

**Testimony of Tony Seiwel, Business Manager
Laborers' District Council of Eastern Pennsylvania**

**Before the Senate Environmental Resources & Energy Committee and the
Senate Economic & Recreational Development Committee**

**Public Hearing on the Consumer and Economic Impacts of
Failing to Invest in Pennsylvania's Natural Gas Infrastructure**

October 4, 2021

Good afternoon, my name is Tony Seiwel, and I am the Business Manager for the Laborers' District Council of Eastern Pennsylvania. Across the state, the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) represents over 25,000 Pennsylvania workers, including those in my district council and two other districts of Western Pennsylvania and Philadelphia. On behalf of our members, I appreciate this opportunity to testify today.

Throughout the United States and Canada, LIUNA members perform a range of construction work in the public and private sectors, among other occupations. Traditionally, our members build and maintain much of our country's infrastructure, including roads and bridges, buildings, and utility and energy systems.

LIUNA has always been an outspoken advocate for greater energy infrastructure investment. Our organization supports an "all of the above" energy policy, which means that we understand both the reality that our economy depends on a diverse energy portfolio to meet demand and the desire to transition to cleaner energy sources. We believe that a balanced and comprehensive energy policy must currently include our natural gas resources.

I appreciate your efforts today to bring attention today to the unacceptable factors that have halted the construction of PennEast pipeline—a project which would have created over 12,000 jobs. Many of those jobs would have begun next year, and many would have been for my members and other local union workers. Pennsylvania has a robust energy industry, and when our infrastructure and work is challenged by outside forces rather than rational policymakers, it disrupts our workforce and undermines local economic stability.

Pipeline infrastructure work is vital to my workers and their communities: it guarantees quality income and job security, which in turn supports local spending and payroll tax revenue. Since 2010, pipeline work has provided over 25 million man-hours of work for our members.

Several news outlets have deemed PennEast to be yet another casualty of the assault on natural gas—like the Keystone XL and Atlantic Coast pipelines—but we need to take that designation a step further by making it clear that this assault is radical and unacceptable. Delays by federal and state regulators and legal challenges by environmental activists have stopped yet another project that would have created a significant amount of work and supplied highly populated areas of the northeast with much-needed, domestically-produced natural gas. The behavior to shut down domestic energy sources and to shut down jobs is radical, and it should be labeled and treated accordingly.

Pipelines are built to comply with all federal and state construction, environmental, and safety laws and regulations. Projects are designed and budgeted based on these requirements, and contractors submit bids accordingly. Pipeline companies plan for a rigorous and time consuming permitting process that involves

approvals from all levels of government and multiple agencies within those levels. Litigation by activists and delays by overzealous regulators make it nearly impossible for projects to move forward. These actions create an impossible business climate, and they should be called out as simply unethical. If activists want to change this process, they should seek changes through traditional legislation and regulatory action. Businesses and their workers deserve to know what to expect, up front.

It cannot be understated that work in natural gas construction has provided long-term careers for LIUNA members, and it has enabled them to be productive members in their communities. Pipeline work has become a specialized occupation and cornerstone in our effort to provide family-sustaining wages, health insurance, and retirement benefits. Like all construction, pipeline jobs are not permanent, but they provide months or years of work and future improvement work, which we schedule around other construction projects to keep our members working. These jobs have allowed many blue-collar workers to live the American dream.

The perceived choice between pipelines and the environment is a false choice. Our members are uniquely qualified to build pipelines, not only because of their high-quality training, but also because they live and raise their families in the same communities where they work. Like our opponents, we want to ensure that projects are completed safely to protect our environment for our future generations.

At LIUNA, safety is our number one priority, and members who work on pipelines are specially trained. For true expertise in their craft, all LIUNA members complete a rigorous, multi-year, first class registered apprenticeship program that includes 3,200 hours of classroom and on-the-job training, occupational safety and health standards, and construction standards. Members also receive ongoing training throughout the course of their employment and careers to upgrade their skills to the latest technologies and materials. Our curriculum imparts a heavy emphasis on safety and instills the ability to recognize hazards that may arise on the job—including hazards to the worker, materials or site, or environment—and teaches them to respond. Our learning model is the leader in the industry, because it is designed and continuously honed by our local unions, our international union, and our employers.

Again, in exchange for their training and skills, LIUNA members earn a middle-class wage, receive affordable health insurance for their families, and gain a retirement benefit that allows them to age with dignity. And, because LIUNA members live in or near the communities where they work, they spend their earnings at local businesses, pay local and state taxes, utilize their insurance benefits at local hospitals, and continue to support the local economy with their retirement earnings long after they stop working.

Lastly, I want to make it clear that construction industry jobs in renewable energy work are not yet a viable alternative to jobs created by conventional power sources. Renewable jobs are often far inferior. For example, solar power is frequently constructed with a low-wage and limited-benefits business model. In many cases, solar developers use contractors who bring in out-of-state workers and pay far lower than what skilled construction workers typically earn. LIUNA reviewed solar construction jobs in Virginia and found that, compared to natural gas work, wages were about 50% less and out-of-state workers filled 70-90% of project man-hours. These practices depress local wage rates and undermine our economies. Concerns about the poor quality of renewable energy jobs were also recently highlighted by *The New York Times* (“Building Solar Farms May Not Build the Middle Class,” by Noam Scheiber).

Pennsylvania’s energy workforce and labor-industry relationships have been cultivated over generations. For more than a century, international and local unions have built long-standing relationships with natural gas (as well as coal, nuclear, and other energy) companies and contractors, which have set the standard in terms of wages and benefits for our members and have helped empower America’s middle class families. Contractors in these industries know that our partnership provides a pool of qualified labor in order to

complete work safely, on-time, and on-budget. Energy construction work is—and should continue to be—available and well-paying work for local, properly trained workers.

In closing, I hope my comments have been helpful to your discussion, and I look forward to working with you to address these barriers to natural gas expansion. I'm glad to answer any questions you may have.