



Since 1952

THE BUILDING TRADESMAN

Official Publication of the Michigan Building and Construction Trades Council
Serving the highly skilled men and women in Michigan's building trades unions

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SHORT CUTS



Candidates picked for Aug. 3 primary

Absentee ballots will be mailed soon in Michigan for the Aug. 3, Primary Election.



The following candidates have been endorsed by the Greater Detroit Building and Construction Trades Council Political Action Committee for the election. The list reflects candidates who have requested an endorsement and have been screened by the PAC.

Please note that since this is a primary ballot, Michigan election law requires you to vote a straight Democratic or Republican ballot – your ballot will be spoiled if you vote for a Dem for one office and a Republican for another.

Pontiac Mayor: Tim Greimel

Pontiac City Council (District 4): Randy Carter

Sterling Heights City Council: Henry Yanez, Michael Radtke

Taylor Mayor: Alex Garza

City Council: Jill Brandana

Dearborn City Council: Mike Sareini

Detroit Labor Day Parade canceled

A note from the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO:

“After speaking with the leadership of all the major Labor Day March participants, it has been decided that we will continue to practice COVID-19 protocols for the remainder of the year and not have any large gatherings. Therefore, regretfully, the 2021 Labor Day March has been cancelled.”

This is the second year in a row the Detroit Labor Day march has been canceled.

Labor Day Mackinac Bridge Walk is a go

From the Mackinac Bridge Authority: “The 2021 Mackinac Bridge Walk is still on. At this time no changes have been announced to the walk for 2021. Due to Covid, there was no walk in 2020 and there will probably be changes required for 2021.”

“The Mackinac Bridge Authority had a Special Meeting on May 18, 2021, to discuss the Mackinac Bridge Walk and the Board Members expressed a strong desire to continue this year’s walk if it can be safely done. They will revisit the subject at their July 9 meeting or earlier if new information becomes available.”

The walk is traditionally held on Labor Day, which is on Monday, Sept. 6, this year.

Biden makes union-friendly NLRB pick

The National Labor Relations Board currently has a 3-1 majority favoring Republicans, but that is about to change as President Biden has announced his pick for a vacant seat.

In his May 27 announcement, Biden selected Gwynne Wilcox, a New York lawyer who specializes in employee rights.

Biden will then get to select another Democrat in August when Republican members William J. Emanuel’s term ends. This would give Democrats control over the board.

Quotable

“Make it a rule of life never to regret and never to look back. Regret is an appalling waste of energy; you can’t build on it; it’s only for wallowing in.”

—Katherine Mansfield (1888 - 1923)



THE ONE-OF-A-KIND SCAFFOLDING used to support Seaway Painting painters on the Mackinac Bridge’s North and South towers over the past few years has been removed as the project nears completion. The platform not only allowed painters a safe and efficient base and enclosure to do their work, it was an engineering award-winner.

Photos courtesy of MDOT Photo

Mackinac Bridge’s innovative scaffold, freshly painted ivory towers get noticed

By Marty Mulcahy
Editor

ST. IGNACE—Michigan’s greatest engineering achievement and most notable landmark looks as good as ever, but even more important, the metal skin on its towers is now protected as well as it has been since it opened in 1957.

The Mackinac Bridge is ready to take on all elements – wind, sun, rain, snow, ice, bird droppings – thanks to the work over the past few years by Michigan Painters District Council 1M tradespeople employed by Seaway Painting. And their work was made much, much easier by the use of a one-of-a-kind, innovative, award-winning scaffold system that improved workers’ safety and helped productivity.

The 15-member crew of Seaway painters are expected to wrap up their painting project on the bridge’s South Tower in August, after completing the North Tower two years ago. The project for both towers came with a price tag of more than \$12 million. The painters have completed the ivory colored exterior, and are currently working in the tight internal “cells” of the South Tower, sandblasting and painting their way through the 552-foot-tall structure.

