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Cover Story

New TVA Hartsville training center sees successful first year.

Featured

The Construction Sector Operations annual conference convenes in person.

Special Section

Boilermakers stand with the people of Ukraine.

The Bradley family finds special bonds as L-146 Boilermakers.
Barbaric war on Ukraine proves need to rethink energy security

Vladimir Putin’s barbaric and criminal war on Ukraine is a nightmare unleashed by a madman and tyrant. The humanitarian disaster playing out daily on our TV screens is heartbreaking to witness. For those of us with family ties and friendships in Ukraine, the invasion is especially alarming and disturbing.

In whatever manner this crisis inevitably ends, nations must rethink their approach to energy security, for energy is central to how this war began and how the West has responded. And energy insecurity may well lead to future conflicts as nations compete for scarce resources.

Sales from Russia’s vast fossil fuel stocks (Russia is the world’s second largest exporter of natural gas and third largest exporter of crude oil) have enabled the Putin regime to modernize and expand its military and adopt an aggressive posture against its adversaries and neighbors.

With Europe dependent on Russia for 40% of its gas imports to heat homes and generate power, European members of NATO have been hesitant to risk too strong a response to Putin’s war. Instead, they have opted to reduce those imports by two thirds by the end of 2022.

For now, the EU is still getting its Russian gas, and Russia is still getting its gas revenues to help continue its war.

Some argue that Europe’s energy dependency on Russia is the result of an over-reliance on green energy. Germany, among other European countries, has banned fracking for oil and gas. It has shut down most coal-fired power plants. And it has committed to decommissioning its few remaining nuclear power plants by the end of the year.

France, which gets 70% of its electricity from nuclear plants (which produce zero carbon emissions), has been under intense pressure to wean itself off of nuclear in favor of wind and solar.

North America faces energy security challenges of its own. The US has had to reach out to the Middle East and Venezuela in an effort to increase oil supplies (while terminating its minimal Russian oil imports).
Powerful green energy lobbies in Canada and the US continue pushing for rapid adoption of wind and solar technologies while seeking to end fossil fuel subsidies and pressuring banks to deny loans for fossil projects.

Meanwhile, the supply chain for exporting North American fossil fuels suffers. Cancellation of the Keystone XL project prevents Canadian oil from reaching Gulf refineries, and ultimately foreign markets. New liquid natural gas (LNG) terminals have been impacted by environmental concerns and global market conditions.

Exports that could help friendly nations achieve more energy security—have been stymied. The West has spent enormous sums on wind and solar, but the fact remains that these investments have not produced energy security. The intermittent nature of renewables makes them less reliable than other energy sources. Renewables must be backed up with flexible gas plants or baseload coal plants.

Further, massive grid-scale batteries that can capture excess renewable energy (at times when the wind does blow and the sun does shine) are expensive and can only produce electricity for short periods.

Despite the downside of wind and solar, the war on Ukraine has led Germany to accelerate its goal of 100% renewable electricity, moving its timetable from 2050 to 2035. Other proponents of wind and solar are also calling for a more rapid build-out.

Importantly, renewables carry energy security risks of their own. The rare earth metals that are essential to manufacturing solar panels and wind turbines are concentrated in China and a handful of other countries. In 2019, China threatened the U.S. with an embargo on rare earth metals, and it has been accused of hoarding those resources for its own internal use.

China’s rare earths dominance gives that nation leverage over other countries that are dependent on renewables. That’s especially worrisome, given China’s record on humanitarian oppression, its close ties with Putin, its military expansionism and its belligerent actions toward Taiwan.

Now that energy security is in sharper focus globally, governments in North America, Europe and indeed around the world would be wise to rethink what it means to be energy secure.

The Boilermakers have long supported an approach that is well diversified. An all-of-the-above energy policy offers resilience in the face of aggression, natural disasters or other disruptions. A portfolio that includes hydrogen; fossil fuels with carbon capture, use and storage; nuclear; and renewables offers the best hope for a low-carbon, net-zero future.

We might never know to what degree Europe’s dependence on Russian gas and oil factored into Vladimir Putin’s calculation on invading Ukraine. He is an evil man. But the suffering, death and destruction we have witnessed at his hands are compelling reasons to make energy security one of our highest priorities.

Let us hope and pray, in the meantime, that the courageous people of Ukraine persevere in their desperate struggle for survival.
M.O.R.E. Work program success dominates CSO conference

Construction Sector lodge leaders met in person for the first time since 2020 at the Construction Sector Operations Conference in Marco Island, Florida Feb. 28 to March 3. The COVID-19 pandemic paused in-person gatherings; and, as International President Newton B. Jones said at the opening of the conference, it was time to gather again to discuss the impacts of a rapidly changing world.

“We’re again in a state of transition in this union,” IP Jones said as he opened the conference. “When we were in railroads, it opened up the entire country to development and progress. Then when that went away, we subsisted on power generation and shipbuilding.”

Power generation is growing more distant for the Construction Sector because the environmentalists have the ear of politicians. “And they say, ‘keep coal in the ground.’ They want the world to become something that comes from batteries. Where do batteries come from? Cobalt, nickel, cadmium—all those rare earth elements that make a battery come from the ground. So, the argument they make about keeping coal in the ground is a hollow one.”

The push for renewables has affected Boilermaker man-hours, making the need to expand work opportunities imperative. To that end, IP Jones created the M.O.R.E. Work Investment Fund to aid Boilermaker construction lodges and contractors in becoming more competitive.

“We’re talking about the recovery agreement and are asking contractors to take a look and go after jobs we haven’t been doing,” IP Jones said.

One of the ways that the M.O.R.E. Work Investment Fund has helped gain man-hours for union members is through statehouse legislation.

“The whole topic of legislative work – it’s extremely important for us to be involved,” IP Jones said. “It’s important for our business managers to assist. We’re making progress with your help.”

And the progress is impressive. National Coordinator of State Legislative Affairs Martin Williams Jr. outlined past legislative wins from California, Washington and New Jersey with ongoing initiatives in Illinois, Delaware, Virginia, Minnesota and Arizona.

Skilled workforce legislation defines certain industrial facilities as high hazard and establishes minimum requirements for safety. While legislation varies from state to state, Boilermakers want to see facility owners using a trained union workforce, earning prevailing wage backed with state enforcement. This not only increases man-hours but ensures a much safer working environment.

Williams also gave an overview of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, or RGGI, established to lower carbon emissions in the power generation sector. The Boilermakers
are against Pennsylvania’s participation mainly due to the lack of expected environmental and economic benefit. He also discussed the union’s work in advancing carbon capture and hydrogen.

