

# You Can't Outsource Retrofitting a Window

## Just how important is the green jobs debate?

Katherine Tweed, Jonathan Morgenstein: February 3, 2012

Lisa Jackson, the administrator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, headed to [Mission Motors](#) in San Francisco on Thursday to talk about clean jobs.

The company, which plans to double its workforce this year, is being highlighted as a shining example of using American ingenuity to build something -- in this case, electric powertrains for motorcycles and vehicles -- that contributes to a "green" economy and ["green" jobs](#).

But there are opportunities far outside of the Bay Area. At a panel on Tuesday night, "[Financing Greentech in the Post-ARRA Era: No Money, No Problems?](#)" the panelists all spoke of the opportunities in efficiency -- in particular, in building efficiency and the shipping industry -- that are everywhere.

"I think energy retrofits are a perfect example," said Ann Davlin, director of development at the Carbon War Room. "You can't outsource retrofitting a window."

She is not the first one to make that statement; it is an often-repeated refrain in the [building energy efficiency](#) space. But it is one that is only slowly seeping into policy. The Obama administration is working on passing HOMESTAR legislation that would help homeowners finance retrofits and a \$4 billion ["Better Building Initiative"](#) that would make commercial facilities 20 percent more efficient by 2020.

But companies shouldn't wait around, warned Davlin. "One of the challenges is that companies are waiting for regulation rather than making the market work for them today," she noted.

The lack of supportive legislation at the federal level doesn't mean that government cannot, or has not, been useful. In fact, this has in some way helped drive legislative and administrative innovation and creativity at the state and local level. Nonetheless, the federal government will eventually need to get on board.

At one point during the discussion, some contention arose over the issue of the role of government and the importance of the green jobs issue. "This is the dumbest part of the debate," said Jason Scott, a partner with EKO Asset Management Partners. "What do you mean, are we just going to stand still? Are we not going to become a more efficient society?"

In exasperation, Scott went on to call the [Solyndra debate](#) even stupider than the jobs debate, noting that the collapsing price for solar has been a boon to other companies, not to mention installers. "It just matters what part of the solar industry you're in," he said. "We either move forward or stand still."

The panelists were all bullish on cleantech, especially the possibilities in efficiency. Although Scott argued that the further you look out into the future, the more it makes sense, he said there were opportunities today that won't take decades to achieve payback.

While they were on the topic of red herrings, the discussion naturally turned to subsidies. "Without a doubt," said the moderator, Michael Molnar of Greentech Capital Advisors, "there are no free markets in energy."

Besides the externalities like health problems with some generation sources, such as coal, Davlin also noted that water use isn't fully analyzed when comparing generation. But no one on the panel was waiting around for governments to install carbon taxes or impose heftier pollution fines.

The praise for the entrepreneur and America's risk-taking culture was a thread running through the discussion and the evening, concluding with the panelists all praising the need for such innovators to individually persevere in the face of adversity.

There was a consensus that 2012 might not be “the rosier year” for companies seeking to get financing for cleantech and efficiency projects. But with renewable portfolio standards and emerging [energy benchmarking programs](#) in the U.S., there will be endless winners at both the high-tech and low-tech level. “This is the greatest wealth-creating opportunity of our lifetime,” said Davlin. “I encourage people to stick with it.”