blends different kinds of sciences as well as business, finance, public policy and social science courses, said Patrick Hossay, associate professor of sustainability for the college.

Hossay said before the college started the program it researched the job market for renewable energy and found it's a growing field both in the state and nationally.

"All industries are increasing their demand for people with this expertise," he said. "We need to explore ways we can bring together science and business."

Daniel J. Douglas, director of the Hughes Center, said science majors need to expand their work beyond a research laboratory to convince people about the benefits of the technology.

“They have to put their work out there and make connections with the private sector,” he said.

Stockton senior Kyle Bartsch, an environmental sciences major, said he has followed the school’s sustainability model and taken courses in anthropology, statistics and political science which he believes will benefit his career in science.

“It helps me understand how to deal with people and explain why we should do things differently,” the 23-year-old Jackson native said. “It’s all about getting experience and going out there in your field.”

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