

40 Percent Unemployment in an Election Year



By: Tom Klein

Until recently, New York's construction and real estate industries provided over half a million local jobs. In construction alone, today 40 percent of our 314,000 workers are unemployed.

That's over 125,000 fed up hardhats unable to put food on the table or make their mortgage payments. There are another 160,000 industry support professionals and 65,000 professionals in engineering, design and architecture, many waiting for projects to work on.

All in an election year, I might add.

Economists estimate that every construction job creates multiple ancillary jobs, making it one of the key sectors to get the economy working again. Until then, the government must prime the pump and minimize over-burdensome regulations that increase the taxes, fees and hurdles that make it unfeasible for employers to start hiring again.

Professional Boilermakers such as the members of Local 5 are a vital part of construction teams, repairing and erecting air pollution equipment, furnaces, water treatment plants, storage tanks, stacks and more. Unfortunately, our jobs have become pawns to NIMBY politics and heavy-handed regulation. It's clear to us that Albany needs to be part of the solution – not an added burden.

New York needs a streamlined power plant siting law that actually encourages fuel neutrality and will create the real investment needed to meet New York's growing power demands. We must also have realistic environmental regulations that work with, not against, New York businesses and the working men and women of New York. That's why the DEC's proposed policy related to water intake systems is of grave concern to union trades members like me.

Forcing key employers like industrial and manufacturing facilities and power plants to adopt a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach to cooling fails to account for technological advances which would not only protect our jobs, but also the integrity of our power supply. Air cooled condensers are a reasonable alternative to closed-cycle systems in many facilities across the state. In the case of Indian Point, one of the largest and first facilities to be impacted by this policy, wedgewire technology will also achieve positive results for the environment without impairing system reliability or the local economy.

Election years are an opportunity to rethink government priorities to assist the working men and women of New York State. Make no mistake about it – we will be watching.

Tom Klein is the Business Manager for Boilermakers Local No. 5 and a member of the New York Building and Construction Trades Council's Executive Committee. He is an Advisory Board member of the New York Affordable Reliable Electricity Alliance.

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The New York Affordable Reliable Electricity Alliance (New York AREA) is a diverse group of business, labor, environmental, and community leaders working together for clean, low-cost and reliable electricity solutions that foster prosperity and jobs for the Empire State.

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