The M.O.R.E. Work Investment Fund Job Targeting strategy has been a success, according to CSO Executive Director Tim Simmons. He outlined how the union is expanding man-hours and helping Boilermaker contractors bid more work. But challenges are many, with the biggest being the war on all fossil fuels. In October of 2020, Duke Energy proposed accelerating the amount of coal plants it plans to retire, adding to the 50 coal units already retired since 2010. Tucson Electric Power said it will end the use of coal to generate electricity by 2032. And that’s just two examples out of many across the United States.

“I’m still wondering how they plan to generate energy with all these plant closures,” Simmons said.

And with upheaval in the energy sector, the M.O.R.E. Work program has expanded not only man-hours but also the union’s scope of work. Contractors are bidding for work in paper mills, steel production facilities, mining operations, chemical plants, agricultural processing plants and refineries on everything from power boilers to tanks. This helps the union become less reliant on industries that are under constant political attack.

The M.O.R.E. Work Job Targeting strategy has produced over $44 million from an investment of $3 million. The return on investment shows over a 1000% increase overall, with an investment gain of more than $41 million in less than three years. Earning over 716,069 man-hours, at an average cost of $6.13 per man-hour, shows the success of a program that’s just beginning. Simmons said there is a lot of Boilermaker work out there still unclaimed and the union is going after it.

He also detailed changes to the Boilermaker Delivery System that added greater flexibility for dispatchers, business managers and agents, along with referral rules updates and an open discussion for lodge leaders on M.O.R.E. Work program initiatives.

International Director of Climate Change Policy Solutions Cory Channon informed lodge leaders about the political landscape of carbon capture and hydrogen.

“President Jones has the ear of the government in Canada,” Channon said. “If we can break through this issue of coal vs CCUS we could save many, many jobs and create more.”

He said carbon capture works, but it’s not yet feasible because of the expense. The
same goes for hydrogen. And high cost isn’t the only obstacle. Environmentalists have created a narrative that all fossil fuels are bad. He said now it’s time to create a new narrative, one of solutions.

“By the year 2030, you’ll see the rapid development of carbon capture. We have solutions and they’re proven.”

To get there, Boilermakers must be engaged in shifting the conversation about a balanced, clean energy future. “It’s going to take effort and collaboration. We need more people engaged in this.”

Rick Gerasta, senior vice president of Segal Consulting, gave an update on the National Pension Trust, noting the changes made to ensure the health of the pension have worked. And the union must stay the course for its continued health.

IVP-NE John Fultz highlighted the excellent management of the Boilermaker National Funds. “Since 2013, the BNF team has saved $985 million for our Boilermakers family by performing audits, monitor-

ing our business partners and negotiating business partner contracts,” Fultz said. In addition, there have been no rate increases for the last 12 years.

Director of Jurisdictional Services Marty Stanton talked about the three main agreements and gave an overview of jurisdictional disputes. And Marketing Manager Johnny Baca discussed recruitment initiatives and the new Spark Store where lodge leaders can order materials from brochures to booths.

BNAP Coordinator Mark Wertz discussed the National Apprenticeship Program, highlighting the National Training Conference coming in May and the updated learning management system for apprentices. Course updates include drug and alcohol awareness, all math courses, financial literacy, apprentice and instructor resources and EEO anti-harassment training.

Director of National Training Services Jeff Hughes brought lodge leaders up to date on the successful boot camp program, held at local lodges across the U.S. The current weld test pass rate at the boot camps is at nearly 96%. Hughes praised boot camp instructors for their dedication.

Director of Government Affairs Cecile Conroy discussed the Biden Administration energy policy. She said hydrogen has buzz among lawmakers; however, hydrogen becoming the “next fuel” is still a long way off. Communications Director Amy Wiser gave an overview of marketing initiatives and showed a new commercial, available for local lodges. She also gave an update on the Boilermaker app with CSO-specific updates coming soon. National Coordinator of Women in the Trades Initiatives Erica Stewart gave an update on a new film on women Boilermakers.

Lodge leaders also heard from Bank of Labor President Bob McCall, Market President of the BOL Labor Division Mike Snowden, Boilermaker History Preservation Department Director Dave Stewart and Ullico President and CEO Ed Smith.
Front and center at the CSO Conference this year was Construction Sector Operations retiring Executive Director Mark Vandiver. Members and staff honored him with gifts, a Riveter statue designed by the late Charles Jones and a plaque from Canadian brothers and sisters.

“I want to thank Mark Vandiver for all his dedication to this organization,” President Newton B. Jones said as he presented Vandiver with a Riveter statue.

Vandiver said he was grateful for his time serving the Construction Sector. “It’s been great working with all the business managers. Our union is the best union in the country. There’s no comparison.”

Tim Simmons, L-108 (Birmingham, Alabama) was named the new executive director of CSO. Previously he held the position of assistant director of CSO and director of national recruitment.
Great Lakes Area Local 169 (Detroit) earned The John F. Erickson NACBE Safety Award. The award was announced during the 2022 Construction Sector Operations conference.

NACBE Executive Director Ron Traxler presented the overall 2021 safety index during the CSO conference. Statistics from 35 NACBE contractor organizations included good news on 2021 incident rates, which were down from previous years. Lost-time injury rates went from 0.32 in 2020 to 0.28 last year, and 28 locals recorded zero compensable injury rates in 2021 compared to 26 locals in 2020. OSHA recordable rates were down to about half in 2021, at .59, from 1 in 2020. However, compensable eye injuries went up from 28 in 2020 to 30 in 2021.

L-169 BM-ST Bob Hutsell accepted the national safety award on the local’s behalf.

“As we all know, COVID has been a very big issue the last couple of years with CDC requirements and company requirements. It’s been a different challenge to man our work, but we’ve come up with solutions to that,” Traxler said.

The National Association of Construction Boilermaker Employers annually recognizes local lodges for their members’ dedication to making and keeping their workplaces safe. NACBE names one nationwide winner and one winner from each of the remaining U.S. sections. The awards are determined by the lowest injury rates followed by the highest percentage of Boilermaker man-hours worked for NACBE contractors participating in the NACBE safety index.

**Sectional award winners:**

**Northeast**
Local 13 (Philadelphia)

**Southeast**
Local 455 (Sheffield, Alabama)

**Western States**
Local 92 (Los Angeles)
NABTU’s Tradeswomen Build Nations program hosted the first of two webinars on March 5, convening tradeswomen online from across the United States and Canada. The event, which was free of charge, included a 30-minute plenary session and three panel-led sessions.

