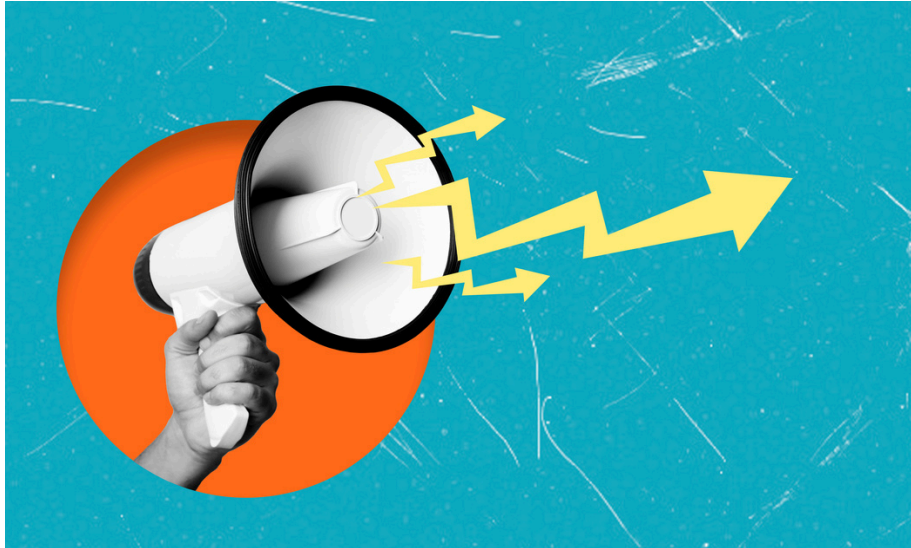




WSLC Workforce Development News

SPRING 2026

News in Workforce Development from the Voice of Labor



MAKING LABOR'S VOICE HEARD

Column by Shondea Chapman, Workforce Development Director at the WSLC

Join an advisory board for a community or technical college today!

In my previous role in instructional support and workforce development within higher education, some of my time was spent coordinating advisory committee meetings for career and technical education programs. That experience made clear how meaningful engagement directly impacts program quality, student outcomes, and alignment with real workforce needs.

Over time, I noticed a correlation between the highly enrolled, popular career training programs to highly engaged, strong advisory committees. It wasn't uncommon to see advisory members on the shop floor visiting the classrooms, engaging with the students, serving as substitute teachers or testing proctors for the programs. These interactions expose students to industry expectations on the shop floor, and offer extended offsite work-based learning experiences.

Advisory committees are not just compliance tools, often treated as a procedural box to check; they are where the real conversation about workforce readiness, industry standards and student opportunity should happen. This collaboration creates a mutually beneficial partnership, building bridges between their industry and future hires.

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One of labor's great strengths is that our movement represents the current industry. From plumbers to nurses to early childhood educators, no one knows better the landscape of an industry and what incoming students need to know than the people who do the work. The advisory board system acknowledges this, which is why organized labor is designated a core part of community and technical college advisory boards.

As important stewards of knowledge have retired or moved onto other opportunities, we have seen in the past few years an unfortunate loss of institutional relationships. We could not have built the vibrant collaborative community we enjoy in Washington without this history of cooperation.

These boards work best when current labor representatives are active participants in their field and can respond to current issues. Career training programs that actively engage union members and are responsive to implementing their knowledge and feedback into the current curriculum are more agile to the changing demands of the industry, skilling a well-prepared workforce and strategically investing in long-lasting partnerships between training providers and industry/labor.

We want to build the curriculum for the workforce of today and tomorrow. To do that, we need diverse voices speaking to the myriad issues that industry experiences in the modern day. Stakeholders from business and labor must move forward with gusto with modern solutions for modern problems. New technology, a changing climate, and an expansion of the Pell for Workforce program are all opportunities ripe for progress.

In my time working in higher education, I saw firsthand the opportunities for growth in these advisory boards. Advisory board members provide valuable expertise in their industry. Actively soliciting their input means more engaged students and a more connected and accurate curriculum. The reverse is also true. A disengaged or out of touch board correlates to low enrollment and retention trends or a program on the decline. Even though the current labor market data may show in demand growth, without a viable committee to lead with expertise, I noticed a major disconnection to industry.

