

COMMUNITIES TO TORONTO HYDRO: “WE NEED GOOD GREEN JOBS NOW”

The Good Jobs for All Coalition launched the Green Jobs for All at Hydro campaign at Toronto City Hall on Monday June 7, two days after World Environment Day.

The campaign calls on Toronto Hydro to invest in economic development, equity and green energy, by promoting and installing solar panels on public buildings across the city, and creating job opportunities for youth, new immigrants, and people of colour.

Speakers at the campaign launch included Chris Williamson, a pre-apprentice electrician, who recently graduated from the Hammer Heads program. A project of the Central Ontario Building Trades Council, the Hammer Heads program mentors, trains and places priority youth into trade apprenticeships, giving them a chance to move into decently-paid, meaningful careers.

Chris - who is 18 - spoke about how his placement as a pre-apprentice electrician gave him the opportunity to have a career, and start saving up money so he can hopefully sponsor his mother – who currently lives in Jamaica – to Canada. Chris said he supports the campaign because he can see how it will create stable career-orientated job opportunities for his friends, who, unlike him, still work part time and casual minimum wage jobs at restaurants, movie theatres and the like.

Fellow speaker and electrician, Amanda Ehrke, also emphasized the job-creation benefits of Toronto Hydro investing in the green economy. “When I was in high school I wanted to become a marine biologist, but if I went down that path I knew I’d end up with student debt and no guarantee of a job,” she said. “I took my dad’s advice and became an electrician instead. Today, I love my job; it allows me to raise enough money to support my family.” She continued; “I’ve been trained to install solar panels and I’d love to install them but we need to get people and utilities like Toronto Hydro to start buying them so we can put all of us electricians to work.”

Other speakers at the press conference included Nigel Barriffe, Rexdale resident and co-chair of the Green Economy for All committee of the Good Jobs for All Coalition, Rosemarie Powell, member of the Jane Finch Green Jobs, John Camilleri, President of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 1, which represents Toronto Hydro workers, and Carolyn Egan, president of the Steelworker Toronto Area Council.

Under the Green Energy and Green Economy Act 2009, renewable energy companies, utilities and homeowners can receive provincial subsidies – through the feed-in tariff program – provided they meet domestic content rules, which require 40 to 60% of the goods and services used originate from Ontario.

The Good Jobs for All Coalition is calling on Toronto Hydro to take advantage of the subsidies available in the Green Energy Act and plan for an aggressive expansion of Toronto Hydro’s role in renewable energy generation in partnership with other public institutions, such as the city, school boards, colleges, universities and hospitals.

The Good Jobs for All Coalition is also asking Toronto Hydro to make local procurement of green products a priority in all activities, use their buying power to attract green manufacturers to Toronto and/or assist existing manufacturers to retool; and work with local training organizations and Toronto's Social Development Office to ensure equitable access and inclusion of workers of colour and youth from marginalized communities in new job opportunities in the sector.

In keeping with the Green Jobs for All at Hydro's holistic approach to solving our social problems, the campaign launch was attended by a diversity of community groups, unions, elected officials, and environmental organizations, including: Toronto Environmental Alliance, United Food and Commercial Workers, Canadian Auto Workers, and Environmental Defense.

Supporters of the Green Jobs for All at Hydro campaign can formally endorse the initiative at goodjobsforall.ca.

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