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Midterm Wake-Up Call: Study Shows Pennsylvania's Nonunion Construction Workers Built the GOP Coalition

PITTSBURGH, PA, May 06—Associated Builders and Contractors Western PA today released the results of a new survey conducted by The Harris Poll in six battleground states, including Pennsylvania, which found that nonunion skilled trades workers—who make up 88% of the state’s construction workforce—are an influential voting bloc in elections and were the driving force behind Republicans’ success in 2024, including the election of President Donald Trump.

“While the working-class identity has too often been conflated with union affiliation, the data shows that the state’s nonunion construction workers voted for President Trump at a significantly higher rate in 2024,” said Justin Erdner, Chapter President of Western PA. “In fact, through measures of party alignment, candidate support, and policy preferences, nonunion workers in the trades consistently align more closely with the GOP than their union counterparts.”

“The survey also makes it clear that working-class support should not be confused with union leadership support in Pennsylvania,” said Erdner. “Nonunion construction workers not only supported President Trump at a significantly higher rate than union workers in 2024, but they also vastly outnumber union workers in the battleground states that will determine control of Congress next year.”

“Despite this political reality, the Trump administration continues to support the controversial project labor agreement (PLA) mandate that President Joe Biden established via executive order,” said Erdner. “The PLA mandate tells nonunion construction workers they are unworthy of participating in federally funded projects, which risks alienating a workforce that forms a critical part of the GOP's electoral base, particularly in swing states where nonunion workers play an outsized role.”

“Ahead of the midterms, President Trump and his administration have a choice,” said Erdner. “They can reverse course and allow all workers, including the nonunion workers who powered their 2024 victory, to participate on federal projects, or they can continue appeasing union leadership through policies that restrict competition, raise costs, and alienate the overwhelming majority of Pennsylvania's construction workforce.”

Highlights from the study include:

- Nonunion construction workers outnumber union workers in presidential swing states, comprising 76%–98% of the construction workforce electorate.
- Merit shop support for President Trump exceeded union support across all six swing states:
 - In Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, nonunion workers supported President Trump at a rate 7 points higher than union workers.
- Skilled trades workers oppose union preferences in federal contracting by a 2-to-1 margin.
- When asked whether the federal government should have the flexibility to select contractors based on best value for taxpayers, rather than union affiliation, 83% of nonunion construction workers agreed or strongly agreed and 73% of union construction workers agreed or strongly agreed.

For more information, visit abcwpa.org.

Associated Builders and Contractors of Western Pennsylvania is a regional chapter of the national construction industry trade association established in 1950, representing contractors and industry professionals across Western Pennsylvania. As part of a network of 67 chapters and 24,000 members nationwide, ABC Western PA advances the merit shop philosophy and supports open competition in the construction industry. The chapter is committed to helping its members develop people, win work, and perform work safely, ethically, and profitably—strengthening both the construction industry and the communities it serves.

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