

The Monitor

RAISING THE BAR BY MONITORING THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY



Iowa's Erosion of Child Labor Laws

New laws ease child labor on hazardous job sites, raising safety and industry concerns.

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

TRANSIT'S IMPENDING FISCAL CLIFF



Marc Poulos
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Chicago region's public transportation agencies – the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra Rail, and Pace Bus – are facing serious operating funding shortfalls in coming years. The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant shifts in public transit usage due to increased remote work. These changes, coupled with longstanding funding deficits, led to major revenue losses for public transportation agencies. And while the Federal government stepped up providing over \$3.5 billion in funding to keep services running during the pandemic and post-COVID, this funding is set to run out by 2026.

Moving forward, Chicago transit systems face an over \$730 million annual budget gap beginning in 2026 simply to return to pre-pandemic service levels. This impending crisis could potentially decimate service to thousands of people, cripple local economies, and diminish the quality of life for residents.

This issue has become a key topic under consideration by the Illinois General Assembly. Elected officials, public agencies, and civic and community organizations have all contributed to an active conversation over the past several months. We at the III FFC have been diligent in keeping up with these activities and are performing our own research to understand the best course of action. Recently, certain civic organizations proposed a bill (HB 5829) to merge Chicago's three transit agencies

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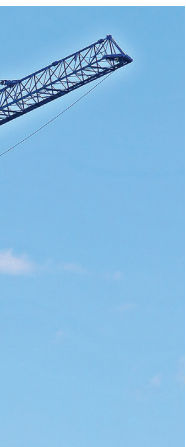
along with the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) into a single entity called the "Metropolitan Mobility Authority." The III FFC is opposed to this bill.

Instead, we intend to work with elected officials to propose a new, labor led bill. This bill will support the existing public transportation agencies and offer new funding sources for their operations. But most importantly, it will be key to protecting Illinois' Road Fund money, which directly supports the road and bridge projects we work on.

Adequately funding public transportation should be a state priority. Public transportation is a crucial component of the transportation network, ensuring every person has an affordable and efficient transportation option, whether they're going to work or school, accessing healthcare, or grocery shopping. It is a fundamental right that should be provided to every Illinois resident, and this should be reflected in the state budget.

In recent years, Illinois' state budget began using a larger portion of the Road Fund, as opposed to the General Revenue Fund (GRF), to support public transit operations funding accounts. This is essentially borrowing transportation money that would've otherwise gone to road and bridge projects. Instead of transferring money between transportation systems, it will be vital that public transportation has its own dedicated funding source that does not jeopardize the funding of other transportation projects.

We remain dedicated to finding both a viable funding solution for public transit while safeguarding road and bridge funding, which is crucial to our work. We look forward to proposing our new labor-led bill that will prioritize the interests of contractors and workers.





ILLINOIS' ROAD INVESTMENTS ARE PAYING DIVIDENDS. PUBLIC TRANSIT IS NEXT.

An efficient, accessible, and safe transportation system is essential to a robust economy and high quality of life. It connects workers to jobs, ensures that businesses can get products to market, brings customers to commercial and entertainment activities, and links residents to medical facilities, schools, and more. Every dollar invested in road and bridge construction and maintenance generates \$2 in local economic activity.

For decades, Illinois' infrastructure system was deteriorating. The shoddy condition of the transportation system was costing commuters more than \$600 per year in preventable vehicle maintenance repairs. Years of kicking the can down the road in Springfield had left the state facing an estimated \$41 billion maintenance backlog. The motor fuel tax, which comprises 52% of all funding for the state's transportation system, had not been increased since the early 1990s. Inflation and vehicle fuel efficiency gains had combined to create a shrinking pool of revenues—all while Illinois politicians had regularly raided the Road Fund to pay for programs that were unrelated to transportation.

Illinois voters took the first corrective step in 2016, passing the Safe Roads Amendment and banning the diversion of transportation dollars for anything other than transportation purposes. When Governor JB Pritzker and a bipartisan majority of lawmakers finally passed the \$45 billion Rebuild Illinois infrastructure and jobs program in 2019 to modernize roads, bridges, and other critical infrastructure systems, taxpayers could be assured that the money would not be spent elsewhere.

One of Rebuild Illinois' principal funding mechanisms was an increase in the gas tax to make up for three decades of rising costs, followed by annual adjustments pegged to the rate of inflation. In July 2024, for example, the motor fuel tax increased by 1.6 cents.

Today, there is concrete evidence that these investments are paying off. More than 6,500 highway miles have been repaired and nearly 1,000 safety improvement projects have been completed. The latest state roadway condition report revealed that the share of Illinois' roads in poor condition has plummeted by 12% over the last five years while the number of roads in good or excellent condition increased by 9%. Illinois Department of Transportation data show that safety is starting to improve as well, with 9% fewer roadway crash fatalities in 2024 than one year ago. Additionally, Rebuild Illinois put

thousands of people to work, both directly in construction zones and indirectly through the supply chain. Construction apprentices, for example, have grown by 29% since 2018.

