

Congressional Career and Technical Education Caucus Hearing October 24, 2014.

Chairman Thompson, Chairman Langevin, members of the Congressional Career and Technical Education caucus, my name is James T. Kunz Jr. I am the Business Manager of The International Union of Operating Engineers Local 66 representing over 7000 men and women who operate heavy equipment in the construction, pipeline and utility industries in the 33 western counties of Pennsylvania and 3 counties in eastern Ohio. We also represent service technicians and others in the construction equipment sales and service industry. 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 program organized for the purpose of providing qualified heavy equipment operators and mechanic technicians to approximately 600 contractors and employers in the construction sector. This is done through either a 4 or 5 year apprenticeship program and also through continuing education and training throughout an operating engineer's career. The program is jointly managed by both labor and management. It costs about \$46,285 to graduate 1 apprentice yet the program is tuition free and funded primarily by our members and contractors. Do to the technical requirements and certifications required to become a productive journeyman an apprentice is required to attend 800 – 920 hours of training at our

site and receive a minimum of 4,000 – 6,000 hours of on the job training as well as demonstrate proficiency in the operation or repair of production construction equipment in order to graduate. By the time they graduate, in addition to proficiency in operating at least 5 different types of heavy equipment, they will have acquired a Commercial Driver's License, First Aid/CPR training, as well as certifications in Rigging, Reeving and Signaling; 40 Hour Hazmat; Forklift safety; OSHA 10 Hour Construction Outreach Safety; MSHA 24 Hour New Miner training and SafeLand USA, required to work in the oil and gas industry. In addition many will obtain their Mobile, Overhead and Tower Crane CCO certifications and their Pennsylvania Crane Operators License., as well as advanced training in the operation and use of Global Positioning Satellite systems, Biodiesel systems and sewer inspection robotics, and Infection Control Risk Assessment (ICRA) training required to work at many medical facilities. All of these certifications and technical training are necessary for an individual to have a successful life time career as an Operating Engineer. And every year we are adding new items to this list as the industry's needs change. On top of the program being tuition free the apprentice is paid while receiving their on the job training. The wage rate for an apprentice operating engineer ranges from \$17.00 to \$23.00 per hour plus benefits. Upon graduation, a skilled, productive operating engineer with

a good work ethic can earn \$22.00 to \$33.00 per hour plus a full benefit package.

These are well paying, lifetime careers.

Currently, our members are experiencing near full employment. This is substantially due to the Marcellus and Utica Shale booms as well as an increase in infrastructure and transportation spending. We expect this trend to continue and have been aggressively recruiting for our program. We work with community groups, training providers, school districts and others to find candidates. We make 40 – 50 recruitment visits to area schools and community groups as well as to numerous job fairs. Yet despite the steady employment, good wages and benefits finding qualified candidates for our program has been a challenge. Much 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 or about 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.

For our 2014 Apprenticeship program 1758 applications were issued, 747 were returned, 741 were scheduled for the test with 616 reporting for the test. Out of the 616 tested, only 196 or 32% passed and were eligible for an interview. Most of those failing to pass did so because of poor math skills. We prefer an 8th or 9th

grade math level but settled for a 5th or 6th grade level in order to get to the 32% who passed. Another test that seems to be difficult for many applicant's is "Locating Information" that tests for using charts, graphs, etc. that is absolutely necessary in order to read crane load charts and other equipment manuals.

Mechanical aptitude also seems to be a challenge.

It is important that we provide our school districts with the vocational resources and information on what life time careers are available in the building trades, on how an apprenticeship works and on the skills and qualifications required by the various trades. It is also important that programs in basic math and mechanical aptitude exist that prepare a candidate for taking an entrance exam and succeeding at an interview.

Today's focus seems to be on the STEM fields, science, technology, engineering and math, and these are very important. But in order for these fields to be successful, a construction workforce capable of building and maintaining this country's critical infrastructure is necessary. Just like those in STEM these are real careers with good wages and benefits and are as important for the economy as any other. Someone has to build it, someone has to maintain it. This is what we do.