

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's Benefits for Small Businesses

The Committee on Small Business Subcommittee on Underserved, Agricultural, and Rural Development

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Thank you Chairman Golden, Ranking Member Hagedorn, and Members of this subcommittee for this opportunity. My name is Jason J. Shedlock, and I sit before you today representing the Laborers' International Union of North America; 500,000 plus strong and united men and women, most of whom dedicate their lives to building our nation's infrastructure. More specifically, I'm one of over 300 members of the Laborers' Local 327 based in Augusta, Maine, as well as the President of the Maine State Building and Construction Trades Council; an organization consisting of 20 affiliated labor unions representing over 6,000 workers across the state.

I'm pleased to be with you today to share some thoughts on behalf of the individuals who will be operationalizing the generational landmark legislation that is the topic of this public hearing.

The bipartisan action that Congress took, and that President Biden signed into law, will have far-reaching impacts on current and future working families across Maine and the nation. Certainly a direct and immediate outcome of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act should and must be seen by the members of our union and those of the entirety of the building trades unions. These highly-skilled sisters and brothers will go to work, proudly building and rebuilding the very communities where they live, and doing it safely and efficiently while at the same time building and sustaining a middle class career for themselves and their families.

Tradespeople like the Laborers I represent stand ready, willing and able to heed the call of Congress and the President to fundamentally transform the totality of our nation's infrastructure. From initial groundbreaking to final delivery of a finished project, my fellow members build every sector of the construction industry: from city skyscrapers and subways, to state highways and bridges, from sidewalks to solar fields; we literally build America. Now if you've ever been to Maine, and I know the Chairman knows this well, you'll undoubtedly notice that we don't have skyscrapers per se or any subways in our state. That said, we are proud to be currently building the state's tallest building, located in the City of Portland; an 18-story high rise built by union Laborers, Operating Engineers, Iron Workers, Carpenters, Electricians, Elevator Constructors and more.

What this legislation means for Maine is finally and more fully addressing what the American Society of Civil Engineers calls a C- infrastructure system. Our state has 315 bridges and 1,438 miles of highway in poor condition, earning C- and D grades respectively. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will translate to, at a minimum, \$1.3B for Maine's highways, \$225M for bridge replacement, \$100M for broadband, \$390M for water infrastructure and \$74M for our airports.

This represents a seismic change in our ability to invest in our state. What it also represents is the opportunity to make a seismic change in our workforce and our local economies. Through our top-notch training programs, members have constant access to emerging and cutting edge technologies that make them the best and most nimble in the business. Through our Registered Apprenticeship programs, we can ensure that the next generation of builders have the tools and skills necessary to secure their future with good pay, safe job sites, benefits for themselves and their families, and an even shot at retiring with dignity after an honest career. I'm proud to add that as the most diverse building trades union, the Laborers' also continuously focus on outreach to traditionally underrepresented populations such as women, people of color and veterans to ensure that our workforce adequately reflects the community where our members live, work, play and pray.

This Administration's dedication and determination to ensure that the jobs created by this massive infrastructure bill are good, high-road jobs is unprecedented. Whether it be the promotion of diverse workforces by requiring geographic diversity for job opportunities, or the implementation of labor standards through Davis-Bacon prevailing wages; local hiring and Buy America preferences or community stakeholder language; this law makes sure that it's not just about the quantity of jobs, but that it's also about the quality of careers.

To further amplify the law's effects on working families, the President's recent Executive Order mandating that all federally-funded projects of \$35M or more be performed under a the gold standard of a Project Labor Agreement means that this investment will not only equate to better infrastructure for every end-user, but also it will translate to the surety of safety and respect for construction workers and our signatory contractors in communities across America.

We must also not ignore the environment in which this law will be implemented. At the center of our collective success and effectiveness is the worsening job crunch in Maine and the country. No one feels this crunch harder than small businesses - including small and medium-sized construction contractors. By partnering with the Laborers union and our fellow trades, we in essence provide these businesses with an "easy button" as they can gain access to our highly-skilled construction workforce while at the same time enjoying the benefits of increased bidding and job opportunities related to this historic infrastructure investment.

Continuing on the trend of collaboration with the business community, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge and appreciate the Laborers' close working relationship with the US as well as regional and local Chambers of Commerce across America with respect to our

nation's infrastructure. We know that it's only by joining together with our partners in the business community that we will most effectively deliver on the tremendous promise of this legislation.

The targeted investment into our communities also has multiplier effects. Not only are many of our contracting partners in Maine who will benefit from this investment considered small businesses, we know that when workers are compensated fairly, their purchasing power at home is positively impacted. This means that workers will reinvest their earnings into their local economies, often supporting Main Street by powering the economic engines that drive our nation.

Another benefit that bears exploring is that with this investment and the subsequent engagement with construction unions to meet the law's goals, we can do our part to address the unacceptable reality of the gender pay gap in America. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, while overall, women earn 81.1 percent of what men earn; in the construction industry, that number increases to 99.1 percent. Further, according to the National Women's Law Center, unionized women earn 24 percent more than women who are not represented by a union. By working with America's building trades unions, we have the opportunity to do right by our sisters in the trades and further facilitate the economic empowerment of women in the construction industry.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Hagedorn and fellow members, the takeaway here for the entire industry and our communities is very simple and summed up well by my General President, Terry O'Sullivan, upon the bill's signing, "The investment will put Laborers to work in every community, revitalize our nation's economy, and open doors to the middle class for hundreds of thousands of working men and women."

Of course there is much more to discuss about the benefits that the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will have on workers, traditionally underrepresented populations, local economies and small businesses, but one thing is abundantly clear; through working with America's building trades unions, we can safely and effectively build and rebuild our nation, solidify and expand our middle class, and inject the life and vitality into America's local economies that is so desperately needed.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. As any good Laborer, I and my union stand ready to assist you in any way necessary as we work together to put this legislation into action; from groundbreaking to final delivery.