



MARYLAND MATTERS

Ray Lewis: Solar Workforce Development Can Transform Disadvantaged Communities

By Guest Commentary - February 12, 2019

A few years ago, we co-founded Power52 Foundation, an organization aimed at providing training and skills to historically underserved populations and preparing them for careers in Maryland's clean energy sector.

In addition to the technical training, other program components include career coaching, life skills development, financial literacy, health and wellness awareness, and rigorous graduate services that provide employment placement assistance and retention. Collectively, these program elements ensure the success of every Power52 trainee and graduate.

Between 2016 and 2018, our hometown of Ellicott City was pummeled twice by a phenomenon so rare that meteorologists refer to it as a 1,000-year storm. Both times, water engulfed historic Main Street, upending vehicles, drowning buildings and ruining businesses. After the deluge subsided, several store owners decided against repairing their damaged properties or resuming their operations. Out of fear of recurrent flooding, they packed up and left.

While the recent flooding in Ellicott City highlights the need to address global climate

change, Power52 Foundation was founded with a more local mission.

Our mission is to break the cycle of poverty, unemployment, under employment and incarceration in urban communities in Maryland and across the nation through economic empowerment and clean energy access. In a nutshell, the goal is to bring forth economic empowerment to citizens in an inclusive manner while promoting an inclusive clean energy economy.

Since founding Power52 Foundation and the establishment of Power52 Energy Institute, the organization has seized the opportunity to train and employ disadvantaged individuals within the clean energy sector, helping create careers and employment in a growing field that promotes reliable, efficient and sustainable power generated right here in Maryland.

Our focus on workforce development enables communities to improve their livelihoods and brighten their futures.

Each Power52 Energy Institute graduate earns a Power52 Certificate of Completion, and North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners, National Center for Construction Education & Research and OSHA-10 credentials enabling them

to enter the Maryland clean energy workforce shovel-ready.

To date, Power52 has hosted 10 cohorts graduating 102 men and women of which 79 are now working in the Maryland clean energy industry. Many of our graduates have become ambassadors of the importance of having access to employment opportunities in the clean energy sector as well as role models in their local communities, paving a path for others to follow.

But with help from Maryland's leaders in Annapolis, we can do a lot more.

By increasing Maryland's share of renewables from 25 percent to 50 percent through passage of the Maryland Clean Energy Jobs Act, leaders in Annapolis can help ensure that our success story is multiplied across the state.

The Maryland Clean Energy Jobs Act, which is backed by a broad coalition of more than 600 civic, environmental, faith and business organizations, increases the amount of clean energy Maryland produces in-state, keeping more jobs, wages and tax revenue in our communities.

Importantly, the bill provides tens of millions of dollars for workforce development funding in low income areas and funds programs led by minorities, women and veterans, benefiting underprivileged populations, businesses and programs, including investments in technical high schools.

There are currently more than 5,000 people working in Maryland's solar industry, more than our crabbing industry, and our vision is that this number should quadruple over the next decade

as we expand our transition to clean energy and ramp up our workforce development efforts.

According to coalition members, the proposed legislation stands poised to create 25,000 in-state jobs in statewide installation, construction, maintenance and manufacturing as well as other areas. And reports by both the state and independent analysts estimate that the Clean Energy Jobs Act will cost Marylanders around \$2 a month while returning many times that amount in economic benefits throughout the state, an excellent return on Maryland's investment.

The work required to address climate change is an opportunity that can flow to all corners of the state and to historically disadvantaged and low to moderate income communities. These LMI communities can and should participate in the economic opportunities that come with the transition to clean energy.

The Clean Energy Jobs Act helps ensure the investments Maryland makes in expanding our state's share of renewable energy provide new opportunities for underprivileged men and women across the state.

Winning two Super Bowl championships was hard, but this win should be easy for Maryland. Passage of the Clean Energy Jobs Act in 2019 is another Maryland success story waiting to be told.

—Ray Lewis and Cherie Brooks

The writers are, respectively, co-founder and principal of Power52 and a 13-time Pro Bowler who led the Baltimore Ravens to two Super Bowl championships; and co-founder and CEO of Power52 Foundation.