

# CORNELL HR REVIEW

## BUILDING A GREEN COLLAR MOVEMENT

*Robert E. Picone*

Environmental sustainability is a widely debated topic—one that the labor movement has tightly embraced and one that more and more HR practitioners are required to confront with regards to personnel policy, training, and CSR. Last week President Richard Trumka of the AFL-CIO, the largest union federation in the U.S., delivered the keynote address at the ILR School’s Union Days Conference on building a “green collar” movement. Mr. Trumka laid out his vision for an America that not only incorporates environmental sustainability into its workforce and lifestyle but also recognizes it as a necessary component to sustaining the economy.

The following are some of the labor leader’s key points:

- Sustainability must begin with safety. Citing the West Virginia mining disaster that occurred a few days prior, he reminded the audience that dangerous jobs are performed every day in this country and that safety in the workplace needs to be of the highest importance.
- The U.S.’s initial prosperity came about through real building and manufacturing, not illusory financial services.
- Because previous U.S. presidential administrations “hit the snooze button” on green energy initiatives, America is losing the global race in green energy. In order to make green jobs a reality, the definition of green must be as broad as possible. A narrow view of what green energy is will not help transform entire industries into the environmentally efficient entities that will be needed to sustain a green workforce.
- Clean coal initiatives should be used as a short-term solution while more environmentally friendly energy sources are further developed and made accessible.

In the end, Mr. Trumka urged working class Americans to have faith that green jobs will be good for not only the American economy and environment but also for working class people. While some jobs in traditional energy may be negatively affected in the short term, Trumka expressed that time will yield in-demand jobs that will bolster the country’s position in the global economy while improving quality of life. ✎

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