

Testimony in Support of SB2301

Steve Cortina, Organizer, Great Lakes Regional Organizing Committee, Laborers

International Union Local 563

2210 East Broadway Ave, Bismarck, ND 58501

701-934-0640

Good morning Chairman Kreun and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity I have to testify before you on behalf of Senate Bill 2301. My name is Steve Cortina and I am a 13-year member of the Laborers International Union of North America Local 563. I started my career working in the wind industry and have worked my way into my current position as Organizer/Marketing Representative for all of North Dakota.

The Laborers Union has been an key part of North Dakota's construction industry for well over 50 years. We work in a multitude of construction area including: heavy highway, pipelines, windfarms, power plant maintenance and turnarounds, maintenance within Crystal Sugar plants, commercial and industrial builds and a variety of jobs supporting the other union building trades.

During the past 7 years, we have increased our presence in the state, started a campaign to fight for local North Dakota workers and have been a visible part of project testimony at North Dakota Public Service Commission-approved projects and at county levels. We've tracked dozens of projects in the state, talked with area landowners about

their satisfaction after companies leave their land and even fought to get several workers paid what they were owed during the height of the oil boom.

It is important to me to fight for local workers because of my work background. For several years at the beginning of my construction career, I worked building windfarms. Starting as a basic labor position I worked my way up to foreman on many projects. Unfortunately, due to many companies coming into North Dakota to build windfarms without local workers, I was forced to travel out of state to many other states in order to provide for my family and continue my career. With years of experience, I would never get a call back from companies working in the state. It was hard on my family having me away for months at a time. All I wanted was to work in North Dakota on these projects and be home every night with my family.

Many of our windfarm skilled members have experienced the same situation. They have excellent experience and apply to work on windfarms but are never even given the courtesy of a call back.

We've often been the voice of local hire/North Dakotans first at Public Service Commission hearings. I believe it is important to know if companies are choosing local workforce when setting up in the state. I also believe it is important for landowners – who are experiencing project fatigue – to know that the construction workers on their land will take care of it and work to fulfill the promise to return the land to its full use.

There is a current windfarm project being built in Williams and Mountrail Counties that has been featured in the news. An area landowner has experienced issues with his property not being respected. Landowners concerns should take precedence over everyone with proposed projects.

When companies testify under oath to the PSC saying they will work to hire local, I want those companies to hold true to their word. With the Senate Bill 2301 – we are looking for a little more accountability through reporting local vs. out-of-state workers and working harder to find local workers.

Since 2015, when oil prices dropped and then at the start of the pandemic, oil prices plummeted into jobs evaporated. With the uncertainty of the future of coal, another tier of workers are facing career changes. We want in-state workers that want to remain here to find continued work and be a priority to contractors.

We will continue to fight for our local workforce in every way possible, whether it be standing before you with proposed legislation, tracking projects and workers and helping our residents find meaningful jobs and careers.

I ask you to vote yes on SB 2301 and take a stand for North Dakota.

Thank you.