New laws and leadership cultivate green building in the Southwest

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There's something happening in those dry Southwestern mountains. It seems to be billowing outward from the ponderosa pines, carried by the roadrunner into the fields of Indian paintbrush and down into the mighty Colorado River. Thanks to the prolific outreach efforts of USGBC's green building community, the benefits of healthy, efficient and low-impact buildings are on the mind, and lawmakers are taking action.

Here's some recent highlights from 2013:

- **New Mexico**: On April 1, New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez signed SB 14, an extension to the state's successful Sustainable Building Tax Credit (SBTC). Thanks to strong community advocacy efforts, including that of USGBC-New Mexico, the renewed SBTC creates an additional $12 million opportunity for single-family residential green construction and $3 million in commercial and multifamily opportunities spread out over the next three years. Just last week, the state Board of Finance heard from advocates about the powerful benefits of green public buildings.

- **Nevada**: Gov. Brian Sandoval signed Assemblyman David Bobzien's AB33 into law last month, reviving the tax incentive for LEED-certified buildings and expanding its scope to investments in improving existing buildings. Greater reward is offered for greater cuts in energy use. State Assembly Speaker Marilyn Kirkpatrick and Sen. Kelvin Atkinson deserve special recognition for their initiative to carry the bill through the Legislature. USGBC Nevada's leadership in the newly formed Nevada Sustainable Energy Coalition, a new business-backed coalition with a bold sustainability agenda, was also critical to the passage of the bill.

- **Arizona**: The Arizona state Senate celebrated Earth Day this year by issuing a proclamation encouraging Arizona schools to participate in the 2013 Green Apple Day of Service, "as an action to engage their communities in our shared goal of ensuring healthy, safe and efficient places for all of our students to learn." Also, state Rep. Frank Pratt's HB 2009, signed last month, offers tax relief to LEED-certified datacenters that move into substantially vacant buildings.

- **Utah**: Rep. Jim Matheson (R-Utah), the founder and chair of the Congressional Green Schools Caucus, was busy promoting healthy, high-performing schools to his colleagues here in Washington this spring. During Earth Week, the congressman hosted an event at the U.S. Capitol to celebrate the release of the Princeton Review's 2013 Guide to Green Colleges, and in June he led a conversation during our 2013 Green Schools State Legislative Summit about the importance of our movement. One of the participants in that discussion was Utah state Rep. Mark Wheatley, champion of last year's UT HJR1, which encourages new school construction and major renovation projects to be healthy and energy-efficient.

- **Colorado**: Last month, Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper signed SB 279 into law, a bill that aims to increase energy resource efficiency in public schools. State Sen. Andy Kerr worked closely with USGBC-Colorado for a few years to lay the groundwork for the passage of this bill. The state also authorized the use of graywater, improved options for commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing, established an energy saving mortgage program, and upped commitments in state buildings to monitor and ensure building energy performance. More information is available here.

Market activity reports for USGBC's Western region are coming soon. How are you working with your elected leaders to foster growth and opportunity for healthy, high-performance buildings?

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Chapter members, Member employees, USGBC staff

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