Illinois' next transportation challenge, however, is fast approaching. As discussed in the Executive Director's article on Page 1, mass transit agencies in the Chicago area are facing a \$730 million annual budget deficit starting in 2026. This "fiscal cliff" is looming because pandemic-related relief funds are set to expire, but it comes at a time when ridership continues to rebound—reaching 62% of pre-pandemic levels due to a 14% increase this year alone. The momentum of commuters returning to Metra, Pace, and Chicago Transit Authority rail and bus services and the 15,000 jobs for Illinois workers at these agencies are both at risk unless a sustainable path forward is identified.

Fortunately, the success of Rebuild Illinois offers a blueprint for lawmakers to resolving this issue. While votes to raise new revenue can be difficult, investments in public infrastructure pay large dividends, including safer communities, thousands of quality jobs, more businesses looking to expand in Illinois, and a reliable transportation system with a robust—and constitutionally protected—funding mechanism. Lawmakers once again have the opportunity to not only save jobs for working families, but also to enable mass transit agencies to make needed investments to improve speed, reliability, cleanliness, and safety. With the right solution, Illinois can build on the progress it has already made and deliver a modern transportation system that boosts economic growth and allows communities to thrive.

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PUBLIC BODY SPOTLIGHT

Elgin, IL

UPDATED RESPONSIBLE BIDDER ORDINANCE TO ADVANCE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



The City of Elgin made a significant stride in advancing workforce development by enhancing its Responsible Bidder Ordinance (RBO), placing a stronger emphasis on apprenticeship graduation requirements. This move reflects a commitment to ensuring high standards in public works projects while fostering the growth of skilled tradespeople.

An RBO is a critical tool in public procurement, designed to ensure that contractors meet specific criteria before they are awarded public contracts. The primary goal of these ordinances is to guarantee that public projects are completed by responsible contractors who value quality workmanship, labor standards, and safety. By prioritizing well-trained workers, municipalities like Elgin aim to deliver better value to taxpayers while maintaining the highest standards for public works projects.

Elgin's RBO has been in place since 2011. However, recognizing the need for more specific guidelines, the city has now updated the ordinance to include requiring contractors and subcontractors to participate in U.S. Department of Labor-approved apprenticeship programs. Not only must contractors and subcontractors demonstrate their commitment to training, but they are now required to have graduated at least two apprentices in each of the past three years for each construction craft the bidder will perform on the project.

This move incentivizes contractors to invest in apprenticeship programs that ensure a steady pipeline of skilled workers ready to meet both current and future demands. Michael Lingl, Special Projects Manager for the Indiana, Illinois, Iowa Foundation for Fair Contracting (III FFC), applauded the decision, stating, "Updating Elgin's Responsible Bidder Ordinance to include specific apprenticeship graduation requirements underscores the city's dedication to workforce development and safeguarding taxpayer dollars. These requirements help cultivate a highly skilled workforce ready to collaborate with local businesses to meet current and future construction needs."

Elgin's revised RBO will play a critical role in shaping the future of public construction. By integrating rigorous apprenticeship requirements, the city ensures a sustainable, skilled workforce capable of meeting its construction challenges for years to come while ensuring taxpayer investments in public works projects are spent responsibly.



SOLAR FARMS: DONE RIGHT WITH LOCAL WORKERS

FOCUS ON

INDIANA



Myron Sutton
REGIONAL MANAGER

Whether you support or oppose solar farms, one thing is certain: more solar farms are being built at an increasing pace, and it is likely one will be built in an area near you or a family member. That's why it is critical for local communities to ensure that these projects truly benefit the local economy – starting with the workforce hired to build them.

Developers often sell solar projects to community officials by touting easy income from leased lands and additional tax revenue, which they suggest could help lower taxes elsewhere. Boasting about the millions or billions they will invest, they keep officials focused on the end game of added revenues. However, these same developers frequently downplay or even disregard the opportunity of employing a local workforce during the construction phase. Instead, they prefer to bring in a traveling workforce from across the country. Why? Because their main priority is maximizing profits – not supporting local communities.

Developers of solar farms are rarely local business owners or local property owners with a stake in the community's well-being. Many solar farms are developed by financial investment groups and money markets that are out-of-state Limited Liability Corporations (LLCs) where the investors remain anonymous. Owners are often private equity and institutional investors, major corporations, and venture capitalist, which can include foreign investors and even foreign money markets. Their goal is simple: build the solar farm, sell it for a quick profit, and move on to the next project. This approach leaves little room for community-centered values like job creation or economic support for local workers.

