I want to thank the Energy Futures Initiative and National Association of State Energy Office for their help with this critical report. We are here because we know the energy sector is the third largest in the United States and is continuing to grow. We know that there are ever increasing technologies that are related to both renewables and energy efficiency that make our cars, our homes, our buildings, and even us, smarter and it all drives down costs to both consumers and businesses.

So that is a great phenomenon, but it is also happening at the same time as another phenomenon and that is an aging energy workforce. The average age of a utility worker is 47 years old and about 47% of all transmission distribution workers will be eligible to retire in the next several years. We know that we need to train and skill the next generation of energy workers. Our nation is embarking on one of the greatest economic opportunities, and that is a clean, efficient energy economy. I can tell you, as someone who comes from a state that has produced three to four cents per kilowatt hour rates; it continues to drive our economy over and over again.

At the opening of our National Nordic Museum in Ballard, Washington, attended by the President of Iceland, I said, “who would have thought that you and I would be sitting here talking about Bitcoin lending and taxation for the state of Washington and Iceland?” We can compete for low prices, so we both have been taken over by that sector.

Consumers and businesses, we know, will demand new services and new technologies along with low carbon solutions. I can’t tell you how much this is playing out in the state of Washington where every company, whether it’s Microsoft or Amazon or Google, is looking to distinguish themselves with the energy mix that they purchase. To say to their consumers that their portfolio is made up of no or low carbon energy solutions.

We want to continue ensuring the United States is a leader in developing these [energy] technologies and in training a workforce that will help us deliver on them. One of the sectors examined by the U.S. Energy and Employment Report is energy efficiency, which already employs millions of Americans and is predicated to grow.

According to a report by the Northwest Energy Efficiency Council, over a billion dollars is invested in energy efficiency in the state of Washington and is creating thousands of jobs. These are good paying jobs too, with an average wage of $5,000 above the national average. The training requirements, from apprentice to advanced degrees, are all critical aspects of training this workforce.

I know that the same organization presented a report that we participated in that says essentially energy efficiency creates its own feedback loop. The savings go into helping a company become more competitive and then it helps them make more investments and it just keeps going. You would think that someplace like the Northwest, that already has a cheap and affordable electricity, wouldn’t be on this path of continuing its investment but I can tell you there are so
many companies focusing on this I can’t even keep up with them. So they are continuing to invent and to innovate and we are just so excited to continue to see that.

Trained workers are a critical part of making all these solutions scalable and the energy industry, as we just said, is facing a [labor] shortage. That is why last Congress we introduced the 21st Century Energy Workforce Act, which would create a federal grant program to incentivize labor and industry to work together to develop more workforce training programs, particularly though apprenticeships. In addition, it would establish Energy Workforce Advisory Boards comprised of labor and industry and workforce educators to design and model energy workforce curriculum. I know that, Mr. Secretary, we had gotten a $10 million grant out of the Smart Grid program to retrain, in Lewis County, about 2,000 workers that had previously been involved in more carbon intensive sectors and that report is very interesting because those 2,000 workers are saying that the starting salary, even at apprentice level, people are starting at $25.

So you can see that these jobs are in high demand, that people want to manage whatever their energy source is with smarter and more educated talented workforce that helps them save dollars overall. Unfortunately though this legislation passed the Senate with 85 votes it did not get final action because of our colleagues in the House. We hope that they will revisit this soon and look at this issue of a skilled workforce as one of the key things that we need to do, particularly on apprenticeships where you can both earn and learn. We think that this is so valuable in matching up the changes in the energy sector with immediate opportunity; we just think that it’s such a healthy response to what we’re seeing in the transformation.

Mr. Secretary, I always say to people at this level that transformation in our economy is something that we have to deal with. There is a reason that Ma Bell doesn’t exist anymore. But the young people who work with me are like who is Ma Bell, they think it’s like a punk rock group. They don’t know. They don’t know.

A major transformation in telecommunications has happened, and a behemoth that we always thought was going to be the deliverer and the jobs transformed to now to this handheld device that we all get so much information from. Well, the same transformations are happening in energy, the best thing that we can do is train the workforce so they will be ready for that.

So I thank you so much for this latest installment of the report. I am optimistic about the opportunities for the future. I thank everybody for their hard work in finalizing this [data], but I hope that you will continue to be involved with this until we really have enabled the transformation that we know is coming, and certainly will deliver us both jobs and more efficient energy. Thank you so much.

*remarks have been lightly edited for clarity.*