“Jobs like these used to be off limits to women,” said featured speaker Sheryl Sandberg, chief operating officer of Meta Platforms (formerly Facebook) and founder of LeanIn.org. “Now anyone with the drive and the skill to pursue these careers can do it, thanks to the women who paved the way and those who came after them—and that’s you.”

Sandberg created Lean In Circles specifically for union tradeswomen, which launched in 2020. Women who sign up are assigned into online groups made up of women from across the trades. The circles meet via Zoom to share ideas, concerns and challenges and find advice from one another. Sandberg reported that more than 700 tradeswomen have signed up so far, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Erica Stewart, National Coordinator of Women in the Trades Initiatives, M.O.R.E. Work Investment Fund, served as a webinar emcee. Stewart serves on the Tradeswomen Build Nations Board.

After the plenary session, Tradeswomen Build Nations participants were invited to click into three panel sessions. Sessions included:

- Legislative and federal updates and the benefits for tradeswomen
- Lean-in Circles for Tradeswomen—mentoring and connecting over shared experiences
- Retention and Recruitment: strategies for tradeswomen to advance in the Trades

All panel sessions, as well as the plenary session, are available online for anyone to view.


To watch the Winter Tradeswomen Build Nations Webinar, visit nabtu.org/twbn-winter-webinar/

To join a Lean In Circle for union tradeswomen, visit leanin.org/circles-for-union-tradeswomen
Boilermakers, TVA mark one year in Hartsville facility
It's been over a year since the Boilermakers opened a new training facility in Hartsville, Tennessee. And in the year since the Tennessee Valley Authority offered the union use of its empty buildings, Boilermakers have made excellent use of the space. In its first year, 280 people, mostly recruits, attended one of the many three-week boot camps—with an impressive weld testing pass rate of 95%.

“For years, Jeff Hughes and I have been working together doing boot camps for the locals and recruits,” said Jay Brophy, MOST training coordinator. “This place is great. It’s centralized, so it doesn’t matter where you’re located.”

Because of its location—about an hour outside Nashville—the facility isn’t just for Boilermakers in the Southeast. It’s also easily accessible to those in the Great Lakes and Northeast. And several of those locals are taking advantage of the facility.

Boot camp instructor Joel Kipfer, L-26 (Savannah, Georgia) said that many people want to get into the Boilermakers. This is one avenue to meet that demand.

“The point of the boot camp is to send people who are trying to get into the union. It streamlines the process,” he said. “The boot camps also have journeymen who come in to get their certifications, but we typically see more apprentices than anyone else.”

At a boot camp, new recruits undergo three weeks of training, then test with contractors to gain certifications. Contractors who’ve tested at the training center to date include Day and Zimmermann, GUMBK and Hayes Mechanical.

Lead instructor Bill Campbell from L-2020 (NTD-SE) has been teaching boot camps since they began. “I teach the majority of the time, but I still work in the field if they don’t have classes.”

One of the reasons he enjoys teaching is that he’s a part of training the next generation. “We’re fortunate to be here, to run this shop and see where it is now from where it was a year ago,” he said.

Jeffrey Hughes, Director of National Training Services for CSO, said the center has 32 operational booths—six flux-core, 16 tube and six for buddy welding—and four classrooms in another building. TVA contributed two forklifts...
and a Broderson crane so Boilermakers could set up the space for official apprentice training. There’s still a lot of open space and Hughes has plans to add an EPRI rigging structure and some virtual reality training booths, in addition to new programming.

“As we grow, we’re going to have human performance training, compliance and we’re getting ready for nuclear mechanic training,” Hughes said.

Nathan Sloas from contractor GUBMK was onsite in December testing boot camp attendees. He’s become a fan of the boot camp model for training and testing Boilermakers.

“We’ve been here since the boot camp’s inception in Muscle Shoals in 2018,” Sloas said. “We were some of the first contractors to test at the boot camp. When we get the call and we’re told they’re ready to test, they’re ready. It’s not a waste of my time when I see top notch welders coming out of the boot camp.”

Sloas noted the new facility has space to grow and evolve. “This is a valuable resource that TVA gave to the Boilermakers, because TVA sees the value in training our next generation of welders.”

The training the union provides is a boon for TVA, according to TVA Nuclear Director of Strategic Alliance Jesse James. “We value our partnership with the Boilermakers. We value the relationship and help with training.”

He said there’s a need for more welders in both nuclear and fossil plants, which is one reason why TVA appreciates the boot camp model. The craftsmanship that comes from the Boilermakers is a critical skill set for nuclear and fossil, James said. And TVA is pleased with what’s coming out of the new training facility and the boot camps, which are hitting the mark.

“I’m really impressed with the safety, the quality of work, the skills of the craftsmen and the professional demeanor when Boilermakers are at work. We need that,” James said.

“We value our partnership with the Boilermakers. We value the relationship and help with training.”

Jesse James
TVA Nuclear Director of Strategic Alliance
The TVA facility has 32 operational booths—six flux-core, 16 tube and six for buddy welding.

Boot camp attendees receive individualized training to prepare them for contractor testing. Nathan Sloas from GUBMK discusses the assignment with a boot camp attendee as James Steele from Day and Zimmermann observes.

Boot camp students from all over the United States attend training and advance their skillsets, giving students the opportunity to test for signatory contractors at the end of each phase of the camp. Boot camps are held at local lodges across the U.S. The current weld test pass rate at the boot camps is at nearly 96%. To date, 815 students have completed at least one phase of the program.
What appears by all accounts to be the last pressure vessel built at CESSCO Fabrication and Engineering Ltd. left the facility in March, widening doubt for a happy ending in the saga that’s had Local 146 (Edmonton, Alberta) Boilermakers locked out for more than 20 months. The “for lease” sign on two of CESSCO’s buildings foreshadows a foregone conclusion that the company will soon shutter.

Yet, since the lockout began in June 2020, a core group of Boilermakers has faithfully manned a picket line from 5:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day without fail and in all manner of weather, sometimes joined by family members and supported by other unions, but often alone.

“I consider this as my job now, and it isn’t easy,” says Arno Schulz. “Somebody has to show CESSCO they can’t get away with this. We’ve got to let people know that this isn’t right.”

Thirty Boilermakers were initially locked out at CESSCO, which is part of Ontario-based Canerector Inc., after the company served up “last, best and final” contract demands that would have reduced wages and pension contributions and gutted critical seniority language. The Boilermakers had been bargaining with CESSCO for over two and a half years and had not seen increases in wages or benefits in over five years. They had hoped to continue bargaining until a satisfactory compromise could be reached, but CESSCO locked them out of their jobs instead.

