

**Transcript: *Wake Up, New York! A Sunrise NYC Podcast***

## **05: We Deserve Good Jobs for All**

Creating a more sustainable future through the Green New Deal means ensuring people have access to well-paying, good jobs. In this week's episode, we dive into the Good Jobs for All Campaign by chatting with fellow Sunrisers and NY Congressman Adriano Espaillat, as well as get some background context from Jacobin writer and geographer Matt Huber. Learn how we can create a more socially and environmentally sustainable future by overhauling our fossil fuel infrastructure and creating millions of green jobs in the process.

*The following has been lightly edited for clarity.*

MUSIC [00:00:00] (THEME: "Time Capsules" by Janet May)

**JENNA:** [00:00:28] Welcome back to *Wake Up, New York! A Sunrise NYC Podcast*, the show that highlights New York City's specific politics, policy, and the road towards a Green New Deal. I'm your host, Jenna. Gio and Paula are out this week, but we still have an information packed and exciting episode for you today.

It's been a little while, but we here at Sunrise NYC have been working really hard the past couple of months, pushing our politicians on this latest infrastructure bill. That's right – it's been busy in Congress, so it's been busy at Sunrise. Now you may be asking yourself, what does this infrastructure bill have to do with climate? How does a Green New Deal and infrastructure relate? Well, you've come to the right place. Today, we're going to be talking about Good Jobs for All and why we need it now.

A central part of the infrastructure bill that Biden introduced is the American Jobs Plan, which is intended to get Americans back to work in ways that will also improve the infrastructure of the United States. The Good Jobs for All campaign has been working to center a climate in the infrastructure and jobs conversation.

Let's hear from Veekas Ashoka, an organizer with Sunrise Movement NYC to learn a little bit more about what Good Jobs for All actually means:

**VEEKAS ASHOKA:** [00:01:41] The Good Jobs for All campaign recognizes the moment we're in, which is the intersection of a lot of different crises: like, of course we're facing the potential of catastrophic climate change; we are coming out of a pandemic with 10% unemployment in

New York; there's just incredible wealth inequality and underinvestment in real people in their healthcare and their housing.

And what the Good Jobs for All campaign seeks to do is to focus the infrastructure debate and to focus this Build Back Better campaign of Joe Biden around workers and around regular people so that we can address all of these crises at the same time, right?

So the Good Jobs for All campaign focuses on jobs. That's the key word here, and it's not just any jobs, right? It's jobs that pay well, it's jobs with union protections, jobs with career and educational growth, and jobs that focus on building the care economy, and on building the clean future that we need in order to address all of these various groups.

**JENNA:** [00:02:54] A key component of the Good Jobs for All federal jobs guarantee is the creation of a Civilian Climate Corp or a CCC.

**VEEKAS ASHOKA:** [00:03:01] So the Civilian Climate Corps is super inspiring to me. It is inspired by a New Deal program that was called, you know, had the same acronym. It was called the Civilian Conservation Corps. And what that was, is it put three million young people – it was actually only young men at the time – to work, you know, building forests and, and doing wildlife restoration. And it was responsible for pulling a lot of young people out of poverty and creating and building a lot of our natural resources in the US.

What the Civilian Climate Corps is, is an evolution of that model that centers justice and equity in the program and ultimately is doing something very similar: creating 1.5 million jobs over five years to address the climate crisis. And specifically prioritize and directly invest in the communities that will be most affected by climate change.

**JENNA:** [00:04:07] The CCC may seem ambitious, but the United States has taken on similar projects before. Matt Huber is an Associate Professor of Geography at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, and a writer and researcher on climate politics, and the economy and environment. He was able to tell us a bit about the history of the Civilian Climate Corp and how it relates to the situation we face today

**MATT HUBER:** [00:04:34] In the Depression, of course there was loss of faith in capitalism, and particularly the market as a force that could actually deliver people jobs. So in that context, there finally became a commitment on the part of the government: well, if the market's not going to do it, the government is going to provide jobs, work to do. And a lot of the Civilian Conservation Corps was doing things like building structures and state parks, and, you know, actually doing soil conservation work in the midst of a Dust Bowl-type crisis.