Despite already budgeting for construction labor costs, some developers opt to cut costs by avoiding local labor, keeping as much of the project's financial benefits for themselves

as possible. And a developer who does not wish to even entertain talking about hiring a local workforce has no true interest in the community's long-term prosperity. In some cases, developers even distract local officials with promises of future tax revenues, while discouraging talk of local hiring. Some may engage in talks about hiring local workers with no intent to follow through, or worse, fail to honor signed agreements. A case in Sullivan County, Indiana, showed this when officials had to take legal action after a developer did not meet their commitment to hire locally, leading to the termination of county tax incentives.



Matthew Huycke, IUOE Local 150 Apprentice, working on the Dunn's Bridge solar project in Jasper County.

So, what happens when a solar developer does hire a local workforce? The results can be transformative. Take the Dunn's Bridge solar project in Jasper County, for example. When construction began on the 700-megawatt solar farm, the general contractor, Black & Veatch, made a deliberate choice to hire local workers. At its peak, the project employed up to 900 local construction workers over the course of a year. The workforce included numerous apprentices who gained valuable skills, laying the foundation for lifelong careers in the trades.

The economic impact was staggering. Over \$250 million dollars in wages and benefits were paid out to local construction

workers, many who worked 10-hour days, six days a week. That's \$250 million injected directly into the local economy—money spent by families who live, work, and invest in the community. These aren't just jobs; they represent a sustainable economic boost that ripples through schools, businesses, and local services.

The bottom line is that solar farm developers do not approach a community out of a sense of charity or desire to create jobs. Their goal is profit. It is up to the elected officials to negotiate the best deal for their community. When we look at the jobs and income generated by solar farm projects like Dunn's Bridge, the question becomes: What official wouldn't want to ensure these opportunities for their local workforce and economy?

LEGAL CORNER

THE FIGHT OVER CLEAN CAR AND TRUCK RULES: CAN ILLINOIS MAKE A QUICK SWITCH TO ELECTRIC?

The Illinois Pollution Control Board (IPCB) is considering new rules aimed at promoting cleaner air by encouraging the use of electric vehicles (EVs) and limiting the sale of traditional gas-powered cars and trucks. These rules, known as the Advanced Clean Cars II (ACC II) and Advanced Clean Trucks (ACT) standards, are being pushed by a coalition of environmental groups like the Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council. The rules would ban the sale of new gas-powered light-duty vehicles by 2035 and set annual sales requirements for zero and near-zero medium and heavy-duty vehicles. But not everyone is on board with this ambitious plan.

The Illinois Constitution contains a transportation lockbox amendment in which public bodies must spend all transportation revenue for transportation purposes. The impetus for this amendment was to prevent constant transportation fund sweeps authorized by the Illinois legislature whereby road and infrastructure funding was dwindling. One major source of revenue for the transportation fund is motor fuel tax. The proposed rules would severely limit the sale of motor fuel and, in turn, mean less money to fix our crumbling infrastructure. The proposed rules do not address any replacement for this loss in revenue. In addition, the electric grid is not in place nor prepared for the additional strain on the system.

Therefore, the III FFC, among other stakeholders, are opposing the proposed rules. The III FFC recently filed a motion to dismiss the proposed rules arguing the IPCB does not have the authority in the first place to adopt these rules.

In short, the Illinois Environmental Protection Act (Act) gives the IPCB broad authority to make rules to protect air quality. However, this authority does not extend to regulating the sale of vehicles unless those vehicles have been specifically determined to be hazardous by the IPCB. In order to adopt a regulation, the legislature must authorize a grant of authority to do so. Nothing in the Act authorizes the IPCB to adopt these rules.

This legal battle raises important questions about how prepared Illinois is to adopt such a plan. The III FFC believes that any changes as drastic as limiting the sale of gas-powered cars need to be passed by the state legislature, not adopted through the regulatory process.

For now, the IPCB will have to consider the legal issues brought forward by III FFC's motion to dismiss and decide whether it has the authority to move forward with these ambitious clean air rules. If the motion is not granted, IPCB hearings in support of and in opposition to the rules will continue. Regardless of the decision, the III FFC will continue to be a proactive advocate for adequate transportation funding.

Kara Principe
COUNSEL



CONTRACTOR SPOTLIGHT



IHC CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES LLC

EVOLVING OVER DECADES, LEADERSHIP IN THE INDUSTRY, & BUILDING A LEGACY

Since joining IHC Construction Companies LLC in 1990, Dave Rock has been instrumental in the company's impressive transformation, driving it from \$20 million to \$200 million in annual revenue. As CEO, his leadership and vision have contributed significantly to IHC's growth, supported by a team of around 90 office employees and 150-200 field staff operating from offices in Illinois and Georgia. Rock credits much of IHC's success to the people they have recruited and retained over the years. "The vision came from younger employees who wanted to see its growth," he says, reflecting on how IHC has navigated changing markets and evolved while maintaining a commitment to high standards.

