



International Association of
BRIDGE, STRUCTURAL, ORNAMENTAL AND REINFORCING IRON WORKERS
1750 NEW YORK AVE., N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

Affiliated with AFL-CIO

ERIC M. DEAN
GENERAL PRESIDENT
202-383-4810



December 18, 2023

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
U.S. Secretary of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo:

On behalf of the 120,000 members of the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers, AFL-CIO (IW), thank you for your unwavering support of union workers through implementation of Biden Administration policy. I am writing to draw your attention to a proposal under consideration at the World Trade Organization (WTO) that would have a harmful impact on union construction workers across the country.

A group of foreign nations, including China, India, and South Africa, are seeking a waiver of intellectual property (IP) protections under the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) for COVID-19 treatments manufactured in the United States. We are concerned that this proposal will lead to the outsourcing of American pharmaceutical manufacturing, and reduced employment opportunities for union workers in the US who build, retrofit, and maintain the pharmaceutical industry's U.S. production and research facilities.

The members of our union are hardworking middle class craft workers who get up and go to work every day to build the nation's infrastructure, including state of the art laboratories and facilities that research, develop, and produce. The U.S. pharmaceutical industry relies on our members to construct the advanced laboratories and manufacturing plants that produce life-saving medicines such as the vaccines and treatments developed to fight COVID-19. These cutting-edge facilities must be built to exacting standards, which can only be done by the most highly skilled workers.

The construction of these facilities is a major source of employment opportunities for our members. As you know, the pharmaceutical industry is an important part of our economy across the country, as leaders in innovation and in the discovery of life saving and life sustaining medications. We therefore are deeply concerned about any effort to weaken the intellectual property protection that allows this industry to sustain and expand investment in our area.

International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers



-2-

Our members recognize that IP protections are necessary to incentivize the enormous investments that pharmaceutical companies have made, and continue to make, in research and manufacturing facilities in our country. Weakening IP protections so that foreign competitors can copy and profit from pharmaceutical technologies invented by U.S. companies will threaten the continued flow of these investments into our community. We fear that this proposal is nothing more than an attempt by foreign rivals to siphon an important industry and the jobs it supports out of the United States, using the pandemic as an excuse.

What makes it more confounding is that the universal conclusion of health care and epidemiology experts around the world is that the health care delivery system in developing nations – not supply – is the overarching challenge to safely administer vaccines, therapies, and diagnostics.

If this important American industry is forced to compete on an uneven playing field against foreign rivals, union workers in the US will suffer. We hope you will help us prevent this by urging President Biden to reject the proposed TRIPS waiver for COVID-19 treatments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. J. ...', written in a cursive style.

GENERAL PRESIDENT

ED/jh