

★ *Putting People First* ★

HELP COMMUNITIES WITH "HELPERS"

Helpers = Valuable Entry-Level Jobs:

The term "helpers" is used to describe construction workers who enter the industry with little or no previous training. Helpers work under direct supervision of higher skilled, journey-level workers. They gain valuable entrance into the industry, a well-paying job, and on-the-job training. Helpers also have access to a four-year apprenticeship or other formal training program to secure a lucrative career in the industry.

Helpers are used widely in the private sector. Merit contractors, which are over 80% of the industry, have a long history of successfully employing semi-skilled helpers. Helpers perform a variety of tasks to assist the skilled journey-level worker, such as carrying and furnishing materials, tools, equipment, and supplies, maintaining and preparing work areas, and other semi-skilled duties on the job site. A helper may use tools of the trade under the direct supervision of the journey person. Helpers serve as a strong first-step in the job ladder for workers who are interested in furthering their education and pursuing a career in construction.

The construction industry uses, and teaches, high-tech skills for a career where young or low-skilled workers can "learn while they earn." The industry employs close to five million workers each year and is committed to providing training toward a career path with no limits -- from field worker, to supervisor, to front office, and ultimately even company ownership.

DOL Helpers Regulation = Government Barrier to Jobs and Training:

- On April 9, 1999, the Labor Department issued new regulations that revert to an outdated, pre-1980s definition that does not reflect industry practice and refuses to recognize them as a legitimate and "prevailing" job classification. The regulations will shut-out valuable on-the-job-training opportunities for disadvantaged workers and minorities by prohibiting contractors from hiring helpers on public works projects. It will force contractors to hire only high-skilled workers.
- This is clearly inconsistent with the Administration's stated goal of reaching out to inner-city workers, disadvantaged youth, and welfare-to-work candidates, because it will limit low-skilled jobs on public projects in their own communities. The Labor Department should instead encourage use of helpers, which would provide access to thousands of valuable entry-level job opportunities.

Helpers Jobs = Opportunities to Develop Skilled Workers:

- Allowing helpers jobs would be a significant outreach to lower-skilled individuals to help build careers. It would be valuable for disadvantaged communities, at-risk youth, and displaced workers who currently do not have access to entry-level jobs on federal construction projects. Helpers jobs allow low-skilled workers a chance to gain access to a lucrative industry, exposure to various construction crafts, and on-the-job training. The construction industry is committed to investing in training employees and new entrants into the industry to fill the escalating shortage of skilled workers and maintain a high-skilled workforce.
- There is no justification for preventing helpers on federal projects. Opponents will try to argue that these workers should be kept out to ensure quality and that helpers will be relegated to low-wage, dead-end jobs. This is simply not true. The position provides a solid, well-paying job which often serves as a valuable entrance to a formal apprenticeship or skilled craft training program. In fact, contractors find that apprentices who start out as helpers have a higher success rate in apprenticeships than those who were not helpers.
- Precluding helpers from working forces contractors to pay skilled workers a high wage rate to perform unskilled tasks. This is particularly prohibitive for small businesses that are less capitalized, and disadvantages them in competing for federal contracts. It also increases costs to the government and the taxpayer. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that allowing helpers would save approximately \$500 million per year.
- More than a decade of litigation has resulted in favorable rulings on the use of helpers (U.S. District Court, 1990; the U.S. Court of Appeals, 1992; and the Supreme Court, 1992). Despite this, the Labor Department has failed to implement regulations to allow helpers, and instead has restricted their use.
- Offering helpers jobs will help create lifelong learning opportunities in local communities. Helpers are a real solution to address the shortage of skilled workers, provide new jobs, and cut government waste.

Support Entry-Level Helpers Jobs!