GROWTH THROUGH ADAPTATION AND DIVERSIFICATION

Founded in 1906, IHC has consistently adapted to the demands of the construction industry, weathering economic shifts, technological advances, and regulatory changes. From its post-WWII days as a leading utility contractor working with companies like ComEd, IHC shifted focus to water treatment and infrastructure. The company capitalized on the growing demand for clean water infrastructure and storm detention following the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970.

"Our markets expanded," Rock explains. "We're not the same company we were at the start. It's good people and a willingness to meet challenges that have driven us forward." IHC's diversification has been key to its longevity, as it has broadened its expertise across sectors like water, utilities, building, commerce, and transportation infrastructure.

DESIGN-BUILD: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO CONSTRUCTION

One of IHC's distinctive offerings is its Design-Build division, which provides an alternative to the traditional bidding process. This approach, particularly popular in the private sector, allows for greater collaboration with clients by negotiating project costs and the scope of work more efficiently. While this method has yet to gain widespread traction in public sector projects, its effectiveness in delivering on client expectations remains a hallmark of IHC's private infrastructure work.



METRA Englewood Flyover project.

A LONGSTANDING PARTNERSHIP WITH MWRD

A significant aspect of IHC's portfolio is its work with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) of Greater Chicago. Since taking on its first contract with MWRD in 1992, IHC has become one of the agency's trusted contractors. IHC is currently managing 20 contracts with MWRD, including jobs totaling \$100 million at the water treatment reclamation plant in Stickney, Illinois.

Rock attributes this ongoing relationship to mutual trust and consistent results. "Since 1992, we've consistently maintained contracts with MWRD, completing three to four major projects exceeding \$200 million each," he says. MWRD's stable funding has ensured a steady flow of opportunities for IHC, fueling the company's growth and enabling it to tackle more complex projects. Much of IHC's work with MWRD involves replacing and upgrading aging water infrastructure, addressing the ongoing need to modernize and repair corroding systems.

In addition, the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in 2021 has led to increased funding for clean water initiatives, further expanding IHC's opportunities in recent years. "I always say that in 2022 we saw inflation like never before, and in 2023 we saw opportunity like never before," Rock reflects on the recent surge in construction jobs. "We went from managing one or two projects at a time in certain areas to overseeing five \$50 million jobs simultaneously in 2023."

ENGAGING WITH LABOR-MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIPS

Rock's role extends beyond his responsibilities at IHC to active participation in labor-management partnerships. He has positions with the Chicagoland Operators Joint Labor-Management PAC (COJLMP), the Mid-America Regional Bargaining Association (MARBA), and the Chicagoland Association of General Contractors, among others. He believes that partnerships with organized labor are crucial to the success of companies like IHC. "Organized labor is our partner—some days we get along, and some days we don't," Rock says candidly. "I am a strong believer in collective bargaining." He emphasizes the importance of engagement with unions, particularly in Illinois, where unionized labor plays a dominant role in the public construction industry.

In contrast, IHC's operations in Georgia face different challenges due to the predominantly non-unionized

"We compete in a lot of markets—utilities, construction management, water, transportation infrastructure—and as the marketplace changes, we will continue to adapt."

Dave Rock,
CEO, IHC Construction Companies LLC



workforce in the region. "Union construction is concentrated in the larger cities, and expanding operations in Georgia is tough due to the lack of skilled, trained labor," Rock points out. This difference underscores the complexity of workforce management across different regions, requiring flexibility and adaptability from companies like IHC.

LOOKING AHEAD: IHC'S FUTURE

As IHC continues to evolve, Rock remains focused on maintaining the company's competitive edge through hard work, strategic partnerships, and an unwavering commitment to quality. "We compete in a lot of markets—utilities, construction management, water, transportation infrastructure—and as the marketplace changes, we will continue to adapt," he says.

Under his leadership, IHC has not only thrived in a competitive industry but has also positioned itself as a leader in essential infrastructure development. With a robust portfolio of public and private sector projects, IHC's future looks bright, built on a foundation of more than a century of excellence in the construction industry.





Lydia Simrayh
CONSTRUCTION ANALYST



I-80 CORRIDOR

It goes without saying that Interstate 80 (I-80) in Will County has been in dire need of repair. Fortunately, as one of the cornerstone projects of Gov. JB Pritzker’s historic Rebuild Illinois Capital Program, an estimated \$1.3 billion dollars is being put into transforming this crucial transportation artery. This massive overhaul will not only restore safety for commuters but also generate thousands of construction and permanent jobs, laying the foundation for long-term, sustainable economic growth in the region.



