



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Construction Industry says Manitoba Jobs Agreements (MJA) are filled with Red Flags

Three major associations representing the majority of vertical and heavy construction industry across Manitoba have requested Manitoba's Auditor General review of the 85-cent-per-hour per worker charge collected on MJA-covered projects that flows directly to a union body on top of existing dues— with no public oversight, no explanation, and no end in sight. Taxpayers are paying for it.

WINNIPEG, MB — Every hour worked on a Manitoba Jobs Agreement covered construction project now comes with a hidden price tag — 85 cents, collected from contractors, handed directly to a union organization, with no public accounting of where it goes or who decided it was the right amount. That's 85-cents per hour per worker. On a major MJA-covered infrastructure project, that's not pocket change. That's potentially millions of dollars diverted from public investment with zero transparency.

Today, Manitoba's three largest construction associations — the Winnipeg Construction Association (WCA), the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association (MHCA), and the Construction Association of Rural Manitoba (CARM) — are formally requesting that the Auditor General of Manitoba investigate this fee and the broader accountability failures of the provincial government's Manitoba Jobs Agreement (MJA).

"This fee is being sent directly to the Manitoba Building Trades without any clear oversight. Nobody in government has explained how the number was set, what it's supposed to fund, or who's watching the money. At the end of the day, taxpayers are the ones paying for it."

— Ron Hambley, President, Winnipeg Construction Association

The Fee Is Just the Beginning

The unaccountable fee is the most glaring problem — but the associations say the MJA is broken at a structural level. The agreement requires that unionized workers be hired first on covered projects, effectively locking out the vast majority of Manitoba's construction workforce.

According to Statistics Canada, approximately 88 per cent of Manitoba's construction workforce is non-unionized.

Under the MJA, open-shop contractors can start a project with their own existing workforce — but that's where their control ends. Any new workers brought on during a project are subject to union hiring preference, and even the use of their own workforce requires union approval. In practice, unions hold veto power over staffing decisions on MJA-covered work. For the 88 per cent of Manitoba's construction workforce that chose not to join a union, that means their job opportunities on these projects depend on union sign-off. Competition shrinks. Costs rise. Manitobans end up paying more to build less.

“Transparency and accountability for public funds are absolutely critical. Neither the industry nor Manitoba taxpayers have been given a clear explanation of how this fee was determined or what it is intended to fund. That is not acceptable.”

— Chris Lorenc, President & CEO, Manitoba Heavy Construction Association

Rural Manitoba Gets Hit Hardest

The MJA’s union-first hiring requirements don’t just hurt competition in Winnipeg — they actively disadvantage workers in rural and northern Manitoba, where unionized labour is far less available and local contractors have built skilled, loyal workforces over decades.

“The MJA gives unions approval rights over the workforce on covered projects and hands them first access to any new hiring. Open-shop companies can start with their own people — but the moment they need to bring someone new on, unions go to the front of the line. That restricts competition, drives up costs, and puts rural Manitoba workers at a disadvantage getting work in their own communities. Manitobans will end up paying more and getting less.”

— Shawn Wood, Executive Director, Construction Association of Rural Manitoba

What the Industry Is Asking

The three associations want the Auditor General to examine how the fee was set, who governs the collected funds, how those funds are reported publicly, and whether the entire financial structure of the MJA meets basic standards of transparency and value for money in public procurement.

Beyond the Auditor General, the associations are calling on the provincial government to fix the MJA’s structural flaws: restore fair and open competition on public projects, end discriminatory hiring requirements, and ensure that Manitoba’s construction workers — union and non-union alike — have a fair shot at building their province.

“Manitoba needs a construction policy that supports good jobs, strong workforce development, and fair competition. Manitoba’s construction workers, contractors, and taxpayers all deserve to be treated fairly.”

— Ron Hambley, President, Winnipeg Construction Association

About the Associations

The Winnipeg Construction Association (WCA), the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association (MHCA), and the Construction Association of Rural Manitoba (CARM) collectively represent a substantial majority of Manitoba’s construction sector, including general contractors, trade contractors, and allied industry firms operating across the province.

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