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Contractors' drug-free "pledge" or the real thing?

By Marty Mulcahy

Some arguments can best be won with the opportune use of a good example.

Here's one: Which is safer, construction projects with a union or nonunion workforce? You might have your own opinion on that subject -- government statistics on safety, injury and fatality are rarely broken down according to union affiliation.

So along comes this example that - in a backdoor manner - provides a powerful character witness for the safety practices of union workers and their contractors.

On May 9, the Associated General Contractors of America sent out a news release that five of the nation's largest construction trade associations teamed up to form the Construction Coalition for a Drug- and Alcohol-Free Workplace.

The coalition has a painfully useless acronym (CCDAFW) and as it turns out, pain-free requirements for member contractors to give little more than lip service to a safer workplace. The group is comprised of the anti-union Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), the Associated General Contractors, the Construction Industry Round Table (CIRT), Construction Users' Roundtable and Women Construction Owners & Executives.

The coalition's mission is "to create a drug- and alcohol-free construction industry by providing companies and organizations with the resources necessary to implement drug- and alcohol-free policies into their business practices."

Sounds impressive. But practically speaking, how they gonna do that? We're imagining a nationwide database of construction workers who



have a card that can be swiped at any jobsite to show they're ready to meet an employer's conditions for working on their property. The reality: not even close.

Instead, the group decided on the following "news" as part of that press release: "CCDAFW today launched a nationwide effort urging construction-related firms and organizations to sign an online pledge signifying they will create and maintain a workplace free from substance abuse. In addition to listing current pledge signatories, the CCDAFW website, www.drugfreeconstruction.org includes educational materials and state-by-state policies for substance abuse testing."

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So along comes this example that provides a powerful character witness for the safety practices of union workers and their contractors.

We looked for more meat on the bone. All we found were quotes that said next-to-nothing. “We are driving an industry toward world-class safety,” said ABC President and CEO Michael Bel-laman. And this from CIRT President Mark Casso: “As an organization composed of CEOs from both leading design and construction firms, the CIRT Board of Directors the center piece of this effort as not only the pledge itself, but also the educational materials, model policies, informational aids and best practices that will be made available and shared.”

Now, compare those words with what the union construction sector has been doing in Michigan since 1987 when MUST (Management and Unions Serving Together) was started.

MUST was formed following an expressed desire from employers to develop a standardized method of testing construction workers for drugs and alcohol. Standardized safety training modules came later. It wasn't a smooth process, but unions eventually saw they could provide added value to employers and owners who recognized the promotion of on-the-job safety as both a moral duty and

economic benefit.

Last year alone MUST administered 25,167 drug tests, and 127,649 safety tests. That's a little more than sponsoring an online petition.

And there's more. The Boilermakers have their own nationwide MOST safety program. Union apprentice-ship schools spend millions of dollars on safety training. At the very least, numerous union health and welfare plans offer drug and alcohol counseling as part of benefits to workers.

“We had to overcome a lot of resistance as the MUST program was being set up,” said Patrick Devlin, Secretary-Treasurer of the Michigan Building and Construction Trades Council.

“You're not going to see this kind of program much on the nonunion side because it's expensive. The bottom line is that nonunion employers take online pledges to improve safety. Union members and employers actively work together to improve safety.”



Marty Mulcahy writes for The Building Tradesman.

We're an immigration nation

By PW Editorial Board

It's a time to think about what we got right since 1776: the idea that a king was unnecessary, that people can rule themselves, that all people should be free, that the most perfect relationship between one human and another is that of equality - these are all very American ideas.

Unfortunately, it's impossible to overlook, even for the day, all the injustices still wrought in America, especially over immigration. Perhaps that is because this topic cuts to the very chase of what the day celebrates, the meaning of “American.”

Who could be more anti-American than those who seek to keep at least 11 million people, undocumented immigrants, away from the fruits of equality that were fought for by generations of Americans - most of whom came from immigrant stock?