But I don't think we have, today, the same political argument that they had in the Depression (that we have 25% unemployment and we have to do a jobs program because of an economic crisis like that). Clearly, as we're seeing just day after day, we do have an ecological crisis. We do have the – the world is literally on fire. And so I think we have to make a similar case that, you know, we have actually been waiting for decades for the market to solve climate change through creating this energy transition and building the new infrastructure we need to decarbonize.

And despite all the hoopla and hype around the clean energy economy, the market is still not delivering this transition. You know, in 2020, 80% of global energy consumption is still from fossil fuels. A recent report really basically said that number has not really budged over the last ten years. So we're still stuck in this fossil fuel economy. The market is not solving it. So. We actually have to make an argument that even though maybe the private sector jobs economy is getting back on its feet and it's doing relatively well and, and even there's this sort of tight labor market that's happening, that we actually need these jobs to solve this larger ecological crisis that is not being solved by the market.

I'm very sad to say that it seems – from statements from people like John Kerry, Janet Yellen, and really core people in the Biden administration – they basically said that, they're still saying this is going to be solved by the market. This is going to be solved by the private sector. And, there's just no evidence that that's happening.

So we really need to make the case that, in an emergency – like World War Two or the Depression – you actually need a public sector to come in and solve the problem, regardless of whether or not it's profitable, regardless of whether or not it's cost-effective, but because the world is on fire. And because we need to solve this crisis – like it's the emergency that, increasingly, people like Joe Biden will acknowledge in their rhetoric but need to treat like a crisis – we actually need to finally make a public commitment and actually use the power of the government and the public sector to actually build out this long-term infrastructure. Like they did with the federal highway system. Like they did with the rural electrification system during the 1930s, where again, it was the market that was not delivering electricity to farmers and rural households and the government said, “well, we're going to do it.” So that's what we need to recover: this idea that this will be solved by public investment because the market is not doing it.

**JENNA:** [00:07:58] The modern CCC is backed by organizations like the Sunrise Movement and was introduced as a bill by Senator Ed Markey and Congressmember Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. The hope is to have it included in the infrastructure package.

Sunrise and many other groups, such as the Movement for Black Lives, March for Our Lives CWA, and the Working Families Party have partnered on the Good Jobs for All Pledge to help build support for federal jobs programs.

The pledge reads, “I commit to doing everything in my power to pass legislation that guarantees good jobs for all, invests \$10 trillion over the next decade to create millions of union jobs addressing the crises of climate change, economic inequality, and systemic racism, and puts money into the hands of people and communities, not the wealthy few.” Let's hear a bit more about it from Veekas:

**VEEKAS ASHOKA:** [00:08:54] So the Good Jobs for All pledge is a short pledge that we ask our representatives to commit to that says that they will do everything they can to pass an infrastructure bill that is \$10 trillion, that includes a Civilian Climate Corps, and that centers justice and equity in that investment. So we were asking, and are asking, senators and representatives in Congress to, to sign that. It was also just a tool to, like, have something that we could hold politicians accountable to. And that was a big reason why it was a pledge itself.

**JENNA:** [00:09:40] One person in support, and who has signed to the Good Jobs for All Pledge is Congressman Adriano Espaillat, the US Representative for New York's 13th congressional district. Since 2017, he has represented the West Bronx and parts of Northern Manhattan.

**ADRIANO ESPAILLAT:** [00:09:57] So, I think often our communities are left behind, or sort of like subject to take the crumbs off the table and that should not be the case. I think that we should be right up there with any other community, in terms of great jobs that provide great income and benefits, health plans, pension plans and everything else that America should be built around, right?

And very often our communities don't get right. And as a result, you know, we are in a perpetual state of disrepair, and poverty, a state of stagnation, economic stagnation. I think that's a tragedy. In fact, you know, I find it reprehensible that some representatives across the country almost, like, use the talking point ‘that they represent one of the poorest districts in the country.’ I don't think that's anything to be proud of. I think that should change. And our job, my job is to try to change that. And so, hence I was very much supportive.

