

Testimony of James T. Kunz Jr. before the Pennsylvania House Republican Policy Committee hearing regarding Workforce Development, September 20, 2011.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Pennsylvania House Republican Policy Committee.

My name is James T. Kunz Jr. I am the Business Manager of the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 66 representing over 6900 men and women, in the 33 western counties of Pennsylvania, who work in the construction, pipeline, utility and the heavy equipment service industries here in Pennsylvania. I am also Chairman of the Board of the Western Pennsylvania Operating Engineers Joint Apprenticeship and Training Program. This partnership between labor and management is a non-profit educational training program organized for the purpose of providing qualified heavy equipment operators and mechanic technicians to approximately 600 employers in the construction and service industries. This is done through both a 4 to 5 year apprenticeship program and also through continuing education training throughout an operating engineer's career.

Unlike some careers in Pennsylvania, there is currently a real shortage of qualified and productive heavy equipment operators, especially crane operators, production dirt equipment such as excavators and bull dozers, and also pipeline equipment operators. Currently my Local is experiencing full employment and we have been recruiting skilled heavy equipment operators from other states to meet our contractor's needs while we train the next generation of operating engineers. This

is due in large part to the growing Marcellus Shale industry and to the several large industrial projects occurring in Western Pennsylvania. Our program has worked for years with community groups, training providers, school districts and others to recruit qualified candidates for the construction industry. In 2010 we made over 40 recruitment visits to area schools and community groups as well as to numerous job fairs. Yet finding qualified candidates for our program has been a challenge. I believe that some of this can be attributed to our educational system. It seems that the success of many of today's high school guidance counselors is based on the number of graduates they get to go to college. Therefore, fewer and fewer are provided information about a career in construction because most counselors have little knowledge about how the apprenticeship process works or the skills and qualifications needed for the construction trades. As a result, candidates are often not ready to successfully pass the entrance exams nor are they prepared for the interview process. Couple this with the fact that many of the candidates lack the basic mechanical skills necessary to enter the construction trades because more and more high schools do not offer some form of vocational training such as shop or mechanics as part of their general curriculum. As a result we are faced with an ever shrinking pool of interested and qualified candidates. It is important that we provide Pennsylvania's school districts with information on how an apprenticeship program works and on the skills and qualifications required by the various

construction trades as well as other careers that do not require a college degree. It is also important that programs exist that prepare a candidate for taking an entrance exam and succeeding at an interview, such as a pre-apprenticeship program. This can be accomplished through vocational training in the high school classroom setting which will help students to develop the academic skills critical to job success. If a student is interested in pursuing a building trades career, he or she would be able to study specifically for the general aptitude tests required for entrance in the various apprenticeship programs. Each student can also be coached on developing the basic attitudes needed to succeed as a professional craft person. And with the right information, a high school guidance counselor will be able to guide a student who has an interest and aptitude into a rewarding building trades career.

There are several successful programs in Western Pennsylvania that work to connect individuals with careers in the construction industry. These could be used as models to develop Pennsylvania's future workforce. The Building and Construction Trades Industry Partnership, formed in 2006, has used Industry Partnership Worker Training subsidies to provide advanced skills training for both journeymen and women, and apprentices. They have also used a community network of over 50 non-profit agencies, churches and training providers to find and connect individuals to careers. In 2009, they formed the Labor-Management

Clearinghouse to work with employers and unions in the utilities, construction, hospitality and building services to help individuals who are looking to advance their careers by connecting to one of these industries. The Holy Family Institute in Emsworth, PA developed their Workforce Readiness Program to provide vocational training in a wide range of career opportunities including the building trades which shows their students real career alternatives and helps them build their own foundation for success. The Minority and Women Educational Labor Agency, established in 2004, is a pre-apprenticeship program that prepares trainees for the application process into a building trades apprenticeship program. This successful program is open to anyone and builds on a student's willingness to learn, their attendance in class, and their persistence to prepare them for a career in the building trades. Additional models are YouthWorks which provides career planning and exposure to at risk youth in the Pittsburgh region and Helmets to Hardhats which provides a conduit between National Guard, Reserve, retired and transitioning active duty military veterans and employment opportunities in the construction industry.

Finally, there are the 17 Western Pennsylvania Building Trades Apprenticeship programs themselves. These tuition-free quality programs provide both apprenticeship training and continuing journeyman education. They are funded by their members and participating contractors and employer associations. Their state

of the art curricula and on-the-job training result in a construction workforce capable of building and maintaining Pennsylvania's critical infrastructure and are working every day with Pennsylvania business to create economic opportunity in the region. These careers are essential to our local workforce and development strategy and working with the various organizations I referenced earlier, the building and construction trades have been working hard to connect today's youth and unemployed to a rewarding lifelong career in the construction industry. A deep talent pool in the building trades industry will enable developers, architects, engineers and others to prosper, growing Pennsylvania's economy, creating even more jobs. Thank You.

I would be happy to answer any questions.