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Secretary Gassman: Wisconsin's Model Apprenticeship Program Key to Meeting Utility Workforce Needs, Growing Economy

Labor Secretary highlights Governor Doyle's Grow plan to expand program

EAU CLAIRE – Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman said today that Governor Doyle's plan to expand Wisconsin's model apprenticeship program is vital not only to ensuring utilities a skilled workforce and growing the economy, but also winning Wisconsin's energy independence.

"Wisconsin's apprenticeship program was the first in the nation, and we can remain a leader by expanding it to include more training opportunities for critical utility jobs that will help us gain our energy independence," Secretary Gassman said. "Governor Doyle's *Grow Wisconsin – The Next Steps* plan further invests in people and our future by provide more training opportunities. These investments complement a second initiative that is equally important: Clean Energy Wisconsin, a plan for energy independence."

During a visit to Chippewa Valley Technical College, Secretary Gassman met with 28 apprentices in their third year of training to become electrical line workers. The apprentices were from municipal and rural utilities throughout the state. With another year of training, they can achieve journey line worker status, a job that pays on average over \$18 an hour to start and over \$29 an hour with experience and provides advancement opportunities within the utility industry.

"We need more skilled workers in the utility sector, especially as boomers begin to retire," Secretary Gassman said. "Nearly one in three of our utility workers is age 50 or older. Additional job opportunities are being created as we focus more on winning our energy independence with wind, solar and other alternative energy sources. Apprenticeship training can open the door to many rewarding careers."

The latest projections from DWD's Office of Economic Advisors put the average annual openings for electrical power line installers and repairers at 100 with 80 of them replacements due primarily to retirements.

Governor Doyle's latest Grow Wisconsin plan would provide \$300,000 to expand the adult apprenticeship program by adding four more areas in plastics and rubber, printing, health care, and utilities. In addition to training as line workers, apprentices also could receive training to become sub station electricians and gas technicians in the utility sector.

Secretary Gassman met apprentices in CVTC instructor Randy Larson's class and observed them as they demonstrated their skills in field testing transformers.