**JENNA:** [00:11:10] The CCC could be a great first step in achieving a Green New Deal.

**VEEKAS ASHOKA:** [00:11:15] So, a jobs guarantee is the first pillar of a Green New Deal. And I'll explain why: a Green New Deal is a culture shift in society, a culture in which we believe that the government can solve problems and that the dignity and rights of individuals are important in what society should be built on.

So we believe, you know, much like – and this was not a radical opinion 50 years ago – we believe that one of those rights is a right to a job, to the opportunity to contribute to society, to get paid a living wage, to do so and to have your needs met as a result of being a contributing member.

And so, step one is to accomplish that goal of having everyone have the opportunity to have a job making the world better and making our communities better. And then once there's a job guarantee, then we need something for folks to do. And so, what better work than the work of caring for each other and the work of creating a future in which we reverse the climate crisis.

**JENNA:** [00:12:44] So, why is this change needed right now? The climate crisis is urgent and a lot of money will be needed to start the momentum needed to make drastic changes in the next decade. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that global human caused emissions of carbon dioxide would need to be reduced by almost half from 2010 levels by 2030.

**VEEKAS ASHOKA:** [00:13:05] Where is the money in our current system once we project out 10, 20, 50 years? We are headed towards collapse if we don't change the way we think about value. The way we think about value currently, the way our system is structured, is extractive, right? What is the most we can squeeze out of people? What is the most we can squeeze out of our planet in order to maximize profit or shareholder value? And in the short term – of course.

But that ride will stop one day. It's already stopping you. Look at the heat waves. Look at the hurricanes. We're going to have incredible devastation if we don't stop it. So what we need to do is rethink what that value is and figure out a way to be regenerative and balanced in our growth, in the value we provide. And I think we can do that in a way that, you know, still allows people to make money and live a good life, but maybe there will be a few less billionaires. And, and I personally think that would probably be a good thing.

**JENNA:** [00:14:18] Professor Huber agrees, we are at this point because of profit and consumption and industry.

**MATT HUBER:** [00:14:24] As I started to do this research, I started to realize that there's this whole part of the economy that's controlled by private capital for profit and it produces everything that we consume in our lives. But also, that that part of the economy is not only mostly responsible for the climate crisis – the industrial production of fossil fuels obviously, but also things like fertilizer, things like steel, things like cement – but also that the people that control those sectors of industrial production are completely indifferent to the climate consequences. They're just concerned with their shareholder value and their profits.

**JENNA:** [00:15:04] Young people across the country are concerned about the climate crisis and what it means for their future Mia, a recent high school graduate who joined sunrise one year ago and helped create her own hub. The New York city youth hub spoke to us about her concerns for economic security as we face the climate crisis.

**MIA:** [00:15:22] You know, the pandemic has shown a lot of job insecurity. My family and my friends had a lot of trouble with their jobs and it's just brought to my attention that, like, everybody should have a good job. Everyone should have security. And right now that's not accessible for everyone.

You know, I'm going to college. I don't know what I want to do yet. A lot of things I want to do are, you know, filmmaking and art space things, which I can't support myself with right now in the current economy, doing work like that. And I want to.

And I think a lot of the care work that my parents do also goes underappreciated. Both of my parents are teachers. My mom is an ESL kindergarten teacher, and a lot of the resources that she has in her school she's funding herself; it's not through her school. And she should be able to have those resources from school.

**JENNA:** [00:16:20] A teenager herself, Mia is still worried for the younger generations, like her younger brother.

**MIA:** [00:16:27] I have a little brother and I understood the breadth of the climate crisis and the solutions needed before he was born, but, when he was born, I really understood the depth and the meaning it would mean to people younger than me as well as like my generation and my age. But a CCC and Good Jobs for All would really just provide that comfort: to know that we're on the right path to a better future, and a greener future, a more just and equitable future; one where my brother doesn't have to fight for climate change; one where he doesn't have to be a part of a Sunrise Movement because all of our goals will be achieved.

