

Maine Congressman: Shipyards Like BIW Have Serious Workforce Challenges



Deputy Secretary of Defense Dr. Kathleen H. Hicks, Sen. Angus King and Rep. Jared Golden visited the Bath Iron Works shipyard where they toured manufacturing facilities and met shipbuilders in Bath, Maine, July 7, 2021. *DOD / U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jack Sanders*

ARLINGTON, Va. – Shipyards are having challenges attracting or training skilled workers to build and maintain U.S. Navy ships, a Maine congressman said.

“We have serious workforce challenges similar to the rest of the country, both inside and outside the military industrial base,” said Rep. Jared Golden, D-Maine, speaking Sept. 2 in a Hudson Institute webinar. In general, manufacturing workforces are in decline.”

Maine is the home of two major shipyards that build or maintain U.S. Navy ships: General Dynamics Bath Iron Works in Bath and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery.

“We have seen in Maine a population decline accompanied with a change in how we directed youth to pursue work and studies, so an entire generation encouraged to go to four-year college degrees,” Golden said. “We saw a lot of people leaving the state of Maine for those types of opportunities, not necessarily coming back, while at the same time the best jobs we have in the state of Maine [are] at Bath Iron Works, or many of our paper mills. These are very blue-collar, hands-on jobs that historically have not required a four-year degree but require hard skill sets that have been allowed to go away and be lost.”

Golden said Bath Iron Works “not only has an aging workforce that is retiring or coming up on retirement at a pretty rapid rate, hiring thousands every year just to try and keep up. They are slowly growing, but they’re having to start from scratch with a lot of these young workers and teach them the very basics of shipbuilding, whether that be welding or whatever. It is a different workforce challenge than in other generations past.”

The congressman spoke of having Maine stand up programs at community colleges, apprenticeship programs or pre-apprenticeship programs “that are going to help people get a foot in the door of eventually getting a great job opportunity in a place like Bath Iron Works.”

Golden said it “takes on average seven years to get a fully competent, specialized shipbuilder at place like Bath Iron Works. That’s a big investment you’re going to make.”