This project, spearheaded by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), encompasses approximately 16 miles of interstate from Ridge Road to U.S. 30. This part of I-80 passes through several municipalities, including Minooka, Channahon, Shorewood, Rockdale, Joliet, and New Lenox.

Each day, roughly 80,000 vehicles travel in this region, with about a quarter of them being trucks. The current infrastructure struggles to support this volume, especially with increasing population growth and heavy congestion, leading to frequent merging, weaving, and accidents. The reconstruction aims to address these issues, making I-80 safer for both commercial drivers and families who rely on this corridor for daily commutes to work and school. In addition to reconstructing the 16 miles of interstate, roughly 30 bridges will be rehabilitated or replaced, and a new flyover ramp will link southbound I-55 to eastbound I-80 to improve the flow of traffic.

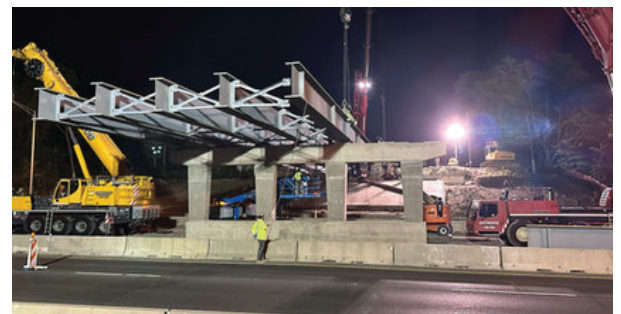
Phase 1 of the project has been successfully completed, and the project is currently in Phase 2 (Final Design, Land Acquisition) and Phase 3 (Construction). Recently, on October 4th, Gov. JB Pritzker and IDOT were joined by local officials to celebrate the completion of three vital bridges

carrying both directions of interstate over Hickory Creek, Richards Street, and Rowell Avenue/ Canadian National Railroad. These three bridges make up a \$96 million investment that jump started the I-80 project.

In addition to these recent accomplishments, current work being performed consists of I-80: Ridge Road to River Road reconstruction; Briggs Street over I-80 bridge replacement; River Road over I-80 bridge replacement; I-80: River Road to Wheeler Avenue reconstruction (this includes I-55 and Larkin

Avenue Interchange reconstruction which will take place next year); and I-80: Rowell Avenue to Gougar Road reconstruction (this includes Briggs Street Interchange reconstruction). The projected time frame for the completion of the bridges mentioned is by the end of 2024, with road reconstruction slated for completion by 2025/2026.

Looking ahead, substantial completion of the entire I-80 project is anticipated by the end of 2028, with final touches, including landscaping and bridge demolition, extending into 2029. Notably, the Des Plaines River bridge will be replaced during this final phase. The ongoing reconstruction of the I-80 corridor represents a monumental effort to modernize vital transportation infrastructure in Illinois. The reconstruction of the I-80 corridor is set to boost economic vitality, enhance safety, and improve the quality of life for both residents and commuters.



Pictures of I-80 reconstruction project.

SOUTH SUBURBAN AIRPORT

The long-discussed development of a cargo-only airport in Will County could significantly impact the region's economy. The proposed South Suburban Airport (SSA) is expected to create thousands of construction jobs over a multi-year construction phase and boost regional economic activity, according to a recent study by the Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI). As the Illinois General Assembly takes steps to move the project forward, it represents a crucial opportunity for economic growth and job creation for local contractors and workers in the region.

The new study by ILEPI, *The South Suburban Airport: Exploring the Economic Impact of a Cargo-Only Chicagoland Airport*, highlights the broader benefits of the project, estimating that the construction phase alone could stimulate regional economic activity by over \$1.3 billion. This influx of capital is expected to spur growth across various sectors – including housing, retail, and hospitality – as local workers spend their earnings within the community. This will lead to increased job security and enhanced local spending power, creating a more robust economy for everyone. In addition, the report finds that the SSA is expected to provide 8,000 jobs throughout all phases of construction.

The proposed South Suburban Airport (SSA) is expected to create thousands of construction jobs over a multi-year construction phase and boost regional economic activity by over \$1.3 billion.

The momentum behind the SSA project has been building, thanks in part to recent legislative actions. In 2019, the Illinois General Assembly allocated \$162 million under the Rebuild Illinois program to construct a new interchange at I-57 and Eagle Lake Road, a vital access point for the proposed airport. This infrastructure investment is crucial for ensuring efficient transportation and logistics operations once the airport is operational.

In addition to the interchange, legislation passed in 2023 and 2024 mandates the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) to establish a prequalification process for vendors interested in participating in the airport's development. This move is designed to streamline the selection of contractors and ensure that the project attracts qualified, responsible, and experienced contractors.