“It’s been a great, safe project, and it’s been great to work with the Mackinac Bridge Authority,” said Steve Vlahakis, owner of Seaway Painting of Livonia. “And our crew of union painters, who have come from all over Michigan and around the country, have done just a great job. We also have people who have been with us a long time, and I’m really proud of the work ev-

eryone had done.”

The multi-year project involved the first inside and out complete sandblasting of the old paint from the two Mackinac Bridge towers, and then the application of three coats of paint to bare metal: a zinc primer, an epoxy intermediate coat and a urethane top coat in the familiar

ivory color. Vlahakis said there are some 5,000 claustrophobic cells in a single tower – “you can get lost in there” – and blasting and painting all the surfaces is a laborious process. Some of the cells “have never been touched” and have original paint on them, Vlahakis said.

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THE SCAFFOLD SYSTEM was designed to closely hug the 552-foot-tall Mackinac Bridge bridge towers, even as the towers taper as they rise. The enclosed 24-foot-tall scaffold helped allow the safe collection of old paint that was blasted off the towers. Cables suspended from new outriggers at the top of the towers allow the movement of the platform.

Nonresidential construction slides again, but there’s still optimism

Nonresidential construction spending in April declined for the fifth-straight month to a two-year low as demand waned for numerous public and private project categories, the Associated General Contractors reported June 1. Construction project times are lengthening, and other challenges include longer delivery times for materials, as well as fast-rising prices for building goods.

“Both public and private nonresidential spending overall continued to shrink in April, despite a pickup in a few spending categories from March,” said Ken Simonson, the AGC’s chief economist. “Ever-growing delays and uncertainty regarding backlogs and delivery times for key materials, as well as shortages and record prices, are likely to make even more project owners hesi-

tant to commit to new work.”

Actual spending in U.S. construction spending in April totaled \$1.52 trillion at a seasonally adjusted annual rate, up 0.2 percent from March and 9.8 percent higher than the pandemic-depressed rate in April 2020. As has been true for the past several months, the year-over-year gain was limited to residential

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With all the focus on infrastructure, another much smaller budget proposal has flown under the radar. The Biden administration’s proposed 2022 budget of \$14.2 billion for the Department of Labor (DOL) is a drop in the bucket compared to \$2 trillion, but it has important implications for OSHA and other agencies that fall under DOL’s purview.

The proposed budget is a 14 percent increase from 2021 and is \$1.4 billion more than what former President Trump proposed. How would DOL use that increase? Enforcement. The proposal calls for \$2.1 billion for OSHA and the Wage and Hour Division. This



17 percent budget increase would boost enforcement by allowing OSHA to hire more inspectors. The agency lost about 14 percent of its staff under the Trump administration. To get an idea of how little funding OSHA currently has to work with, the AFL-CIO’s annual Death on the Job report noted that the agency’s 2021 budget gives them less than \$4 per U.S. worker. In addition to safety and health inspections, the

Pension rescue does an enormous amount of good for union plans

Editor’s note: Within the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act, adopted in March with slim Democrat majorities in Congress and President Biden’s signature, provided was an \$86 billion bailout to the nation’s financially troubled multiemployer defined benefit pension plans, including a number in the building trades. Following is a report that provides some perspective on the newly invigorated – but still fragile – financial position of some multiemployer pensions.

By Josh Shapiro
Groom Law Group

After many years of discussion and debate, Congress has taken action on the impending multiemployer pension crisis – which, if left unaddressed, would have led to the failure of over 150 plans covering roughly 1.5 million active and retired workers.

Although primarily aimed at the COVID-19 pandemic, the recently passed American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provides special financial assistance to failing

But... ‘All the instabilities and weaknesses that allowed roughly 150 plans to become hopelessly underfunded remain’

multiemployer plans that will keep these plans afloat for many years to come. ARPA also contains temporary funding relief that is broadly available to multiemployer pension plans. Despite extensive negotiations that sought a bipartisan solution to the pension crisis, ARPA was passed along strictly partisan lines.

