

POLICY INNOVATION IN ACTION: GREENING COMMUNITIES IN WASHINGTON STATE

Background

Over the last several years, Washington has been a leader in pioneering policies that drive investment in the clean energy economy. The state has a renewable electricity standard—passed by a voter initiative in 2006 (I-937)—mandating that by 2020, 15 percent of the state’s electricity needs must be met with renewable energy and energy efficiency. The state also has a renewable fuels standard to increase the amount of biofuels and wean the state off foreign oil imports.

In 2007, Governor Christine Gregoire issued an executive order, later affirmed by the state legislature in SB 6001, creating goals to reduce Washington’s global-warming pollution and increase the number of green jobs in the state to 25,000 by 2020. This important policy is in line with the governor’s commitment to establish Washington as a leader in clean energy technology and ensure the state’s workforce is trained and ready to meet this opportunity. The state now must create the infrastructure necessary to ensure that these goals will be met—including establishing a comprehensive program to meet the global-warming pollution reduction goals and workforce development strategies to put workers on pathways to high-wage, clean energy careers.

Fortunately, Washington is widely recognized as a national leader in designing and implementing workforce programs and holding those programs accountable via rigorous evaluation that tracks their outcomes over time.¹⁶⁵ Washington’s State Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (SWTECB) serves as the state workforce investment board for the purposes of WIA, but it has far greater capacity and authority to lead the state’s workforce efforts than virtually any other state workforce board in the country. One program it administers, Industry Skill Panels (ISPs), has become a model for state-supported sectoral workforce development strategy: ISPs (see page 8) are regional partnerships of education, business, labor, and local workforce investment boards tasked with identifying skills gaps within particular industry clusters and developing proactive solutions to benefit multiple employers within industries—not just a single employer, as with the more traditional economic development and business recruitment practice—that offer career ladder jobs and that drive the state’s regional economies, such as healthcare, manufacturing, and aerospace. Energy is a targeted sector, but as of 2007 there had been no skill panels dedicated to clean energy.

In late 2007 the Washington State Apollo Alliance, Climate Solutions, Solid Ground, and The Workforce Alliance led an effort to develop a proposal that would link a green-collar jobs training initiative and greenhouse gas reduction strategies in a single piece of legislation. They engaged a broad range of stakeholders, including the Washington State Labor Council, the SWTECB, the Washington Workforce Association, and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, to help craft the green jobs component of the proposal.

The proposal that was ultimately developed by this collaboration was included by Governor Gregoire as a high-profile part of her governor-request legislation for 2008’s short session in Olympia—in no small part because of the broad cross-section of stakeholders that developed and supported the proposal.

Washington’s proposed linkage between climate protection and green jobs is an exemplary model that makes both policy and political sense

Key elements of the Washington State legislation

The legislation directs the Department of Ecology to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases consistent with the goals established in ESSB 6001. This effort will include: **Tracking and coordinating** work throughout the state to meet the pollution reduction goals • **Designing a market-based system** for limiting emissions at the lowest cost • **Designing principles** to consider when entering the state into a market-based, greenhouse gas reduction program • **Scientific review** of the pollution reduction goals established in SB 6001 to determine if the goals meet what scientists say is necessary to avoid the worst impacts of climate change; and • **Mandatory reporting** for major sources of global warming pollution.

Workforce development for green jobs

The green jobs provisions of the legislation include a number of components. The legislation:

Directs the Employment Security Department (ESD), in consultation with other states agencies, to analyze the labor market and projected job growth in green energy sectors, the current and projected recruitment and skill requirement of green industry employers, the wage and benefits ranges of jobs within green energy sectors, and the education and training requirements of entry-level and incumbent workers within those sectors. Based on this research, ESD will propose which industries should be considered high-demand green industries, based on current and projected job creation and their strategic importance to the development of the state's clean energy economy, and which jobs within those industries should be considered high-wage occupations and occupations that are part of career pathways to the same, based on family-sustaining wage and benefit ranges.

Directs the SWTECB to create and pilot Green Industry Skill Panels (GISPs), funds for which will be distributed on a competitive basis. Like regular ISPs, the GISPs will be organized around broad partnerships: business representatives from industry sectors related to renewable energy or energy efficiency; labor unions representing workers in those industries or labor affiliates administering joint apprenticeship programs or labor-management partnership programs that train workers for these industries; employer associations; educational institutions; and local workforce investment boards within the region that the GISP proposes to operate; and other key stakeholders. Any of these stakeholder organizations are eligible to receive the grant and serve as the intermediary that convenes and leads the GISP. Panel applicants will need to provide labor market and industry analysis that demonstrates high demand, or demand of strategic importance to the development of the state's clean energy economy, for high-wage occupations, or occupations that are part of career pathways to them, within the relevant industry sector. The panel will conduct ongoing labor market and industry analysis, in consultation with ESD and drawing on the findings of its research when available; plan strategies to meet the recruitment and training needs of the industry; and leverage and align other public and private funding sources.

Authorizes the creation of a Green-Collar Job Training Fund for the purpose of training workers for high-wage occupations, or occupations that are part of career pathways to the same, in high-demand industries related to clean energy. Funds will be appropriated beginning in 2009, administered by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) in consultation with the SWTECB, and informed by the labor market research of the ESD and the GISPs. The SBCTC will distribute grants from the fund on a competitive basis. Applicants eligible to receive these grants

may be any organization or a partnership of organizations that has demonstrated expertise in implementing effective education and training programs that meet industry demand and recruiting and supporting to successful completion targeted populations of workers.

In awarding grants priority will be given to applicants that demonstrate the ability to: draw on the labor market analysis of ESD and the GISPs, utilize strategies developed by the GISPs, work in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, leverage and align other public and private resources, link basic education with skills training, involve employers and unions in the development and validation of career pathways, and integrate support services.

Target populations for use of the fund are: low-income adults and youth in families under 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines or a locally defined self-sufficiency standard; entry-level or incumbent workers in high-demand green industries who are in, or are preparing for, high-wage occupations; or dislocated workers in declining industries who can be re-trained for high-wage occupations in high-demand green industries.

Governor Gregoire announced the legislation on January 14, 2008.¹⁶⁶ Two days later it was introduced in the Senate and House (SB 6516 and HB 2815) with 25 Senate sponsors and 33 House sponsors. On March 5 the Legislature approved the bill and sent it to the Governor for her signature. While there were many efforts to weaken the bill or defeat it outright—and changes made to the original legislation summarized above—the unprecedented linkage it establishes between climate protection and green jobs is a model that makes both policy and political sense, and serves as an instructive example for policymakers in other states to emulate.

GREENER

Jobs and Workforce Development in the Clean Energy Economy

PATHWAYS

A REPORT BY

SARAH WHITE & JASON WALSH

CENTER ON WISCONSIN STRATEGY • THE WORKFORCE ALLIANCE • THE APOLLO ALLIANCE

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