**JENNA:** [00:17:20] So what will this fight look like? As we recover from and continue to fight COVID, there is an opportunity to put people back to work in an equitable way to address a lot of society's problems.

**VEEKAS ASHOKA:** [00:17:32] New Yorkers have... there's a 10% unemployment rate, which is quite high. It is even higher amongst black and brown communities. So, a jobs guarantee and the Civilian Climate Corps would clearly help reduce that. There's two ways that it would explicitly help black, indigenous, and other communities on the front lines of climate change. And that's both in the types of jobs and the types of work.

So the types of jobs: it is very important that the Civilian Climate Corps, first of all, pays well, right? There's actually plenty of work out there in our current economy, but it's all exploitive work. So it's important that, you know, we pay people what they deserve to be paid, a living wage at the very least.

It's also important that this work builds to something, right? That it builds into a long-term career It's not a dead end job; it's not a contract gig that can end at any time. And so it builds both educationally and, you know, through union membership or career growth, otherwise. All that type of work will explicitly benefit communities that need it most.

**JENNA:** [00:18:44] So, who will these jobs be for? Representative Espailat says:

**ADRIANO ESPAILLAT:** [00:18:50] Young people! And because of that, I'm working with Congressman Rangel at City College in putting together the Charles B. Rangel Institute for Transportation Infrastructure project that will help train these young people. And when the Second Avenue Subway project begins, for example, they will be trained and ready at the starting line and it will be successful. [The subway project] won't be successful unless [the young people] component is an integral part of it and really a successful part of it as well.

**JENNA:** [00:19:21] Young people need jobs and frontline communities need help, including the young people in these frontline communities. Veekas explains how a Civilian Climate Corps would prioritize equity.

**VEEKAS ASHOKA:** [00:19:32] We think that it's very important that at least 50% of the investment that comes through a Civilian Climate Corps – and honestly all investment – should focus on the communities that are affected by climate change the most. Right?

You know, I love the example of NYCHA. I just think it's so inspiring to think about what a Civilian Climate Corps could mean for public housing, right? It could mean that we accomplished the goals of a Green New Deal for Public Housing: we have, you know, no more elevated asthma levels; we have, you know, clean energy, less oil fumes; more green spaces; state-of-the-art buildings and communities. We can build all those things clearly – through a Civilian Climate Corps – but also the people who get those jobs should be the ones who are, who live in public housing.

And so that can be a prioritization that is built into this Civilian Climate Corp, just like it's built into the Green New Deal for Public Housing. There's no reason why we can't do that. And we could do similar things for all other programs as well.

**JENNA:** [00:20:35] Representative Espaillat also discussed communities at the front lines of the climate crisis and environmental justice, including some of his own constituents.

**ADRIANO ESPAILLAT:** [00:20:44] I think that as communities that contribute the least (or much less) to the climate problem compared to other communities – but yet are impacted adversely and in a disproportionate ways – I think that this provides a level of potential relief for that perpetual problem.

So, you know, most of our communities, for example, take public transportation, right? They don't drive to work for the most part. In fact, many of them don't (most of them) don't own a vehicle. Yet, in my district for example, we have the Cross Bronx Expressway cutting right through the middle of it. And unfortunately, we have high levels of asthma and other respiratory diseases because of that reason. And yet when environmental issues or projects are rolled out, we're not always at the front of the line, right?

I hope that that reality changes with [Good Jobs for All]. I hope that it provides great job opportunities for the future, prevailing wage jobs that will lift families to the middle-class – that's what we're talking about, right? Or to do better for themselves and to have a great health plan and a pension. And then at the same time we could build better, but also smarter and greener.

I like to think of reversing what Robert Moses perpetrated against us many decades ago. Which... he was the architect of these perpetual disparities. You know, the Cross Bronx Expressway is a great indicator of that.

