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Government announces creation of 2,000 'green jobs'

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In the aftermath of the massive layoffs of government workers, Gov. Fortuño's administration announced the creation of more than 2,000 new "green jobs" to be paid for with \$120 million in federal funds earmarked to stimulate the economy through energy conservation.

Secretary of State Kenneth McClintock, Economic Development Secretary José R. Pérez Riera and Energy Affairs Administration Executive Director Luis Bernal announced Thursday funds from the American Recovery Reinvestment Act, or ARRA, will create some 100 jobs for "energy inspectors and auditors" as soon as next week for the "air conditioning (sic) program."

"Next week we will be accepting the first 'Request for Qualifications' for energy auditors and inspectors for the air conditioning program [funded with] ARRA funds," said Bernal.

But an RFQ is not a call for hiring personnel. Government agencies use RFQs to qualify companies interested in doing business with them. Apparently, the real scope of Thursday's announcement is that the EAA will contract private companies, which will be required to hire new personnel to serve as energy auditors and inspectors.



Secretary of State Kenneth McClintock, left, and Energy Affairs Administration Executive Director Luis Bernal

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Green jobs

ARRA funds will pay to train auditors and inspectors and will also finance their salaries for an undisclosed period of time.

The government officials avoided mentioning how many of these will be permanent jobs, except for McClintock, who "expects" all positions to become permanent, be it because of "continuation of the regular program or because they are hired by private companies."

McClintock explained that these energy inspectors will advise families on how to make their homes more energy efficient, so their monthly energy bill is significantly reduced.

"The inspector will come to your home and advise you on what appliances you need change to make the house energy efficient ... what kind of air conditioner you need..." McClintock said.

Meanwhile, Bernal said "this energy conservation program is part of the administration's strategies to reduce energy consumption for low income families to pay less for electricity."

He added that the administration is already implementing "the necessary strategies to air condition the homes of

low income families," including the reduction of energy rates.

Revitalizing the economy

But in an economically depressed environment — with 17,000 new unemployed workers — it seems unclear how these initiatives (air conditioning homes, replacing appliances, etc.) will "jump start" the economy.

Pérez Riera is convinced that the economic crisis affecting the island will be surpassed by injecting money into the economy.

"The way to revitalize an economy is doing what we are doing; injecting money. We got \$6,000 million from the federal stimulus plan," said Pérez Riera.

Pérez Riera said some \$875 million of those funds have already been used. He expects that amount will increase to \$1.7 billion by year's end.

"With that amount of money flowing, that amount of construction [projects], that amount of economic movement, the economy will go forward," assured Pérez-Riera, who denied the massive layoffs would have a decelerating effect on the island's economy.

Nevertheless, the public official signaled a caveat to his assertion.

"While this money is circulating through Puerto Rico's economy, we have to implement the necessary changes to make Puerto Rico more competitive in the long run," said Pérez Riera, who anticipated a steady 3 percent, or higher, economic growth rate.

Proactive search for jobs

McClintock said displaced government workers should start taking the necessary steps to get a new job instead of participating in "pathetic protests."

"They should do as a person I know did. She got herself on the Internet and found a federal job for which she qualifies, and she as already been notified that she is going to be hired..." he said about an unidentified acquaintance.

"With such positivism and without diversions from pathetic protests like last night's, they will go forward ... and this person will never suffer unemployment ... There are jobs out there, but you have to look for them," McClintock argued.

Regarding the massive government workers layoffs, Pérez-Riera denied the government's contention that "it will run out of money for payroll by the end of the year" was based on an overestimation of its revenues.

"The Treasury Department's estimations are close to the revenues being collected. It [Treasury] has been very good at estimating when compared to past administrations, where overestimations were by billions of dollars," he said.

Confronted with the approval of this year's balanced budget, where all government expense is justified and paid for based on its revenues, Pérez-Riera tried to justify the difference as a "cash flow problem."

"You can make some projections for next year on how much you are going to spend ... you have money coming in and out and you need to make recurring payments, like payroll, you face other expenses... sometimes there is not enough cash," Pérez-Riera said.

But McClintock said the difference in the availability of funds is due to the delayed enactment of Phase 2 of Law 7.

"The intention was to enact Law 7 earlier than it [actually] was ... Everybody expected the expenses were to be defined by Law 7. Everybody expected that layoffs were to be announced gradually," McClintock said.

The delay on the implementation of Law 7, in turn, was due to the lack of updated personnel files at all government agencies, he noted.