

TESTIMONY OF EDWARD GRABOWSKI

ON BEHALF OF

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MACHINISTS AND AEROSPACE WORKERS

TO

THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

May 6, 2019

Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Meadows, and Members of the Committee, thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify today. My name is Edward Grabowski. I am the President of Local Lodge 2061, District 166 of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. Machinists Union Local Lodge 2061 is based in Cape Canaveral, Florida and represents around 700 members that are employed on several different federal contracts at both the Kennedy Space Center and Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. The members of our local union perform a wide variety of jobs on these contracts. They include, but are not limited to, Helicopter Pilot, Laboratory Technician, Propellant Mechanic, Machinist, Industrial Electrician, Crane Operator, Plumber and Elevator Technician. These jobs, performed by our members, ensure the successful completion of vital government operations carried out by federal contractors.

The contracts themselves are diverse. One such contract, the Kennedy Space Center Propellants and Life Support Services contract, serves a critical role by providing propellants and life support operations, maintenance, and engineering support and equipment for NASA and launch processing facilities. This means they are directly responsible for the receipt, transport and delivery of high-pressure gasses, cryogenics, hypergolic fuels and oxidizers to both the spacecraft/payloads and rockets/launch vehicles that propel them into space. All aspects of this work are hazardous, and the tasks associated with them must be handled with the utmost professionalism to guarantee the safety of personnel and the vehicles they support. Other members of our local lodge work on contracts that provide medical, environmental, laboratory, flight hardware processing and launch operations as well as base operations functions.

Please allow me a moment to tell you about our members themselves. A large percentage of our members, including myself, are proud veterans of the armed forces. It is partly because of this military service and the security clearances associated with it that afforded us the great opportunity of employment supporting the nation's space program. Although our employment brings us to Brevard

County, Florida, we reside throughout the Central Florida area. This area includes Volusia, Seminole, Orange, and Osceola Counties in addition to Brevard County.

I have devoted over 28 years working alongside our members in support of America's space program. I can personally attest to these individuals passionate and conscientious focus when it comes to their work. All have sacrificed holidays and valuable time with family to get the job done. They have remained loyal to the space program in its moments of tragedy and shared in its moments of triumph. Many have persevered and survived both the end of the space shuttle program and the reduction in force that comes with federal contract changes. We are a diverse group of people in age, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality. The stages of our lives range from newlywed couples with babies to those closely approaching retirement. Our members generously give back to the local community by annually donating and shopping for disadvantaged youth in Brevard county during Christmastime. This past year enough funds were raised to provide gifts to 320 kids in the county.

I hope this tradition can continue and grow from year to year as it has in the past, but there is a big threat to our fundraising. It is the threat of federal government shutdowns. We recently had to endure three shutdowns within a twelve-month period. All have been stressful as each brings great uncertainty to us as federal contract employees. Though we work side by side with our civil service counterparts, there is no guarantee of back pay for us. The first two shutdowns lasted only one day, but still caused members on certain contracts to lose pay. The last, which totaled 35 days, created enormous problems for our members and the local community as a whole. We were fortunate in one aspect, because all of our employers kept our medical insurance in force. However, the members had to meet their portion of medical insurance premiums for coverage to remain current. This was often accomplished by using personal leave time or by writing personal checks to the employers. That was but one expense associated with health care. We have members and their dependents that suffer from serious medical concerns. These consist of cancer, cardiac issues, pulmonary ailments and diabetes. Even after meeting the premiums these individuals and families also had to pay for deductibles, out of pocket co-payments, and expensive pharmaceuticals.

The fact is, the government may shut down, but life's challenges remain ongoing. Without a guaranteed income for 35 days, our members still had to meet all of their financial obligations such as mortgage payments, rent, auto loan payments, utilities, food and the aforementioned medical costs. Some had to take out short-term loans in order to make ends meet. In some cases, the only hope they have of repaying these loans without a financial penalty is to receive back pay for wages lost during the shutdown. It has been a mixed bag of results for our members with regard to receiving back pay. Some of our members have received backpay payments, but many members employed on certain contracts have not received any back pay for their lost wages. This has resulted in an eight percent loss of annual income for many of them. For those who did receive back pay, it did not come in full until the end of March. That is more than two and half months later. It also must be pointed out that we have members where both spouses and/or partners in a household work on these contracts impacted by these shutdowns causing a doubled hardship

It is hard to convey the anxiety we all experience leading up to, during, and after the shutdowns. The financial effects for some are lasting and damaging. Earlier I mentioned that the security clearances many of us hold provide a gateway to our employment. When individuals that hold sensitive clearances

experience financial difficulty it can place their clearance in peril, and the loss of a clearance can result in loss of employment for the individual.

My testimony provides insight on the impact of these shutdowns on just one union local in our country. There were thousands of federal contract employees represented by the Machinists Union that were impacted by this last shutdown. We must remember that the financial loss experienced by these workers due to the shutdowns ripples through the communities they live in. The goods and services normally purchased by them will not be sold. Examples of this are home, auto and durable goods purchases, disposable income expenditures such as dining out and entertainment, as well as day to day expenses like day care and lawn service. Not to mention the deep financial impacts for individuals that will affect retirement investment, education funding, and general savings for emergencies.

If we judge the prospects of future shutdowns by the twelve-month period from January 2018 to January 2019, one would have to plan for more shutdowns to come. It is time to provide some financial assurance to the hard working, dedicated federal contractor employees. The first step can be achieved by supporting and passing legislation such as the Fairness for Federal Contractors Act, H.R. 824, which ensures backpay for all federal contract employees impacted by the recent 35 day shutdown. I encourage all to support this legislative effort. Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Meadows, and other members of the subcommittee, I again thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to answering any of your questions.