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Climate bill could mean big business for Oregon

If legislation passes Senate, Oregon could land as many as 50,000 new green jobs

Portland Business Journal - by [Matthew Kish](#) Business Journal Managing Editor

Business leaders say a controversial bill that passed the U.S. House last week could bring thousands of desperately needed jobs to Oregon.

The bill, known as the American Clean Energy and Security Act, is arguably the most significant environmental proposal in the nation's history. It calls for a radical overhaul of the nation's energy system by limiting pollution linked to global warming. It would require the U.S. to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent by mid-century and spur massive investments in renewable energy technology.

A centerpiece of President Obama's energy agenda, it passed the House 219-212 and faces a tough fight in the Senate.

The bill would have a disproportionate effect in Oregon, which has the highest concentration of renewable energy, or "green," jobs in the nation.

If signed into law, it would create anywhere from 10,000 to 50,000 new jobs in Oregon, according to the Center for American Progress.

To put that in perspective, at the high end that would more than replace every construction and manufacturing job lost in Oregon in the last year. The addition of 50,000 jobs would cut the state's unemployment rate from 12.1 percent — second-highest in the nation — to 9.6 percent.

"We have an opportunity to create ... new jobs here in Oregon and be a national leader," said Congressman David Wu, a Washington County Democrat who voted for the bill.

The bill is opposed by heavyweight business groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers.

Locally, the Portland Business Alliance, the city's chamber of commerce, has not taken a position on it. The Oregon Business Association remains supportive of many of the concepts in the bill, but has not reviewed the entire 1,300-page proposal. Associated Oregon Industries, another statewide business group, did not respond to a question about the bill.

Some claim the proposal could become the "largest tax increase in American history" because it would drive up energy prices, hitting the pocketbook of every consumer. It could force manufacturers that consume massive amounts of energy to move overseas to find cheaper power.

The bill's sponsors — Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., and Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass. — claim otherwise. They say the bill would create millions of jobs, increase national security by reducing dependence on foreign oil and protect the planet by reducing dangerous pollution.

They also claim the bill would cost the average American family only 22 cents to 30 cents per day — less than the cost of a postage stamp.

Any jobs lost in Oregon could be blunted by the creation of thousands of green jobs.

"Oregon is well positioned to lead the nation and the world (in renewable energy and green jobs)," said U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., who sits on the Environment and Public Works Committee that will hold the first Senate hearings on the bill.

The bill plays to many of Oregon's strengths in renewable energy.

According to the bill's sponsors, it would increase the use of solar energy 20-fold and increase the use of wind energy by more than 500 percent.

That means several large solar manufacturers and wind turbine companies in Oregon could land a windfall of new orders.

"It's certainly going to create a lot of work, job creation, business, all that good stuff," said Jon Thomsen, CEO of Ecos Consulting, a group that works with businesses to reduce their environmental impact.

Oregon is home to North America's largest solar manufacturing plant, a 480,000-square-foot facility owned by SolarWorld AG. The company has started expanding the facility by an additional 210,000 square feet.



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Brightworks CEO Scott Lewis believes the bill could also head off "ecological catastrophe."

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Other solar-related manufacturers in Oregon include Sanyo Solar, which is building a solar ingot and wafer production facility in Salem; PV Powered, a Bend-based manufacturer of solar inverters; and Solaicx Inc., the Santa Clara, Calif., company that makes silicon wafers for solar panels at a North Portland plant.

Another company, Troutdale-based Solectric Inc., in February said Oregon is the front-runner to land its planned 100,000-square-foot manufacturing facility that would employ about 220 people to make thin-film solar modules.

Several large wind energy companies also have a significant presence in Oregon, including the North American arm of Spanish energy giant Iberdrola SA, the Danish turbine-maker Vestas A/S, Germany-based REpower and Houston-based Horizon Wind Energy.

Element Power, which focuses on utility-scale solar and wind energy projects, recently opened its sole office in Portland.

The city's stable of green consultants would also benefit if the bill passes.

"Broadly speaking, our whole economy and our whole society inevitably has to make a commitment to true sustainability," said Scott Lewis, CEO of Brightworks, a sustainability consulting company that works with builders. "If we don't we face ecological catastrophe."

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