



Testimony of:

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On behalf of Associated Builders and Contractors

**U.S. House Committee on Small Business Subcommittee on
Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Workforce Development**
“The Community College Pipeline to Small Business”

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Chairman Crow, Ranking Member Kim and members of the U.S. House Committee on Small Business Subcommittee on Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Workforce Development:

Thank you for the invitation to discuss the indispensable role that community colleges, trade schools and career and technical education programs play in the construction industry, which currently employs 7.4 million throughout our country.

My name is Frank Boecker, and I am the human resources manager for Sunwest Electric, a business established in Southern California in 1985 with the goal of providing a select market of customers with a competitive, high quality, turnkey product. Since our founding, Sunwest has grown into one of the most respected merit shop electrical contractors in California, with 240 field employees currently working on projects throughout Southern California.

I am testifying today on behalf of Associated Builders and Contractors, a national construction industry trade association established in 1950 that represents more than 21,000 member companies across the country. Founded on the merit shop philosophy, ABC and its 69 chapters help members develop people, win work and deliver that work safely, ethically and profitably for the betterment of the communities in which its members live and work.

Sunwest is a member of the Associated Builders and Contractors Southern California Chapter. Founded in 1993, ABC SoCal became one of the first nonunion apprenticeship programs to be certified in California, with approvals in the electrical program in 1993, plumbing program in 1995 and Electronics Systems Technician, HVAC and sheet metal programs in 2011. Since then, over 2,500 apprentices have graduated from these programs. This year, ABC SoCal is offering more than 200 continuing education classes, including safety and management courses taught by skilled instructors. ABC SoCal has five master craft instructors, which is the highest NCCER instructor certification available, among our 42 instructors, which offers our apprentices a unique opportunity and a depth of knowledge and experience inaccessible in many other parts of the country.

I believe that the path to a successful career begins in the classroom. Sunwest Electric is proud to offer every employee the opportunity to participate in the many educational opportunities at ABC SoCal or our own program at Sunwest. As part of our Sunwest in-

house education and employee development programs, we offer hands-on experience, computer education, safety courses and construction management classes to help our employees to continue to progress quickly in their careers as electricians. Our company currently has more than 100 employees attending a four-year workforce development program, with Sunwest paying 100% of the costs, including books and tools. These dedicated employees will spend at least 120 hours each year in a classroom and more than 8,000 hours on the job, gaining the experiences needed to succeed in the industry. It is important to note that most of these individuals will start at \$19 per hour, even before they have completed their education requirements. Once they have completed their free four-year education and successfully passed the state's certification program, they are nearly guaranteed to double their salary.

What I have found throughout my time as an apprentice, journey-level worker and in human resources, is that the opportunities available in the construction industry cannot be met through just one talent pipeline. To fill the [approximately](#) 430,000 construction craft professionals needed in 2021 alone, the federal government should promote all effective programs and pathways that lead to a fulfilling job in the construction industry.

The workforce shortage facing construction and many other industries across the country is one that we must continue to address, and I appreciate the committee drawing attention to these critical opportunities available to America's workers. For too long, the definition of success messaged to young Americans was that a college degree was a necessary requirement for a good career, ignoring the value and benefits of community college programs, apprenticeship programs and trade schools. We must continue to spotlight the opportunities for young people and individuals looking for a career through more affordable options, and in our case, a free, earn-while-you-learn four-year education that provide the skills needed for financial independence and a rewarding career.

With more than 40 years in the electrical industry, I have been able to help others gain the necessary trade knowledge and experience to be a successful electrician. For 15 of those 40 years, I have taught apprenticeship classes at night while working on projects during the day with some students to provide them with hands-on experience in the field. Part of my promise to my employees is that I will dedicate my time after work to help them complete the application process and prepare them for the journey-level worker electrician test. Of particular relevance to this hearing, I have also partnered with local

universities to help them develop curriculum in construction management and provide career counseling for graduates.

In 2020, I served as the chair of the ABC Southern California Chapter Board of Directors and continue to serve on the Board of Directors today. Throughout my service on the ABC SoCal Board of Directors and in my many years in the construction industry, I am proud to be a part of the solution to the workforce shortage issue throughout the industry. Perhaps my proudest moments, however, come from the individual success stories that can be found in each Sunwest new hire or ABC SoCal apprenticeship program graduate. It is with their testimonies in mind that I address you. I have included some success stories with my testimony, which should inform the committee of the impact of the construction industry's educational capacity.

As a veteran, I have found that military veterans have an incredible opportunity to create a career in construction. Sunwest emphasizes hiring veterans as we build our workforce.

For example, one of our many veterans on staff as a current Sunwest craft trainee is a former U.S. Marine. When Noah exited the military, he knew that college was not for him, and he reached out directly to us for employment. When we hired him on the spot, he knew that we were providing him an opportunity to transition his skills into a trade that will support him and his family in the future.

In the construction employment market, we have seen that many otherwise overlooked individuals are some of the most dedicated and hardworking employees in our industry. I have found this to be the case with formerly incarcerated individuals, like Andrea, a single mom who was involved in gangs in her youth. After going to prison and then being paroled, she reached out to a local program called Hope Builders, which we are proud to partner with, to help her get moving in the career that she wanted. Now a Sunwest employee, Andrea is a great example of someone who has turned her life around as she builds her community.

A career in construction has limitless possibilities and now is an ideal time to get into the industry.

Congress must continue promoting the benefits of alternate education pathways for successful careers and encourage more of the great partnerships among companies like Sunwest and the organizations and community colleges that help bridge the gaps for those seeking employment. I thank you for the opportunity to serve as a witness for this

important hearing and look forward to your questions.