While ARPA does not address the fundamental weaknesses of the multiemployer pension system that led to the current crisis, it has averted the imminent collapse of the system, which is good news for participants and contributing employers. The

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\$2.2T infrastructure plan holds sway at trades conference

By Mark Gruenberg
PAI Staff Writer

WASHINGTON (PAI) – President Joe Biden’s proposed infrastructure plan – what’s in it and what workers want to include in it – dominated the discussion at the one-day virtual legislative conference of North America’s Building Trades Unions.

“This year has been unlike any other,” NABTU President Sean McGarvey led off on June 5, referring to the coronavirus pandemic, which sent unemployment soaring, hampered construction work and forced the conference itself, like so much else, virtually onto Zoom.

But it also presented a giant opportunity that the 14 NABTU unions and their members can take advantage of, McGarvey said. He lauded their past work in convincing lawmakers to insert pro-worker provisions into congressional rescue acts, and urged them to keep at it.

Workers’ lobbying and contacts with lawmakers at home pave the way for NABTU and construction union contacts and effectiveness on Capitol Hill, McGarvey said. He also gave out a phone number, 202-951-8059, for workers to call, via NABTU, to contact lawmakers.



REBUILDING ROADS is only part of the construction to-do list if the infrastructure plan passes.

The virus helped bring Biden – and his comprehensive infrastructure plan – to the Oval Office to succeed President Donald Trump, who talked an infrastructure game, personally

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Biden’s budget would be a boon to construction

By Mark Gruenberg
PAI Staff Writer

WASHINGTON (PAI) – If a federal budget blueprint is a political roadmap, and it is, then Democratic President Joe Biden’s \$6 trillion spending plan for the fiscal year starting Oct. 1 is a roadmap of progressive priorities.

And it drew praise from union leaders. The GOP and its business backers reacted with criticism and disdain.

Biden unveiled his budget’s details, crammed into more than 1,000 pages of small print, on the afternoon of May 28, but congressional committees, working from a 54-page preview he published more than a month before, are already holding hearings on some key sections.

“President Biden’s proposed federal budget fulfills his promise to Build Back Better with significant

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OSHA eyes budget hike; resumes ‘naming and shaming’

By Nick Fox
Laborers Health and Safety Fund of North America

Infrastructure proposals like President Biden’s \$2 trillion plan are getting most of the attention in the construction industry, and with good reason. The proposal represents a once-in-a-generation investment in America’s roads, bridges, water system and energy grid, and has the potential to create millions of good-paying union jobs.

increased funding would allow more investigations into workers being misclassified as independent contractors, which continues to be one of the most common ways that workers are denied safe and healthy working conditions.

Unemployment insurance. The proposed DOL budget would also – for the first time in decades – update how unemployment insurance funding

Unemployment insurance funding

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Viewpoints



Why the PRO Act is vital

Something I've just learned about Amazon—one of America's most profitable and fastest-growing corporations, headed by the richest man in the world:

According to the Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Amazon warehouse workers sustained nearly double the rate of serious injury incidents last year as did workers in non-Amazon warehouses.

In addition, largely because Amazon failed to provide its workers adequate protective equipment during the pandemic, the corporation admits that nearly 20,000 employees were presumed positive for the coronavirus.

Workers who spoke out about these unsafe workplace conditions were fired.

Amazon boasts of paying its workers at least \$15 an hour. But that comes to about \$30,000 a year, hardly enough for a family to get by on.

The explosive growth of Amazon's army of poorly-paid and ill-treated hourly workers is emblematic of the long-term decline of America's middle class and levels of economic inequality America hasn't seen since the late nineteenth century's Gilded Age.

This has strained the social fabric of the nation — fueling anger and frustration, a rising tide of drug overdoses and deaths of despair, even tempting some working-class people to embrace Trumpism and white nationalism.

The success of Amazon's "shock and awe" campaign against workers who dared try to bring a union to their Bessemer, Alabama warehouse exemplifies the immense political power the architects of this growing inequality now wield. It's an alarming omen of the future.

