

# Senator Jeff Merkley: Green jobs should be union jobs

By Don McIntosh

If America ever gets serious about responding to the global climate crisis, a rapid shift to 100% renewable energy will spur untold numbers of jobs in electricity generation and energy efficiency. U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Oregon) wants those jobs to be good jobs — family wage, with benefits, and a union.

Together with AFL-CIO president Rich Trumka, Merkley announced a bill in the U.S. Senate July 18 that would give private renewable energy projects an incentive to follow the federal government's own Davis Bacon prevailing wage requirements for construction, and to sign union-brokered project labor agreements.

The Good Jobs for 21st Century Energy Act, S. 2185, would offer a 10% federal income tax credit to any developer that met those and other labor standards. In other words, they could deduct 10% of the project cost from any income taxes they owe.

The bill would also authorize up to \$600 million for a program of grants to help small and medium sized manufacturers (those with fewer than 750 employees) pay for energy efficient improvements.

“What we don't want to do is wipe out jobs in the transition that were good pay-



National AFL-CIO president Rich Trumka, left, joined U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) to tout the introduction of a bill that would incentive private green energy developers to sign project labor agreements and pay the prevailing wage. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley's office)

ing jobs, and end up with poor paying jobs in the renewable world,” Merkley told the Labor Press by phone Aug. 2.

The bill has 13 co-sponsors, all Democrats, including presidential candidates Cory Booker (D-NJ), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Kamala Harris (D-CA),

and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), though no other senators from Oregon and Washington. It's also endorsed by the AFL-CIO, United Steelworkers, Laborers (LIUNA), Electrical Workers (IBEW), Plumbers and Pipefitters (UA), and Utility Workers Union of America, as well as

the National Resources Defense Council, Blue Green Alliance, the Union of Concerned Scientists, and Data for Progress.

Merkley admits his bill has virtually no chance of becoming law while Republicans remain in charge of the Senate and the White House, but he sees this and other bills as a placeholder signaling what Democrats could do on jobs and the environment if they retake the Senate majority and White House in 2021.

Merkley has introduced several other placeholder environmental bills since last year. His Zero-Emission Vehicles Act, cosponsored by Bernie Sanders and Sheldon Whitehouse, would require that of all new car sales in America, at least 50% be zero-emission vehicles by 2030 and ultimately, 100% by 2040. And his Community Health and Clean Transit Act—which has six Senate cosponsors including presidential candidates Bernie Sanders, Cory Booker, and Kamala Harris—would provide zero-interest loans to public transit districts to enable them to buy electric buses. Merkley said electric buses can cost \$250,000 more than diesel, but save \$40,000 a year on fuel and maintenance. Given a zero-interest loan, transit districts could use those operational savings to pay back the additional cost.

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