

## **A Climate Workforce for Vermont**

Opinion Editorial by Lieutenant Governor Molly Gray

Last month, I dedicated the first panel discussion of my 2022 “Seat at the Table” virtual meeting series to the Vermont workforce necessary to address climate change and meet the goals of the Vermont Climate Action Plan released December 2021. The plan makes wide-reaching recommendations for how we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and minimize climate change’s impact on our communities. The recommendations set out in the plan will require a well-trained, highly-valued and fully-supported Vermont climate workforce.

As a state, we’ve committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 26% below 2005 levels by 2025 and to 40% below 1990 levels by 2030. To achieve those goals, modeling suggests Vermont must weatherize at least 90,000 additional homes, install 112,000 additional heat pumps, add over 150,000 additional electric vehicles to the road, and expand programs that help low- and moderate-income Vermonters fully participate. These changes won’t happen on their own. Investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency job training opportunities for those looking to enter the workforce or make a career change will be necessary, and we need to act now.

Solar installation is one of the five fastest growing careers in the country. Encore Renewable Energy Founder, Chad Farrell, shared during the “Seat at the Table” panel, “To best capitalize on the energy transition, Vermont will need to rapidly expand our educational, vocational and transitional training capacities to ensure that the state is most well equipped to realize the economic development and job creation benefits associated with the energy transition while also combating the worst effects of climate change for our state.” I couldn’t agree more.

The good news is there are numerous employers and Vermont organizations already leading the way in providing renewable energy and energy efficiency job training opportunities. What is more, many of the fastest growing career opportunities in the sector are high-paying, union jobs that we can recruit and train workers for right here at home. Luckily, this training is already underway.

Vermont Technical College (VTC), for example, serves over 3,200 Vermonters each year and works with hundreds of employers across industry sectors with a mission to provide an affordable career-focused technical and professional education. VTC already prepares Vermonters to become HVAC/R Technicians, ready to meet the growing demand for heat pump installation.

ReSOURCE, a non-profit, provides work training for adults and youth, removing barriers to employment and sharpening skills for entry level job readiness in carpentry, construction, and weatherization.

Vermont Works for Women is working to make sure every Vermonter, particularly women and gender non-conforming individuals, can fully, safely, and equitably join a climate workforce. VWW’s training programs for women impart both hard skills and the confidence to succeed in male-dominated workplaces, while also supporting employers who build a culture of respect and support for current and future female employees.

“Renewable energy is a high opportunity career field, but employers in the renewable energy and related sectors struggle to attract and retain female workers. Women comprise only 3% of

construction workers and 4% of installation, maintenance, and repair workers,” Executive Director of Vermont Works for Women, Rhoni Basden shared during the “Seat at the Table” panel.

This legislative session as we work to invest historic federal funding, lets invest in the programs, non-profits, schools, and education centers necessary to grow the climate workforce required to meet our climate goals. Let’s also show our next generation, and those who enter the climate workforce, the importance of critical renewable energy and energy efficiency work through specific funding, programs, and initiatives. Here are just a few ideas:

Vermont has one of the highest high school graduation rates in the country, yet 41% of our new graduates don’t go on to any additional training. Let’s consider offering those who seek advanced training in the renewable energy and energy efficiency sectors free tuition or loan forgiveness on the condition they stay and work in Vermont.

February is “Career and Technical Education” month and across Vermont we are reminded of all the Centers working to give our next generation the professional skills necessary to enter the workforce or go on to higher education in Vermont. Our CTE’s and Vermont State Colleges are key partners in growing a climate workforce and our education funding needs to reflect this.

ReSOURCE, Vermont Works for Women, Encore Renewable Energy and so many other renewable energy and energy efficiency businesses, non-profits and training programs are critical partners for us in meeting our climate goals. Let’s keep their voices and expertise at the table as we work together to grow a climate workforce and meet this moment.

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*Molly Gray serves as Vermont’s 82<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Governor. During the legislative session, Lt. Governor Gray hosts a “Seat at the Table” virtual speaker series on topical issues facing Vermont communities. The January 2022 panel on “Meeting Climate Change Mitigation Goals Through Workforce Development” is available here: <https://ltgov.vermont.gov/seatatthetable>.*