

Phil Lou

Vashon Island, WA

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Phil Lou and I am from Vashon Island, Washington. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story.

I am a college graduate and have worked in various fields as a fisheries biologist, foreign fisheries observer and commercial fisherman.

However, for the past 15 years, I've been working with wood. I've built homes, fine cabinetry and installed custom yacht interiors. The work was interesting, challenging, and financially rewarding, but I did not find it fulfilling. I wanted to work in a field that benefitted the community and the environment.

As a teenager in Honolulu, I joined the Sierra Club High School Hikers. We spent time hiking, backpacking and working on conservation projects. I developed a strong appreciation for nature and conservation.

After graduating from college, I joined the Peace Corps as an inland fisheries volunteer. I lived in a small village in the West African nation of Cameroon for two years. The village had no electricity or running water. There was a stark contrast between my life in the U.S. and the lives of the villagers. My first practical application of solar energy was when I heated water in a black jug in the sun for my evening bath.

These experiences formed my values that led me to an interest in renewable energy technologies. In searching for formal education, I found Shoreline Community College's "Zero Energy Program" which offers classes in photovoltaic design and installation, solar thermal water heating and residential energy audits. I enrolled in the photovoltaic class and made the two-and-a-half hour, twice weekly, two ferry boat commute to Shoreline from Vashon Island.

The photovoltaic class taught me theory, design and safe installation practices of solar electric generating systems. We benefitted from the 33 years of experience in renewable energy systems of our instructor, Mike Nelson. In addition to classroom instruction, we had hands-on experience by installing a solar array on campus.

In Washington State, an electrician's license is required by law to install solar arrays that are connected to the electrical grid. I obtained an electrician's trainee card and am currently an apprentice with Artisan Electric, Inc., a small, family-owned union business on Vashon Island. The skills and education I have gained from Shoreline Community College are assets to this company. My current responsibilities include photovoltaic design and installation. Our company has done three installations and there are two installs scheduled for the first week of May. We have eight additional installation proposals.

With what I've learned from Shoreline Community College and with help from my employer, Jason Williams, I was able to install a solar array on my home. My family and I watch with satisfaction as our utility meter spins backward on most days; meaning our array is generating more electricity than we are using and the balance is flowing back into the local electrical grid.

In addition to the work I'm doing with Artisan Electric, I'm a co-founder of Greenwerks Technologies, Inc., formed by students I met in the Zero Energy Program at Shoreline Community College. This company will specialize in renewable energy technologies such as photovoltaic, solar hot water, energy audits, weatherization and rain catchment.

There is a perception that community colleges are educational stepping-stones to universities. It may be true in some cases, but in my case it was the reverse. Twenty four years after graduating from the University of Oregon, I attended Shoreline Community College to gain the specialized skills necessary to participate in the emerging Green Energy industry.

This new work has been challenging, satisfying and inspiring. I think often of the children, including our 15-year-old son, Jeffrey Lou, and what kind of world we will leave

them. My hope is that this will be my contribution to part of the solution for our future energy needs.