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\$44M. in funding boosts energy-efficient projects

By BEN LEACH, Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, October 22, 2009 |

The U.S. secretary of energy said Wednesday that global climate change is a reality and that New Jersey and the entire country are going to have to work even harder to become leaders in clean energy.

Secretary Steven Chu was the keynote speaker at the 2009 New Jersey Clean Energy Conference, which kicked off Wednesday at the Atlantic City Convention Center.

Chu announced that 65 communities throughout New Jersey, including several in the southern part of the state, will receive \$44 million in funding for energy-efficiency projects.

The funding had already been announced, but the recipients were not made aware of their funds until Wednesday. The awards range from \$16,500 in Clifton, Passaic County, to more than \$14.4 million for the New Jersey State Energy Office.

"(The funding will) promote some of the cheapest, cleanest and most reliable energy technologies we have - energy efficiency and conservation - which can be deployed immediately," Chu said. "Local communities can now make strategic investments to help meet the nation's long-term clean-energy and climate goals."

The secretary said New Jersey is moving in the right directions with solar installations and exploring offshore wind power capabilities, but he said the state can do even more to set an example.

Chu said the state needs to investigate community clean-energy projects, which would help decrease the cost of the projects by keeping contractors working closely within those communities.

"If we can do this and actually make it a social norm ... programs then can take off in a much better way," Chu said.

New Jersey Board of Public Utilities President Jeanne Fox said New Jersey is hoping to have

community programs in place sometime in 2010, with a small pilot project taking place right now.

"It's definitely a priority," Fox said. "But we're still working on it. We thought it was a lot more simple than it really is."

Fox said one of the difficulties is figuring out rates when both residential and commercial projects are within the same community, since the same project will have different costs for residences and businesses.

Chu's appearance at the conference was one of many stops he is making across the country. While much of his keynote speech focused on global climate change, Chu said that what states are doing now could influence how the country moves forward on clean energy.

"Part of my job ... is to learn about what states and communities are doing and import the most successful parts of what states and communities are doing," Chu said.

Chu made mention of New Jersey's rank as the state with the second most solar installations in the country with more than 4,000 statewide. Only California has more.

Other speakers included Fox, of the BPU, and Gov. Jon S. Corzine.

The BPU also honored two local clean-energy leaders with awards that were given out in a dinner on Wednesday night.

The Business Leader of the Year Award went to Harrah's Entertainment for promoting clean-energy practices to its employees that extend to their homes.

A new award, the Clean Energy Advocate of the Year Award, went to Daniel Cohen, president of Fishermen's Energy, one of the offshore wind development companies that have plans for offshore wind farms off of New Jersey's coast.

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Stimulus funds

More than \$44 million in federal stimulus funds will be awarded to 65 New Jersey communities for energy-efficiency projects. Some communities were awarded only a portion of the total amount so far. Once their plan has been approved by the BPU, they will receive the remaining amount. The BPU is continuing to approve projects from across the state. Below are the local recipients:

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