

Delaware joins national 'greening' coalition

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Delaware is the only state that has been invited to participate in the Climate Prosperity Project, a national project that places a clean environment at the center of economic development efforts, Gov. Jack Markell announced Monday.

The Climate Prosperity Project, sponsored by the Rockefeller Fund and Global Urban Development, seeks to demonstrate that innovation, efficiency and conservation of resources are the best ways to create jobs and increase competitiveness. Participants in the project will provide expert advice on how to pursue environmentally sustainable economic development strategies.

"There's no question that our views on the environment are changing," Markell said in a conference call with reporters. "When I was a kid, smokestacks meant progress and not pollution."

The effort to "green" Delaware's economy means helping existing businesses and residents save money on energy costs, but it also means creating jobs in green industries, Markell said. "I want to help Delaware businesses see their potential opportunities in the global green economy, because it will help get our economy moving again and it is good for our air, water and soil."

Markell's climate prosperity plan hinges on three principles:

*Green savings.

"What you do to become more resource-efficient saves you money," said Marc A. Weiss, chairman of the Global Prosperity Project. Delaware will use federal stimulus money and the state's new Sustainable Energy Utility to promote energy savings in business and for residents.

"Green savings, you can see the results within the first couple of years, and that's when people are going to realize doing good things that are good for the environment don't cost me money, they save me money," Weiss said. One simple example, he said, is a chicken grower who added solar panels to his broiler houses and cut his energy costs in half.

*Green opportunities.

"The green savings is tied to green opportunities. The more you're making things more efficient, the more you're generating demand through the supply chain for all the products and services to supply these products," Weiss said.

For instance, Delaware businesses can produce items for the offshore wind industry, Weiss said, or for electric cars.

*Green talent.

Programs such as a wind-energy technician training program at Delaware Technical & Community College will be part of Markell's green-talent initiative, Weiss said.

Markell said the state will work with Delaware's educational institutions to develop "eco-knowledge networks" in marine energy, electric-vehicle conversion, life sciences, green financial services, sustainable agriculture, high-efficiency solar and climate prosperity-economic development.

The networks would establish "talent hubs" in these areas, and the concentration of expertise and talent would lead to new industries.

"Gov. Markell came up with a really sophisticated, smart and totally workable economic development strategy through sustainability," Weiss said.

"It definitely can work very well if everyone gets behind it," Weiss said, adding that the effort could "completely modernize Delaware's economy."

Chad Tolman, energy chairman for the Delaware Sierra Club, said Markell is "on the right track" with his approach toward conservation and business opportunity.

"I think there are tremendous opportunities for bringing new business to Delaware and replacing some of the more traditional jobs that we've lost," Tolman said. "Delaware could become a national leader in both manufacturing and installing these wind turbines all up and down the East Coast.."

Alan Muller, head of Green Delaware, also said Markell is on the right track -- but that it will take more than talk to transform Delaware's economy into a green machine.

"To do that, speaking as an environmentalist who's been advocating for these things ever since I started advocating, [such efforts] have always been tanked by Delmarva Power, by the Chamber of Commerce, by the Legislature, by any vested interest you can think of," Muller said. "I don't think that transformation is going to happen without a high level of public support."

Stephanie McClellan, Markell's policy director, said that by participating in the project, Delaware has "the opportunity to strategically plan with some of the most innovative locations in the country to be able to develop a strategy for a green economy and how to green our economy."

McClellan will attend the project's meeting this weekend in San Jose, Calif. "On my own dime," she said, and will be "presenting our strategy from Delaware, getting our detailed feedback."

Other states, including Florida, Iowa, Maryland and New Mexico, have been working with the Climate Prosperity Project. Although Delaware is the only state invited to participate, seven metropolitan areas that include Denver, Seattle and California's Silicon Valley also were invited to join.

'Climate Prosperity Plan'

Gov. Markell introduced a "climate prosperity plan" with three aspects:

GREEN SAVINGS: Stimulus money will be used to promote energy savings for residents and businesses.

GREEN OPPORTUNITIES: By making things efficient, demand will grow, thus creating state jobs.

GREEN TALENT: Markell wants to work with Delaware colleges to develop "eco-knowledge networks" to build up state's number of experts in the green sector.