

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico’s Third District announced today that he has introduced legislation to help community colleges provide clean energy workforce training. The Community College Energy Training Act of 2011 provides grants to support the training of technicians to work in the wind, solar, geothermal, and biomass energy sectors. The bill also covers other energy-related occupations, including energy-efficient building construction and retrofitting, recycling and waste reduction, water and energy conservation, and sustainable agriculture. The legislation currently has 24 cosponsors.

“By providing resources to community colleges, we can help them expand and develop green job training programs and curriculum that will prepare our young people to work in the growing clean energy sector,” Congressman Luján said. “If the United States is going to be a leader in renewable energy, we have to have a skilled workforce that is trained and ready to get to work. This bill not only expands training opportunities across the country, but it will also help those community colleges that already offer renewable energy job training to stay on the cutting edge of the clean energy industry.”

Luján’s legislation has received the support of community colleges from across New Mexico.

“The Community College Energy Training Act of 2011 would provide more of the momentum we need as a country to more quickly transition to the kind of green economy that will spur meaningful economic growth,” said Central New Mexico Community College President Katharine Winograd. “This legislation would empower our community colleges to be even more effective in quickly responding to the workforce training needs of emerging energy industries. The legislation would help these industries grow faster while helping community colleges generate a very promising pipeline to good jobs for the citizens and students we serve.”

Said Dr. Phillip Barry, President of Mesalands Community College in Tucumcari: “The North American Wind Research and Training Center at Mesalands Community College in Tucumcari, New Mexico, is pleased to support Congressman Luján’s vision for the creation of the legislation, to continue to train citizens attending community colleges, for present and future occupations in renewable energy.”

“We at Santa Fe Community College support this legislation and are excited about the current and future role of community colleges as the new energy economy evolves,” said Dr. Sheila Ortego, President of Santa Fe Community College. “Congressman Luján is to be commended for this forward-thinking bill, which will help us provide access to quality education to help students prepare for good paying jobs. Workforce development and economic development are integral to our mission. We work closely with local business and industry to develop training and retooling programs that provide students what they need to participate in New Mexico’s green and technology economies. We are especially pleased Congressman Luján is a partner in this endeavor, as our enrollment has doubled in solar energy, water conservation, green building and biofuels. This bill will help meet the need of students and industry going forward.”

The Community College Energy Training Act of 2011 establishes grants to community colleges to be jointly awarded by the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Energy for training in these various fields. Fifty percent of the annual \$100 million authorization will be used to create community college programs that focus on the renewable resource industries in a given region, allowing students to train in fields that impact their own communities. The other 50 percent goes toward upgrading existing programs throughout the country that are already providing this type of job training and education.

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