



March 31, 2009

The Honorable Lynn Woolsey
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Workforce Protections
House Education and Labor Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Price
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Workforce Protections
House Education and Labor Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Woolsey and Ranking Member Price:

On behalf of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) and its 25,000 contractors, subcontractors, material suppliers and construction related firms across the nation, I am writing to thank you for holding today's hearing on "Green Jobs and Their Role in Our Economic Recovery." ABC member companies have been at the forefront of green construction since before this terminology came into use. However, we are greatly concerned with recent statutory language which would prohibit over 84% of the construction industry from accessing federal dollars to train construction workers in green fields of works and strongly urge you to maintain open access to these important funds.

Open shop contractors, which make up over 84 % of the private construction industry, recognize the growing market force of green buildings and are adapting their training methods to prepare workers for this ever expanding segment of the construction industry. In fact, for the past several decades millions of square feet of "green" and LEED certified building space has already been built using open shop contractors and the specialized skills of their workforce.

ABC chapters and member companies are actively engaged in training workers in a wide variety of skilled occupations and are constantly striving to keep pace with technology and innovation in order to make certain America has the skilled workforce it deserves, and that all American workers, regardless of union affiliation, enjoy equal opportunity of access to critical job training. However, the continued participation of open shop contractors, and the job opportunities for over 84% of the construction workforce they employ, in the booming green building market is threatened by the efforts of many in Washington, D.C. to exclude non-union companies and training providers from participating in new government funded green jobs training programs.

The Green Jobs Act, enacted as part of the "Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007" which was signed into law in December 2007, establishes National Energy Training Partnership Grants to fund training programs targeted at creating an efficient energy and renewable energy skilled workforce. Specifically, the Green Jobs Act would require any entity applying for these grants to partner with organized labor. The reality is that this language would bar the numerous open shop training programs from receiving this grant funding.

Organized labor makes up just 16% of the private construction workforce and likely represents a similar amount of work in the green building market. Given the desire to see a continued increase in the use of green building and green technology, it seems that limiting the ability to participate in green training to such a small percentage of the construction industry would make this growth difficult. If the green building market is going to continue to expand in the coming years as some groups predict, the participation of the open shop will be a crucial factor in ensuring there are enough skilled workers to meet the demand.

To that end, ABC, along with many other construction and business groups, strongly supports the “Green Jobs Improvement Act” soon to be introduced by Congressman John Kline which would amend the Workforce Investment Act to allow both union and open shop training providers access to the federally funded energy efficiency and renewable energy worker training programs. This bill would give all workers the opportunity to train in the ever increasing field of green construction and would not block certain training providers access simply because they choose not to be affiliated with organized labor.

The advances in the technology and skill involved in green building, and the benefits of their use, is indeed a welcome trend for contractors, skilled workers and the end user. It is our view that the most efficient path to encouraging this continued growth of this sector is by giving all training providers, regardless of union affiliation, access to federal training programs so that the greatest numbers of workers can be trained in green jobs. In today’s tough economic times, especially in the construction industry, Members of Congress have a responsibility to provide all workers with training opportunities paid for by their tax dollars.

Again, thank you for your work, and we look forward to your continued efforts to promote green building opportunities for all contractors.

Sincerely,



Brewster B. Bevis
Senior Director, Legislative Affairs
Associated Builders and Contractors

cc: Members of the House Subcommittee on Workforce Protections