**JENNA:** [00:22:28] Robert Moses was a public official, mainly in New York, whose career spanned from the 1920s through the 1970s. He worked on many projects regarding transportation and parks, and some of his projects – like the Cross Bronx Expressway – favored cars over other types of transportation and quite literally divided and destroyed neighborhoods, disadvantaging low-income people and communities of color.

**ADRIANO ESPAILLAT:** [00:22:50] It's sort of like cut the Bronx in half: the South Bronx the North Bronx... and everything that came with it, right? The South Bronx always, unfortunately, characterized by poverty and drugs and all kinds of unemployment, right? Urban decay.

And so why not create a Big Dig-type of project that will do away with that historical divisionist plan of splitting communities by zip codes, into poverty and wealth.

**JENNA:** [00:23:20] Professor Huber delves into how these campaigns better address these concerns compared to predecessors and the power of unions.

**MATT HUBER:** [00:23:29] If you really look at the movers and the shakers of the Green New Deal program, it was mostly academics, geos, professional class folks like myself, people that work at universities, really trying to articulate and envision a working class kind of environmental program. But it was not actually rooted in real working class communities.

I mean, class is a complicated topic, but a shortcut to understanding kind of class inequality in a country like the United States is you could just lay out this one basic fact, which is: two thirds of American adults don't have a college degree, right? If you're thinking that all of the people that were working on Green New Deal programs have a college degree, then they're already not in the kind of majority of society, right? And if we want to build these popular democratic majorities we have to actually be embedded in working class communities. So that is what you would call a politics that's more class-rooted in communities.

We actually have historical examples of what that looks like, and it looks like actual infrastructure in communities that are part of people's everyday lives. In the early 1900s, those were unions and political parties, particularly in Europe, that were literally like embedded in the landscape in people's lives.

So in the early 1900s, if you lived in an industrial city and you were a worker in some of these factories, you know, it was just... almost every city had a union or a party, a hall, like a big physical building that people would hang out in and go to. They wouldn't just go there to like, get their union dues worked out; these union meeting places had games, they had programming, they had speeches, right? Educational programs. And in some cases they were literally embedded in the residential high rise buildings, where people are literally living on top of this union infrastructure.

So, you know, nowadays we might think of something like churches, which are these really embedded physical institutions in people's lives that, still today, you know, play a big role in getting people out to vote and mobilizing folks politically.

**JENNA:** [00:25:52] So what would a Civilian Climate Corps mean for New York City? Mia tells us how this program can help address our transportation needs.

**MIA:** [00:26:02] A lot of the things I'm seeing that a CCC would do is, like, alleviate transit deserts for my friends who live in places where they can't easily get to the city or easily get anywhere 'cause they don't have any trains or buses near them that are easy to access.

Or, you know, more green spaces in New York City; New York City is like a concrete jungle, right? We need more green spaces so that New Yorkers can have a feeling of nature around them, the feeling of peace within that. And I think that's something that I definitely,

throughout childhood, did not grow up having and I want that to be the norm for all of New York City – to have that access to a green space.

**JENNA:** [00:26:49] Representative Espaillat agrees that a CCC could help address transportation deserts, which are areas that tend to have poor access to public transit and/or limited access to other modes of transportation.

**ADRIANO ESPAILLAT:** [00:27:05] For example, I have several in my district; I want to take a look at this whole reimagining of the Cross Bronx Expressway in part of my district and Richie Torres' district, but I also have the second phase of the Second Avenue Subway: how do we do that? We do it smart, greener, creating jobs (right?) for local residents.

'Cause the first phase was in one of the richest zip codes in the country. And so they didn't pay much attention to the job aspect of it, but I'm paying very close attention to the jobs aspect of the second phase, which leads right into Harlem.

I would say it's a regional project because it will connect to Metro North, it will connect via bus – hopefully, electric buses – to the airport, it will create a connection perhaps to the west side and future water transportation. So it's really a regional project, locally based. And I think it could help transform our community, particularly a transportation desert in the middle of East Harlem.