In Amazon warehouses like Bessemer, workers are treated like robots. Algorithms relentlessly impose dangerous production quotas. They get two 30-minute breaks each ten-hour day. Every movement is monitored.

Amazon delivery drivers report being instructed to turn off their safety apps so they can meet their quotas. Others report having to urinate into bottles because of delivery timing pressures.

Even though public support for unions is as high as it's been in 50 years — 60 million American workers would join a union today if they could — Bessemer workers were outgunned by a behemoth whose market capitalization exceeds Australia's GDP.

The National Labor Relations Act makes it illegal for employers to fire workers for trying to organize a union. But the penalties employees for violating the Act are so laughably small (re-hiring the worker and providing back pay) that employers like Amazon routinely do it anyway.

Amazon may be the future of the American economy, but if that future is to have room for the kind of prosperous working families that 50 years ago defined American capitalism, unions are critical.

In March, the House of Representatives passed legislation designed to level the field. It's called the Protect the Right to Organize Act (PRO Act). The Senate version has 47 Democratic co-sponsors. It needs three more to give the PRO Act a fighting chance of getting to Joe Biden's desk.

The PRO Act would end many of the practices Amazon used to defeat the union effort in Bessemer. Real penalties would be imposed on companies and corporate officers who retaliate against union advocates or otherwise violate the National Labor Relations Act.

The PRO Act would make it easier for workers to form a union, with the aim of protecting them from unfair working conditions.

The PRO Act alone won't end economic inequality or return prosperity and opportunity to America's working families. But passage of the PRO Act would help.

It would also send a clear signal that ours is truly a government "of the people" — such as the million people who work for Amazon today, not the one multi-billionaire at the top, and of the vast majority of Americans who are working harder than ever today and getting nowhere, in America's Second Gilded Age.

Robert Reich
Professor of Public Policy
University of California-Berkeley

The Building Tradesman welcomes your letters to the editor. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and to shorten them. Please sign the letter and include a way to contact you.

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Better wages, better workers

By Jim Hightower

A recent headline blared: "Labor shortages end when wages rise."

Gosh, Captain Obvious, what an amazing discovery! Someone notify the Nobel Prize committee, for surely this revolutionary revelation will win this year's prize in economics. Better yet, someone notify that gaggle of Republican governors whose theory of labor economics begins and ends with the medieval demand that workers be whacked with a stick to make them do what the bosses want.

At issue is the furious complaint by restaurant chains, nursing homes, Big Ag, and other low-wage employers that they have a critical labor shortage. It seems that millions of workers today are hesitant to take jobs because there's no affordable childcare, or the jobs they're offered expose them and their families to COVID-19, or the work itself is abusive and demeaning... or all of the above.

Business chieftains wail that they've been advertising thousands of jobs for waiters, poultry workers, nursing assistants, and such, but they can't get enough takers. So, corporate-serving governors have rushed to their rescue. Shouting "Whack 'em with a stick," these mingy politicians are stripping away jobless benefits, trying force workers to take any crappy job they're offered. It gives new meaning to the term "workforce."

But wait, there's an honest way to get the workers they need: Offer fair wages! As the owner of a small chain of restaurants in Atlanta notes when he stopped lowballing wages he not only got the workers he needed, but "We started to get a better quality of applicants." That translated to better service, happier customers, and more business.

The real economic factor in play here is not wages, but value. If you treat employees as cheap, that's what you'll get. But if you view them as valuable assets, that's what they'll be — and you'll all be better off.

(via www.otherwords.org)



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The Michigan Building and Construction Trades Council

Mighty Mac's innovative scaffold gets noticed

(Continued from Page 1) said. The Mackinac Bridge Authority said the new coating should last about 35 years.

The original paint is lead-based and Seaway is required to contain 100 percent of the paint as it is removed and shipped to an appropriate landfill.

Photos of the original painting of the towers in the 1950s show paint being applied with brushes and spray guns. One painter we talked who worked on the bridge described being strapped in a bosun's seat, dangling from rope and applying the ivory color to a spot on a tower they had missed earlier. He reported being scared when the wind blew him about 15 feet away from the tower, but he fortunately came back feet first.

