

The Seattle Times

Tuesday, January 26, 2010 - Page updated at 04:03 PM

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Corrected version

Ask citizens to help boost job creation through a Jobs Act bond measure

By Hans Dunshee
Special to The Times



Everybody's talking about jobs.

Some say "cut regulations," which is code for lowering health and safety protections for workers and the environment.

Others say "lower labor costs" or "eliminate the minimum wage." That only takes money out of pockets of average workers already struggling to pay the mortgage and feed their kids.

Those ideas are marginal approaches that mostly pad the pockets of stockholders and out-of-state business owners, and cutting wages or safety standards only leads to a destructive race to the bottom.

In the Guangdong Province of China, the lowest minimum wage is 39 cents an hour. That's the prize for winning a race to the bottom: a job that pay \$62 a month. If not for the federal minimum wage, South Carolina's minimum wage would be zero. They don't have a state law.

But do we really want to create jobs by undercutting China and paying people 38 cents an hour?

Our long-term strategy has to be winning the race for the best jobs in the world. And our short-term strategy during this recession has to be creating good jobs, right away, in every corner of our state.

That's why I'm proposing that we create 38,000 real jobs, right here in Washington state, and that we do it directly. We hire local businesses who hire local people and put them to work doing energy efficiency, safety and health work in schools and other public buildings.

President Franklin Roosevelt did it during the Great Depression.

And the things that got built during the Depression — the parks and airports, the bridges and dams — still stand today. Deception Pass State Park is an example.

Republican Gov. Dan Evans did it in the last great recession, in 1972. He championed putting \$2 billion (in today's dollars) on the ballot. The voters voted yes and thousands of jobs were created building schools, sewer plants, water systems and parks.

We can do it again. We can create 38,000 jobs in every corner of our state by fixing up our public schools and public buildings.

The Jobs Act is a bond measure for \$850 million in projects around the state. This money will pay for needed repairs — such as replacing the roof on an elementary school. Then the school can undertake energy-efficiency work, such as

installing better insulation and heat pumps, that will pay for itself in energy savings. So with an investment of \$850 million from the state, taxpayers get \$2.5 billion worth of projects and save \$190 million a year in lower electricity bills.

President Obama said, "Our homes and our offices consume almost 40 percent of the energy we use and contribute almost 40 percent of the carbon pollution that we produce. The simple act of retrofitting these [old] buildings to make them more energy efficient ... is one of the fastest, easiest and cheapest things we can do to put Americans back to work while saving families money."

This isn't a pipe dream. A recent pilot project in schools with \$17 million of state money put \$43 million to work and created 1,200 jobs. But we can do more.

With 165,000 jobs lost in our state in this recession, it's smart to look at an idea that could put 38,000 people to work. Some would say do nothing because of the added debt, but a 1.7 percent increase in debt-services costs will grow the economy and save more tax dollars overall. That's a smart investment.

When we faced dark days in the past, our leaders — Roosevelt and Evans — took bold action. Their courage created jobs for millions of Americans, and we should do nothing less.

If you like this idea, please call your local lawmakers at 800-562-6000 and tell them to vote for jobs.

State Rep. Hans Dunshee, D-Snohomish, represents the 44th Legislative District. He chairs the Capital Budget Committee, which controls the state's construction budget.

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