The SSA project is also positioned as a public-private partnership (P3), which allows for unsolicited proposals from developers. This approach aims to leverage private sector expertise and investment alongside public funding, potentially accelerating the project's timeline and enhancing its overall feasibility. P3s have proven to be effective in past infrastructure projects, offering opportunities for collaboration between public entities and private contractors.

Ultimately, the potential benefits of the SSA project are clear. The SSA will create middle-class jobs, grow Will County's transportation and logistics hub, and drive economic growth for years to come.

1. Illinois Economic Policy Institute. (2024). *The South Suburban Airport: Exploring the Economic Impact of a Cargo-Only Chicagoland Airport*. Retrieved from <https://illinoisupdate.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/ssa-report-final.pdf>

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

ERIC PAULSEN

Construction Analyst

Eric Paulsen's career has been shaped by his dedication to public service, strong investigative skills, and a family background in construction. Now serving as a Construction Analyst with the III FFC, Eric brings a unique blend of experience to the role.

Eric's passion for law enforcement began early on, thanks to a basketball coach during his freshman year of high school. That coach, who was a Detective Sergeant, became a role model for Eric. After earning a degree in Criminology, with minors in Sociology and Political Science from Carthage College, Eric became a Deputy with the Boone County Sheriff's Department, where, ironically, his former coach had also served before moving to a different police department. Eric spent 28 years in law enforcement. Eric retired as a Master Sergeant with the Illinois State Police after 28 years in law enforcement, where he supervised a platoon of troopers and sergeants and served as a K9 handler for 18 years.

While law enforcement was Eric's main career path, he also gained experience in the construction industry early on. Eric worked as a laborer for his dad's company, Paulsen Paving & Excavating, while he was testing for different police departments. The IUOE Local 150 signatory company specialized in paving, excavating, sewer work, and concrete before it dissolved in 2013 when Eric's dad and uncle retired.



This early exposure to construction, combined with his law enforcement background, laid a strong foundation for his current role. Much like in law enforcement, his job at III FFC requires ensuring compliance—whether with the Illinois Prevailing Wage Act, OSHA regulations, or public bidding requirements. He compares his role to investigating a crime, as both involve attention to detail, thorough investigation, and enforcement of laws. Eric's experience working on construction has helped him smoothly transition into the world of construction compliance.

As part of his responsibilities, Eric works to protect public bodies by helping them identify responsible contractors and enforce compliance with prevailing wage laws. He also tracks and investigates new companies that bid on public contracts to ensure they adhere to the necessary standards.

Eric enjoys the social aspect of his job, which is less stressful than his law enforcement days, and values the chance to protect workers and responsible contractors. Outside of work, he's an avid outdoorsman, enjoying deer hunting, fishing, and family time with his wife Jenn and their two college-aged children.

Eric Paulsen's unique blend of experience in law enforcement and construction makes him a valuable asset in the fight for compliance and fairness within the construction industry. His commitment to protecting public bodies and fighting against irresponsible contractors makes him an essential member of the III FFC team.

IOWA'S EROSION OF CHILD LABOR PROTECTIONS PUTS VULNERABLE YOUTH AT RISK

In May 2023, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds signed an expansive bill that significantly weakened the state's child labor protections, sparking widespread concern among child advocates, educators, and labor groups. The new law relaxes restrictions on the hours minors can work and broadens the types of jobs they are permitted to perform, including tasks previously deemed too dangerous for young workers. These changes should raise serious alarm for all Iowans who care about the well-being of our children.

One of the most troubling aspects of the revised law is the extension of permissible work hours for child workers. Previously, there were clear limits on the number of hours minors could work during the school year to ensure that their education and personal development came first. Under the new law, minors can now work longer hours and stay on the job until 9:00 p.m. on school nights (Iowa Code §92.2). Proponents argue that this flexibility benefits young people seeking part-time employment, but child advocates fear that these extended hours could lead to exploitation and negatively impact children's health, education, and well-being.

Research consistently shows that excessive work hours have detrimental effects on adolescents' physical and mental health. Long shifts can cause fatigue, stress, and sleep deprivation, all of which undermine a student's ability to concentrate, perform well in school, and maintain healthy social relationships. By allowing minors to work longer into the evening, we risk impairing their academic performance and jeopardizing their future educational opportunities. Adolescents who work too many hours are also less likely to engage in extracurricular activities, which are crucial for personal development, leadership skills, and college readiness.

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of the new law is the expansion of the types of jobs that minors aged 16 and 17 can now take on, including roles previously banned due to safety concerns. These hazardous jobs—such as woodworking, operating power saws, and demolition—require specialized skills and safety protocols that even seasoned adult workers must be trained to handle through rigorous apprenticeship programs.

