



Building America Back Better Biden's Agenda is Working for the IBEW

How President Biden's actions benefit working families and IBEW members

INVITING IBEW PRESIDENT, LABOR LEADERS TO WHITE HOUSE

IBEW President Lonnie Stephenson was among several leaders to meet with President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris [in the Oval Office](#) on February 17.

"Today's meeting with President Biden was enormously productive in addressing how the labor movement can work with the administration in putting Americans back to work and creating good-paying union jobs," [President Stephenson said](#) of the 90-minute meeting.



IBEW President Lonnie Stephenson (left, next to Vice President Harris) joined President Biden and labor leaders for an Oval Office meeting where retirement security, infrastructure legislation, apprenticeships and energy policy were discussed.

Stephenson was joined by AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler and others to discuss coronavirus relief, retirement security, energy policy, infrastructure legislation and apprenticeship initiatives.

SUPPORTING UNION APPRENTICESHIPS

[Biden announced his action](#) to rescind Trump's executive order creating industry recognized apprenticeship programs (IRAPs), which constituted a direct threat to world-class training programs like the IBEW's.

"We applaud President Biden's decision to rescind IRAPs," Stephenson said. "It is one more way that he and Vice President Kamala Harris are opening the doors of opportunity for all working people and building an economy that works for everyone."

The Biden administration also announced a national apprenticeship committee to expand participation to new sectors like clean energy.

"Building our economy back better requires unions, employers, educational and policy leaders to come together to expand apprenticeship opportunities for working Americans, and the committee is a vital forum for that," [Stephenson said](#). "High-quality union apprenticeship programs are crucial to not only training the next generation of skilled workers but helping to rebuild America's middle class."

Biden shared his support for the National Apprenticeship Act of 2021 sponsored by Rep. Bobby Scott (D-Va.), a \$3 billion, five-year program to expand apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs. That legislation, H.R. 447, passed the House on February 5.



BIDEN ON DOMESTIC MANUFACTURING: 'WE'RE GOING TO INVEST IN AMERICAN WORKERS'



During a high-level meeting with Biden officials, including Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and other top advisors (top), President Stephenson touts the IBEW's ability to construct new plants and build out the electrical vehicle charging network.

President Biden fulfilled a campaign pledge by launching a [sweeping review of the country's supply chains](#) with an eye to beef up domestic production of computer chips, medical gear, electric vehicles, electric vehicle batteries and other materials critical for defense, energy, transportation and information technology.

A high-level meeting was called by the White House on February 24 to discuss the [executive order signed](#) that day by President Biden. The meeting consisted of President Stephenson, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, White House National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy, Director of the President's National Economic Advisory Council Brian Deese, UAW President Rory Gamble, and the top auto executives representing 100% of new automobile sales in the United States.

President Stephenson emphasized the IBEW's ability to construct new plants, retool existing facilities and build out the EV charging infrastructure. He touted the IBEW- and industry-developed Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Training Program (EVITP) as the national standard for skilled workers.

"These are going to be union jobs," IBEW Political & Legislative Affairs Department Director Austin Keyser said Biden administration officials said repeatedly.

President Biden made clear who he would depend on to strengthen U.S.-based production of key components that have been outsourced to other countries in recent years.

"As we implement this work, my administration will draw on a full range of American talent — including labor and industry leaders, policy experts, scientists, farmers, engineers — to get their input," Biden said.

Rebuilding U.S.-made links in supply chains is a dual benefit for the country: beefing up domestic manufacturing and putting Americans to work as well as weening suppliers off parts produced overseas, often by strategic competitors like China.

VOICING UNEQUIVOCAL SUPPORT FOR UNION ORGANIZING BEFORE BIG AMAZON VOTE

On the eve of a historic union vote at Amazon, [President Biden released a video](#) February 28 stating the administration's full support for organizing.

"Every worker should have a free and fair choice of whether to join a union," Biden said in the video. "There should be no intimidation, no coercion, no threats, no anti-union propaganda."