The future of the workforce depends on solidarity and showing up for our members and each other. Consider joining an advisory board for a community or technical college, relevant to your industry, to have a hand in building the workforce of tomorrow. I can assist, just reach out at schapman@wslc.org.

As I launch into my new role, I am eager to connect with unions, campuses and career training programs in hopes that we can build new relationships and partnerships as we seek to train a strong workforce. I serve as your liaison between our union affiliates, our registered Apprenticeship programs and our state's community and technical college systems.

Through our partnership my goal is to support in the following capacity:

- Increase Labor representation on advisory committees and boards.
- Conduct roles and responsibility training with labor representative.
- 1x1 visits with college reps, campuses and program tours.
- Provide workshops and training on policy, agenda updates, union, workforce development and other public policy agendas to enhance workforce.

WSLC's April Sims to Co-Chair Workforce Board

from *The Stand*

Governor Bob Ferguson has appointed Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO President April Sims to serve as co-chair on the Washington Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board. Cherika Carter, Secretary Treasurer of the Council, has also been reappointed to represent labor on the Board.

The Workforce Board consists of nine Governor-appointed voting members from business, labor, and government. Three of the voting seats are held by labor representatives — including the position held by Carter — three are held by business, and the remaining three are held by representatives of state agencies, like the Department of Commerce.

As a non-voting co-chair, Sims will represent labor's voice. Joining her as co-chair is Association of Washington Business' Morgan Irwin.

"Washington's workforce system plays a critical role in economic opportunity," said Sims. "I look forward to collaborating with partners to align training, education, and workforce investments so they deliver results for workers, employers, and communities statewide."



Sims with co-chair Morgan Irwin, VP of government affairs at the Association of Washington Business. Photo: Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board

The Workforce Board reviews the performance of the state's largest workforce programs, including 16 education and training programs that receive almost \$1 billion annually in state and federal funds. The Board's focus is on ensuring a high-quality workforce training system through promoting work-based learning, responding to student complaints within the workforce training system, and developing and making policy recommendations to the Governor and Legislature. Board staff evaluate programs, develop research to support policy recommendations, and lead worker outreach.

Labor Leader Spotlight: Rachael Geyer

Rachael Geyer shared her perspective as a labor leader in workforce development. Geyer is the Director for Apprenticeship Training at the Pierce County Roofer Apprenticeship Program, one of Washington's state recognized Apprenticeship programs.

What was your first job and what did it teach you about work?

My first job was at Papa Murphy's and it taught me more than just making pizzas. I learned how important teamwork and accountability are and that showing up and doing your part makes a real difference. Even early on I saw that strong teams and reliable people are what keep things moving and that lesson has guided how I lead and support others in my career.



What drives you in your role as a union leader in workforce development?

I'm driven by the chance to make a difference in people's lives. Helping apprentices succeed, seeing their confidence grow, and knowing they're building a long-term career is incredibly rewarding to me.

What do you wish people knew about the work that you do?

What most people don't realize is how much goes into running an apprenticeship program. It's about keeping standards high, building programs that actually work, and setting roofers up to succeed on the job and in their careers. At the end of the day, it's about building a stronger, safer workforce that looks out for each other.

What are you working on now that you're most excited about?

I'm most excited about working with Clover Park Technical College to develop a mental health curriculum that's relatable and straightforward for roofers. By speaking their language and keeping it practical, we can provide roofers with real resources to turn to in times of crisis and help them take care of themselves and each other on the job.

BILL INTRODUCED TO RENEW TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE (TAA) PROGRAM

On March 4, 2026, Rep. Linda T. Sánchez (D-California) introduced the Trade Adjustment Assistance Modernization Act (HB 7805) to Congress aiming to restore the critical Trade Adjustment Assistance program that expired in 2022 and left nearly 200,000 displaced workers unable to access job training, income support, health care assistance, and vital reemployment services needed after trade-related layoffs. Sánchez emphasized that these workers are not statistics but individuals and families harmed by offshoring in her office's press release on the policy.



The bill proposes reinstating TAA for workers, farmers, and firms for 7 years. Furthermore, expanding eligibility, increasing funding, improving benefits, such as childcare support, reinstating TAA for Community Colleges, and a new TAA Communities program to help local systems respond more effectively to major job losses. Nineteen other Congressional members cosponsored the bill, including Suzan DelBene (D-Washington) and has been endorsed by major national labor organizations—including the AFL-CIO, IAM, IFPTE, UAW, IBEW, CWA, and USW.

