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U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

**“Empowering Workers to Rebuild America’s Economy and Longer-Term Competitiveness:
Green Skills Training for Workers”**

April 21, 2009, 10:30 a.m.

**430 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C.**

Testimony offered by Joan K. Evans, Director of the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, April 21, 2009.

The Wyoming Workforce Services System

The Wyoming Department of Workforce Services (Department) endeavors to enhance the skills of job seekers and match those individuals to employment opportunities throughout the state, relying primarily on U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and Wagner-Peyser funding to accomplish this objective. The Department consults with businesses regularly to determine workforce needs and aids job seekers in enhancing their skills to meet the needs of business.

The Department interacts with a wide variety of industries, including green industries, although these do not yet constitute a significant share of the Wyoming economy. While the definition of green jobs varies widely, this testimony assumes that green jobs are primarily ones that encompass renewable energy, conservation, and energy efficiency.

The Department of Workforce Services is both proactive and reactive in determining the skills needed by industry. For example, the Department is actively pursuing a strategy that encourages creation of partnerships involving multiple businesses within the same industrial

sector. Other key players in these industry partnerships are local and state public entities encompassing workforce development, economic development and education/training programs. Sometimes referred to as “sector solutions,” these types of partnerships bring together the key workforce development players in an atmosphere that encourages communication, trust and collaboration. The partnerships primary goals are to determine workforce needs across an entire industry sector, then develop solutions, such as focused recruitment and training for certain critical occupations. The final step is to identify training or other providers, and secure revenue sources to fund any identified solutions. Through these partnerships, public workforce development and education dollars are better focused to help multiple businesses within any industry sector – reducing duplicative or business-by-business efforts and increasing efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

The Department, in collaboration with the state’s Workforce Investment Board – the Wyoming Workforce Development Council – has determined that the healthcare and energy sectors, including renewable energy industries, are to be the main foci of the Wyoming Industry Partnership initiative because of their direct impact on Wyoming’s citizens, both in terms of their ability to impact the broader economy and directly provide necessary services for the state’s 522,000 residents. The Council has set aside \$400,000 in stimulus funding to support healthcare and energy industry partnerships and approximately \$100,000 to encourage projects that will enhance worker skills needed in renewable energy industries.

The industry partnership concept drew considerable support during the 2009 Wyoming legislative session. A measure was introduced that would have codified the initiative and provided state funding to support eligible partnerships. Although the measure ultimately failed, it achieved a degree of success in educating lawmakers about the industry partnership concept and its potential for workforce development. The stage is set for garnering further legislative support in the next lawmaking session.

In an effort to respond more quickly to statewide workforce needs, the Department is requesting a U.S. Department of Labor waiver that would allow the University of Wyoming and the state's seven community colleges to be approved as Workforce Investment Act training providers as a whole. This request, if granted, will remove the case-by-case approval process for training programs. If the colleges implement new industry training programs, those programs will be automatically approved and eligible for WIA funding, allowing quicker reaction to business and market needs.

Because business and industry are more acutely attuned to their own markets and workforce needs, the Department will always be reactive to a degree, and remains ready to respond quickly to requests by companies to aid them in training future and existing employees. The Workforce System remains the main broker between industry and training providers.

Emerging Green Jobs in Wyoming

Wyoming has long been known not only for its pristine mountain scenery and wide-open landscapes but also for its seemingly never-ending wind. Nature's alignment of Wyoming's mountain ranges has created what are essentially wind tunnels through many of the state's canyons and over its ridge tops. These wind-swept areas are now ground zero for an emerging green industry: wind power.

The number of wind farms is growing rapidly, and Wyoming's educational institutions are trying to keep up with demand. Examples of the training programs being offered:

- Wind Technician Program – offering a variety of training options including an Associate of Science degree with a concentration of wind energy. The program has 25 students but hopes to expand enrollment to 75 by January 2010. The program makes use of the Integrated Systems Training Center, of which the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services helped to launch through a USDOL

grant. The Center offers training in electrical, hydraulics, pneumatics, mechanical systems, industrial piping, HVAC and other skills.