Enhanced worker safety and environmental concerns are much more of a priority these days, and the invention of the scaffolding is a reflection of this. Looking for a safer and secure way to allow painters access to the towers, Seaway employee Dan Halberg made a mock-up of a unique scaffolding system in his St. Ignace kitchen. With a design by Ruby+Associates and metal fabrication by Moran Iron Works of Onaway, the plan worked, and was used Seaway painters. The design won awards, earned a patent, and is being studied for use the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, Vlahakis said.

The scaffold design by Ruby+Associates took home the Best Neighboring State Project Award given by the Structural Engineers Association of Illinois 2019 Excellence in Structural Engineering Annual Awards.

And in December, the scaffolding set-up by Ruby+ Associates was named the Outstanding Project Winner in the "Other Structures" category of the National Council of Structural Engineers' (NCSEA) "Excellence in Structural Engineering Awards."

"The judges were impressed by the solutions provided for the unique challenges on this project," said Carrie Johnson, chair of the NCSEA Awards Committee. "The engineers were tasked with creating a painting platform. This was a two-story, movable steel and aluminum structure capable of sustaining 100 mph winds. The solution eliminated the need for almost 400 feet of scaffolding."

In February 2020, Seaway Painting won the E. Crone Knoy Award from the Society for Protective Coatings, an industry group focused on protecting and preserving concrete, steel, and other industrial and marine structures.



CONVENTIONAL SCAFFOLDING was used by Seaway Painting workers to paint lower parts of the 552-foot-tall Mackinac Bridge towers.

Photo courtesy of MDOT Photo

The award "recognizes an outstanding achievement in industrial or commercial coatings work that demonstrates innovation, excellence in craftsmanship, or the use of state-of-the-art techniques or products to creatively solve problems or provide long-term service."

Then in March 2020, Ruby+Associates received one of five Engineering Honorable Conceptor Awards from the American Council of Engineering Companies of Michigan at their annual Engineering and Surveying Excellence Awards Gala.

The Mackinac Bridge Authority said the scaffold platforms were custom designed and built for painting crews to enclose and move up and down the bridge's towers above the roadway deck, first during the 2017-2018 project to strip and repaint the bridge's North Tower, then again doing the same on the South Tower. The platforms encircled the tower legs and allowed workers to adjust it to accommodate the towers tapering near the top. Another platform allowed access to the struts joining the tower legs. The design allowed for the enclosure and capture of paint and sandblasting materials.

Vlahakis said the unique scaffolding, which has no pros-

pect of being used for the next three decades, has been scrapped. It would otherwise continue to be taxed and need to be stored, he said.

The award nomination noted that the design needed to withstand winds regularly exceeding 100 mph and allow for the enclosure and capture of paint and sandblasting materials. The original paint is lead-based and Seaway is required to contain 100 percent of the paint as it is removed and ship it to an appropriate landfill facility. The new paint, which is zinc-based, is expected to last at least 35 years, with periodic maintenance.

"There's been great quality,

union craftsmanship on that bridge since day one, and that has never changed over the years," said Mackinac Bridge Authority Board Chairman Patrick "Shorty" Gleason, a Local 25 iron worker. "We're just finishing a 10-year program on painting the bridge, and it's really no surprise that you're seeing top-notch work today, with both the great painting and with the making of that scaffolding. That scaffolding is a redesign of the one they used to build the bridge in the 1950s, and the way they put this one together, it was a remarkable job, they really deserve to win awards."

Nonresidential construction slides

(Continued from Page 1)

construction, the AGC said.

Still, the F.W. Dodge Data and Analytics' "Momentum Index" for U.S. construction moved 9.1 percent higher in May, the group reported June 7. The index measures initial reports of nonresidential building projects in the planning stage which have been shown to lead to spending.

Dodge said May's jump was the result of a large increase in commercial planning activity, which posted its strongest month-over-month increase since October 2017. Institutional planning, meanwhile, fell by less than one percentage point.