This country has always been, and will always continue to be, a nation of immigrants. The first to arrive came from Asia, across what was then the Bering land bridge, thousands of years ago. The first Europeans - the most illegal immigrants of all - were the British, French, and Spanish settlers. After the U.S. was established, the idea of a “city on the hill” where people from all nations could come in search of a better life came to be.

And people came. They were oppressed and usually bitterly poor, but they worked hard and eventually came to be accepted.

It's not entirely coincidence that the McCarthy period, one of the darkest times for liberty and democracy of the 20th century, overlapped with the period during which the fewest immigrants arrived at our borders.

Racist laws in the early 20th century established nationality quotas on immigration, banning Asians and Africans, effectively shutting the borders. During the time of the civil rights movement, when America started to more fully embrace its promise, immigration restrictions were eased. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act removed restrictions on Asian and African immigration, allowing equal numbers to come from each country, as well as providing for family reunification.

There are those who want to try to stop this. The vast majority of the millions of immigrants, documented or not, still believe in the idea that if you work hard - and fight - you can and should make it. Why else would they have come? The DREAMers - young people who have put in countless hours studying and graduating from high school and college - and their families, embody what it means to be an American.

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Capitalism is an irrational system

By Sam Webb

Economist Paul Krugman, in his new book - *End the Depression Now!* - and recent opinion columns in the *New York Times*, expresses exasperation with sections of the political and economic elite on both over their stewardship of the economy.

Krugman says too many people at or near the levers of power are choosing austerity policies that could well send the world into a far deeper economic quagmire.

What drives him nearly crazy is that other choices exist and could easily be pursued if the will were there on the part of highly placed decision-makers. Such choices include accenting government spending, allowing for modest inflation, and economic growth. These would, says Krugman, lift the global economy out of the doldrums, including bringing the unemployment rate down from its current depression levels.

But to his consternation, the language and practice of austerity drowns out the voices of reason and economic revival here and in Europe.

So the question is: What explains this seemingly irrational attachment to policies that leave the U.S. and Europe in stagnation and could well throw both into a deep depression?

The answer has three parts, all interrelated.

First of all, proponents of austerity in high places (the most zealous are on the political right - the Republicans in the U.S. Congress) are tethered to an erroneous economic argument. That is, that belt-tightening is necessary for economic expansion because it boosts investor confidence, tamps down inflationary pressures, and prevents evil public capital from crowding out sacred private capital in the marketplace.

But this argument has been ably refuted on numerous occasions by Krugman and many others. And it has proved terribly wanting in countries where it has been the practice.

Second, behind every policymaker espousing austerity is not some defunct economist as John Maynard Keynes once suggested, but powerful



corporate class interests, and especially finance capital.

For these interests, a protracted economic downturn, as we are now experiencing, is an opportunity as well as a crisis.

We make a mistake if we think that the top tier of monopoly capital is committed to a robust recovery that would lift all boats.

A capitalist economy oscillating around a low level of economic activity not only is capable of generating profits, but can also strengthen the bargaining hand of capital against labor and the popular movement. Indeed, a world economy characterized by overcapacity, stagnation, and intensified competition, provides optimal conditions for rolling back the political and collective bargaining rights and benefits won in an earlier period of capitalist development.

Finally, capitalism, we should not forget, is an irrational system. Its commitment to the structural logic of capital accumulation and profit maximization makes it so. This has always been the case, but it takes on even greater force in this era of structural crisis and environmental destruction on a global level. No matter where we turn, it seems like capitalism is aggressively pursuing policies that make no sense from the standpoint of humanity, economic sanity, and nature.

Capitalism needs to be replaced.

What explains this attachment to policies that leave the U.S. and Europe in stagnation?

430,000 signatures filed to end Ohio gerrymandering

By Rick Nagin

Union members and allies submitted petitions with over 430,000 signatures to Ohio Secretary of State John Husted on Tuesday to place a constitutional amendment on the November ballot to end gerrymandering of state and congressional legislative districts.

