**Headline:** How Unions and Joe Biden Are Launching a New Frontier in American Manufacturing

By David McCall

**Author Bio:** David McCall is the international president of the [United Steelworkers Union (USW)](https://www.usw.org/).

**Source:** Independent Media Institute

**Credit Line:** *This article was produced by the* [*Independent Media Institute*](https://independentmediainstitute.org/)*.*

**Tags:** Labor, Economy, Politics, Opinion, North America/United States of America

**[Article Body:]**

Tom Bixler and several hundred of his co-workers produced top-quality glassware at the Libbey Glass plant in Toledo, Ohio, over the years while keeping the aging equipment there operating through sheer grit.

They even set efficiency standards despite the steep odds and [carried the company](https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/unions-ratify-four-year-agreements-with-libbey-glass-301138470.html) through Chapter 11 bankruptcy, all to ensure the sprawling manufacturing complex remained viable and a centerpiece of the local economy.

But while they’re rightly proud of all they’ve done to sustain the facility, Bixler and fellow members of the United Steelworkers (USW) know they need to continue innovating to build a more secure, sustainable future. They’re now [embarking on a critical transformation of their plant](https://www.energy.gov/oced/industrial-demonstrations-program-selections-award-negotiations-heat#flexible) that will not only safeguard Northwest Ohio’s glassmaking jobs for decades to come but help forge a new frontier in American manufacturing.

Bixler, president of USW Local 65T, joined U.S. Deputy Energy Secretary [David Turk](https://www.energy.gov/person/david-m-turk) and U.S. Representative Marcy Kaptur last week as they highlighted a federal grant award of up to $45.1 million that will enable the plant to install a pair of larger hybrid electric furnaces intended to boost efficiency, reduce pollution, and expand employment.

The cutting-edge furnace technology—combining the advantages of oxygen fuel and electric melting to process the raw materials for glassmaking, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by up to 60 percent—has the potential to set a new standard for the industry and [revolutionize](https://www.energy.gov/oced/industrial-demonstrations-program-selections-award-negotiations-heat#flexible) glass production nationwide.

And this commitment to the glass industry represents just one part of President Joe Biden’s initiative to grow the manufacturing economy with clean energy and union jobs. In all, his administration this month announced $6 billion for [33 decarbonization and modernization projects](https://www.energy.gov/articles/biden-harris-administration-announces-6-billion-transform-americas-industrial-sector), deploying a range of new technology, in iron, steel, chemicals, refining, cement, pulp and paper, and other industries.

Historic union-backed legislation—the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act—will fund the grants.

“This is something that’s going to blaze a whole new trail,” said Bixler, a mold maker at Libbey for 41 years, who considers the federal grant, to be matched by the company, as Biden’s investment in workers who have worked so hard to preserve the plant and keep the community strong.

“The technology in the furnaces has not changed for eons,” explained Bixler, noting the 12 mold-makers in Local 65T work with members of USW Locals 59M and 700T, as well as co-workers in the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, to produce drinking glasses, stemware, and mugs.

“We all work together to keep the plant operating and the glass flowing off the line with very antiquated equipment.”

He and other workers [made sacrifices](https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/unions-ratify-four-year-agreements-with-libbey-glass-301138470.html) to bring Libbey through bankruptcy a few years ago. While the financial crisis temporarily jeopardized the century-old plant, Bixler said, the new grant and furnace innovation will help to ensure the facility’s survival “for our grandchildren and great-grandchildren and on down the line.”

The USW wrote a letter of support for Libbey’s grant application and now intends to help the company expand apprenticeship opportunities, ensuring good jobs for community members and dedicated union workers for the plant.

“One of the best things our country can do is to get back to having a union workforce in every aspect of the economy,” said Bixler, noting Biden awarded many of the grants to union-represented employers and start-ups pledging to respect workers’ labor rights. “The biggest thing is safety. We also get better paid for everything we do, compared to anybody non-union doing the same job.”

Among other grants to USW-represented employers, Biden’s Department of Energy (DOE) awarded [up to $500 million](https://www.canarymedia.com/articles/clean-industry/the-clean-cement-projects-getting-1-5b-in-biden-admin-funds) to National Cement Company in Lebec, California, for pioneering the use of agricultural byproducts and other new technology to produce carbon-neutral cement.

It’s slated to provide Century Aluminum up to $500 million for the nation’s first new aluminum smelter in 45 years, a facility in the Ohio/Mississippi River basins that will greatly increase U.S. production capacity and [create more than 1,000](https://centuryaluminum.com/investors/press-releases/press-release-details/2024/Century-Aluminum-Selected-by-U.S.-Department-of-Energy-to-Receive-500-Million-Investment-to-Build-New-Green-Aluminum-Smelter-to-Accelerate-Industrial-Decarbonization/default.aspx) USW-represented jobs.

It awarded U.S. Pipe in Bessemer, Alabama, up to $75.5 million to install [electric induction melting furnaces](https://www.energy.gov/oced/industrial-demonstrations-program-selections-award-negotiations-iron-and-steel) that will not only reduce pollution but cut costs, add jobs, and increase manufacturing capacity.

The investment in increased efficiency comes as the IIJA, the national infrastructure program, ramps up demand across the country for the kinds of water and sewer pipe that USW members produce at U.S. Pipe.

Together, the DOE and IIJA investments provide a foundation for the more-than-100-year-old company to remain a vital linchpin of numerous manufacturing supply chains as well as a driving economic force in Bessemer.

“Normally, if you get a job at U.S. Pipe, you retire from it,” said USW Local 2140 President Ron Woods, noting union contracts provide family-sustaining wages and other essentials that enable workers to live middle-class lives.

Woods anticipates that the new furnace will not only lead the company to hire more workers but also give dozens of existing union members the opportunity to learn new skills and take on additional responsibilities.

“Naturally, they will get paid more. When you make more, you spend more. We have some new people here, and this will help them buy houses and cars,” Woods said, adding that new jobs and higher wages not only benefit local businesses but pay the taxes needed for strong schools and other amenities.

During his visit to Toledo, Turk observed that the grants will better position U.S. companies to compete in the [global](https://www.toledoblade.com/business/energy/2024/04/04/libbeys-new-45-million-doe-grant-emission-cuts-jobs-technology-transfer/stories/20240404136) economy. That remark struck a chord with Bixler, who noted glassmakers continually face overseas threats.

“We’re looking forward to getting this grant and implementing this new technology, so we can preserve the future,” he said.