"The rising trend in planning activity," Dodge said, "is a good sign that the economic recovery is starting to spread into the construction sector. However, these projects are unlikely to have an impact on construction starts this year. Rising material prices and a continued shortage of skilled labor have led to project delays. On the upside, construction starts are shaping up for a healthy increase in 2022."

You and your health . . .

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How seeing a doctor saved one firefighter from cancer

LIVONIA FIREFIGHTER

Michael Valdez never thought he'd get cancer.

"I don't smoke. I'm young and healthy," Valdez says.

But in April 2020, at age 33, he found himself sitting in his truck in a hospital parking lot, wondering if he'd live to see his two children grow up. "Is this going to kill me?" Valdez thought to himself.

The "this" was a pea-sized tumor that appeared in a scan of his left testicle. He visited the emergency room because the pain that started as "just a little discomfort" developed into a raging pain in his groin. Going to the ER, even in the midst of a pandemic, turned out to be the best decision.

The pain was caused from the tumor pressing on a nerve, so removing it became a priority. Quick removal also meant there was less chance for cancer cells to spread if the tumor was malignant. After discussing it with his wife, the surgery was scheduled for two days after his ER visit.

Avoid the doctor at your own risk

While Valdez's pain got him to see a doctor right away, it doesn't always happen that way. Sometimes pains or body changes occur gradually and are casually brushed off — by men especially. There's a host of reasons why men put off getting care, but doing so only increases their peril. The average life span for men is about five years shorter than women in the U.S., and avoiding doctors and dying of preventable diseases are contributing factors.

Men are more likely to skip regular check-ups than women, with 72 percent of respondents to a Cleveland Clinic survey saying they would rather do household chores than go to the doctor. But putting off that check-up is how a small problem often

becomes a big one. Especially when it comes to heart disease — the No. 1 killer of males in the U.S. — treating conditions such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol can make the difference between managing the condition, or dying from it.

"The signals of illness aren't always going to hit you over the head. That's why I will do every routine check-up. . . I plan on being here for my family. It's the manly thing to do."

Michael Valdez

To catch early signs of testicular cancer, experts recommend that men do a monthly self-exam to feel for hard lumps or changes in the size, shape and consistency of the testicles. "I wasn't diligent about checking myself," Valdez says, "so it turned out my pain was helpful because it made me seek care without delay."

Early treatment = successful treatment

The surgery to remove Valdez's tumor was successful, though it took a weekend of waiting to get the pathology report. When he got the call, the news was cautiously optimistic: The tumor was malignant with cancer cells, but those were removed from his body. Follow up tests confirmed the pathology report, so when Valdez and his oncology doctor consulted next, it was a big relief to hear that neither radiation nor chemotherapy was recommended.

"The health risks associated with radiation and chemo outweighed the benefits in my case. We decided that active monitor-

ing, in the form of getting a scan every three or four months, a chest X-ray, and lab work would provide enough of an early warning system to catch something before it's a real problem," he says.

Four weeks after surgery, Valdez was back to his fire-fighting job. A year later, he's training for a triathlon that includes a half-mile swim; 12.4-mile bike ride; and 5k (3.1 mile) run.

Since the encounter with testicular cancer, Valdez is eager to answer health questions from coworkers or friends. And it's why he's sharing this story during Men's Health Month in June.

Everyone has men in their lives that they care about and want to be healthy. Michael Valdez's story reminds us that men's health isn't a topic just for men or about men.

Not going to the doctor because . . .

"I'll tough it out"

Don't ignore pain! And don't avoid regular check-ups. The best way to stay tough is to take care of yourself through proper medical care.

Fear of diagnosis

Your worst fears about a serious medical problem are more likely to become reality by avoiding the doctor rather than seeing one.

Uncomfortable with exams

You are not alone. The smart way to handle anxiety is to tell attending medical personnel of your concerns. You're likely to get information or support that puts you more at ease.

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