Multiple attempts to reach out to parent-company Canerector’s CEO Amanda Hawkins, which included invitations from IVP-Canada Arnie Stadnick and International President Newton Jones to meet for discussions, were met with silence.

As the lockout approaches the two-year mark—the allotted time the union is guaranteed to be allowed presence at CESSCO—maintaining the picket line is important not only to prove the determination of Boilermakers and Local 146, but for also for the greater local and provincial labor movement.

As Schulz explains, if other companies see the Boilermakers cower and quit, they might get the idea to follow CESSCO’s lead, trampling contracts, locking out dedicated workers in favor of cheap scab labor, and sapping labor’s strength in an already anti-union environment. Alberta is a notoriously anti-union province, and an anti-labor bill known as Bill 32 was recently made law to advance measures similar to the United States’ so-called “right to work” policies.

“I think most people don’t 100% understand why we’re there; but they see we’re out there, and they know we’re fighting for something,” Schulz says. “For me, this is part of pretty much a two-year contract out here I need to finish. So, you just come every day and do what you can. You’ve got to finish it to the end now.”
Thirty Boilermakers were initially locked out of CESSCO in June 2020. Since then, the majority moved on to find other work through Local 146, and several, sadly, crossed the picket line to continue work at CESSCO. Through it all, five Boilermakers have steadfastly walked the picket line every day to stand their ground as a union.

“Somebody has to stand up to these people. The little bit of difference we might be making? We’ve got to do it. We can’t let CESSCO, Canerector and the Hawkins family get away with it. We’ve got to let as many people as possible know what these people are all about.” – Arno Schulz, prep shop supervisor, 40 years at CESSCO

“There’s no backing down for us. We’re going to stay strong. You’ve got to be strong and think of the future for the younger generation in our union. Don’t give up, just keep going.” – Sid Gaasbeek, welder and fitter, 42 years at CESSCO

“Sometimes you don’t want to get out of bed to come here, but we have to do it. We have to give ourselves some reason. We have to be strong for our union, our members and for ourselves. We have to send a message to our members that if something happens to anybody we have to stand together. It’s very important to keep the union strong and for our solidarity.” – Don Fortin, machinist and foreman, 35 years at CESSCO
“It’s been difficult mentally to do this for so many months now, through two different winter cycles and two hot summer cycles. But at the same time, the motivation comes from when we see success in bargaining somewhere else, in other shops in the area.

As long as they’re willing to keep us locked out, we’re willing to stay out here and show the traffic on 99th Street that we’re still here. We haven’t given up. We haven’t gone away. CESSCO and Canerector don’t get to win without us being here and we’ll be right here to the end.”
— Jeff Burns, machine operator, lead hand, relief job steward, 22 years at CESSCO

“I think every once in a while about the CESSCO that once was. We had something here. This was the shop that started the Boilermakers Local 146 here. There was something good here at CESSCO—we were doing something good. Quality products went out of this shop on time and under budget. We were sending out good quality products, and no one ever came back and said we did anything wrong.

“I want to say thank you to anyone who’s shown their support and for coming out and joining us. Stand strong. Don’t take ‘no’ for an answer. If you come down this road, it might be a heavy load, and it might be a long haul.”
— Dwight Watson, pressure welder and job steward, 38 years at CESSCO

For more about the CESSCO lockout, visit www.EndOurLockout.org
Ми солідарні з Україною

We stand with Ukraine

“Міжнародне братство Бойлермейкерс солідарне з та підтримує лідерство президента Володимира Зеленського та непохитно-хоробрий український народ, який бореться за збереження своєї нації, української ідентичності та свою свободу.

Президент Зеленський та його народ показують світу, що коли люди об’єднуються, вони можуть зупинити навіть найжорстокіші сили тиранії.”

– Міжнародний президент Ньютон Б. Джонс

“The International Brotherhood of Boilermakers stands in solidarity with and praises the leadership of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the steadfastly brave Ukrainian people as they fight to maintain their nation, their identity as Ukrainians and their freedom.

President Zelenskyy and his people are showing the world that when people organize together, they can stop even the cruelest forces of tyranny.”

– International President Newton B. Jones
They are our brothers and our sisters.
Like you. Like me.
The worst horrors unleashed on them with a swift and wicked indifference to their innocence.
They are suffering. They are scared.
But they are not alone.
We stand with them.
Ми солідарні з Україною

At left, the Southern Railway Administration Building in Kharkiv, Ukraine, before the invasion. At right, a man raises his arms in anguish in front of a residential building destroyed in Kharkiv.

St. Andrew’s church in Kyiv, Ukraine, before the invasion, depicts a vibrant, lively city in contrast to a more recent image of a Kyiv street.
Local 128 retiree designs wall of recognition

Local 128 (Toronto, Ontario) retiree Matt Thomson, has a history of craftsmanship that began before he joined the Boilermakers union in 1980. Graduating his apprenticeship at the top of his class, he became a TIG welder and a certified welding inspector. He went on to spend his Boilermaker career booming across Canada, the U.S. and internationally representing L-128. During his travels, he saw something he wanted to recreate in his own local.

After working out of L-85 (Toledo, Ohio) in 2001 and completing a job, Thomson went to the hall to thank the business manager for the opportunity. Inside the local, a wall of recognition dating back to 1946 caught his eye, and that’s where he got the idea to create one for his own local. After receiving approval at a L-128 board meeting, he began the project in 2003. The wall of recognition, where currently 600 L-128 members are remembered and honored, has increased in size over the years making room for the next 20 years. Thomson updates the wall bi-annually and has vowed to do so as long as he can.

In addition to the wall of recognition, Thomson designed, built and installed railing art in the vacant space underneath the wall’s plaques as a tribute to Local 128’s upcoming 75th anniversary in May. For the railing, he compiled photos from members across the U.S. and Canada and selected 18 photos out of the thousands received; He built the frame out of tubing, and had the photos cut into 3/16-inch carbon steel plate with a liquid nitrogen cooled laser for the main frame. He then used stainless steel for the 75th medallion, welded to a frame, sandblasted and power-coated.

Thinking of the future, he attached the stainless steel medallion to allow for easy removal to accommodate future anniversaries. With the assistance of L-128 welding instructor Ed Hoffman Jr. and first year apprentice Zach Tanner, together they permanently installed the railing art at the union hall with lighting.

