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Workforce development bills will improve skills, help new workers *SB 175 extends successful stimulus programs to train employees*

SALEM –The Senate approved a bill this morning that will set up two workforce development programs modeled after successful programs funded with federal stimulus dollars. SB 175 would create the “Putting Oregon Back to Work Program” to improve Oregon’s workforce skills and the “Oregon Youth Employment Program” to provide teenagers with valuable job experience.

“Workforce development must be a key piece of Oregon’s strategy for economic recovery,” said Senate Majority Leader Diane Rosenbaum (D-Portland), who introduced the legislation during the interim. “These two programs have a great track record and expanding them will help our businesses meet their workforce demands while allowing workers get the skills they need to fill the jobs of the future.”

The Oregon Youth Employment Program helps young people learn job skills through on-the-job experience. Currently, Oregon youth face an unemployment rate of over 30 percent and stiff competition for entry level jobs. This program will provide critical work experiences for youth while allowing them to earn high school and college credits, become job-ready, and earn money to support themselves. Businesses benefit by building their future workforce while gaining the contributions of these young workers.

The Oregon Employer Workforce Training Fund will help Oregon businesses find cost effective ways to meet worker training needs while increasing business competitiveness. Companies with similar needs can be brought together to more efficiently leverage training dollars, rather than each company investing separately. Matching funds from companies would stretch this public investment and training would be provided at times and places convenient to workers in order to increase participation and completion.

“As Oregon regains its economic footing, it is crucial that we are making the right investments in our workforce,” said Senator Mark Hass (D-Beaverton), chair of the Senate Education and Workforce Development Committee. “Oregon business leaders have the best knowledge when it comes to the workforce demands that Oregon needs to meet. The state, workers, local communities, and Oregon industry all benefit because business leaders were at the table when these programs were developed.”

Both programs proposed in SB 175 are products of the Oregon Workforce Partnership, a non-partisan, private/public, statewide association that works to build a more highly skilled workforce to support and

expand the state's economy. Their membership includes Oregon's seven Local Workforce Investment Boards, which are comprised of business leaders, educators, and local officials. The programs will be supported using available grant funds from the federal government.

SB 175 now goes to the House floor for a vote.

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