

Green jobs get boost

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Gannett News Service

July 7, 2009

WASHINGTON — Oregonians soon may find themselves pioneers once again, this time as creators of the new green energy economy.

Oregon has been selected by the U.S. Education Department to help develop a training curriculum for the new class of green jobs under a pilot program that could give a much-needed boost to the state with the nation's second-highest unemployment rate behind Michigan.

"The states selected will be pioneers for the country," said Glenn Cummings, a deputy assistant secretary of education. "These green initiatives will be a tremendous learning opportunity for the entire country, and they'll be job creators down the road."

Oregon's task is to develop skills needed for solar and wind energy technology, as well as for environmentally friendly construction. It's part of a 14-month program run through the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education in Louisville, Ky.

Oregon was one of five states selected. The others are Ohio, New Jersey, Illinois and Georgia.

The payback for helping to develop this new curriculum is jobs.

And Oregon could use them.

Unemployment in Oregon hit 12.4 percent in May, up from 9.8 percent in January. The national unemployment rate for May was 9.4 percent.

Some of the \$787 billion in stimulus funding Congress approved in February is supposed to create green jobs.

But what is a green job? And how do you train for one?

Experts say most green jobs will require some college, but not necessarily a four-year degree.

The vast majority of jobs created through a green economic recovery program are in the same areas of employment where people already work. Building wind farms, for example, creates jobs for engineers, sheet metal workers, machinists and truck drivers. Expanding mass transit systems employs civil engineers, electricians and dispatchers.

A green-oriented recovery program could provide an especially powerful boost to the ailing



Statesman Journal file

Solar panels are installed onto a Salem roof in May 2007. Oregon has been selected by the U.S. Department of Education to develop a training curriculum for the new class of green jobs under a pilot program.

Potential benefits

The potential benefits of a green jobs program statewide are substantial.

A \$1.2 billion investment in Oregon's green economy would produce more than 27,300 jobs and reduce the state's unemployment rate by several percentage points, according to a 2008 report from the Center for American Progress and the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts.

construction and manufacturing sectors — in Oregon and elsewhere.

Increasing the energy efficiency of buildings through retrofitting requires roofers, insulators and building inspectors.

Oregon lost more than 17 percent of its construction jobs during the past year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The plan for Oregon under the jobs program is to develop a smooth transition from high school into the trades and professions necessary for green energy and construction.

These new skills are meant to last a lifetime.

"Programs of study should build on sound career development," said James Stone, director of the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education in Kentucky.

Oregon was selected largely because of the certificate and degree programs at Lane Community College in Eugene.

Since the 1980s, Lane has been training students in energy efficiency principles across an array of construction and facility management disciplines.

"Lane has been doing this long before it was hip to be green," said college president Mary Spilde. "A lot of the green jobs now are in energy efficiency, and that's where a lot of our programs are focused."

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