



## **An Open Letter to U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski**

January 7, 2016

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Mikulski:

As the representatives of over 3 million skilled craft construction professionals that comprise North America's Building Trades Unions, we wanted to express to you our extreme disappointment over your efforts to leverage the power and trust that the people of Maryland have placed in you as their representative to doggedly pursue language in the recently passed omnibus bill that will result in diminished job opportunities for hard working Americans and relegate imported foreign workers to jobs that have been characterized as "Close to Slavery" by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Your actions will result in a **tripling** of the number of H2B foreign guest workers that will now be allowed to enter and work across the United States in a variety of industries. To add insult to injury, you have also spearheaded efforts to undermine, and defund, even the most basic labor protections the Department of Labor and Homeland Security have at their disposal to ensure that no harm is caused to either the vulnerable foreign workers who are imported to do this often backbreaking work, or the hard working American workers who must now compete against a virtually powerless workforce to make a living.

In no industry is this more disturbing than for the women and men, both union and non-union, who have chosen to pursue careers in the construction industry.

Put simply, your "accomplishment" has undermined the fundamental principle, embedded in U.S. immigration law for more than one hundred years, that U.S. workers must be protected from unfair competition by foreign workers for both temporary and permanent jobs.

We must assume that you believe that hard working Americans already have enough jobs and that their paychecks are large enough that we, as a nation, no longer need to fund efforts to engage in an already insufficient U.S. worker recruitment process, because you have summarily defunded this process.

Further, we suppose you would like to look the men and women of our unions in the eye, as well as the eyes of non-union construction workers, and tell them that you believe that they no longer need prevailing wage

protections, and that they and their responsible employers should compete against "low-road" construction contractors who can assemble a low-wage and easily exploitable and expendable workforce, with no formal assessment, because that is what you have accomplished.

Our immigration system must serve the national interest. Flooding a loose labor market such as the construction industry with additional low-skill labor hurts the wages and reduces the job prospects of both recent immigrants and native-born workers who are struggling the most.

To be blunt, Senator, your actions will induce a race to the bottom on wages and benefits for U.S. workers in impacted industries, including building and construction, and will directly and negatively affect our collective membership.

What is perhaps most ironic though, is the fact that you took your action at the exact same time as many segments of your own state are suffering from economic disparity and a feeling that this country has abandoned them; as evidenced in the events and atmosphere surrounding the Freddy Gray homicide case in Baltimore.

Our unions have been rather proactive in attempting to work with local elected officials, community leaders and business leaders in the Baltimore area to craft workable and effective job and career training opportunities -- in our case, the idea of a construction apprenticeship-readiness program for the city of Baltimore -- that are purposefully designed to address those socio-economic factors that lie at the heart of urban unrest in major metropolitan areas across our nation, and which contributed mightily to the destruction we saw on the streets of that city last spring.

But rather than apply your influence, stature and leadership in the U.S. Senate towards crafting solutions that work to lift the labor standards throughout the entire spectrum of industries that operate in Maryland, and which could provide increased job and career opportunities for many Marylanders in need, you chose instead to pursue a narrow focus on protecting the status quo of a niche industry that has been shown, over and over again, to be a culvert of abuse, exploitation and outright indentured servitude.

It is altogether fitting that you have chosen to retire at the end of your current term. For what was once an illustrious career as a progressive fighter and champion for equality, labor rights and wage parity, has sadly devolved into the spectacle of an out-of-touch politician using her leadership and stature to do nothing more than protect and defend a "low road" status quo that does absolutely nothing for your constituents or the future overall economic and social health of the state of Maryland but does create a host of problems for workers in the construction industry across our nation.

We can assure you that Maryland's construction workers, both union and non-union, will welcome new leadership on their behalf in the U.S. Senate; leadership that we will expect to fight FOR good paying jobs in Maryland and across the nation, rather than sell out an entire career and legacy on behalf of a "low road" status quo.

Sincerely,

Sean McGarvey, President  
North America's Building Trades Unions

Newton Jones, International President  
International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron  
Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers & Helpers

William P. Hite, General President  
United Association - Union of Plumbers, Fitters,  
Welders & Service Techs

Kinsey M. Robinson, International President  
United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers & Allied  
Workers

Patrick D. Finley, General President  
Operative Plasterers' & Cement Masons'  
International Association of the United States and  
Canada

James P. Hoffa, General President  
International Brotherhood of Teamsters

Terry O'Sullivan, General President  
Laborers' International Union of North America

James Boland, President  
International Union of Bricklayers and Allied  
Craftworkers

Frank J. Christensen, General President  
International Union of Elevator Constructors

Kenneth E. Rigmaiden, General President  
International Union of Painters & Allied Trades

James T. Callahan, General President  
International Union of Operating Engineers  
Joseph Sellers, Jr., General President  
International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail  
& Transportation Workers (SMART)

Lonnie R. Stephenson, International President

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers

Eric M. Dean, General President  
International Association of Bridge, Structural,  
Ornamental & Reinforcing Ironworkers

James P. "Bud" McCourt, General President  
The Insulators Union