

# National building trades leaders establish partnerships with key industry players to create jobs in private-sector

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Union presidents who sit on the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department (BCTD) Executive Board have spent the past two years trying to build relationships with key industry players in order to create private-sector union jobs, Building Trades President Mark Ayers said.

And in at least one large construction area — nuclear power — they appear to be succeeding. BCTD signed an agreement April 19 with a utility in Texas to have union labor build two nuclear power plants. That makes three signed agreements covering five potential nuclear power plants in the last two years. The other plants are in Georgia.

The fact that four of the five plants are in the South is not by coincidence, as construction union presidents want to expand labor's presence there and are uniting with community groups to do so — by bringing well-paying jobs.

The power plant agreements, and similar construction pacts the department is pursuing with other industries, are important. Construction joblessness is above 20 percent, and bank credit for private construction has been yanked in the recession.

"In better times, about 75 percent of all dollars spent on construction were private dollars," Ayers told the several thousand delegates at the department's legislative conference, in his keynote address April 19.

Even with last year's stimulus law



Oregon U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley is escorted by a delegation of Oregon union officials to the podium to speak at the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Legislative Conference. The gathering was held April 18-21 in Washington, D.C. (Photo courtesy Bill Burke, Page One Photography)

still inserting federal construction project funds into the economy — construction union legislative reps said approximately 71 percent of those funds are obligated but still unspent — the nuclear plant contracts means that "in essence we are building our own recovery act with the private sector," he added.

The nuclear power construction alone will be worth \$50 billion and 100 million hours of new work over the next decade, he said.

Other top points in Ayers' keynote address:

- President Barack Obama's executive order last year, restoring the option of project labor agreements (PLAs) in

federal construction means "we have seen three major government jobs in Hawaii, California and Oregon go union in the past few weeks. "Since last summer, 21 of 25 Energy Department projects were covered by PLAs. There will be many more. That's what we're fighting for and that's what the president is delivering for us ... jobs," Ayers declared.

- The health care fight "is not over" even after Obama signed the massive revision of the U.S. health insurance system. "It is far from perfect ... We will continue to push for employer mandates in the construction industry that level the playing field for small union employers — life blood of our unions — and for a public option that will provide real competition for the insurance companies."

- Delegates were urged to push for "a balanced energy and climate bill that will generate tens of thousands of construction jobs now and in the future." The House passed a cap-and-trade climate control bill in December.

Ayers urged all building trades unions to reach out to low-income and minority communities and recruit youths for training and apprenticeship programs. He praised building trades councils in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Cleveland, San Francisco and Portland for doing so.

"As we build better, more-collaborative relationships with communities, we also build power. And when the interests of our unions and the communities in which we work converge, there is no power that can stop us, no adversary that can divide us," Ayers said.

## Tom Markgraf Multnomah County Commissioner District 2



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