**Green For All Blog**
**By Barbara Grady**

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On "lobby day" at the Washington State legislature, busloads of young men from inner city Seattle, church congregations from Spokane, electrical workers, plumbers, community organizers and elderly women from modest neighborhoods across the state poured into Olympia.

They all came for one reason - to press their legislators for a green jobs and energy efficiency bill that would put people to work weatherizing tens of thousands of homes across Washington State.

These ordinary-folk lobbyists prevailed. After repeated visits to the capitol to testify at hearings and meet with legislators, and countless phone calls and letters, they convinced the Washington Senate and House to pass SB 5649, a massive statewide weatherization, energy retrofit and green jobs program using federal Recovery money.

This landmark legislation spells out a plan to bring energy efficiency retrofits to as many as 20,000 modest homes, non-profits, and small businesses a year across the state and provide green job training and employment to hundreds of people who will do the weatherization and retrofits. It stipulates that the job training will seek out disadvantaged and low income populations and create pathways to sustainable living wage jobs with benefits. Moreover, the legislation provides startup funds for community organizations to continue the weatherization and retrofit work long after the Recovery money is spent.

As plumber Dusty Hoerler said, "The Recovery Act is one of the great opportunities for this country. To see the administration coming through on their commitments to energy independence and cutting down on consumption tells us there's work to do." He is a member of local 32 of the Plumbers & Pipe-fitters who spent his spare time lobbying for the bill. "There are so many heating systems built in the 1950s and 1960s when consumption was not an issue. There are staggering numbers of furnaces out there that are not efficient," he continued. Since there are lots of jobless plumbers around the state, this new work will be welcome.

Washington State's experience with grassroots organizations crafting a plan for using Stimulus money in the way it was most intended – to help cool the planet and provide pathways out of poverty – is a breakthrough well worth watching by the other 49.

"It feels good to win and be part of a process that brings regular folks to the table to shape their destiny and see the bill come to reality," said Keisha Krumm, a community organizer with Sound Alliance in Seattle who worked with leaders from a coalition of organizations in the Puget Sound Area to win passage of this legislation.

"It offers an example of hope that citizens can still make a difference when they come

together and become a force," she said.

It all started when teachers, plumbers, pastors, neighborhood leaders and others whose unions and congregations were part of alliances in Seattle and Spokane decided that sustainable jobs and improving the environment were the issues they needed to work on right now. Research done by the Spokane Alliance group led to the launch of a pilot project called Sustainable Works in which local people learned to do energy efficiency work that was paid for with energy cost savings on the homes' utility bills. SustainableWorks created a jobs pipeline that would bring low income people to do the work in Spokane's neighborhoods.

Intrigued by that work, the Sound Alliance joined the Spokane Alliance in developing a plan to expand Sustainable Works around the state. In the process numerous others got involved such as Bob Markholt who runs the Seattle Vocational Institute Pre-apprenticeship Construction Program, executives from the local utility, union foremen and instructors from Washington State University's Energy extension program. Together they developed an airtight plan that could put thousands of unemployed and under-employed people to work in weatherizing and learning energy efficiency trades.

The Alliances presented their plan to Washington State Senator Lisa Brown (D-Spokane) who became excited about it and wanted to use it as a core of legislation on how Washington State would use its Recovery money. Brown got other legislators on board working on the legislation and a bill was eventually introduced by Sen. Phil Rockefeller (D-Kitsap County), chair of the Senate Environment, Water & Energy Committee.

With dozens of groups interested in this legislation – ranging from utilities to teachers to unemployed construction workers to environmentalists – hundreds of people showed up at the capitol building in Olympia during the weeks SB 5649 was considered to give their views. The legislation took twists and turns, morphing at times in ways that were not environmentally sound, and then morphing back.

Green For All poured itself into helping shape the legislation into a bill that could be passed. Green For All founder Van Jones traveled to Washington to testify on the bill before the Senate Environment, Water & Energy Committee at a crucial moment when the legislation looked like it could be derailed by competing interests. Meanwhile, Vien Truong, Green For All senior state policy associate, advised the various community groups on legislative language and the legislative process.

"There were many, many different perspectives since we had such diverse set of groups and individuals," Sen. Rockefeller said. "We had to integrate all of those. It was legislatively challenging."

SB 5649 focuses on $15 million in Stimulus money that Washington will receive in a flexible program that allows the state to decide how to put it to work as long as the result is increased energy efficiency. That flexibility led to divergent views on how it could be spent.

For instance, utilities wanted language that would allow them to count their participation in the weatherization program as meeting some of their statutory requirements on including renewable energy in their load. Environmentalists objected.

Then Van Jones testified and convinced legislators of the importance of keeping the bill environmentally sound. The language that diluted renewable energy requirements was removed and environmental groups reconfirmed their support.

“When Van testified the legislators really paid attention,” recalled Keisha Krumm of the Sound Alliance.

“Van’s testimony was influential,” agreed Sen. Rockefeller.

At another point several large businesses wanted to focus the $15 million on energy efficiency upgrades to large buildings such as hospitals. One business already had an expertise in energy retrofits and thought it could put the money to use most economically.

“There was a force that wanted to do big projects. I just said that’s not what the purpose of this was. This is community based and for people of moderate means,” Rockefeller said.

In the end, the businesses and business coalitions removed their objections.

At the other end of the spectrum, local Community Action Programs(CAP) that represent non-profits neighborhood groups had issues with some of the job training requirements. A compromise was reached in which a percentage of all jobs created would be apprenticeship jobs.

SB 5649 was passed and signed into law on May 7, sending Washington State on its way in creating green pathways out of poverty, cleaning up the air in its city neighborhoods, lowering its contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions.

“For me,” said Sapina Pele, a former teacher who hopes her neighborhood gets some weatherization help, “the sustainable jobs issue is important and I am concerned about the earth. Naturally I’m concerned about it helping in the communities that I live in where people do not have the opportunity for retrofit or weatherize because they don’t have the funds.”

“It is a Triple Play,” said Sen. Rockefeller, “It will help produce jobs and business investment around the state. Two it will help prevent climate change, and three we hope it will affect communities because of the opportunities for people to help each other.”

Now, Washington State faces the task of putting SB 5649 into action. Just as the state broke new ground in wide grassroots involvement in developing the legislation, maybe its residents just might break ground in rolling up shirt sleeves and getting the work done.