- Wind, solar and biomass technology training that increases machinery capacity through preventative maintenance which improves the overall efficiencies of the equipment used in the oil, gas and mining fields.
- Renewable Energy Program – producing well-trained technicians through a \$295,000 appropriation from the U.S. Department of Energy to support construction of a small wind generator testing and training site.
- Energy Rater Training Seminar – providing course work and test preparation for the Residential Energy Services Network Energy Rater Certification exam.
- Energy Efficient Residential Contractor Training – providing two-day training for installation of windows, doors, and insulation for individuals interested in starting or expanding their own contracting business.
- Green Landscaping – offering a workshop on landscaping to benefit the environment and save water and energy.
- Green Electricity – providing a workshop on environmentally responsible and energy efficient electrical products.
- Green Plumbing and HVAC – offering a workshop on environmentally responsible and energy efficient plumbing products.
- Environmental Technician, Health and Safety Technician, and Construction Trades -- including specific training in Energy Star Rating and Radon Testing and Mitigation.
- Construction Technology – focusing on building energy efficient residential housing using renewable resources and building science. According to Sam Rashkin, National Director of Energy Star USDOE, this program is one of only

two Energy Star programs in the country.

Wind energy is probably the most visible of the green industries in Wyoming. A traveler along Interstate 80 through southern Wyoming cannot help but notice the vast arrays of wind turbines along notoriously windy stretches. But other industries are emerging as well, and are being aided by another Department program: the Workforce Development Training Fund. This fund, which is stocked with state dollars, offers grants to eligible businesses to train their workers. In the past year, the Workforce Development Training Fund has allowed companies to access training in green building practices, green certifications, energy audit training and energy efficiency training. In fact, since July 2008, the fund has awarded 10 grants totaling \$17,317 for green training. The fund also provides grants to train workers in skills that are transferrable to green industries. For example, a welder or electrician can work in traditional energy fields such as oil or coal, or help build a wind turbine or new transmission lines to move wind-generated electricity.

One particular training success is the Department's the Employment Training for Self-Sufficiency Program, which enhances the skills of low-income parents and improves their wage-earning potential. This program has enrolled 60 individuals in the aforementioned Integrated Systems Training Center and produced 46 graduates and an average starting hourly wage of \$12.00 per hour.

Another entity that will significantly impact Wyoming's ability to train workers in renewable energy is the planned federal Wind River Job Corps Center. After receiving roughly \$3 million from the U.S. Department of Labor, the Renewable and Energy Training Center at the Job Corps Center will be a state-of-the-art facility enabling students to acquire the skills they need to safely work in the energy industry. The Energy Training Center will also provide

reclamation training, environmental studies, renewable energy training, geology/exploration, and extraction resources training.

The \$40 million center will be completed in February 2011 and provide job training to hundreds of students aged 16 to 24 while creating roughly 120 jobs in the Riverton area. Not only will the center provide training in green industries, the facility itself will incorporate green features such as solar energy sources so students can learn first-hand the benefits that a green facility can provide and receive training on how to maintain an environmentally friendly facility.

Wyoming's traditional energy industries, such as coal, oil and natural gas, will continue to be dominant players on the state's energy landscape; however, renewable energy sources, particularly from wind, are growing. (Attachments 1, 2, 3 and 4). The Power Co. of Wyoming is moving forward with plans to build 1,000 wind turbines near Rawlins, in the southern part of the state, which will create more than 1,000 jobs. In addition, the State Board of Land Commissioners recently approved a special-use lease for a \$4 billion wind farm in Converse County. Added to these initiatives, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act offers Wyoming \$10 million for weatherization projects which are being coordinated by the Wyoming Department of Family Services and will greatly enhance the ability to increase energy efficiency for low-income families. Funding is also being made available for energy efficiency work through the State Energy Office of the Wyoming Business Council.

The full potential for Wyoming's green industries currently may not be known. Yet the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services is anticipating that green jobs will have a growing and significant impact on the state's economy and is taking steps to provide trained workers for these emerging industries. By efficiently using training and support dollars, keeping the pulse on available training and collaborating with business, economic developers and training entities, the Department is preparing today's workers for tomorrow's green workforce.