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Doyle stresses value of trades

Pipe fitters key to renewable energy projects

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ASHWAUBENON — With an expanding effort to further develop the renewable fuels industry in Wisconsin, Gov. Jim Doyle said it is key that trade and labor organizations step up efforts to attract young workers into technical fields.

Doyle spoke Friday to about 100 members of the Wisconsin Pipe Trades Association in Ashwaubenon.

"We have to get more young people to understand what the value of the trades are and how badly we need them," he said. "We are going to need people ... who know how to do work in the skilled trades.

"We're going to need to sell the pipe trades and other construction work much better than we have before," Doyle said. "You have done it the right way, but we really need to intensify that effort."

Pipe fitters play a key role in the construction of ethanol plants and other infrastructure needed to capitalize on renewable energy efforts in the state, Doyle said.

Expansion of the industry is expected to create additional jobs in the state while working to wean the country away from dependence on foreign oil, he said.

"If you capture carbon, you've got to transport carbon. ... and you need pipes to transport carbon," Doyle told members of the association. "They need to be sophisticated and built by highly, highly trained people."

Terry Hayden of Plumbers and Steam Fitters Local 434 said the average starting wage for people coming into the industry is around to \$15 to \$18 per hour.

Like other trades, they see a need for people — a need that may intensify as baby boomers move out of the work force.

"Even now, we have significant numbers that retire each year, and that's only going to grow," Hayden said. "Our industry, like a lot of other building trades, are a great career, not just a job.

"What we're selling is the ability for someone to have a good wage ... and a retirement they can depend on," he said.

They have been actively recruiting and promoting the industry in high schools and technical colleges around the state.

Some local unions also help pick up education costs for people entering the field, Hayden said.

Local 434 covers a large swath of central and western Wisconsin, he said.
