

To: Frank Disalvo and Helene Schember, Cornell Center for a Sustainable Future

From: Cornell Global Labor Institute

Re: Summary of CCSF Topical Lunch, May 24, 2010

Date: August 17, 2010

On May 24, 2010, the Cornell ILR's Global Labor Institute (GLI) hosted a discussion on "Green Jobs, Climate Policy and Economic Development," as part of the Cornell Center for a Sustainable Future's Topical Lunch series. It was a stimulating discussion on the intersection of climate protection, the current policy discourse around green jobs, and economic development. The discussion included scholars from the School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Department of City and Regional Planning, School of Applied Economics and Management, Department of Development Sociology, the Johnson School's Sustainable Global Enterprise, the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, School of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, and School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering.

ILR-GLI's recent research has focused on the impact of climate protection policy on labor unions and working families, including projected employment trends related to transitioning to a clean energy economy (see United Nations Green Jobs Study - 2008). The ILR-GLI currently provides educational trainings to unions on climate protection and convenes policy meetings among high-level labor and environmental leaders for the NYS Climate Action Plan, as well as federal and international-level climate policy. Building on GLI's research and educational activities, the discussion began with a brief account of the national green jobs discourse, highlighting the tension between neoliberal economic development (based on trade-driven growth) and meeting important social and environmental needs, like quality employment and emissions reductions. Participants were particularly interested in the research methods used in these emerging green jobs studies and at what level politically influential unions like the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) and Teamsters engage in the development of green policies and practices. Several CCSF scholars pointed out that the green jobs discourse has been proposed by segments of the labor, environmental and business communities as a panacea for generating a new clean energy economy, reducing unemployment, and fighting global warming. However, mainly due to political challenges, green job creation in the U.S. has thus far been slow and not to the scale required to address climate change. Plus, some so-called green jobs do not actually reduce emissions. Also important, a closer look at the social implications of various options to reduce emissions as they pertain to power generation, transportation, agriculture, urban planning and building design reveals numerous challenges and opportunities for working people, including employment loss and gain and the potential to build alliances between the labor, environmental and community-based organizations. All of this evidence points to the need for a clear policy framework, at all levels of governance, to reduce emissions at the levels science demands and the need for greater attention on the social and political challenges to addressing climate change.

The lunch discussion ended with several people raising questions about how to build more integrated research and action agendas between those scholars and practitioners who work in the natural sciences and those that work in the social sciences. The Marcellus Shale project, headed by Susan

Christopherson, was raised as one possibility for fostering greater interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly because there are significant labor dimensions to the proposed project. It seemed widely recognized among those in attendance that this topical lunch was a much needed first step towards building a much broader and deeper discussion within CCSF around integrating research and action agendas on the socio-economic and political issues related to climate protection with other scientists' expertise on the technical challenges and solutions related to climate protection.

Attendees:

Host - Sean Sweeney, sweeneygli@gmail.com or ss266@cornell.edu

Jill Kubit, jk356@cornell.edu

Lara Skinner, lrs95

Helene Schember, hrs6

Lauren Chambliss, elc55

Monica Touesnard, mat59

-Rod Howe, rh13

-Susanne Bruyere, smb23

Monica Touesnard, mat59

-Tim Mount, tdm2

Alex Colvin, ajc22

Lowell Turner, lrt4

Susan Christopherson, smc23

William Sonnenstuhl, wjs7

Jeff Tester, jwt54

Zellman Warhaft, zw16