“I’ve had a great career as a Boilermaker. I’m very grateful,” he said. “That’s why I started this project, to give thanks for the opportunities I’ve had with the Boilermakers.”
Boilermakers union strengthens Bradley family bond

Through his visible hard work and influence, John Bradley modeled a Boilermaker lifestyle that would become a desirable career path for his children. Bradley, a 43-year Boilermaker with Local 146 (Edmonton, Alberta), is pleased that nearly all of his children followed in his footsteps.

“Five of the six kids are Boilermakers. I’m proud of them all,” Bradley says. “I couldn’t ask for anything better. I get to be on jobs with them every once in awhile. I get to watch them develop. I never worry about their security. They have really pleased me, and I can safely say all of my kids would be a benefit on the job.”

Bradley’s time in the trades holds many fond memories, many which stem from the union brothers and sisters he has met along the way and standing up for what progressed the union forward. Supporting women in the trades was one of the advancements he believed in. With two daughters who have followed in his footsteps, he has seen how his involvement directly benefited his family. He explains that while women are more accepted today than before, it makes him proud to see his daughters being a part of the Boilermaker trade.

“I never babied them,” Bradley says. “I’ve pushed them hard, and my girls have done excellent.”

Though his children’s lifestyles may look very different, all their success as Boilermakers is evident. Naomi Bradley, with 12 years at L-146, is described by her family as being a driven and ambitious single mom who has taken her career seriously.

“She is such a good welder and worker,” says her sister, Leia. “Everyone loves to be around her. She’s always the life of the lunchroom, often embarrassing me as big sisters do.”

Naomi says her hard work allows her to provide a secure life for her daughter. She is a believer in the union advantage. She adds that becoming a parent and understanding what it meant to care for her daughter strengthened her bond with her father, both on and off the job.

“My dad has been in the union for 40-plus years, and it’s how he supported his family,” Naomi says. “The tipping point for me was when I had a child to be responsible for.”

She advises women interested in the trades not to let motherhood stop them from achieving where they want to be in their careers. Naomi worked until she was...
seven months pregnant. She describes how she was consistently treated as an equal and received wonderful support from her union brothers and sisters.

Leia Bradley, who has 10 years in the local, lives in Baja, Mexico. It was important to her to be able to live the life she wanted, while also being able to take jobs that provide for her family. She recalls that growing up with her dad, traveling and living in different cities, she was raised to be a “nomad.” When Leia is on layoff, she spends her time at home in the warmer Mexico climate with her husband and son. It’s something else she has in common with her father. John Bradley also spends three months of the year enjoying the Baja and runs an RV and surf camp with Leia.

Working as a Boilermaker, it was crucial for Leia to prove to her union brothers and sisters that she had the skills it would take to become a Boilermaker, without her family name aiding her.

“I worked hard to establish my own name in the Boilermakers,” Leia says. “I didn’t work with family for about seven years. After so many years, I accomplished a great name for myself, and every single person in my family did the same.”

Now Leia has done just that and loves the opportunities she has to work alongside her own blood. “We all consider ourselves brothers and sisters in the trade; and when your actual blood is there beside you, it’s a feeling I can’t quite describe,” she says. “I’m so proud of all my family, and they have pushed me to be the best Boilermaker I can be.”

Taking a different path than his sisters, Jared Bradley, with 18 years at L-146, is now the weld centre coordinator and welding examiner/instructor at the local. Jared knew from the start that traveling wasn’t for him. His opportunity to start working with the local began by helping a few nights a week with welding courses. He wanted a job where he could be home every night with his family. When the previous coordinator retired, Jared applied for the job.

Though Jared doesn’t work on jobsites with his father or sisters anymore, that doesn’t stop them from running into each other from time to time. They even have spent time together standing up for union rights. As a family, the Bradley’s walked the CESSCO picket line together.

Jared credits his father as a bit of a recruiter within their family. He says, “He brought me into Boilermakers, my sisters, my step-brothers and I believe some cousins.” Step-brothers Jarrod Schafers and Alexander Schafers are Boilermakers too. Jarrod has six years with L-146, and Alexander is a first year welding apprentice with the local.

The family are proud Boilermakers. Each member has his or her own experience, story and path, but all agree that the Boilermaker trade has made their family stronger. Leia perhaps says it best: “I don’t think the Boilermakers would be the same if I didn’t have her [Naomi] or any of my family to share it with. It’s bonded us in a way that other families don’t get to bond.”
Not many people can say they’re still working an extremely physical job at age 70. But after 50 years in the Boilermakers as a working forger, Local 1506 (Catasauqua, Pennsylvania) member Barry Batz has earned that distinction. Batz, who began working at The Phoenix Forge Group in 1971, went to his first day on the job at 19 and grew roots, putting him at the same company for half a century.

“Barry has been a member of the Boilermakers in good standing for his entire career as a forger and is still going as strong or even stronger than forgers more than half his age,” says Frank Spaits, secretary-treasurer for L-1506.

Forging involves taking blocks or cylinders of raw metal and heating it at high temperatures so it can be shaped into usable tools, fittings or any variety of products.

And it’s not easy work, according to L-1506 President Scott Brobst, who worked alongside Batz for 36 years. “I’ve done the job he’s doing. It’s amazing at his age to still be forging,” Brobst says. “It’s unbelievable.”

Batz’s first day on the job is seared into his memory. He drove his 1965 GTO to the shop. As he walked toward the forge, he realized he’d locked his keys in the car. But that’s not the only event the made the day memorable. After his shift, he freed his keys, drove to see his girlfriend, Barbara, and proposed. When July of ’72 arrived, they tied the knot and are still going strong today.

Before Batz worked at the forge, he had a job at Goodyear. He fixed alignment, front-end, tune-up, transmission—just about anything. When work slowed at the garage, layoffs commenced. He was safe but his coworkers, who only per-
formed one specific vehicle repair, weren’t. He disliked that system and wanted a union job with union protections. He found that at the forge.

The Phoenix Forge Group, founded in 1882, produces fittings for pressure vessels, tank and cylinder fittings, electrical fittings and various other forged components. They produce quality union-made products but the work isn’t easy. It takes strength, determination and skill to lift a 120-pound billet coming out of an induction furnace. Batz can hook and lift a billet, the same as he did in his 20s.

Brobst knows how hard it is and knows the skill it takes to do the job. “Forging is a continual learning process,” he says. “It’s a dangerous job. But you get in there and get past the fear.”

Batz is still working well past retirement age and not only at the forge. He also moonlights at a funeral home, works at a golf course and, until a few months ago, completed deliveries for a local pharmacy. That’s only his current slate of jobs. In the past he’s bartended, worked at orchards, an auction house and tree farms.

