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ALLIANCE CREATES NEW JOBS AND LIFE-SAVING TECHNOLOGY

By BILL LAWSON

Too often, vicious partisanship dominates political discourse in New Jersey. Members of both parties dig in their heels, cater to their particular special interest supports, and little to know policy progress is ever made.

There are, however, rare instances of genuine cross-party partnership, in which groups that might normally be seen as political rivals join together for the good of the state.

New Jersey witnessed just such an instance in April. The local biopharmaceutical industry teamed up with building trades unions to host U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., on a tour of an iron workers training facility in Springfield.

Menendez got to see firsthand what can be accomplished when industry and labor work together. This alliance has been crucial in creating New Jersey's thriving drug sector. Policymakers should take a cue from Menendez and make a point to familiarize themselves with New Jersey's labor-drug company alliance — it's enabling the creation of much-needed jobs and high-tech treatments.

The senator toured the District Council of Northern New Jersey Iron Workers training facility. This state-of-the-art operation trains and certifies iron workers to build the labs needed to conduct medical research. The senator personally spoke with several apprentices in-training.

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companies provided over \$53 billion in state economic output between 2009 and 2010.

This partnership between industry and labor allows New Jersey's biopharmaceutical industry to excel and produce much-needed economic opportunities.

But the benefits can't just be quantified in dollars. This relationship also enables

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the creation of new, advanced medicines that can save and prolong lives.

To ensure this partnership thrives, New Jersey labor unions and biopharmaceutical companies have joined together to form the Pharmaceutical Industry Labor Management Association. The goal of this group is to unite labor and industry in advocacy for public policies that bolster growth and innovation.

This alliance enables a virtuous cycle.

When the life science industry is successful, firms invest more money into new facilities. Those facilities are built and manned by union members. Biopharmaceutical companies benefit

from having a large, reliable workforce of highly-skilled workers. The new medicines developed in those facilities help sustain the well being of working families across New Jersey.

Locations like the one Menendez toured provide a ground-level view of the importance of the labor-drug industry alliance. At zero taxpayer cost, trades unions spend \$800 million annually on training and certification programs to ensure their members remain the world's best. And a high quality labor supply directly enables the in-lab medical advances that lead to new treatments.

This partnership needs to be coupled with smart public policies. Lawmakers shape the regulatory environment under which new drug research is conducted. If rules are smart and streamlined, the local drug sector will continue to thrive.

And that's why it's so promising to see a key legislator like Menendez taking the time to personally witness with the labor-drug industry alliance in action. He's now seen how a union training facility can have far-reaching positive effects on the rest of the economy.

We commend the senator for his continued efforts to protect this pact. His efforts have been crucial in keeping New Jersey's pharmaceutical sector one of the most vibrant in the world. Other lawmakers should follow suit and help protect a key component this state's economy.

Bill Lawson is the training coordinator of the District Council Ironworkers Funds of Northern New Jersey.