
Labor unions' climate agenda for City Hall includes cutting school emissions, adding bike lanes

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Labor unions' climate agenda for City Hall includes cutting school emissions, adding bike lanes

BY DANIELLE MUOIO DUNN | 05/19/2022 05:00 AM EDT

NEW YORK — Major labor leaders are throwing their support behind an array of climate initiatives they say will create good union jobs as state and city leaders race to meet their mandates for cutting emissions.

Climate Jobs New York — a coalition of unions representing 2.6 million state workers — is calling for the city to make public schools and housing carbon-free by 2030, install 300 miles of bike lanes and divert all food waste into energy by 2025.

The [170-page report](#) — reviewed exclusively by POLITICO — was developed with researchers at Cornell University and has the backing of major unions like 32BJ SEIU, the United Federation of Teachers and District Council 37.

Union heads said it shows areas the city can meet its climate targets while creating a substitute for lost jobs because of climate change. The Just Transition Working Group, which was created after the state passed a law to reduce emissions 40 percent by 2030, recently issued similar recommendations on how climate change policies will impact jobs.

“There is going to be a complete reset of our economy under the green renewable jobs,” Henry Garrido, executive director of DC37, said in an interview. He added that he wants members to know “they can take advantage of the good jobs being created as a result of it.”

Details: The report focuses on areas that are directly controlled by the city, giving officials more power over the projects and labor agreements. That includes making New York City Housing Authority complexes and schools carbon-free.

“Public buildings should be low hanging fruit,” said Dave Hancock, interim executive director of Climate Jobs New York. “It’s a huge opportunity because it’s city-owned building stock, there are a ton of sources available, we own the buildings and you’ve got the buy-in from key public and private unions.”

There are other benefits too. Many school buildings are old and lack proper ventilation, making temperatures unbearable at certain points of the year. Investments in energy efficiency can help improve many work environments, Garrido said.

The report also calls on the city to add more capacity for processing food waste into biogas, which it found could create 1,494 direct jobs over three years.

The city isn’t doing enough to achieve its climate goals, according to the report, which points to recent emissions increases and little capital funding for energy efficiency and emissions reduction projects. Cornell researchers said they tried to show areas the city can make the deepest cuts.

“We are really thinking about how do we take on climate change at scale and the pace that science demands,” Lara Skinner, Director at the Worker Institute’s Labor Leading on Climate Initiative, said in an interview. “For us, doing that work at the scale and pace that’s necessary for science is also necessary for creating a lot of jobs.”

A spokesperson for the administration did not immediately comment.

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