But why?

“Well, let’s put it like this: All my life I’ve seen people, my father-in-law for one, have two jobs,” Batz says. “He worked for a beer distributor and did wallpapering on the side.”

His father-in-law retired at 62 and enjoyed life for only a few years before his death. Batz says he’s seen “too many people who’ve worked hard all their life who sat down and became a couch potato. They didn’t live long after that.”

Batz likes being active. He and his wife enjoy travel. Working past retirement allows them to travel without financial worry. And if Batz doesn’t have enough to occupy the 24 hours he gets each day, he also volunteers his time. He once made 250 crosses from scrap wood to give away to anyone who wanted one.

His journey through life hasn’t always been easy. Batz remembers a time at the forge—which predates the current owners—when management locked out the Boiler-makers for 16 months. He hustled to find work to care for his young family. It was a hard period in his life but there ended up being a bright spot.

The year before the lock-out, Larry Hollis started as a foreman at the shop. He and Batz became friends. Since he was management, he wasn’t in the union. And when the lockout commenced, Hollis was told to get on the floor and do the work, which he did for a short while. But he’d finally had enough and quit instead of helping the owners succeed against the union. Batz admired the decision and they’re still close friends today.

Batz embraces his life—and job—with the enthusiasm of youth. He says the work is not as physical as it used to be. The shop has changed since he started.

“We used to have like 13 to 15 hammers running. It was hell during the summer. And during the winter it was artic cold,” he says. “Working conditions have really improved in the 50 years I’ve been a forger.”

While another 50 years is statistically impossible, Batz doesn’t know how long he’ll stay as busy as he does today. For now, he’s happy. He’s content.

And—he’s impressive.

“It’s not everybody that’s a member of the union and works 50 years at the same place. It’s not everybody that’s a member of the union and works 50 years at the same place. It’s not everybody that’s a member of the union and works 50 years at the same place.

Frank Spaits
L-1506 Secretary–Treasurer

The Phoenix Forge Group celebrated Barry Batz, L-1506, 50 years at the company in 2021.
Local 28 (Newark, New Jersey) got a jump start on finding future talent—and gave back to the community—when they teamed up with Riggs Distler to host Boy Scout troop 230 on Jan. 22. The scouts sought the Boilermakers’ help to earn their welding merit badges, but the scouts left the hall with much more, including some impressive swag.

L-28 BM-ST Jim Chew said the event was an “opportunity to introduce some young people to the Boilermaker world and possibly spark the interest of some future Boilermakers.”

Chew and Dave Addison, assistant business manager and president, enlisted the help of Craig Belfatto, vice president of Riggs Distler, who provided 24 work buckets filled with new welding shields, welding jackets, welding hats, safety glasses, welding gloves, chipping picks and tape measures.

“When you have a contractor like Riggs Distler, who is so committed to the work we do, the safety of its employees and the community, you can’t go wrong,” Chew said.

After Marie Chew, the business manager’s wife, fed the crew a pancake and sausage breakfast, the scouts watched the Boilermakers’ history film and then learned how the FCAW process works. Following a comprehensive safety orientation, Chew and Addison gave each scout individualized teaching as they welded a 6-inch T-bar using the FCAW process, thus earning their merit badges.

“One of the things that impressed me most about the day was the amount of respect and responsibility that each of these scouts has shown us,” Chew said. “This is a direct impression of what not only their families are instilling in them but also the role that great organizations like the Boy Scouts of America play in helping shape our children for the future.”

As for the scouts, the parents and scoutmasters in attendance, they got an education as well. “I had no idea of the role the Boilermakers play in our everyday life,” said Joe Sites, one of the scoutmasters.

Boy Scout Troop 230 members earn their welding merit badges at Local 28 with the help of L-28 assistant business manager and president Dave Addison, in back and at left of the sign, and L-28 BM-ST Jim Chew, to the right of the sign.
BC dignitaries visit Victoria Shipyard

Local 191 (Victoria, British Columbia) hosted three representatives from the British Columbia government on a tour of Victoria Shipyard in an effort to showcase the shipyard’s capabilities and Boilermakers and other craft skills.

“Provincial government in British Columbia is working on a ‘made-in-B.C.’ shipbuilding strategy and views the shipyards as a key contributor to the economy of the province,” said IR Richard MacIntosh. “They are focused on helping the industry grow and create good family-supporting jobs.”

L-191 BM-ST Rob Taylor led the tour for Hon. George Chow, Minister of State for Trade; Hon. Rob Fleming, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure; and Andrew Mercier, Parliamentary Secretary of Skills Training, along with representatives of the Vancouver Island Metal Trades.

NABTU names Ecker Tradeswoman Hero

Local 27 (St. Louis) Boilermaker Stephanie Ecker is the latest woman to be named a Tradeswoman Hero by North America’s Building Trades Union. Each month, the program honors four journeymen or apprentices who go above and beyond in their trades.

Ecker is part of a family legacy of journeyman Boilermakers, that includes her grandfather, father, brother, uncles and two cousins. She worked became an apprentice in 2014 after having worked on permit for five years, and she graduated to journeyperson in 2019.

“She’s a tradeswoman who steps up when others step back,” said Great Lakes Boilermakers Apprenticeship Program administrative assistant Wanda Conroy in Ecker’s nomination.

New film focuses on Boilermaker women

As part of the M.O.R.E. Work program Women’s Initiatives, a new film is in process to help recruit and retain more Boilermaker women.

The film aims to interview a variety of Boilermaker women throughout the United States and Canada to address a three-pronged goal:

♀ Show the diversity of the Boilermakers’ female members.
♀ Tell the story of the challenges Boilermaker women face on the job.
♀ Help Boilermaker brothers (and sisters) better understand how to advocate for Boilermaker women.

So far, Boilermakers have been interviewed at L-549 (Pittsburg, California) and L-92 (Los Angeles), and plans are to continue working with business managers to strategically coordinate interviews over the coming months, as time permits. Footage not used in the final film will be used for other future projects.

Read more about sister Ecker here:
## SERVICE PINS

The following pins have been presented in recognition of continuous years of service in the Boilermakers union as reported by local lodge leadership.

