

**Testimony of Rick S. Bender, President
Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO
Before the
Employment and Workplace Safety Subcommittee
United States Senate Field Hearing
Seattle, Washington
November 28, 2007**

Good morning, Madam Chairwoman, and thank you for inviting me to appear before you at this Field Hearing. My Name is Rick Bender and I am the President of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO. Our organization represents approximately 400,000 working women and men in Washington State. I have been a member of Washington State's Workforce Board for more than ten years, working to address the advancement of workers into family wage jobs with benefits and retirement security; by and large those are union jobs in Washington State. Washington State ranks fifth in the country in union density with one out of five workers being part of organized labor.

Recent surveys of Washington employers state that currently 45% of the jobs in demand require one to less than four years of training - mid-skill jobs. Those jobs generally pay \$16.00 to \$30.00 per hour, are in construction trades, technician level skills of many occupations, health sciences, etc. The trend to 2015 is that 43% of those mid-skill jobs will still be in demand.

Here in Washington, we have worked in coalition to create *Running Start to the Trades* as a pathway for high school students to achieve credit with an apprenticeship while they are still in high school; much like Running Start which provides community college credit while in high school.

We worked to achieve legislation that requires 15% utilization of apprentices on state prevailing wage jobs, so that all public infrastructure investment also provides an investment in training the future workforce. We would be very pleased if you would consider championing similar legislation for federal Davis Bacon projects so that training was an integral component of our public federal investment, Senator.

We have a shortage in the skilled construction trades at present. For years we had approximately 9,000 enrolled apprentices in any given year. Currently we have more than 12,000 enrolled apprentices and our apprenticeship training

centers are bursting at the seams. There will be a continued need to train apprentices for the next eight to ten years at current or higher rates, not only for the work that is already sited and bid, but to replace the retiring construction workforce which is the oldest in American history. But our high school faculty and career counselors don't know about apprenticeship or about the demand for mid skill occupations.

We have begun to address that in Washington by working with the K-12 system and employment training providers and business and labor to expand Navigation 101, which is a career exploration curriculum for high school. Unfortunately, it is not required nor is it available in all school districts in our state. This tool has done a great deal to give real information and choices to high school students that are about aptitudes and real jobs that do not require a baccalaureate route.

We are very concerned right now that Career and Technical Education (CTE) and our Skill Centers are at risk. We are working to ensure that additional math requirements for high school graduation (third year math) are not required to be academic. We are looking for acceptance of third year math that is equivalent, but can be an applied course that demonstrates job relevance to students. Your assistance in working with educators, employers and labor to ensure that more students graduate and join the labor market would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for the opportunity to make these introductory remarks, and I look forward to your questions.

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