

**SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON BUILDING WISCONSIN'S
WORKFORCE**

**TESTIMONY OF THE WISCONSIN STATE COUNCIL OF
CARPENTERS**

JULY 20, 2008

Chair Strachota and members of the committee, my name is Mark Reihl and I am the Executive Director of the Wisconsin State Council of Carpenters. I am accompanied today by Al Atkinson – Director of Education of the North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters (NCSRCC), Joe Weisling – Training Director of the Southeast Wisconsin Carpentry Training Center, James Greer – Madison area Apprenticeship Coordinator and Mert Summers – Assistant Executive Director, NCSRCC. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about the efforts of the Carpenters Union to build Wisconsin's workforce.

**POWER POINT PRESENTATION – OVERVIEW OF THE CARPENTERS
APPRENTICESHIP AND TRAINING PROGRAM IN WISCONSIN.**

- Our goal is to have the best trained, most productive, safest, workforce in the construction industry, and one that reflects the population of the community in which the work is done. We understand that if our contractors are going to compete successfully and have the ability to pay good wages and benefits, they need our members to be the most productive in the industry. Our union is about training and this

overview will show the investment we have made to develop the skills and productivity that sets our members apart. And, I might add, our union trains its workforce, both new and old, at no cost to the taxpayer through our collective bargaining agreement.

- Journey worker skill advancement has become a larger part of what we do. We don't want just specialists, but members with skills in a number of areas. It makes them more valuable to the employer and makes them more employable when work in one area is slow.
- In Wisconsin, the Carpenters Union invests over \$4 million annually to train and retrain its workforce.
- In addition to our Wisconsin Training Centers, nationwide we offer members the finest training in the industry, with 1,500 full-time instructors, 250 training centers across North America, and a new \$22-million International Training Center that trains instructors and develops new courses to keep our members at the top of their fields. Over \$200 million is spent annually on training by the United Brotherhood of Carpenters.

LABOR SHORTAGE IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

- Overall, we don't have a quantity issue as much as a quality issue. That's especially true now with the slowdown in the construction industry. Our membership for the most part is evenly spread across all age groups. The same however,

cannot be said in reference to the demographics that exist within the state.

- We are seeking the same high quality motivated students and individuals with good math and reading skills that are being told the key to their future is a college degree. Our members are professionals who work on multi-million dollar projects and make decisions every day that have an impact on the quality of the construction, the completion timeline, and the safety of other workers as well as the public that will occupy or use the structure. School districts believe the trades are a dumping ground for people who don't have a good basic education and the determination to succeed in a demanding profession. We look at our trade as a career.
- In Wisconsin, unless there are dramatic changes in the number of minority students completing high school and entering the construction trades, the future construction workforce won't reflect the demographics of the area. To reach out to this population, the construction industry supports and funds programs like BIG STEP (Building Industry Group Skilled Trades Employment Program) in Milwaukee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We must do a better job of marketing the careers and opportunities available in the building trades. Currently the average age of entry level apprentices is 28 years old. Employers are losing valuable years of

productivity and future workers are losing thousands of dollars in wages and fringe benefits.

Parents, High School Students, Teachers and Guidance Counselors need more information about the opportunities available, qualifications needed, and type of worker this demanding industry requires. In 2007, the average successful Union Carpenter earned \$72,750 in wages, health insurance, pension, and training fringe benefits.

- The Associated General Contractors (AGC) and the Carpenters Union are working on school-to-work programs with curricula and hands on programs to show students the career pathways offered by the construction industry.
- Bring back the traditional “shop” classes to our schools. Most of the high school “home building projects” are doing very little to prepare students for a career in construction. They are feel good activities and become a dumping ground for kids who won’t be attending college.

We must narrow the gap between the educational attainment levels of whites and minorities in high school and invest more in Adult Basic Education programs after high school. One of the most successful programs in preparing minority adults for apprenticeships and careers in construction is the BIG STEP program in Milwaukee. It is primarily funded by the contractors and the Union Construction trades in Milwaukee.

Governors Doyle’s Executive Order 108, which requires contractors on state construction projects to train apprentices, is a step in the right direction which will require strong enforcement to be successful.

The legislature should pass legislation to extend this provision to all public construction projects and Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WEDA) programs.

The State of Wisconsin should support a “high road” strategy that discourages employers from driving wages to the bottom in the construction industry. The state should vigorously enforce prevailing wages laws and crack down on the misclassification of workers as independent contractors. Misclassification has become a common practice in the construction industry and is hurting workers as well as taxpayers in Wisconsin.

Finally, state investment in infrastructure is crucial to maintaining our construction workforce and keeping our state competitive.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.