### Local 1 • Chicago IL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Member(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Kenneth Malecki</td>
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<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Daniel Spano</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Wally Bukowski, Jamie Crandall, Stan Finley, Anthony Garcia, Timothy Lowe, Charles Parkman, Thomas Waidvogel</td>
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### Local 40 • Elizabethtown KY

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<tr>
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<td>Delmas R. Holbrook</td>
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<td>Chas W. Davis, Walter L. Wilcox</td>
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<td>Averyl Carter, Joseph F. Cecil, Ernest T. Coons, Daniel F. Everett, James R. Henley, Donnie L. Ortkiese, James B. Thompson</td>
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<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Daniel A. Frantz, Willis D. Milburn, Jerry Smith, Paul Ralph Tomas</td>
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### Change your address

Change your address online at [www.boilermakers.org](http://www.boilermakers.org) or call us at (913) 371-2640

Also please notify the secretary of your local lodge.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local 83 • Kansas City MO</th>
<th>Local 106 • Cincinnati OH</th>
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<td><strong>70 YEARS</strong></td>
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<td>Vencil W. Darrow, Lawrence C. Green</td>
<td>Tony Stahl</td>
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<td>Lorenzo S. Rodriguez</td>
<td>Danny Burt</td>
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<td>Mike Eskridge</td>
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<td><strong>50 YEARS</strong></td>
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<td>James T. Kinsella</td>
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<td>Patrick A. Wentland</td>
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<td>Gary C. Bee, Sherman Bignell, Timothy Hynes, Steven R. Sampson</td>
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<td>Steven D. Brown, Curtis R. Brownell, Bruce G. Huber, Walter R. Potter, Ross M. Quick, Randy J. Steele</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mark Campbell, Vernon Jackson, Ronald Smith</td>
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IN MEMORIAM

With deepest sorrow, the Boilermakers union records the death of these members as reported to the International Secretary-Treasurer's office and extends heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved families.

NTL Allen, Michael V.  
NTL Bales, Steven R.  
NTL Bradley, Danny L.  
NTL Gianci, Anthony E.  
NTL Cook, Ronald A.  
NTL Crawford, Richard D.  
NTL Dickson, Donald L.  
NTL Downey, Timmy L.  
NTL Duncan, Clindl L.  
NTL Feiner, Robert  
NTL Frantz Jr., James B.  
NTL Grimes, Denzele R.  
NTL Hardwick, Douglas C.  
NTL Hittner, Gary W.  
NTL James, Robert L.  
NTL Laakkonen, William M.  
NTL Laduke, William W.  
NTL Lumley, Tifton T.  
NTL McCreery, Ronald W.  
NTL Milburn, Stanley L.  
NTL Palo, Jack R.  
NTL Roundtree, Bill H.  
NTL Short, Burnice T.  
NTL Smith, Gerald D.  
NTL Snowden, William E.  
NTL Stanley Jr., Fred T.  
NTL Steinhauser, Ellis A.  
NTL Stone, Paul H.  
NTL True, Charles A.  
NTL Wolfe, Tom H.  
1 Hayes, Charles J.  
1 Jerred, Robert R.  
1 Turner, Frank R.  
4 Unsworth, Kenley  
5 Bennett, Calvin  
5 Curson, Donald J.  
6 Anderson, Peter J.  
6 Archer, Thomas R.  
6 Brady, John R.  
6 Cances, Frank A.  
6 Flores, Emilio V.  
6 Gonzales, Alfonso  
6 Hart, Jack B.  
6 Kendrick, Edgar D.  
6 Kurspeski, Walter A.  
6 Maseda, Frank A.  
6 Naves, Jose A.  
6 Ortiz, Jose G.  
6 Otvos, Francis R.  
6 Uili, Papu  
6 Walker, Charles T.  
7 Melski, William P.  
7 Mulhollan, Cleave E.  
7 Persico, Richard V.  
7 Byrd, George J.  
7 King, Jerry M.  
7 Ritter Jr., Jack L.  
7 Siemion, Michael  
8 Brogan, Edward J.  
8 Lattin, Steve R.  
8 Everettts, Randy R.  
8 Fink, Howard B.  
8 Kulyik, Stephen J.  
8 Loftis, James  
8 Monahan, James W.  
9 Nulton, Dean M.  
13 Richards, Jacob G.  
13 Roberts, Clifford L.  
13 Schaffner Jr., Dale R.  
13 Sweeney, John L.  
13 Wallauer, Richard A.  
14 Allen, Jesse L.  
14 Beasley, Edward D.  
14 Brown, Ryan D.  
14 Coursey, Raymond O.  
14 Goodrich, Timothy F.  
14 Harris, Larry R.  
14 Johnson, Jimmie L.  
14 Lang, Robert M.  
14 Lee, Jessie J.  
14 Nobles, Russell C.  
14 Smith, Redic F.  
14 Stewart, George F.  
14 White, Johnny E.  
14 Williams, Benton W.  
14 Boschert, James D.  
14 Clark, Dennis L.  
14 Cline, James M.  
14 Nicholson, Otis H.  
14 Pope, Kenneth D.  
14 Vincent, Edward W.  
14 Bondura, Russell L.  
18 Ghizzone, Robert J.  
18 Kearney, Daniel V.  
18 Maffei, Louis D.  
18 Middleton, Robert J.  
18 Parkell, Michael J.  
18 Singh, Wilson M.  
18 Verdesco, Corrado  
18 Carrigan, Theodore  
18 Defreitas, Todd J.  
18 Pepin, Donald M.  
18 Abernathy, Charles W.  
18 Key, Bobby L.  
18 McHone, Billy R.  
18 Williams, Billy J.  
18 Young, James A.  
18 Quinlan, Daniel J.  
18 Berard, Glenn A.  
18 Beveridge, Boyd W.  
18 Bonicard, Jerry D.  
18 Castillo, Luis A.  
18 Gilhaus, Richard D.  
18 Hambrice, Gary L.  
18 Lormand, Murray A.  
18 Payne, Grover W.  
18 Perry, Mack E.  
18 Picou, Arthur  
18 Smith, Cleveland E.  
18 Bennett, Harold T.  
18 Brown, William M.  
20 Barnes, Charles D.  
20 Chambers, Michael D.  
20 Jackson, Daniel D.  
20 Parish, James W.  
20 Rager, James K.  
20 Raff, Arthur P.  
20 Revlett, Mark A.  
20 Ringstaff, Eric M.  
20 Summers, Ricky L.  
22 Thomas, Paul R.  
22 Varnes, Robert E.  
22 Cox, Benston M.  
22 Crumpler, Richard D.  
23 Eppard, Rudolph C.  
23 Jackson, Michael G.  
23 Morris, Grant C.  
23 Skeens, Charles J.  
23 Thompson, M. A.  
23 Warren Jr., Vance G.  
23 Krause, Richard L.  
23 Roberts, O'Neal V.  
23 Yates, Robert T.  
23 Christian, Ronald W.  
23 Eds, Carl E.  
23 Tucker, Mark D.  
23 Duran, Jose M.  
23 Giebelhouse, Henry S.  
25 Morris, Gerald F.  
25 Ragan, Loren O.  
25 Ramage II, Walter  
25 Swisher, Albert B.  
25 Bryden, James R.  
25 Hache, Laurier  
25 LeBlanc, Clarence  
25 Linco, Leslie F.  
25 MacRury, Leroy  
25 Knight, Lance A.  
25 Maxey, Curtis A.  
25 Blanchard, Parry L.  
25 Brown, Joe S.  
27 Anderson, Morris O.  
27 Armstrong, Jackie W.  
27 Baxley, Floyd A.  
27 Brahey, Benton R.  
27 Cavitt, Martin B.  
27 Courter, Ricky A.  
27 Hoyt, Ronald L.  
27 James, Glen D.  
27 Knight, Phillip K.  
27 Laster, Jess F.  
27 Merando Jr., Leo K.  
27 Sandstrom, Jesse D.  
27 Spencer Jr., Earl L.  
27 Armstrong, Harry L.  
27 Avery, Joshua E.  
27 Dey, Stephen A.  
27 Ellis, Raymond L.  
27 Euler, Donald L.  
27 Grajczyk, Carl R.  
27 Martin, George E.  
27 Rodgers, Harold R.  
27 Rompf, Mark A.  
27 Rompf, Timothy L.  
27 Varga Jr., Robert  
27 Martin, Keola W.  
27 Brophy, John A.  
27 Bukowski, Ian M.  
27 Coca, Vasile  
28 Davis, Herman H.  
28 Davis, Jake  
28 Durzo, Frank  
28 Gheleta, Gheorghe  
28 Hernandez, Arturo  
28 Honegger, Adolfo E.  
28 Luckteig, Thomas C.  
28 Martinez, Ruben  
28 Mejia, Miguel  
28 Padilla, Luis  
28 Slay, Robert J.  
28 Vick, David P.  
30 Blaylock, Thomas R.  
30 Glass, Gary L.  
30 Kaupp, David A.  
30 Smith Jr., Joseph R.  
30 Bacungan, F. C.  
30 Baseden, Otis J.  
30 Bell, Rudolph R.  
30 Bowser, Terry E.  
30 Cooper, Michael L.  
30 Crookston, Bill T.  
30 Denny, John H.  
30 Eusebio, Marlon C.  
30 Graham, Harry E.  
30 Ince, Cecil J.  
30 Jung, Paul L.  
30 Kravets, Ivan  
30 Lindsey, Russell D.  
30 McCloud, Ronnie L.  
30 Meier, Alden G.  
30 Na, Tong C.  
30 Ochs, James A.  
30 Paik, Myong P.  
30 Selby, Harvey J.  
30 Senn, George L.  
30 Solis, Rafael  
30 Stoppa, Erich E.  
30 Swenson, Swen H.  
30 Thompson, Stanley D.  
30 Vinyard, Olin L.  
30 Weigand, William F.  
30 Wood, Mark A.  
30 Wright, Floyd C.  
30 Alisp, Tony E.  
30 Applegate, William T.  
30 Back, Robert  
30 Bareswilt, Lloyd G.  
30 Burnett, Clayton S.  
30 Carter, Robert E.  
30 Ferguson, Russell L.  
30 Fox, Mark W.  
30 Gagnon, Real  
30 Hall, David W.  
30 Hoffner, Thomas E.  
30 Horn, Ricky L.  
30 Kirk, Jack R.  
30 Leach, Gary T.  
30 Martin, William D.  
30 Petty, William L.  
30 Regester, Gregory  
30 Roach, David W.  
30 Gagnon, Real  
30 Robbins, Roy D.  
30 Robbins, Stanley M.  
30 Roof, Lowell T.  
30 Shields Sr., Stephen W.  
30 Taylor, Martin W.  
30 Turnage, Carl T.  
30 Viel, Stephen L.  
30 Webb, Harold G.  
30 Wilburn, Roger W.  
30 Dae, Ronald W.  
30 Clower, Bill R.  
30 Foster, William L.  
30 Ryan, Douglas G.  
30 Singleton, Clarence L.  
30 Stout, Rick D.  
30 Gigstead, Richard  
30 Schweitzer, Daniel A.
During WWII, the United States’ 14.5 million workers rose to the challenge and answered President Roosevelt’s call to build the “arsenal of democracy.” Workers supported the country and pledged to stop strikes and walkouts during the war, which they did with few exceptions. Price controls had been in effect during the war and, to a great extent, unions voluntarily accepted stagnant wages to support the war effort. But after the war, Boilermakers and all wage workers had a new enemy—inflation. Goods that had been unavailable or rationed during the war were again available but at high cost with prices rapidly rising. Prices for a variety of goods rose 18% in 1946 alone. Food costs skyrocketed 34%.

