





Manchin testimony highlights prevailing wage public hearing




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U.S. Senator Joe Manchin testified at Thursdays public hearing in the House Chamber.

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By [Chris Lawrence](#) in [News](#) | February 19, 2015 at 6:15PM

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Members of the legislature heard a range of opinions during a Thursday public hearing at the capitol on legislation aimed at changing the provisions of prevailing wage in West Virginia.

Organized labor and construction workers are against the idea of tampering with the mechanism which currently calculates the wage on publicly financed construction projects through the state Division of Labor. Their fear is eliminating the prevailing wage opens the door to out-of-state non-union workers. They say those workers may be less qualified and their work below standard.

Supporters believe the prevailing wage artificially sets a standard of pay higher than it should be. Those who favor the idea believe the market should set the standard to make publicly funded construction projects less expensive. A Senate compromise would put the projects at those more than \$500,000 and would allow the prevailing wage to be calculated by WorkForce West Virginia with guidance from economists at West Virginia University and Marshall University.

The most high-profile speaker was U.S. Senator Joe Manchin who said eliminating the wage would be wrong and cost jobs, but said lawmakers needed to listen to labor who was ready to support adjustments.

“You’ve heard labor and business talking and working together

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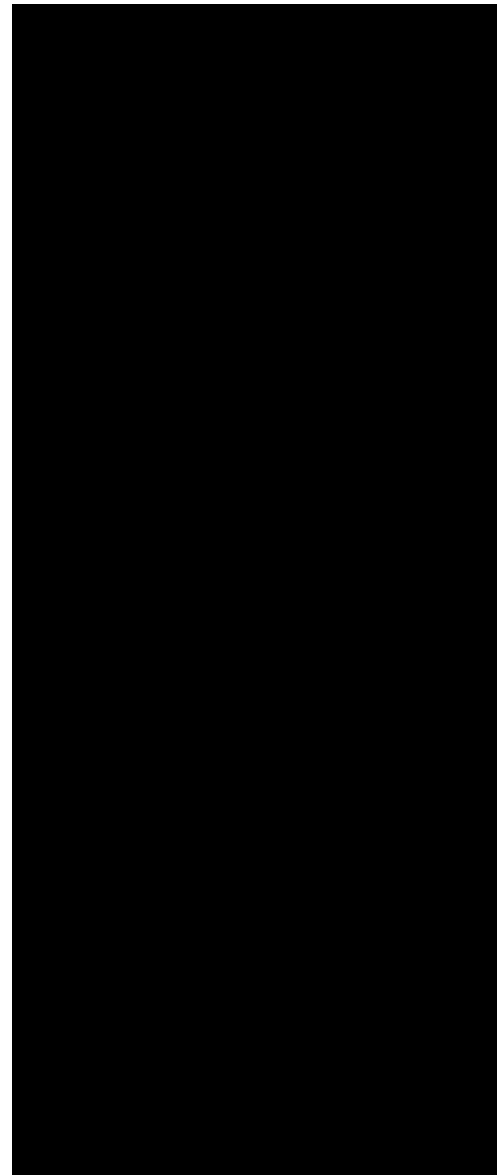
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wanting to find adjustments to be made which makes this a better piece of legislation. They're wanting to do that," Manchin testified at the public hearing. "Seize the opportunity to do something here that's good. Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."

Manchin said labor has already agreed to the \$500,000 threshold. He said only three other

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"They've given you basic information that this done in the highest levels to get the job done and not put a burden on municipalities and state contract jobs," said Manchin.

Others testified something needs to be done because the current system is broken.

"When a West Virginia school teacher earns less than 30 percent of a construction mechanic, the system is broken," said John Jarrett of Jarrett Construction in Charleston. "When West Virginia taxpayers pay as much for three schools that other state's pay for five schools, the system is broken."

Jarrett has an open shop. He employs union and non-union construction labor. He also lamented he pays full benefits including retirement and health care coverage, but gets no recognition of those benefits from the state.

Don Gatewood is president of American Energy Contractors in Huntington and vice president of Spoke Construction in Bluefield. He has a union and a non-union shop and believed lawmakers were on the right track.

"This is not about cutting wages. I'm not at all about cutting wages. This is about letting the market place work," said Gatewood. "It's a good compromise because it takes prevailing wage and makes it prevailing wage which has a lot of benefits to this state."

The Senate's version of the bill is now being debated by the House Government Organization Committee.



Chris Lawrence

clawrence@wvradio.com
[@wvoutdoors](#)
[chris.lawrence.9822](#)

Chris Lawrence is the anchor of the MetroNews Morning News, heard weekday mornings from 6am-9am on MetroNews Stations across West Virginia. Chris is also the host of the award-winning West Virginia Outdoors, which can be heard Saturday morning at 7am on MetroNews. Chris has won numerous awards for coverage of hunting and fishing.



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