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## Advancing industry and innovation

By Eric J. Martinson

Labor and management are often painted as adversaries by talking heads in the national media. But when it comes to building and innovation in the biopharmaceutical industry, that characterization could not be further from the truth.

Here in the state of Washington, leaders from our labor community and biopharmaceutical companies have embraced an effort to find common ground and promote policies aimed at stimulating local job growth, encouraging innovation and producing much-needed economic opportunities.

Putting this partnership into action, representatives from the state of Washington's biopharmaceutical sector and the labor unions who represent the workers in that industry recently took a tour of the state-of-the-art Western Washington Sheet Metal Joint Apprenticeship Training Center in Everett. Also at the event were a group of state legislators, including House Speaker Frank Chopp, who wanted to learn more about the industry and our training programs.

At the event, House Rep. Derek Stanford, whose district benefits from biopharmaceutical activity, observed that "pharmaceuticals have a big impact on jobs and the economy here. Jobs are job one, and we are constantly looking for partnerships where we can help business and labor come together and work together to grow the economy."

At the national level, the biopharmaceutical industry supports 3.2 million jobs. Here in Washington, the life sciences support over 77,000 jobs, and data from the Washington Research Council shows those jobs contributed \$5.7 billion to the state's gross domestic product and \$5.3 billion in personal income in 2009.

Simply put, the industry is a significant economic driver in the state of Washington. But the benefits of this industry-labor partnership extend beyond the bottom line. The relationship also expedites the creation of new, lifesaving medicines that can prolong lives and improve the quality of life for all Americans.

PhRMA representative Jeff Gombosky, who also attended the tour, highlighted the important medical component of the sheet metal workers facility and apprenticeship program. "A well-trained workforce and state-of-the-art facilities are a crucial part of the infrastructure that supports this work," he said. "To have a training facility that can educate workers to ensure that they know the most that is being developed right now is absolutely critical as to whether or not these products are going to have success."

The commitment among America's building trade unions to medical innovation goes beyond training. Trade unions invest over \$800 million annually, at no taxpayer expense, to teach the latest techniques and skills to their workers. This investment ensures that biopharmaceutical companies have a consistent stream of highly skilled workers at the ready.

**To ensure the continued success of this partnership, labor unions and the biopharmaceutical industry at the national level 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.**

**Training centers like the one in Everett are vital to the biopharmaceutical industry, and we were proud to host members of the Washington Legislature, including House Speaker Frank Chopp, and representatives from both labor and industry to see first-hand the Sheet Metal Workers' commitment to advancing the industry.**

*Eric J. Martinson is the business manager of Local Union 66 in Everett, a division of the Sheet Metal Workers International Association.*

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