**JENNA:** [00:28:05] So, we heard about transportation deserts, but a CCC can help address food deserts as well.

**ADRIANO ESPAILLAT:** [00:28:11] With this pandemic, we saw this food security issue manifest itself, but I knew that it was already there. And so we had to rethink this, right?

And we have to talk about urban agriculture. And we have to talk about smart and green development for housing, right? And we have to talk about rooftop farms. And we have to talk about abundant technology being used and experimented with in our local high schools. We have to talk about a connection between New York farms, our Green Markets, and our bodegas. We have to talk about a green bodega, right?

So these are the challenges that we have ahead of us and, tragic I will say, episodes such as the food security issues that manifested itself again during the pandemic just strengthen my resolve to be part of that solution.

**JENNA:** [00:29:21] The CCC has the power to transform the way we work, move around and get our food. People can have good jobs doing the work that's needed to improve their

communities and combat the climate crisis. The potential of this program feels really personal to Veekas.

**VEEKAS ASHOKA:** [00:29:37] I've asked myself this, like, why is this so inspiring to me? Like, why am I so inspired by this campaign? And, I think it goes back to like, when we're all young, we think about all the various things we want to do in life. And you know, what we imagine for ourselves, or at least what I imagined for myself, is all the ways that I could make this big difference in people's lives and the impact I could make on people I cared about.

And, I specifically really loved the idea of being a teacher. I grew up in Arizona though, and a starting teacher in many school districts makes around \$33,000 a year (at least as of a couple of years ago). And, you know, I saw a lot of my teachers, like, we're literally living in poverty. They had second jobs in grocery stores, or they were really struggling to make ends meet.

You know, I think about this story a lot where my speech and debate coach ended up having to spend a lot of his own personal money on basic supplies for our club and money was so tight for him at one point that, you know, even paper was something that like we didn't have in our club because he was having to buy it himself and money was too tight to buy paper that week. And I remember very consciously thinking senior year of high school that I don't want that life for me. I want to be able to have safety and security and a level of comfort that I just don't see teachers having. And that really sucks. Like it, it really sucks that I had to choose to not follow my dreams and not impact the lives of a lot of kids because I wanted basic comfort.

And I think that's what's so inspiring to me about the CCC is there's so many jobs out there if you think about it. From mutual aid programs and community gardens, and teaching and care work, home health aids all across the board, artists who provide such incredible value to each other, our communities, our society, and is so fulfilling internally... that in any way, other than a capitalistic way, we would think, of course, that is the most valuable.

But that is exactly the kind of work that doesn't pay well in a society that doesn't value humanity like ours. And a Civilian Climate Corps explicitly centers that, right? It explicitly says that that work is really valuable, is exceptionally valuable, is the most valuable and we should pay well for it.

**JENNA:** [00:32:47] Thank you for listening to *Wake Up, New York! A Sunrise NYC Podcast*. I'm your host, Jenna Tipaldo. And we produced this episode with Frankie James Albin, Natalie Bartfay, Hillary McDonald, Jilly Edgar, Paola Sanchez and Gio Santalucia. Special thanks to Representative Espaillat, Professor Hube, Mia, and Veekas for speaking to us.

To learn more about Sunrise NYC, visit us online at [sunrise-nyc.org](http://sunrise-nyc.org). And you can learn more about the Good Jobs for All campaign at [goodjobsforallpledge.org](http://goodjobsforallpledge.org).

## **SHOW NOTES**

Come back for our following episode in which we continue our discussion on achieving GJ4A.

*This episode of WAKE UP, NEW YORK! was produced by Frankie James Albin, Natalie Bartfay, Jilly Edgar, Hillary McDonald, Paola Sanchez, Gio Santalucia, and Jenna Tipaldo, your host. This episode was mixed and edited by Natalie Bartfay. Our music is composed and performed by Janet May. Special thanks to Sunrise members Veekas and Mia, Congressman Adriano Espaillat, and Matt Huber.*

*If you're interested in getting involved in Sunrise Movement NYC, find us at [sunrise-nyc.org](http://sunrise-nyc.org) or follow us on social media @sunrisemvmtnyc.*