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Op-Ed: Infrastructure Builds Our Communities

Honoring Our Essential Workforce on Labor Day, By Lauren Atwell

(Fairfax, Virginia) -- Happy Labor Day! As you take a well-deserved break from a very difficult economic year, take a few moments today and give thanks for those businesses and their employees who make our national infrastructure possible.

Without infrastructure construction projects, America would not have clean water, nor the ability to carry away wastewater and safely treat it for the environment. We would find it impossible to easily move products and goods from one side of this nation to the other. We would not have the connected web of underground cables necessary to make our virtual meetings—or the Internet itself—possible today. Or be able to deliver electric power to millions of American homes.

My company and the other 19,000 businesses in the American utility construction industry keep this labyrinth of industry and economic viability in working order each day. Our 575,000 employees excavate the trenches and foundations needed to build this vast network of water, wastewater, natural gas/petroleum, telecommunications, and electric infrastructure. Each year, we perform about \$152 billion worth of construction work on this equipment to install, upgrade, or repair it.

Utility construction can be a dirty job, but we don't mind. Without this complex engineering and hard labor, our American communities would be uninhabitable to modern standards.

This vast network, much of it hidden underground, is the ultimate American community improvement project. Everyone has a stake in it. We depend on local communities to plan this network, but we also depend on the federal government to provide much of the funding required to make these expensive public works projects viable.

Our national leaders in Congress and the White House have an opportunity ahead to not only improve our national infrastructure, but to use these water and sewer pipes, roads and bridges, ports and airports, and gas, electric, and broadband lines to boost our national economy after a half-year of dismal economic news.

Labor Day is a day to thank the contributions workers have made to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of our country. It's a great job and career, and we're thankful our men and women can do this work each day. But "We Dig America" is not just the slogan my industry has used for decades to highlight our industry's appreciation of this nation. It is also what each of us believe and undertake in our daily labors throughout the year as we build our communities and the United States of America.

Lauren Atwell is the chief operating officer of Petticoat-Schmitt Civil Contractors, Inc., based in Jacksonville, Florida, and is the chairman-elect of the National Utility Contractors Association, the trade association of America's utility construction industry.

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About The National Utility Contractors Association (NUCA)

Founded in 1964, the National Utility Contractors Association represents nearly 1,700 U.S. utility and excavation contractors, manufacturers, and suppliers who provide the materials and workforce to build and maintain our nation's intricate network of water, sewer, gas, telecommunications, and electric infrastructure. NUCA is found online at www.nuca.com, and can be followed on Twitter at **@NUCA_National**. The association's Twitter hashtags are #WeDigAmerica and #NUCAdigs.