

Union workers play role in bioscience future

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In his State of the Union address last month, President Barack Obama shared his thoughts for how America can return to its previous strength: “We need to out-innovate, out-educate and out-build the rest of the world,” he said.

Here in Indiana, we believe that an important part of the solution requires new approaches as well as new alliances. One such alliance — the Pharmaceutical Industry Labor Management Association, or PILMA — hosted an event last month that highlighted the promise of this new collaborative approach.

At the event, U.S. Rep. Andre Carson joined leaders from labor and management for a conversation about the role of the life sciences in our state’s economy and for a tour of the state-of-the-art training facility at Iron Workers Local Union 22. By embracing a spirit of collaboration, the member companies and unions of PILMA have succeeded in advancing an agenda aimed at growing the industry, creating jobs and finding new lifesaving cures.

The life science sector plays a large role in Indiana, with nearly 15,000 direct employees. The bigger story is the larger role that biopharmaceuticals play, with nearly 90,000 jobs supported throughout the state.

These supported jobs, of course, include the skilled workers of Local Union 22. Each job within the sector helps to create an additional 3.7 jobs like ours.

Our alliance facilitates an ongoing conversation about how we can help America rebuild; it helps us work hard to find common ground on those issues where we disagree. Ultimately, the more that unions and the biopharmaceutical research industry work together, the faster the Indiana economy will grow and, ultimately, the more jobs will be available to residents.

Joining Carson at our event, Mike O’Connor from Eli Lilly and Co. recognized the critical role that union training and apprenticeship programs play in keeping our state competitive.

“We can’t innovate without organizations like the Iron Workers doing the training in facilities like this and other facilities across Central Indiana,” O’Connor said.

A top priority of Carson’s and the rest of Indiana’s federal delegation should be to encourage biopharmaceutical firms in Indiana to start new lines of research. Doing so would encourage companies to expand local operations and create jobs.

Indiana has programs in place, such as the Indiana Future Fund, to help the biosciences sector thrive. With growth will come an immediate and direct need for improved infrastructure, and that is where we come in.

Working together, unions and drug makers will continue to prepare Indiana's workers for the future. In-lab medical innovations lead to lifesaving medications that extend and improve the lives of our fellow Americans. And, importantly, that research provides sustainable, well-paid employment for union workers across the state.