Nearly 6,000 workers at an Amazon warehouse are voting this month on whether to join the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. None of the company's warehouses in the United States are organized and the [company is fighting the effort](#).

"The choice to join a union is up to the workers – full stop," Biden said.



DUMPING 'WHO'S WHO OF UNION BUSTERS' FROM FEDERAL PANEL

President Biden on February 2 sent the entire 10-member Federal Service Impasses Panel – all appointed by Donald Trump – packing.



The panel is supposed to fairly mediate disputes between executive agencies and federal unions but instead had been [busy implementing Trump's orders](#) to make it easier to fire federal workers, restrict union officials' access to workers and reduce the scope of collective bargaining. Most of the members had no experience in labor-management relations.

"My hat goes off to our members," said IBEW Government Employees Director Paul O'Connor. "They dug in their heels against a four-year assault on federal employees. This was nasty stuff devised to devastate federal labor unions and to silence their collective voice. It was nonstop."

Upon Biden's request they resign, eight complied and two were fired after refusing to quit.

SIDING WITH WORKERS ON A LABOR LAW OVERHAUL: PRO ACT INTRODUCED

It would be the biggest to change labor law since the National Labor Relations Act gave workers the right to organize. And President Biden is all in, he told IBEW leaders in a [video he made for the IBEW Officers Meeting](#) on February 1.

"With this administration, you will have a partner, I promise you that," Biden said in the video. "You will have a partner to make it easier for workers to unionize and for unions to organize."

Nearly half of nonunion Americans (48 percent) would choose to be represented by a union if possible. But the share of workers represented by a union was 12 percent in 2020. Why? Because [labor laws](#) are no longer on the side of workers and enable employers to routinely interfere, intimidate, coerce and fire them during organizing campaigns. The PRO Act (H.R. 842) would help counteract this inequality by strengthening labor rights.

"Every American deserves the dignity and respect that comes with the right to organize and collectively bargain. The policy of our government is to encourage union organizing, and employers should ensure their workers have a free and fair choice to join a union," Biden tweeted on February 3.



The PRO Act was reintroduced on February 4, after it passed in the House of Representatives in the previous Congress, where an anti-worker majority blocked it in the Senate. Passing it in both chambers of Congress and getting President Biden's signature is one of the IBEW's biggest legislative goals.

"I've said from the beginning of my campaign, throughout my whole career, the middle class built this country and labor built the middle class," Biden said. "A lot of these folks have been my friends for a long, long, long time. As they say in parts of my state, 'These are the folks that brung me to the dance.'"

AVERTING TRUMP'S LAST-MINUTE HIT JOB ON AMERICAN ALUMINUM WORKERS

President Biden stopped in its tracks a [last-minute Trump order](#) that would have allowed foreign aluminum producers to flood the U.S. market. On his way out of the White House on January 20, Trump granted the United Arab Emirates the chance to ship state-supported, cheaper aluminum products into the United States, which would have crushed American workers producing aluminum for national security and infrastructure needs.

"As he was walking away from the White House, Trump demonstrated that his concern for American workers was a façade and that he was willing to sacrifice their jobs and security," said a statement by the United Steelworkers President Tom Conway. "We applaud President Biden's decision to revoke Trump's sellout of American aluminum workers."

Biden's move will keep in place a 10-percent tariff on the foreign aluminum.



PROVING ELECTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES, ESPECIALLY AT THE NLRB

On Biden’s first day as president on January 20, he fired the National Labor Relations Board general counsel, Peter Robb, a dedicated union-buster. The acting general counsel, Peter Sung Ohr, went about reversing Robb’s actions, including issuing 10 directives that dramatically shift the way investigators and lawyers approach cases.

[Sung Ohr wrote](#) that Robb’s moves were “inconsistent” with the National Labor Relations Act.

“The Act makes clear that the policy of the United States is to encourage the practice and procedure of collective bargaining and to protect the exercise by workers of their full freedom of association, self-organization, and designation of representatives of their own choosing for the purpose of negotiating the terms and conditions of their employment,” Sung Ohr said in the February 1 memo.