Data shows that TAA participants historically earned \$50,000 more over a decade than similarly displaced workers without access to the program. The bill represents a long-awaited opportunity to rebuild a proven system that strengthens workers, unions, and entire communities impacted by global trade disruptions.

Watch the streamed press conference [here](#).

You can help! – contact the WSLC immediately if you hear of any possible layoffs affecting your community. Contact Emmanuel Flores (eflores@wslc.org) or Chelsea Mason-Placek (cmasonplacek@wslc.org) for assistance.





YOU'RE INVITED: NEW DATA, NEW POSSIBILITIES FORUM

The Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO (WSLC) and the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace, IFPTE Local 2001 (SPEEA) are pleased to host the upcoming virtual forum [New Data, New Possibilities: Reimagining Workforce Insights with Washington's New Occupation Data](#). The event is organized in partnership with the Washington Employment Security Department and Washington Workforce Board and will be held Thursday, April 23rd from 10am-12:30pm PST.

The Washington labor movement adopted a [resolution](#) several years ago highlighting gaps in occupation-specific labor market information and calling on the WSLC to advocate for enhanced workforce and education data collection. The impetus being that gaps in data lead to policies, programs and investments driven by anecdotes that can undercut workers' lived experience and negatively impact outcomes for students, workers and businesses. As an example, see [a recent op-ed](#) by the Washington Building & Construction Trades Council about the harm of flawed assertions of a skill shortage.

Thanks to the leadership of Washington State Senator Vandana Slatter and a coalition of advocates, Washington adopted [groundbreaking legislation](#) in 2020 that led to Washington being one of only a handful of states to collect occupation data from almost all employers. Join us on April 23rd to learn more about the significance of this data, how Washington is paving the way for national efforts and to consider what more is possible.

Get more information and register [here](#).

Unemployment Insurance (UI) Navigation Presentations



One of the biggest barriers to accessing UI benefits is understanding what is available and how to navigate the system. Enter: Michael Pichler, UI Navigator at the WSLC. Pichler has provided one-on-one assistance to thousands of workers across the state navigating the UI system. But in addition, he offers 1 hour in person workshops and presentations in every corner of the state tailored to helping apprentices understand how to overcome barriers in accessing benefits. To book a presentation from Michael, contact him at mpichler@wslc.org or by phone.

The Oregon Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO and the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO are excited to announce the 2026 Pacific Northwest Labor Leader Workforce Development Conference on August 13, 2026 in Portland OR. Labor leaders, mark your calendars!

Last held in 2023 in Seattle, this conference brings together nearly 80 labor leaders from across states and industries who engage in workforce development as workforce development board members, community and technical college advisors, apprenticeship coordinators, educators and more. The event helped spark new ideas and ways for labor to collaborate in workforce development. More about the 2023 conference [here](#).



We look forward to continuing the momentum in 2026! This is an opportunity to learn about labor-centered workforce initiatives in other regions, build workforce development partnerships across unions and develop strategy to empower workers in a rapidly changing economy.

More information will be coming soon! In the meantime, we encourage attendees to reach out with ideas for the conference. Please let us know what topics would be most interesting and helpful for you! Are you working on something impactful in workforce development? We want to know!

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



Carter (far left) pictured with (from left to right) Chrissy Lynch, President of CT AFL-CIO, Liz Shuler, AFL-CIO President, and Lorena Gonzalez, President of CA AFL-CIO

WSLC Secretary Treasurer Cherika Carter spoke on a panel in the other Washington, at the AFL-CIO's national AI Summit, about the leading work our state is doing in developing a worker-centered AI perspective, highlighting legislation about setting up guardrails around AI, like bills around nurse title designation and surveillance pricing. We invite union members to [register and join](#) the WSLC on April 30 in Tukwila for the WSLC Summit on Artificial Intelligence and Technology.

Mark Your Calendars

[New Data, New Possibilities
Virtual Forum](#)
April 23, 2026 10 am

National Apprenticeship
Week
April 26 -May 2, 2026

[WSLC AI Summit](#)
Tukwila, WA
April 30, 2026 9 am

[WA Apprenticeship & Training
Council Meeting](#)
May 6, 2026

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THE FOUNDATION FOR WORKING FAMILIES is a non-profit organization established by the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO and its affiliates to assist union families when they need it most. Donate to support the mission below.



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