



Statement of Brent Booker  
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Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
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Hearing on  
*Examining Workforce Development and Job Creation in Surface Transportation  
Construction*

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Good morning. Chairwoman Norton, Ranking Member Davis, and distinguished members of this subcommittee.

My name is Brent Booker, Secretary-Treasurer of North America's Building Trades Unions (NABTU). On behalf of the three million skilled craft construction professionals and 14 affiliated national and international unions that I am proud to represent across the United States and Canada, I would like to thank you for granting me this opportunity to testify before this subcommittee.

Building America's infrastructure is literally what our members do every day. Whether it is roads and bridges, transit, airports, waterways, power plants and other energy infrastructure, municipal water systems, public buildings, schools or skyscrapers, our dedicated members apply their unique skill sets to building infrastructure in every corner of our great nation.

For many of our members, the strength of both the construction industry and their individual job opportunities are directly tied to the strength of public policy that advances the building of public infrastructure. And NABTU has for years advocated for a big, broad, and bold infrastructure bill that solidifies and expands economic opportunities for workers and business, tackles the tough challenges our public infrastructure faces, and lays out a vision for a brighter future. We strongly believe that the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will do that just.

I cannot stress enough the importance of this bill, which is the single greatest investment in our nation's infrastructure in my lifetime. It is truly historic. This investment, along with the strong labor standards in the bill, will allow us as a nation to meet our pressing infrastructure needs and

will lay the foundation for sustained economic growth in communities large and small with jobs that pay family sustaining wages and benefits.

And this bill will increase opportunity across the board: for new job opportunities for construction workers; for new economic development opportunities for our communities; for new business opportunities for both large corporations and small business; and for new training opportunities for those that seek a career in construction.

The construction industry is, by its very nature and ranking from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, among the most dangerous industries in the country. Workers perform difficult physical labor, often working on or around heavy machinery, and are regularly exposed to extreme temperatures, toxic substances, and difficult conditions. To guard against these inherent dangers, promote first-rate work and uphold public safety, workers must receive the highest quality education and training. Public infrastructure projects are critical to not only rebuilding and strengthening our communities, but they are critical to ensuring a reliable pipeline of highly skilled workers.

For generations, NABTU affiliated unions, in conjunction with our industry partners, have trained the safest and most productive construction workforce in the world through our registered apprenticeship system. It is the gold standard for construction training, and for workforce training overall. These world class, state-of-the-art “earn as you learn” joint labor-management programs provide apprentices with on-the-job training from highly skilled journey-level workers, as well as state-of-the-art classroom training. The NABTU affiliate training system is comprised of 1,600 training centers and over 20,000 instructors, in almost every Congressional district in the United

States, which we and our industry partners privately fund at nearly \$2 billion annually. Seventy-five percent of all construction registered apprentices are trained in NABTU registered apprenticeship programs. Since 2017, an average of 75,000 new apprentices have been registered annually. Before the pandemic began, in 2019 alone, over 80,000 new apprentices began their careers in NABTU programs. In fact, if NABTU's joint labor-management training system were a four-year degree granting institution, it would be the largest in the country. But unlike a four-year degree granting institution, or even a community college, our programs offer a debt-free path to a fulfilling, life-long career.

The noble goal of the National Apprenticeship Act of 1937, commonly referred to as the Fitzgerald Act, is as important now as it was then – to safeguard the welfare of the apprentice. NABTU programs have never wavered from achieving this goal. To achieve this, there are specific standards of a registered apprenticeship program that are critical in worker training. First, there is a standard of hours for related technical instruction, which is the classroom component of apprenticeship training. Second, there is the written agreement between the apprentice and apprenticeship program, which sets forth the parameters of apprenticeship training, as well as items such as graduated wages and benefits that an apprentice will earn while he or she progresses through the program. Third, our programs and written agreements have approval by a third party, namely the U.S. Department of Labor or a state apprenticeship agency. This “three-legged stool” of apprenticeship training provides the necessary security to the individual apprentice who is put on a path to becoming a highly skilled, safe and effective worker in one of fifteen construction trades.

The benefits of NABTU Registered Apprenticeship Programs are substantial. A worker who has completed a NABTU registered apprenticeship program earns an average annual wage of \$60,000, and \$300,000 more over the life of their career compared to non-registered apprenticeship participants. Workers are guaranteed good wages, health care and retirement benefits during and after their apprenticeship. NABTU's registered apprenticeship programs also provide up-skill training for tens of thousands of journey-level workers each year with the goal of continually improving their skills, which allows them, and our contractors, to remain competitive in a constantly evolving industry and marketplace.

For our contractor partners, the benefits are substantial as well. By employing a highly skilled apprentice, our contractors see a return of \$1.30 to \$3.00 for every dollar invested in worker training. A safer workforce means decreased workplace injuries and accidents. And our contractors have direct input into our programs because each program and training center is jointly administered with an equal number of representatives from labor and a specific trade's contractors. This allows our programs to consistently meet the current demands of the construction market.

And with the enactment of the infrastructure bill, demand is going to increase, both in the number of workers needed to rebuild our infrastructure and in having a workforce trained in the latest technologies that are being deployed because of this investment.

To help meet that demand, NABTU has undertaken over the last several years the expansion of our apprenticeship readiness programs (ARPs), which on Capitol Hill are oftentimes called pre-apprenticeship programs. These workforce training programs prepare participants to enter and

successfully complete a building trades registered apprenticeship program. From 15 ARPs a decade ago to nearly 200 ARPs today, NABTU has partnered with community organizations, construction contractors, and project owners to grow the pipeline of talented individuals who seek a construction career, particularly among communities historically underrepresented in the construction workforce. We have specifically utilized these programs to recruit more women, communities of color, Native Americans, veterans and the justice involved. This initiative has a dual purpose of both helping diversify our workforce and increasing retention. As our apprenticeship readiness programs have written articulation agreements with one or more of our registered apprenticeship programs, we are able to place ARP graduates directly into apprenticeship and onto the pathway to the middle class. Investing in ARPs is both good for underserved communities, and good for business. With the inclusion of local hire provisions in the infrastructure bill, we have a real opportunity to expand these types of programs to more communities across the country.

But for our system to remain successful, and for NABTU to continue to offer ladders of opportunity for those who wish to climb them, we need job opportunities where apprentices can learn their skills in the field. Our programs simply do not bring individuals in if there is not a job opportunity for an apprentice. In construction, one job leads to another. This continuity of employment is critical as an apprentice cannot complete their apprenticeship without employment opportunities over the three to five years required to complete their program. And this is why the infrastructure bill will be so critical to training opportunities for the next generation of construction workers. The magnitude and breadth of this investment will ensure that anyone, from any

background, and any community, who wishes to have a construction career can find an opportunity to begin it.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.