By allowing minors to engage in these tasks, even under the guise of an "approved training program," the law places children in dangerous situations that could result in serious injuries or even fatalities. Construction jobs, in particular, demand not only physical strength but also mental acuity and decision-making skills that minors have not yet developed. The idea that a teenager, after only minimal training, could safely operate dangerous equipment or participate in demolition work is deeply concerning. These are tasks meant for adults with years of experience and proper safety training. Allowing young, inexperienced workers into such environments increases the likelihood of preventable accidents that could have lifelong consequences.



This law not only jeopardizes the safety of young workers but also undermines decades of progress in labor protections. Iowa's child labor revisions send a dangerous message: that economic gain and convenience for employers take precedence over the safety and well-being of children. By introducing minors into jobs that were previously reserved for skilled adult workers, there is a risk of creating a race to the bottom, where employers might prioritize cheaper, more exploitable child labor over adequately trained adults. This shift could depress wages, undermine labor standards, and create a climate where worker exploitation becomes more common.

It is imperative that policymakers revisit these changes and strengthen, rather than weaken, protections for Iowa's youth. Instead of placing children in dangerous jobs where they are unprepared to handle the risks, we should be investing in safe, supportive environments for them to learn and grow—both in and out of the classroom.

1. Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2019). "Sleep." Retrieved from <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/factsheets/sleep>



Andrew Waeyaert
REGIONAL MANAGER

THE 26TH NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR FAIR CONTRACTING CONFERENCE



The 26th Annual National Alliance for Fair Contracting (NAFC) Conference, held from September 15 to September 18, 2024, in Nashville, Tennessee, was a notable convergence of industry experts, public officials, and labor advocates. As a first-time attendee, the experience was both informative and enriching, offering a comprehensive dive into key topics like labor standards, public infrastructure, and fair contracting practices. The event provided ample opportunities for networking, learning, and strategic planning, with rich discussions surrounding policy development, and the future of unionized construction.

The conference opened with the NAFC Research Committee meeting. Experts discussed priority construction industry research areas, addressing topics such as apprenticeship programs and prevailing wage impacts. A notable highlight was the segment on turning research into policy, led by Dr. Tom Kriger of the North American Building Trades Unions (NABTU), which explored how academic findings can influence real-world labor practices, which was a crucial takeaway for fair contracting organizations.

In the evening, the Indiana, Illinois, Iowa Foundation for Fair Contracting (III FFC) and the Pennsylvania Foundation for Fair Contracting (PAFFC) hosted an Operating Engineers Reception. This event was a fantastic opportunity for networking, where attendees bonded over their shared goals for improving labor standards and ensuring fair wages on construction projects.



III FFC staff at an outing at the conference.

Monday morning's Plenary Session set the tone for a day packed with informative workshops and panels. The first workshop — moderated by Josh Weger, Executive Director of the Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI) — focused on Project Labor Agreements (PLAs). This session explored how PLAs promote efficiency and fairness in construction projects and demonstrated the critical role they play in maintaining labor standards.

Simultaneously, a second workshop featured a panel on "Construction Industry Research & Publications". Frank Manzo, ILEPI's Economist, offered valuable data on public construction projects and their broader economic benefits. The workshop emphasized the importance of leveraging research to advocate for sustainable labor practices.

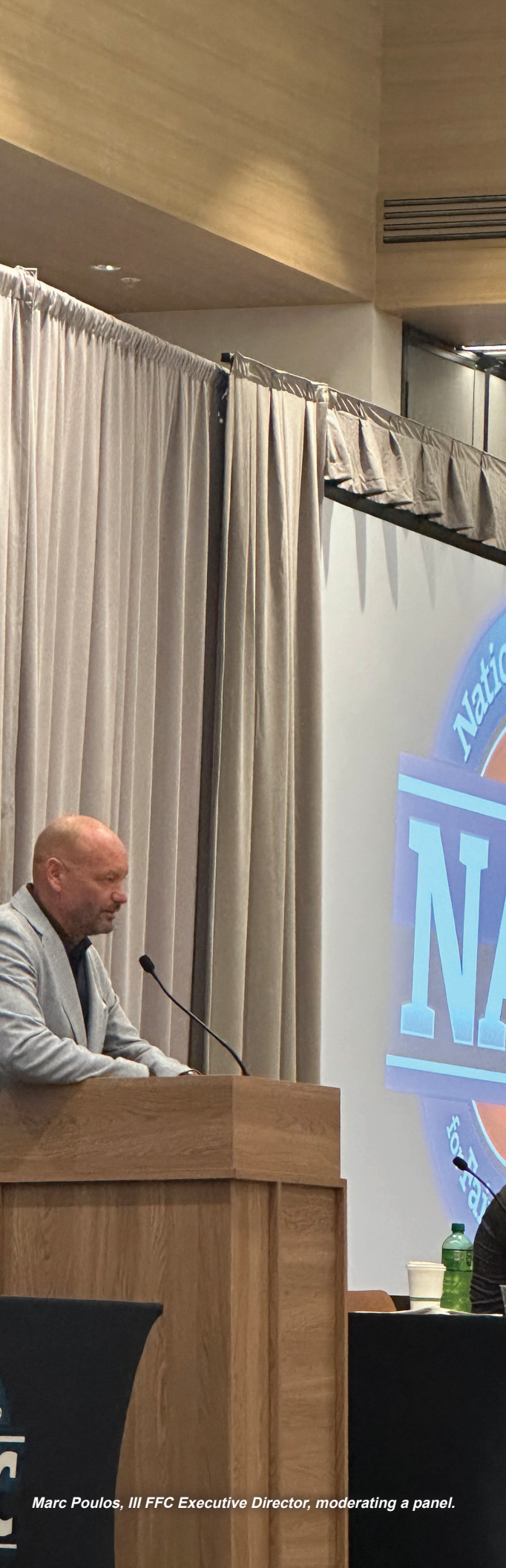
The conference continued with a panel discussion moderated by the III FFC's Executive Director, Marc Poulos. The panel explored the evolving landscape of fair contracting advocacy, compliance, and enforcement developments, providing attendees with critical insights into the latest regulatory trends.

