

## **Mayor's Construction Plan Expands Middle Class Opportunities for City Residents of Color** **By Lou Coletti**

A recent OpEd by a representative from the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) claimed that economically disadvantaged New Yorkers, particularly people of color, will not benefit from the project labor agreements Mayor DeBlasio signed just weeks ago. The author must take lessons from President Trump in distorting facts. Here is the truth.

The author's assertion that project labor agreements leave open shop workers in the cold is totally off base. All PLA projects can be bid both by union and non-union contractors. If a non-union contractor is the lowest responsible bidder, it is awarded the contract and signs a labor agreement for that specific project. Even so, all city construction projects pay workers prevailing wages whether they are union or nonunion. For the ABC's non-union workforce, working under a project labor agreement means a raise over their usual pay.

The author does not seem to understand that one of the primary functions of project labor agreements is to open pathways for local residents into apprenticeships, which lead to careers in the trades, not temporary jobs. The PLA the Mayor just signed provides some of the strongest provisions in this regard while also creating greater opportunities for minority and women owned firms to win jobs, grow and succeed. Project labor agreements also lead to cost savings, which in this economic environment is more important than ever. But the author failed to acknowledge these truths and conveniently neglected to include data in his OpEd to back up his phony assertions. I challenge him to offer facts and not a bunch of undocumented generalities about what ABC member contractors are doing for NYC. But I am not holding out hope.

Here are the facts about BTEA contractors and the building trade unions they employ.

According to NYS Department of Labor statistics:

- 62.7% of the 8,583 active apprentices are NYC residents
- 79% of these residents are minority and women
- 9% of the residents are women

Here are more FACTS from the NYS Department of Labor:

- 59% of apprentices are Minority and Women with 9% being Women—the highest in the nation
- 47% of journeyman are Minority and Women

And according to yet another independent report by the Economic Policy Institute:

- 21.2% of the total workforce is African-American
- 30.5% of the total workforce is Latino
- 36.1% higher wages for Black/African American union workers than non-union workers
- 52.7% higher wages for Latino union workers than non-union workers

In addition, BTEA contractors have institutionalized our efforts to build our workforce from within our communities by creating and investing in organizations like Construction Skills which recruits applicants out of 14 NYC Vocational High Schools. We also established Helmets to Hardhats for returning Veterans and a program called Non-Traditional Employment for Women. Referrals from these organizations go to the top of applicant lists and we give first preference to graduates of those programs to enter apprenticeships. Are non-union contractors doing anything like this? My guess is no.

I should also point out that data show nonunion contractors are far less safe for their workers. According to the NYC Dept. of Buildings, 83% of all fatalities over the last 5 years occurred on non-union construction sites and 81% of all accidents occurred on non-union sites. 65% of all stop work orders occurred on non-union sites and 64% of accident related violations were issued to non-union contractors. Rather than advocate against initiatives that will expand career opportunities for New Yorkers, perhaps the ABC should work on keeping people safe on the job.

Two things we can agree on are that construction is the path to the middle class and that equality and opportunity are important values the city should pursue. But I challenge the ABC to show us the facts about how their contractors are contributing to these goals and providing opportunities for NYC residents of color and women. In the meantime, Mayor DeBlasio deserves our thanks for signing these PLAs and taking meaningful steps toward a more inclusive construction workforce.

*The author is President and CEO of the Building Trades Employers Association, which represents 26 trade contractor associations and 1,200 contractors doing \$60 billion of construction in NYC.*