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Another Voice/Labor

Another Voice: Brownfield workers take risks and deserve a fair, living wage

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Brownfield remediation is the process of removing or sealing off contaminants on a property so that it can be reused without posing health risks. Brownfields can contain contaminants such as lead, arsenic, and hydrochloric acid.

These are dangerous sites that pose myriad environmental threats and serious health risks to those tasked with the job of remediating them: construction workers. The men and women who build and maintain Buffalo are your friends, your neighbors, your kids' coaches, and maybe even your family members.

A recent Buffalo News article regarding brownfield remediation included the following words: "Angry," "upset," "worried" and "concerned."

These sentiments aren't about the daunting task of rehabbing these sites, or the health risks for those workers. No, these quotes describe the feelings of developers about legislation that requires paying these workers a fair and living wage.



Sam Capitano is Business Manager, Upstate NY Laborers District Council and President of Laborers' Local 210.

The New York State legislation referenced, A7491B/S5868B, requires the payments of prevailing wages on projects in order to be eligible for the tangible property tax credit associated with brownfield remediation.

Covered projects include anything receiving over 30% of total project cost in subsidy, with a total project size exceeding \$5 million.

The bipartisan legislation passed both houses this session, unanimously in the senate.

Brownfield remediation requires a trained and skilled workforce certified in hazardous waste remediation. Attaching prevailing wage requirements to the tax credit promotes the utilization of certified apprenticeship programs, ensuring workers receive the necessary skills and safety training.

Critics of the legislation assert that it was "rushed through," but this was not the case. It was discussed thoroughly and went through every legislative committee. To insinuate otherwise is incorrect and irresponsible.

Let's continue dismantling false narratives. Fact: prevailing wages do not raise project costs. Labor costs are a small portion of overall project costs. Additionally, prevailing wages ensure increased efficiency through the use of trained certified professionals who get the work done on time and on-budget.

The men and women who build Buffalo deserve so much better than outrage over paying them a living wage to do dangerous work. Let's re-examine priorities.

Sam Capitano is business manager, Upstate NY Laborers District Council and president of Laborers' Local 210.