

Despite structural changes, labor movement is strong

John Topp
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The labor movement in this country is undergoing some change in structure at the national level. But make no mistake, the underlying principles of worker strength through organization is still on a solid foundation.

What we're seeing is structural change. Not since the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations merged has there been such a movement. The new national group is called Change to Win, and it's fundamentally a labor organization that wants to take member organizations to a new level of competitive fairness in this new world economy. The leadership appears deeply committed to historical fundamental principles of union organizations: fair and equitable treatment of all workers. These leaders' views of the best practices for advancing the labor movement appear to be at the core of the movement. This is labor's business, and at the end of the day, the labor movement at the national level will sort this all out.

Local stability

In the meantime, at the Milwaukee level today, all 20 organizations of local labor's construction unions are functioning intact through the Milwaukee Construction Building Trades Council. This council also works closely with the Joint Apprenticeship Training committees of the various disciplines to ensure a seamless transition to future generations of the work force. Although there is change occurring at various levels, the Milwaukee organizations, through good management and leadership, are working diligently to maintain stability of the skilled work force for the contractors and, ultimately, the customers who provide the opportunity to work.

Change is an inevitable process that can be a lesson in the dynamics of the human spirit. This is especially true when the goal is to be effective, efficient, competitive, fair, realistic, secure and profitable all in the same breath.

The market will ultimately dictate to all of us in construction -- labor and management alike -- what this change will look like in the future. The game is survival -- no fluff, no child's play. The rules of governance provide the order, and the human element provides the challenge.

We have a delivery system in our construction industry that works well. With certainty, labor will find leadership emerging from its ranks to find a path to follow alongside the contractors, to ensure a viable, value-driven product for our customers.

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