

**TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS**

OCTOBER 5, 2011

HEARING ON

***Adding to Uncertainty: The Impact of DOL/NLRB Decisions and
Proposed Rules on Small Businesses***

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Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Velazquez, and members of the Committee, thank you for your invitation to appear before you today. My name is Allen West, known as Willie to my family, friends and business associates. I am the owner and founder of West Sheet Metal Company, located in Sterling, Virginia. My company currently employs about 45 sheet metal workers and one office staff combined, but I have employed as many as seventy-some sheet metal workers. My company installs and fabricates heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems and sheet metal duct work for high-profile clients like Lockheed-Martin and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. I started the company in 1983, but I learned my trade in a certified apprenticeship program operated by Sheet Metal Workers International Association, Local Union 102, (now Local Union 100), which represents sheet metal workers in Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia.

I started in the apprenticeship program of Sheet Metal Workers International Union Local Union 102, in 1968. Then I left to serve in the United States Army. Following my discharge, as a Specialist 4th Class and after being awarded the Army Commendation Metal, I resumed my apprenticeship training. After I'd completed this four year program, I became a journeyman and

worked for Wilco Sheet Metal in Rockville, Maryland from 1973 until 1983. I left Wilco to start my own business in 1983.

From the beginning, I wanted to provide good-paying, solid jobs for sheet metal workers and I wanted to employ well-trained and skilled sheet metal workers. So I entered into a signed agreement with the Sheet Metal Workers International Association, Local Union 100, formerly Local Union 102. I view my workers as an integral part of my business and an important asset in its success. I wanted to partner with them through their union and the collective bargaining agreement helps me to do that. The theme of the contractor and union partnership is "Together We Do It Better." I know this to be true.

As a signatory to the agreement, I use the local union's hiring hall. When I need workers, I call the hiring hall and describe my needs. They refer skilled, trained, workers. I know that these workers have undergone a rigorous and thorough training program through the apprenticeship school that the Local Union operates and I have confidence in their abilities. In addition to the Local Union Joint Apprenticeship committee, there is a national organization, the International Training Institute, that sets all the training standards for sheet metal workers and also establishes curricula and programs for apprentices and journeymen to upgrade their skills. This upgrading training is free and is offered in the evenings and on Saturdays. These training programs ensure that training is consistent all across the country so that wherever I have a project, I have access to skilled and trained workers.

I also want to make sure the jobs I am creating and providing are good jobs that can support a family and help workers be successful. Through the union contract, my workers participate in a health care plan and a pension plan. In making contributions to these plans and by combining with other union contractors, we are able to achieve a high level of benefits with

cost savings. In addition, I do not have to hire people to administer the plans or deal with such issues as health insurance plans and retirement programs.

The international union also sponsors the National Energy Management Institute that sets standards for energy efficiency and air quality and looks at new markets and the training required for sheet metal workers to develop the skills needed for these new markets. For example, I know that welding has remained in demand during this time of high unemployment and sheet metal workers are able to access training to be ready for these jobs, such as CAD/CAM computer skills.

The Sheet Metal Workers Occupational Health Institute sets standards for OSHA compliance and provides worker training. This, in turn, lowers my insurance costs and my workers learn to work safer and enjoy better working conditions.

These institutes and training facilities and health and retirement plans are all administered by joint committees of union and company representatives. They help both contractors and workers. All the funds used to provide this training, and these benefits and other assistance come from contributions by the parties to the contract and no government money is used at all. All of these programs are the result of private agreements.

What I have described in my testimony is all accomplished within the framework of the National Labor Relations Act. I do not have a lot of personal experience with the National Labor Relations Board, but I know that it governs the relationships between my workers and my company and their union and allows us to accomplish these important goals so that I can concentrate on my business and create and provide good jobs in my community.

I have reviewed some of the recent decisions and proposed rules by the National Labor Relations Board and Department of Labor and I do not see how they disadvantage small businesses. They do not affect the framework within which I operate my business and will not

affect my business or my relationship with my workers or the companies I do business with.

These seemingly minor changes certainly do not create any uncertainty for me and they will not affect my ability to create jobs. In fact, if the NLRB streamlines its election process, it seems to me that this will reduce turmoil in the workplace and be helpful to business, especially small businesses. What I need for my company to survive is more work and that means more consumers and more buyers. These recent changes by the NLRB and the Department of Labor do not affect that in any detrimental way.

In closing, I wish to emphasize that I view my workers and their union as a significant driver of my success as a small business owner. We are all working together to be successful. Thank you for this opportunity to talk about my business and my relationship with my workers and their union.