

Associated Builders and Contractors, Wisconsin Pipe Traders, AGC-Milwaukee: Construction employees and employers thank Legislature for addressing construction skills gap

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Groups representing both construction employees and construction employers today applauded the Wisconsin State Legislature for helping address the construction skills gap by allowing high schoolers to participate in adult apprenticeship programs. Assembly Bill 745 authored by Rep. Romaine Quinn (Barron) and State Senator Pat Testin (Stevens Point) could shave up to six months off the length of an apprentice program, like AP courses that allow high school students to earn college credit. Construction apprenticeship programs are typically 3-5 years in length.

AB 745 passed the State Senate last night on a voice vote, and previously passed the State Assembly with a voice vote on Feb. 20. It is now on its way to the governor's desk for his signature.

"High school seniors will be able to begin their journey toward a life-long career in a meaningful way even before they graduate," Wisconsin Pipe Trades Association President Terry Hayden said. "Because of this bipartisan bill, these young adults will be able to participate in related instruction and on the job training months earlier

than they otherwise would have.”

“70 percent of construction firms reported having a hard time filling skilled construction openings,” Associated General Contractors of Milwaukee CEO Mike Fabishak said, [referring to a recent industry-wide survey released by Autodesk and AGC of America](#). “It is good to see legislative Republicans and Democrats coming together to get more young people into these well-paying jobs sooner.”

“Construction apprenticeship programs turn out men and women who have more than a job,” Mechanical Contractors Association of Wisconsin CEO Jeff Gaecke said. “Apprenticeship’s unique combination of classroom, hands-on training and on-the-job experience will allow high school students to begin their professional career before graduation.”

“The average age of a Wisconsin construction apprentice is 28 – a decade older than the average high school graduate,” Associated Builders and Contractors of Wisconsin President John Mielke said. “The Quinn – Testin legislation will expose more young people to careers in construction without costing taxpayers any more money.”

Next session, these four groups will work on two additional skills gap initiatives that cleared the Assembly this year with overwhelming bipartisan support.

- AB 124 / SB 86 generally referred to as either “Second Start,” or “Second Chance” (authored by Rep. Krug and State Sen. LeMahieu) would have created a mechanism within the Department of Workforce Development to connect apprenticeship and skilled trade opportunities with those who start an education at a UW campus but did not complete.
- AB 734 / SB 620 would have allowed apprenticeship tuition to be deducted from income tax just like tech college / university tuition (authored by Rep. Stafsholt and State Sen. Moulton). The goal would be to amend this legislation next session to include all apprenticeship programs tuitions.