

**Remarks of Terence M. O'Sullivan  
General President, Laborers' International Union of North America  
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Thank you, Dave, for that very kind introduction.

I want to thank the Blue Green Alliance and the U.S. Green Building Council for the opportunity to speak here today.

The work of Dave Foster and the work of the Blue Green Alliance is critical to the mission of building a high-road green economy. There's no greater soldier for a healthier planet, nor a stronger warrior for working people than Dave Foster.

Over the years, LIUNA has had a challenging history when it comes to working with environmental groups. The Blue Green Alliance has been instrumental in turning that history around. While we don't always agree, we have learned that we share important core values with our environmental partners – the Sierra Club, the NRDC and the National Wildlife Federation.

In fact, we wouldn't even be talking about our environmental successes as a union had it not been for Dave Foster and the staff of the Blue Green Alliance. Through the BGA, today we are united, environmentalists and trade unionists, behind a common vision and a common mission.

It is an honor to close this Green Jobs Summit. Over the next two days, tens of thousands will gather to consider the greening of America's building stock. But the jobs necessary to do the work are frequently overlooked.

At LIUNA, we believe that is a mistake.

Getting the jobs piece right is not only an important part of developing a green building program – it is necessary if we are to succeed.

As the Laborers' International Union has pursued its home weatherization program, we have come to see both the opportunities and the challenges of getting green building employment policies right. Most of all, we have seen that home weatherization cannot go to scale without an intentional and high-road labor policy.

Many of you may not be familiar with LIUNA – who we are, what we stand for and what we fight for.

The members of LIUNA build bridges, highways and transit systems. We lay pipe for water systems, construct power plants, build skyscrapers and weatherize homes.

We fight for social and economic justice. And we were the first building trades union to recognize that pursuing our traditional work today was not a license to ignore the needs of tomorrow and of future generations.

We understand that climate change is real, man-made, and if left unchecked, a threat to the well-being of our children and our grand-children.

That is why we fully support the Obama administration's efforts to dramatically ramp up building retrofit in both the commercial and residential sectors.

At a time when the discussion in Washington and throughout the country is about the need for jobs, home weatherization continues to represent an untapped opportunity. We heartily support the president's goal of increasing the number of homes weatherized each year from 130,000 to 1 million and ultimately 5 to 10 million homes a year.

But the truth is our nation is having trouble getting there. It's not easy to move from 130,000 homes a year to 1 million. If good, green jobs are to be part of our future, we must recognize the significant challenges we face.

Our market research indicates that consumers remain skeptical they will get promised savings if they invest in weatherization. Some say that taking the high road – certifying workers, screening contractors, paying living wages – would impose too great a burden on a developing industry.

The truth is that weatherization cannot succeed in going to scale unless it goes high-road.

We should learn from the experience in Australia. In 2009 the government announced a program to insulate 2.7 million homes in order to create jobs and cut home energy bills. This year the program was terminated after work in 16 percent of those homes was found to be flawed... after 87 roof fires... after 1,000 homes were deemed unsafe... and after numerous worker deaths from electrocution and heat stroke.

The lesson is clear: Only a high road option with trained workers and certified contractors will succeed.

The challenges do not end there. As many in this room know, we have a long way to go before we can attract the private capital needed to take the market to scale. Added to that, the inefficient patchwork of state, local, and utility-sponsored programs makes a home retrofit too confusing and too costly.

There are more than a thousand distinct programs, operating under hundreds of different sets of rules, and yet there is tremendous resistance to reforms that would create common standards.

We shouldn't underestimate the burdens we create for weatherization contractors. Contractors cannot afford to invest in new equipment and hire new workers without a clear idea of how much work they can generate.

Yet retrofit programs typically force contractors to bid work one house at a time, making it nearly impossible for small contractors to expand, or attractive enough for larger contractors to enter the business.

Another flaw that is fatal to creating a high-road industry is the contracting process itself. Most retrofit programs are designed to award work to the lowest bidder rather than the firm that delivers the best value. This method of contracting hurts workers and consumers by forcing contractors to cut wages, to cut quality and to cut corners in order to compete. The weatherization industry can offer lifelong careers for workers – and savings for consumers – but neither will come true unless we develop a professional workforce that can do the job right the first time.

