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## Secretary Gassman Visits Western Tech Welding Class

### *Labor Secretary Highlights New Training Program to Meet Manufacturers' Demand for Welders, Help Offenders and Dislocated Workers Start New Careers*

LA CROSSE – In a visit to Western Technical College today, Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman highlighted a new program to meet the Coulee Region's growing demand for welders and set young offenders and dislocated workers on paths to rewarding careers in the skilled trades.

"This program is a great example of what we can accomplish when we pool our resources and work together," Secretary Gassman said. "All are well served by this effort: young offenders who seek a second chance, dislocated workers in search of new job opportunities, and manufacturers who need welders to fill orders, expand their business, and create more jobs."

Secretary Gassman and State Representative Jennifer Shilling of La Crosse met with a dozen students who began training in welding and blueprint reading last Wednesday, May 23. The college is providing the customized training under contract with Workforce Connections, Inc. Before starting their welding course, students received two weeks of instruction in manufacturing math. The preliminary training also included coaching in how to seek and keep a job, plus visits to welding shops and manufacturing plants.

The pilot project is being funded by the Department of Workforce Development and the U.S. Department of Labor. Over a year ago, Workforce Connections received a federal grant of \$934,679 for an X-Treme Opportunities program to provide youthful offenders, 16 to 21 years of age, training in high demand occupations, including the skilled trades. Nearly 30 individuals were trained as welders last summer.

The welding pilot has been enhanced this year, qualifying as a 2-credit technical college course and incorporating elements of the new national Manufacturing Skill Standards Certification. Dislocated workers also have been enrolled this year. Besides the federal grant, the pilot is funded from two sources administered by DWD: federal Workforce Investment Act funds and a portion of a \$70,000 Wisconsin GROW grant that DWD awarded the Western Wisconsin Workforce Development Board last fall.

"Job opportunities leading to good pay and benefits await students completing this course," Secretary Gassman said. "We need the talents of all who want to work to sustain economic growth and build on the success of Governor Doyle's first term."

In a 2006 survey of Western Wisconsin employers, Workforce Connections learned the region's manufacturers were having difficulty filling welding jobs and expected matters to get worse as baby boomers retire. Western Technical College welding instructor Jeff Cermak said a bulletin board outside his office had over 350 job postings for welders with starting pay typically at \$15 to \$16 an hour. Carol Wagenson of Workforce Connections said students completing the 2-credit course in welding likely would start anywhere from \$10 to \$13 an hour and receive a raise, plus benefits, after completing their probationary period.