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Secretary Gassman Cites Apprenticeship as Pathway to Good Jobs, Congratulates Graduates of Utility Apprenticeship Programs

Labor Secretary outlines Governor Doyle's steps to address budget shortfall

STEVENS POINT – Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman said today Wisconsin's model apprenticeship program offers job seekers, particularly dislocated workers, good job opportunities in hard economic times.

Secretary Gassman promoted the apprenticeship program as a pathway to rewarding careers as she congratulated 39 utility apprenticeship graduates, employed throughout the state by Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin (MEUW) and Rural Electric Cooperatives (REC) at a ceremony in Stevens Point.

"The country's economic crisis has created very serious challenges across the nation, affecting all of us," Secretary Gassman said. "In these difficult times of layoffs, employers still need workers with the right skills. For dislocated workers, the economic downturn can be a time to retool, build skills and explore other job opportunities. Wisconsin's apprenticeship program, first in the nation, offers career opportunities in a variety of areas, including utilities that provide energy to our homes and fuel our economy."

On behalf of Governor Doyle, Secretary Gassman joined MEUW and REC executives in congratulating 39 graduates and their families. In addressing them, she outlined immediate steps Governor Doyle has taken to address serious consequences of the prolonged recession. The national economic crisis, unprecedented in decades, has left the state facing a \$5.4 billion budget gap.

"Governor Doyle has ordered spending cuts, left state positions vacant and taken other austerity measures as immediate steps to deal with the budget gap brought on by the national economic crisis," Secretary Gassman said. "In his first year in office, the Governor dealt with a \$3.2 billion fiscal crisis with no general tax increases. Just as he did then, he is doing all that he can to avoid tax increases and protect education and other top priorities. At the same time, he has called for a federal economic stimulus package that will help states, working families and employers turn the economy around."

The 39 graduates include 30 power line apprentices who completed four years of training. With experience, they will earn an average wage of \$30 an hour or \$53,554 a year. DWD employment projections estimate 100 openings per year for power line workers. The remaining nine graduates will become journey meter technicians, the first to graduate from a new three-year training program. With experience, they will earn on average more than \$18 an hour or approximately \$31,600 a year. DWD estimates a need for 30 a year, due to retirements and normal turnover.

Utility apprenticeships have increased steadily in recent years from 246 in 2006 to a current enrollment of 341. The latest number includes 69 apprentices employed by municipal and rural utilities. More information about the apprenticeship program can be found at <http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/apprenticeship/>. Job seekers can find employment opportunities at <https://jobcenterofwisconsin.com/>.