That more than met the requirement of at least 385,253 signatures from half (44) of Ohio's 88 counties.

The action culminated a drive of just over three months prompted by the rigging of congressional districts last summer by extremist Republican politicians elected in 2010.

The petition drive, initiated by the Ohio League of Women Voters and other good-government groups, was joined by We Are Ohio, the labor-led coalition that organized last year's successful repeal of Senate Bill 5, the union-busting law stripping collective bargaining rights from public employees.

We Are Ohio said more "extreme legislation like Senate Bill 5" would be inevitable if partisan noncompetitive districts continue to be drawn.

The petition drive also included volunteers from the Ohio Democratic Party, the campaign of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown, and Organize for America, the campaign to re-elect President Obama.

In an evenly divided state, GOP operatives had drawn 16 congressional districts such that Republicans were favored in 12 while Democratic voters were piled into the remaining four.

Under the proposed amendment districts would be drawn by an independent, nonpartisan 12-member commission, composed equally of Democrats, Republicans and non-affiliated voters, none of whom could hold elected or partisan office or be lobbyists.

Obama se anticipa a republicanos, presenta nuevo plan tributario

Por Prensa Latina

El presidente Barack Obama lanzó hoy un golpe publicitario electoral a la bancada republicana y confirmó que defenderá un programa para recortar impuestos a la clase media estadounidense.

Un comunicado de la Casa Blanca adelantó que el mandatario demócrata explicará este lunes los detalles del plan durante una conferencia para abordar el controvertido tema tributario, que ha sido lema central de la campaña política opositora.

Trascendió que la administración federal presentará un proyecto legislativo para extender las reducciones de gravámenes a aquellos individuos que ingresen menos de 250 mil dólares anuales.

Republicanos en la Cámara de Representantes habían previsto anunciar a finales de este mes una medida similar dirigida a mantener las rebajas de tasas adoptadas durante el mandato de George W. Bush y que deben caducar en cinco meses.

Para promocionar su agenda económica, Obama preparó una nueva gira proselitista a partir del miércoles por los estados llamados pendulares (de gran peso electoral) New Hampshire, Colorado y Nevada.

El uno por ciento de los estadounidenses más ricos paga solo 18,5 por ciento de impuestos por ingresos, alrededor de la mitad de la tasa oficial que obliga a 35 por ciento, confirmó un estudio del Tax Policy Center (TPC).

Una investigación de esta organización no gubernamental halló que casi dos tercios de los millonarios del país pagan mucho menos en gravámenes anuales que lo oficial-

mente establecido por el estado.

La mayoría logra eludir sus deberes gracias a atajos legales o vaguedades en las normas taxativas mayormente relacionados con descuentos para obras de caridad o por manutención de niños, entre otros factores.

El asunto atrajo la atención mediática cuando trascendió que el candidato presidencial republicano y exgobernador Mitt Romney solo entregaba un 15 por ciento de impuestos, pese a amasar una fortuna de 250 millones de dólares.

De acuerdo con el TPC, al menos 24 mil de los contribuyentes millonarios no pagaron absolutamente ningún impuesto sobre ingresos en el año 2011 y aquellos que suman a sus arcas más de 65 mil dólares al año sufragaron solo un nueve por ciento.

Otras noticias: Corte analiza ley de Texas para identificar votantes latinos

Una corte de esta capital escucha desde hoy los argumentos del Gobierno federal y de Texas sobre una ley considerada discriminatoria porque obliga a los electores hispanos de ese estado a presentar documentos de identificación con fotografía.

Los tres jueces federales del panel permitirán a los representantes del Departamento de Justicia y del territorio sureño exponer sus planteamientos en los próximos cinco días, pero prevén emitir el veredicto del caso en agosto.

El dictamen del tribunal impactará en al menos otros 15 estados, entre ellos Mississippi, Carolina del Sur, Georgia e Indiana, que aprobaron o pretenden implementar legislaciones similares para evitar supuestamente el fraude electoral.