Unfortunately, the industry still does not operate with a uniform standard for what skills a worker must demonstrate before being allowed to work on a house.

A thriving industry is not going to emerge from a thousand tiny energy efficiency programs with no common standard.

I don't want to leave you with the impression that our task cannot be accomplished.

LIUNA believes that we can succeed. We believe we can create good, green jobs that also put green in workers' pockets.

We have invested heavily in weatherization training. We have put our money and our resources on the table, beginning with a major commitment to develop a weatherization training program that we believe is the best in the country.

We have mobilized our training infrastructure in all 50 states to meet the workforce challenges of the weatherization industry.

We developed a new, comprehensive training program based on the Department of Energy's best practices, and we launched the first national certification program for weatherization technicians. We have convened meetings of investment firms to assess the viability of financial models designed to leverage the power of private capital to make it possible to take residential retrofit programs to scale.

We have active legislative programs at the federal and state level which fight for public support for weatherization investment through such programs as Home Star.

Our efforts have included an ambitious program to support contractors, with services ranging from market intelligence to marketing research to negotiation of supply-chain discounts.

We recognize the need for a new approach to any firm's most valuable asset: its employees.

We streamlined collective bargaining agreements to reflect the economic reality contractors face while still meeting the needs of workers and their families, including employer-paid health coverage.

We believe our collective efforts are paying dividends.

In Portland, Oregon, LIUNA has partnered with community allies and contractors to implement an outreach effort that generated nearly 150 applications for home weatherization from residents of a working-class neighborhood.

We are working with the Sierra Club to help design and launch similar community-based programs in other markets including Maine, Long Island, Denver, Seattle, and Bainbridge Island, Washington.

In Boston, LIUNA has teamed up with a company named Advantage Weatherization. Like our union, Advantage CEO John Kelly decided to take a chance on weatherization. His business partners thought he was crazy when he bought trucks and equipment.

But today John is the largest weatherization contractor in New England, employing some 50 LIUNA members recruited from low-income communities.

We have achieved the same result in Las Vegas, with Brandon Kephardt of Better Buildings Systems. Advantage and Better Building Systems have retrofitted more than 2,000 homes under the Recovery Act, completing work safely, ahead of schedule and on budget.

In Milwaukee, LIUNA has worked with the City Council and the Mayor's Office to design a set of contracting standards. Among other things, these standards will make the city the first in the nation to require that all retrofit workers demonstrate basic competence before working on a city-financed project, and in return, these same standards will set a floor on wages for all retrofit workers. There are lessons to be learned from these experiences.

We cannot pursue weatherization from a "business as usual" mindset. We need a collaboration of government, contractors, venture capitalists and labor.

We all hear the word "can't" far too often from people who say they want to transform the economy but balk at the tough choices that are required to make our economy work for a better environment, for working people and for all of us.

When we're told that the industry can't afford to pay workers a family-supporting wage, can't offer health care, can't favor the best quality contractor over a low-quality one who is cheaper because he pays poverty wages ...

When we're told that we can't shape markets to achieve the desired outcomes, even though that's the only way to wean our economy off its dependence on dirty power...

We say, yes you can.

Brothers and sisters, we have to say it loud and clear: We are not going to get to a clean economy and a healthier planet by taking the low road because the low road is what got us here in the first place.

And we're not going to clean up the environment on the backs of workers because too much has been put on workers' backs already.

On behalf of LIUNA, I am here to pledge that we will stand with you, and I am asking all of you to stand with us.

I am asking you to remember the hope and optimism we felt on Election Day in November 2008, our pride as Americans rose across the land, a profound belief that no matter your politics, America does what others can't and does better what others can.

It's time again to be fired up. It's time again to be ready to go.

It's time again to hear our calling, to stand for our cause and to fight for our mission.

Brothers and sisters, we can build a clean energy economy that works for a healthier planet.

We can build a clean energy economy that works for business, that works for America and that works for working people.

We must, we will and together yes, we can!