Monday's sessions culminated in a touching retirement reception for NAFC Chairman Emeritus Rocco Davis. His lifetime contributions were celebrated in a touching tribute that underscored the impact of long-term leadership in fair contracting.

Tuesday morning began with a Plenary Session followed by two insightful workshops. The first, "Enforcing Labor Standards on Federal Infrastructure Investments" featured III FFC Counsel Michael McNally. This workshop dissected the intricacies of key federal programs like the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), and the Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors (CHIPS) and Science Act, emphasizing their significance in protecting workers' rights and wages.

The second workshop, "Persuading Public Officials Through Advocacy & Media" aimed to equip attendees with pragmatic tools for influencing policy at both state and federal levels. This session offered





Marc Poulos, III FFC Executive Director, moderating a panel.

attendees practical skills for engaging with policymakers to promote pro-labor policies in an environment where labor rights are continually contested.

The day concluded with a Plenary Panel of experts from the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), followed by a discussion on state legislative developments. This final panel, which included III FFC Counsel Kara Principe, provided a critical overview of how state legislatures are impacting the construction industry.

For a first-time attendee, the NAFC Conference offered an invaluable platform for learning and engagement. It underscored the ongoing need for strong advocacy, well-researched policy proposals, and active collaboration between public bodies, unions, and contractors to ensure fair contracting practices in construction. As the conference concluded, participants departed with a renewed sense of purpose, equipped with valuable insights and strengthened connections that will foster further advancements in the industry.

For more information on NAFC and their annual conference, please visit www.faircontracting.org.



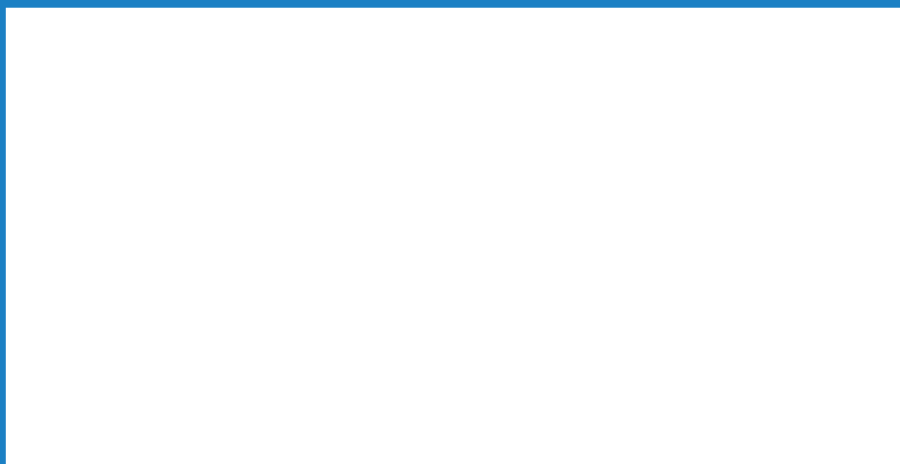
Dan Weksler
POLICY ANALYST



Kara Principe, III FFC Counsel, speaking on a panel.

The Monitor

RAISING THE BAR BY MONITORING
THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY



It's really quite simple. Successful projects happen when Labor and Management share the same priorities. And when the highest priority is having a team of safe, well-trained workers on the jobsite, those projects are completed on time and on budget.

We're the Indiana, Illinois, Iowa Foundation for Fair Contracting (IIFFC).

We were established to increase market share for responsible contractors, work opportunities for skilled craftsmen and craftswomen, and value for taxpayers by executing a comprehensive program of procurement oversight, jobsite monitoring, market analysis, and public policy education.



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