Workers simply couldn’t afford their lives unless their wages increased to catch up with inflation. So, when negotiations failed, they went on strike. In 1946, more workdays were lost to work stoppages than in the six years that came before as workers used their power to demand wage increases. And Congress, with its ally the National Association of Manufacturers, fumed at worker strikes and slowdowns.

People were clamoring for more goods at the same time union members were striking for better conditions, setting up negative public perception of worker strikes. Media-fueled frenzy over communism infiltrating unions also drove anti-union sentiment. This opened the door for greedy business owners and their friends, the anti-union Republicans who dominated Congress, to make laws to weaken unions.

While several bills were under consideration to limit worker power, the worst of the lot passed Congress and became law: the Taft-Hartley Act. There were many terrible parts of this act that still hurt unions today, with one of the most egregious outlawing the “closed shop.” This opened the door for right-to-work laws (more aptly described as right-to-work for less) that allowed nonunion workers to benefit from union contracts and protections without joining the union or paying dues.

But that wasn’t the only aspect of this hit job against unions. Taft-Hartley separated workers into classes by excluding supervisors and independent contractors. It also permitted employers to petition for a union certification election, undermining the ability of workers and unions to control the timing of an election. Taft-Hartley also established the right of management to campaign against union organizing drives—paving the way for what we see today with captive audience meetings and other nefarious tactics businesses use to cripple union drives for recognition.

Anti-union powers in the U.S. were successful in slowly eroding union power as union density among workers dropped from 35% in the 1940s-50s to 10% today. The good news is that workers have massive power when they band together for collective action. The U.S. has seen increased organizing across many industries, especially since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. With a renewed understanding of the power of solidarity, the time is ripe for growth in the union movement.
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