

[SF Reporter](#)

By Laura Paskus

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Claiming a spot in the morning sun, four 20-somethings grab a smoke in a packed-dirt lot near the intersection of Agua Fria Street and St. Francis Drive. Autumn has just shaken a stick at summer, and the four stamp their feet, complaining about the cold. Slabs of wood lie across a portion of the yard; portable metal buildings stand as the only testament to the failed public school that once claimed this lot.

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Since heading to Washington DC earlier this year, freshman congressman Ben Ray Luján, D-NM, has been focusing on green jobs and strengthening New Mexico's connection to green industries. His interest in the issue was cultivated, he says, during his time on the state's Public Regulation Commission, on which he advocated for an increase in the state's reliance upon renewable energy.

New Mexico can lead the nation in green energy and jobs, he says, thanks to the presence of solar and wind resources. The state must take full advantage, he says, of the expertise present within its national laboratories and universities. "This is something that is all-encompassing, and we need to do all we can be doing with small businesses and technology transfer around Sandia and Los Alamos," Luján says. "The job opportunities that are being created—that have already been created and that are alive and well today—are about being smarter about the way we do things."

New Mexico also is a proven leader in sustainability, he says.

Shrayas Jatkar, a Sierra Club conservation organizer, says the “low-hanging fruit” of green jobs centers around energy efficiency—weatherization of public buildings, for example.

Looking around northern New Mexico, where he grew up, families have lived sustainably for generations: They are smart about cultivating local foods, using water and energy wisely, and building practical homes.

“The way we built our homes for many, many years around New Mexico, we did it so they were cool in the summer and hot in the winter,” he says. “It’s important how much sustainability was a part of our daily life.”

As chairman of the House of Representative’s Congressional Hispanic Caucus’ Green Economy and Renewable Energy Task Force, Luján offered an amendment to the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 that would provide funding for clean-energy job training and education programs at Hispanic-serving institutions and tribal colleges. (Having passed the House, that bill still awaits a vote in the Senate.)

Luján also recently invited YouthWorks educational coordinator Bott-Lyons and Executive Director Melynn Schuyler, as well as two program graduates, Dominic Cantu and Douglas Rael, to speak before the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute’s annual policy conference.

“Those two guys stole the show, telling people not to give up, telling us to make sure we’re including everyone and not just a select few,” he says. “And I’m looking to them to be a part of those solutions,” Luján says.

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