

Vice President Kamala Harris came to Philadelphia to announce pay increases for construction workers

President Joe Biden visited the same trades training institute in March — a sign of the administration's focus on union workers. Harris also toured an I-95 construction site Tuesday.



Vice President Kamala Harris speaks at the Finishing Trades Institute in Northeast Philadelphia to announce an initiative to increase wages for construction workers. [... Read more](#)

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by **Punya Bhasin**
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Vice President Kamala Harris visited Philadelphia on Tuesday to announce an increase in minimum wages for some construction workers, reflecting President Joe Biden's [focus on middle-class workers and the economy](#) as he runs for a second term.

“These workers deserve recognition and appreciation and they deserve something more,” Harris said. “They deserve a raise.”

Harris spoke to a crowd at the Finishing Trades Institute, which houses apprentice programs for workers in professions such as glazier work, drywall installation, and painting. The institute in Northeast Philadelphia is full of model building parts like housing frames, and “Investing in America” signs hung from the ceiling for Harris’ visit.

It was a familiar setting for the Biden administration, as the president visited the institute to [roll out his budget proposal in March](#). Biden and Harris have focused their reelection campaign — and recent visits to Philadelphia — on highlighting their support for union workers, the middle class, and infrastructure investments.

Harris unveiled a plan to help construction workers

This new action announced Tuesday is the first comprehensive update in the last 40 years to the Davis-Bacon and Related Acts Regulation, which requires payment of locally prevailing wages and fringe benefits to construction workers participating in federally funded projects.

Wages vary based on the location of the work but Harris said in her remarks that a heavy equipment operator in Allegheny County could stand to double her hourly wage from \$17 to \$28 thanks to the change.

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“The estimate that right now there are 1.2 million workers covered, but given the investments being made right now... the workforce is about to grow dramatically,” said Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su, who visited Philadelphia with Harris. “That’s why the timing of this rule feels so urgent.”

Biden nominated Su as labor secretary in February, but Democrats’ attempts to get her confirmed to the permanent position have failed and Republicans have questioned whether she can remain in the temporary role indefinitely. Harris, however, defended Su on Tuesday and referred to her as the labor secretary.

“I don’t use the word ‘acting,’” Harris said at the Building Trades Institute.

Su said in an interview after Harris’ speech that Tuesday’s announcement on construction worker wages is “about empowering workers and making sure workers are paid a fair wage and that federal construction dollars aren’t bringing down local wages.”

Construction workers can expect to see thousands of extra dollars per year in their pockets as part of this new ruling, according to the White House, and the change will allow workers to earn wages that are more in line with the industry.

The new rule will also update regulatory language to better reflect modern construction practices and strengthen worker protections.

The visit fit into Biden's reelection campaign message

Biden is focusing his reelection campaign on "[Bidenomics](#)," the catch phrase for his legislative achievements and economic plans, as well as organized labor. Harris reiterated that messaging Tuesday, rebuking claims of an impending recession.

“We have divided our resources among the various sectors of those who are actually building America and you see that evident in the various labor unions that are represented here today,” Harris said. “We know that we must invest in the working people of America if we are to strengthen America’s economy, and so we are fighting to build a nation, where every person, not just the wealthy or well connected, have the opportunity to thrive and that, all my friends here, is called Bidenomics.”

Harris added that infrastructure in America was “falling apart,” and the Biden-Harris administration has worked to rebuild it, using [the rebuilding of I-95](#), as an example. After her remarks she toured the construction site of a new ramp that is being built to connect I-95 to the Betsy Ross Bridge, meeting workers there who also helped rebuild 95.

But the Biden administration's focus on economic achievements comes as constituents are growing increasingly [frustrated with the economy](#), despite the [pace of inflation decreasing](#) under the Biden administration.

The crowd at the union training institute Tuesday, composed mostly of laborers and union workers, applauded the announcement and gave Harris a warm welcome.

Harris' visit was also met with criticism from the Republican National Committee.

"Incredibly out of touch, Kamala Harris and Joe Biden continue to tout 'Bidenomics,' as if their economic disaster is good news for Pennsylvanians," Rachel Lee, a RNC spokesperson said in a statement. "The Biden-Harris agenda has delivered soaring prices, higher debt, and falling real wages for working families across the nation."

But despite some criticism, Harris insisted in her speech that "Bidenomics is working."