

Testimony

Hello, my name is Tuuli Snow. My family owns and operates one of the last independent boatbuilding companies in Seattle, Washington. In a city that used to be the home of dozens of shipbuilders, this is quite a feat. We build work boats; pilot boats, fishing vessels, and tugboats, in addition to a contract we hold to build 53 workboats for the US Navy. Last year we built the first hybrid vessel in the US Department of Energy's fleet, and we are currently building a set of first of their kind electric tugs for a company in Long Beach, California. Small shipyards like ours are essential to supporting the maritime economy.

5 years ago, Snow & Company had 30 employees and this year we have just over 100. This is not par for the course in terms of hiring. Shipyards across the US are struggling to attract and maintain talent for a few reasons, most of which include ignoring vast labor markets. A lot of our growth has been due to a deeply innovative change I have made in focusing on hiring from non-traditional avenues. We hire veterans, immigrants, refugees, individuals coming out of prison, or starting work release, and seek people from communities that have traditionally been overlooked or excluded from the maritime industry.

I often say, "I play for the maritime long haul, not just our company" investing my time and energy into building a better industry, not just a better business. Historically, in nature, and across the globe, we have seen that a more diverse ecosystem is often a more fruitful one. More sustainable, more creative, and more effective. A great barrier to entering the maritime community is exposure. People are unaware of what is out there. Many believe that you have to go to sea in order to get a maritime job, because they don't know any other aspects of this

industry. They don't realize you could be a project manager, or a naval architect, an electrical engineer, or even a nurse. This isn't a career path that was introduced to them in kindergarten, middle school, or high school. People don't see the same opportunities and career pathways as other industries. I enter communities, neighborhoods, and towns in Washington to share the great opportunities in this industry and hopefully encourage more people to enter it.

There has been a huge boom in young people returning to trade school and traditional apprenticeships in the last 2-5 years. There is less public shame today than in the recent past, where technical colleges have been viewed as less valuable than other 4 year universities. People complete these technical programs or apprenticeships with an active and applicable skill set, ready to enter the workforce and bearing significantly less debt. In apprenticeship programs, young people are paid while learning these valuable, and necessary, skills. This is a change we greatly need but has made a gap in skills visible. We have hundreds of maritime experts that are ready to retire and a new workforce excited to learn, but this makes our expertise an hourglass shape, heavy on entry level and heavy on expert, but less concentrated in mid-level trades people. Investment in our youth is absolutely vital, and this hourglass shows, so is investment in working adults.

Opportunities to learn new trades and skills, opportunities to be mentored and trained, opportunities that should be granted to those we traditionally ignore.

There is a common misconception that you must speak English to have an impactful job in the United States, which I have repeatedly proved to be inaccurate. Two years ago, I had a Ukrainian refugee reach out to me via email stating he could not speak English, but he could weld, and he

wanted to apply at our company. I invited him in for an interview and weld test, which the hiring manager was initially very sure would not work out due to his lack of English. About 30 minutes later, after his weld test was complete, the hiring manager came back to me and said “if I do one thing right this year, it will be hiring this man. He is incredible.” After passing his E-Verify check, we started him immediately. That individual now leads a team of Ukrainian and Russian refugee fabricators and welders. He is one of our highest paid production employees, proving to us, you don’t need to speak English to work hard with exceptional results. In a time when we have immediate access to technology that can translate quickly and effectively, taking a chance on skilled non-English speakers seems like an obvious opportunity to me.

Building a good team is one thing and keeping it is another. To keep our employees happy, healthy, and present, and to attract young talent, we provide 100% employer paid health insurance, with 80% for any dependents the employee has. Most businesses can’t or won’t do this, but we see it as a necessity to build a strong team. We feel this cost is made up for and reflected in the high quality products we produce.

Shipping and shipbuilding are absolutely essential to the livelihood and strength of our country and economy. My request today, from all of you, is for an investment in the maritime industry. An investment in industrial lands to protect businesses like ours. Allocation of funds to small shipyard grants. Investment in youth and education to grow this sector for decades to come. Investment in the health and welfare of our employees. Investment in adults looking to learn new skills that will inflate our diminishing workforce. And an investment in marginalized

communities that will breathe new life, creativity, and innovation into this industry.

Thank you.