http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/construction-jobs-s5.jpg

Project Labor Agreements (PLA's) are one of the few tools that local governments have left to put "Wisconsin first" when it comes to public construction projects, but Madison legislators want to eliminate it as part of the bidding process.

MADISON - As President Trump takes the initial steps to get America out of poorly negotiated trade deals like NAFTA and TPP, Wisconsin Republicans are negotiating amongst themselves to eliminate guarantees that public construction projects are completed on time, on budget and built using local workers.

The issue at hand is legislation to prohibit local governments from using Project Labor Agreements (PLA's) as part of the bidding process for government construction projects like schools, libraries and jails. Poorly negotiated, like NAFTA and TPP, this legislation will take job opportunities away from Wisconsin workers on taxpayer funded construction projects.

Project Labor Agreements are one of the few tools that local governments have left to put "Wisconsin first" when it comes to public construction projects. Taxpayers throughout the state will be spending hundreds of millions of dollars building new schools and maintaining those already in use. Project Labor Agreements allow local governments to get up front guarantees to make sure that these schools are built by local workers and completed on time and on budget.

No one wants the jobs for these projects to be filled by workers from Iowa, Illinois, or Minnesota, but this legislation sets the table to allow just that. Project Labor Agreements protect Wisconsin jobs on Wisconsin construction projects. PLA's are in place for the Northwestern Mutual expansion project in Milwaukee, Lambeau Field, Miller Park and the new Bucks arena. Toyota has used Project Labor Agreements for every American auto plant they have built. Even Wal-Mart is increasingly using PLA's for their construction projects.

Like NAFTA and TPP, this legislation is another example of poorly negotiated policy from politicians who believe in a one size fits all approach. A one size fits all approach from Madison is bad for local governments, bad for construction workers and bad for Wisconsin.

This legislation is a completely partisan effort to undercut both local government and construction workers. The bill prohibits local government from asking for up front guarantees in the bidding process to make sure that school, libraries, jails and other public construction projects are done on time, on budget and built with local workers.

Instead, the proponents of this legislation believe that local governments should ask contractors to provide workplace guarantees out of the kindness of their heart. We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars in construction projects in every part of Wisconsin. No guarantees for taxpayers, no guarantees for workers.

It’s poorly negotiated, completely partisan and bad for Wisconsin.

Proponents say that they don’t want to force non-union workers to contribute to a union. Wisconsin’s new Right to Work law specifically prohibits forcing any worker to join or make contributions to a union. The proponents of this legislation have brought forth a litany of “alternative facts” to defend these poorly negotiated bills. And last, but certainly not least, proponents of this legislation want to eliminate any up front leverage that local governments might have to guarantee that projects are done on time, on budget and built with local workers.

With wide majorities in both houses of the legislature, Republicans will decide the direction that Wisconsin is going take. The irony is that with one party rule in Madison, Republicans are negotiating with themselves to undercut both taxpayers and workers. The only question is just how far they will go.

Eliminating the use of Project Labor Agreements as part of the bidding process is a bad deal for Wisconsin. It is a poorly negotiated piece of partisan legislation. Unfortunately, the proponents of this legislation say that this is the path we are going to take whether you like it or not.