

Jersey to DC: support the energy sector's biggest employer and its 32K NJ workers

By Brian Bovio and Scott Nelson

As the U.S. Senate considers what to keep and what to leave out of the reconciliation bill that's also known as Build Back Better, we urge New Jersey's senators to support policies that save their constituents money, make homes and businesses more comfortable, and support a large, growing, and well-paid workforce in our state. In other words, we are asking them to support energy efficiency, including "HOPE for HOMES" rebates and job training programs.

According to the latest annual [Energy Efficiency Jobs in America](#) report from the nonprofit organizations E2 and E4TheFuture, almost 32,000 people in New Jersey work in energy efficiency jobs. That is almost twice as many New Jersey residents as work in fossil-fuel jobs.

And energy efficiency is an employment engine far beyond New Jersey. Across the U.S., 2.1 million people work in energy efficiency — more than work in oil, gas or coal. They do all kinds of jobs, ranging from retrofitting homes to save energy, to upgrading HVAC systems, to manufacturing furnaces and air-conditioning systems, to designing software that manages energy use.

While energy efficiency employment numbers are growing, the workforce is still not back to pre-pandemic levels. But elements of the reconciliation bill could help energy efficiency workers grow the economy, save ratepayers money, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. For example, the [HOPE for HOMES](#) Act — long championed by Rep. Frank Pallone, who chairs the House Energy and Commerce Committee — includes rebates for home efficiency improvements, as well as workforce training support on energy efficiency for residential contractors.

Our customers at Bovio Rubino Service and Oceanside Service are demanding energy-efficient offerings because they save money and keep people more comfortable at home — and comfort matters even more than usual these days, with people spending more time at home because of COVID. Today's Energy Star-qualified HVAC systems are up to 60% more efficient than equipment from 10 years ago, while a home-performance retrofit can cut energy bills by 25 to 30%.

That's going to matter this winter, when heating bills are projected to jump. The U.S. [Energy Information Administration](#) says natural gas heating bills will spike by 30% if we have an average winter, while homes heated by oil will see a 43% rise, and homes

heated by propane will see a 54% hike. Electric-heat bills are projected to increase, too, but by a relatively small 6%, which is making energy-efficient heat pumps look especially attractive.

Both of our businesses have been around for decades, and are relatively large for our sector. But unlike us, most energy efficiency businesses in New Jersey have fewer than 20 employees. As members of the board of directors of the New Jersey Air Conditioning Contractors Association, we are hearing that especially for small firms, finding great people to hire is challenging these days. We're glad to see funding for energy efficiency training in the bill.

Workforce training measures in the [HOPE for HOMES](#) portion of the reconciliation bill would help energy efficiency businesses hire more people and expand faster, enabling more homes to get more efficient more quickly. In addition, the childcare support measures could help make returning to work economically feasible in the wake of the pandemic.

Despite all the strife and harsh divisions in our politics these days, energy efficiency is something that has always drawn broad support from across the political spectrum. Efficiency programs create jobs, promote economic growth, and save families and businesses money. They offer good jobs with benefits — jobs that can't be exported to another country — in a growing sector. And while reducing emissions that contribute to climate change, energy efficiency also promotes energy independence, bolsters national security, and fosters resilience in the face of increasingly severe weather events.

We hope that when the Senate passes this bill, it will include strong support for energy efficiency — which also means support for a more prosperous nation and a more sustainable planet.

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