The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act signed into law by President Obama last month was designed to fuel our nation's economy by getting people back to work. In Minnesota, we need the help. Last year, 55,000 Minnesotans lost their jobs. Since the beginning of this year, another 30,000 have lost their jobs.

Compared to a normal year in which Minnesota typically gains 40,000 jobs, those numbers are shocking. Our state economist tells us things are likely to get worse before they get better. By the time things turn around, we could lose as many as 120,000 jobs - enough people to fill up the Metrodome twice.

As you might imagine, lawmakers at the State Capitol are paying close attention to the best ways to maximize the job creating potential of federal recovery dollars coming to Minnesota. One of the biggest bangs for the buck will be to use those dollars to bring new, good-paying, green jobs to the state.

Minnesota is poised to move quickly into the green job market. Over the past few years Minnesota has led the nation in the passage of environmental and energy laws, including the country's strongest Renewable Energy Standard, a nation-leading energy efficiency and conservation bill, a comprehensive carbon emissions reduction goal, and the newly passed Clean Water Legacy Act to monitor, protect and restore our waters.

All of those moves sent a signal to the rest of the nation and the world that Minnesota is open for business in the new green economy. The next step is turning sound policy into real jobs. A Green Jobs Task Force has created a statewide action plan that if passed by the Legislature will move us even further ahead in the green job market.

Green jobs are quality, family-sustaining jobs that also help to improve our environment. They are largely domestic jobs that can't be shipped overseas. They often pay more than other jobs – sometimes as much as 10 to 20 percent more. Workers come from all walks of life, including young, entry-level workers with little experience in trades such as building or electrical work, as well as older, more experienced workers already in these fields but in need of skill upgrades or additional job training.

One reality we must address is that green jobs are less likely to be held by minorities or urban residents. Making progress on that front will be a significant, but not impossible, challenge to resolve. Two bills I've authored would be a good start. The first would apply guidelines for how our state spends federal stimulus funds for energy programs. It would set energy efficiency priorities in residential and government buildings, while maximizing the creation and retention of living-wage jobs in an accountable and transparent manner.

The second bill would focus on shared prosperity - especially for those most often excluded from economic opportunities. It would ensure women, people of color, and those from low-income communities have a fair shot to get in on this dynamic new job market by creating guidelines ensuring adequate representation.

Cities like Los Angeles have undertaken similar initiatives that together, could give Minnesota a

model of how to maximize the benefits of “going green” for working families. A comprehensive strategy ensures that all redevelopment projects subsidized by the city are built green, and that they serve as vehicles to move low-income residents into middle-class construction careers. That approach could easily be adapted here in Minnesota and is at the heart of the bills I’ve sponsored.

Momentum is growing in Minnesota that could help us take the lead in the fastest growing investment and job creating prospects we’ve seen in decades. Momentum is also growing to ensure these exciting opportunities are available to everyone. We need aggressive green job and green production goals linked to a strong commitment to fairness and equity. That’s a sure recipe for an inclusive green economy strong enough to lift people out of poverty and into prosperity.

You may contact Rep. Champion by email at rep.bobby.champion@house.mn, by phone at 651-296- 8659, or by mail at 329 State Office Building, St. Paul, Minnesota, 55155.