APPOINTING A CHAMPION FOR WORKING FAMILIES AS NLRB GENERAL COUNSEL

President Biden selected a key Communications Workers of America attorney as National Labor Relations Board general counsel.

[AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka](#) called Jennifer Abruzzo’s appointment another step toward righting “the wrongs of the past four years.”

“There is no better person than Jennifer Abruzzo to help return the NLRB to its core mission of upholding and protecting workers’ rights to form unions and bargain collectively,” Trumka said, hailing her experience advancing innovative initiatives to increase worker power.

Abruzzo spent nearly 23 years at the NLRB as deputy general counsel and acting general counsel, helping to protect workers from corporate attacks.

PROVIDING MULTIEMPLOYER PENSION RELIEF

President Biden supports the re-imagined and improved Butch Lewis Act, the IBEW-supported legislation that would assist ailing multiemployer pension plans. A previous version of the bill passed the House of Representatives in 2019, though not the Senate. Now, [legislation based on Butch Lewis](#) is included in the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief bill that passed the House on February 27.



Hundreds of labor activists representing the IBEW and other unions rally on Capitol Hill in 2019 to urge Congress to pass a bill aimed at rescuing troubled multiemployer pension plans.

Not only would it help shore up troubled plans, it would also help avert a looming funding crisis for the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation as a result of possible plan failures. Most of IBEW’s multiemployer plans, including the National Electrical Benefit Fund, are in good shape.

“This version of Butch Lewis is everything we asked for, and more,” said IBEW International Secretary-Treasurer Kenny Cooper. “This is an issue that has kept me up at night for years. There were times when others thought we should negotiate the best deal possible with the Republicans, but we knew those deals would have fundamentally changed the pension system in a way that would have destroyed our plans.

“We fought hard to change the landscape of the government, to reset the negotiating table. Politics matter for the members of the IBEW. We are on the verge of putting the number one threat to our retirement security to rest, with the swipe of a pen, because our friend Joe Biden now sits in the Oval Office,” Cooper said.



CREATING MOMENTUM FOR UPGRADING AMERICA'S INFRASTRUCTURE



In February, President Biden invited key senators and labor leaders to the White House to discuss [the importance of passing a \\$2 trillion infrastructure package](#) that will create jobs and upgrade transportation networks. His proposal is expected to be unveiled in the coming weeks.

As his campaign's Build Back Better platform promised, Biden intends to fund a historic swath of projects in energy, transit, broadband and the urgent rehabilitation of roads, rails, bridges and tunnels. That includes a major investment in the power grid, a move demanded by the failure of the Texas power grid, which will put tens of thousands of IBEW members to work.

"We're eager to see the concrete details of the infrastructure plan, but we have no doubt about President Biden's commitment to do it right and create millions of good, union jobs in the process," [Stephenson said](#).

TAKING A BROADER VIEW OF WHO'S AN EMPLOYER

Biden's labor department is considering issuing a [new regulation on joint employers](#), holding that a larger corporation is responsible for the actions of a subcontractor when it comes to labor standards. Trump's administration took a much more narrow perspective that largely absolved corporations like McDonald's or Amazon from accountability for the treatment of workers by franchise owners or subcontractors.

DROPPING A CASE THAT COULD HAVE UPENDED USE OF PLAS IN CONSTRUCTION

At the request of North America's Building Trades Unions, the Biden administration's acting NLRB general counsel withdrew a suit brought by the Trump administration in Seattle. The case sought to delegitimize a key collective bargaining tool for large public projects that governments and labor unions have long used for mutual advantage: the project labor agreement.

Trump's NLRB general counsel targeted the project labor agreement and letter of assent system by the Seattle Building Trades for a large highway project. The action had been scheduled to go to court on March 22.



An unfavorable outcome could have threatened well-established practice in the unionized construction industry.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT...

President Biden addressed the 2021 IBEW Officers Meeting. [Here's the video](#).

IBEW President Stephenson joined other labor leaders at the White House for an Oval Office meeting. [Here are President Biden's opening remarks](#).

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