

IBB INTERNATIONAL REP STEWART: Good

morning, Union Brothers and Sisters.

("Good morning" from the delegation.)

I am so excited to be here in Las Vegas attending your 30th International Convention. I, as he said, am Erica Stewart and I'm a proud member of International Brotherhood of Boilermakers Union and I'm from Mobile, Alabama. Can I get Roll Tide from anybody? A Roll Tide, just one?

(Applause.)

One? Not even a one Roll Tide.

Nothing.

("Roll Tide" from the delegation.)

Roll Tide. Let me get it. Okay.

So a little bit about me. My journey as a tradeswomen started back in 1997. I had just gotten off active duty. I served in the U.S. Army. Do we have any veterans in the house? Any vets? We got Army? Navy? All right. Air Force? What about those jarheads, the Marines.

("Booyah" from the delegation.)

Okay. Okay. We in the house.

So a friend of mine asked me to ride with her to put in an application at an Ingalls shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi. I was like, Look, girl, I'll ride with you but I'm really not interested in applying at the shipyard. It just wasn't for me.

So after we arrived at human resources, I was -- I decided to take a nap when she went inside the building. So she went in and she came out with a huge stack of papers and insisted that I also apply. There was also a guy that was standing in front of the building and he chimed in saying that I should apply for the job and he began to talk but I still wasn't convinced. Like blah,

blah, blah.

So I asked the guy after he just kept talking, If I complete this application, would you please allow me to get my -- finish my nap and would you find somewhere else to smoke that cigarette because the smoke was killing me. Okay?

So I half completed the application and I gave it to them just to get both of them to leave me alone. So about 15 minutes later they both came back knocking on the window. And I was pissed, like, you all still here. Leave me alone. And they said they called your name to be interviewed. And I was like, what, you got to be kidding me. I was nowhere prepared or dressed for an interview.

You see, my dad worked 34 years at Bell South, now known as AT&T, as a union member himself. So I'm a union girl from a union dad. He was a union steward himself for the CWA, Communication Workers of America. And my mom she worked as a supervisor at a group home. So they both worked crazy long hours. So I stayed most of the time with my grandma. Some of you guys probably had -- you were raised by the village with your grandma, aunties or whatever.

But my grandmother taught my siblings and I you have to dress up for an interview. You got to put on, you know, your Sunday's best for the interview and here I was going into an interview with a sweat suit on. That was a big no-no. Grandmother was not smiling down. She was looking down from heaven like you better not, you better not, you better not. But I had to do what I had to do.

So I entered the room, right, four guys sitting at this long table and they begin to ask me questions. Like, how do you feel about working outside in the heat? It's no problem. What about working outside in the cold? It's not a problem. What about extreme heights? Not a problem. So with all of my military training, I had no issues working in those kind of conditions.

So go figure, they offered me the job on the spot. My starting rate at the time was \$10.13. I was rich. \$10.13. I mean, think back when you first started, guys, what your first rate of pay was. Some of you all was there a little bit longer than I was, so like \$5 or \$7 you thought you were rich. I was rich. All right.

So I got all excited. I wanted to share my good news with my friend. I'm like, girl, we got a job. We coming in tomorrow. Yes. She was, like, I didn't get the job. I got the job and she didn't. It was a long ride back from Mississippi to Alabama. She was sad and I was sad for her but I was, like, I had to do what I had to do, right?

So once I completed the long weeks of training, I was excited to be released into the actual shipyard. However reality kicked in really, really quick for me. Being the only woman in the crew was tough. The foreman gave me the blues. Okay? He put me on jobs that he knew an apprentice should not have been working alone. I would ask for help, but that booger refused to get me any help. And I call him a booger. That's the nicest word that I can say because I'm a lady.

(Laughter.)

But he refused to even let the guys in the crew help me. He never addressed me by my name but he gave me a new nickname every day that was very inappropriate. I was always overlooked for overtime. But I needed this job so I beared all I

could take. I had three mouths to feed. It was many a nights that I left there in tears but I always returned the next day hoping for a change.

One of the guys finally suggested to me to request a steward -- a union steward to file a grievance on that foreman. However, when the steward came to do the investigation, no one wanted to give a statement as a witness due to fear of retaliation.

That following day, I had that one guy that said if I wanted to still file that grievance on that foreman, he would be willing to step up and give a statement. I indeed did and I was very grateful for him to step up to be that one guy to support me.

After winning my case against the foreman, I was transferred to a much better foreman who made sure that I received the best training to later become a journeymen welder. I was so excited. I also began attending more of my monthly union meetings. I was later asked by my Business Manager to serve as a union steward. I was nervous, but I gladly accepted the offer.

My union leadership journey continued

where I was elected by my fellow brothers and sisters. Let me tell you something, it's good to be appointed but when you're elected by your peers, when your fellow brothers and sisters will actually nominate you and elect you for these positions, that means a lot. Can you agree with me? That's a lot. We got some officers in here.

(Applause.)

When you're elected by your peers and they see something in you, that's an honor. That means a lot. So for me to be elected but be nominated and be elected by my peers to be the President of Local 693, to be a voice for the membership it meant a lot.

In 2017, I was appointed to serve as the Boilermakers' first women International Representative. It was such an honor.

And later in 2018, I was asked to serve as the Boilermakers National Coordinator of Women in Trades Initiatives. In that role, I was appointed to represent my Boilermaker Union sisters on the Tradeswomen Build Nations Committee of NABTU along with my hard-working, my sister Erin, my go-getter sisters.

I want to talk to you a little bit about the Tradeswomen Build Nations conference that will be held in Washington, D.C., December the 1st through the 3rd at the Washington Hilton.

Just for reference, the 2022 TWBN conference was held here, yes, here, in Las Vegas last year. It was the largest gathering of tradeswomen in the world. The conference was attended by thousands of building trades leaders and professionals from across North America. This conference cultivates leadership, mentorship, sisterhood as well as activism to address vital issues facing tradeswomen in the workforce.

There are inspirational speakers, during the plenary sessions and workshops and networking opportunities geared toward empowering tradeswomen. The Tradeswomen Build Nations Conference provides an educational environment and workshops and trainings on subjects ranging from childcare strategies to women in union leaderships and even workshops designed for our Union brothers to support their sisters in the trades.

The conference provides a fun and inspiring platform for all participants from all



over the U.S., Canada and even overseas to celebrate what it means to be a tradesperson.

TWBN plays a key role in raising morale, and ensuring retention of sisters in construction and our Union. It's a conference by tradeswomen for tradeswomen.

(Applause.)

So let's talk stats. Okay. This conference is now the largest yearly conference that NABTU or any of its affiliates have. Every year TWBN breaks its own record. In 2019, prior to COVID-19, we had 2,700 attendees.

(Applause.)

That's big. Whoo. And so coming out of the mask era we made it to nearly 3,300 attendees.

(Applause.)

So we thought that maybe that was a fluke because people were tired of being locked up but this year we're seven weeks out and we already have 2,089 registered as of day before yesterday. I should also let you know that we welcome our Union brothers at this conference. Please, we would love the support. We want to share this movement with

you.

Also, the theme of this year's conference is Solidarity, Strength and Sisterhood. I have the honor to, once again, co-MC the TWBN Conference with our Committee Chair, my Ironworker sister, Sister Vicki O'Leary, and the most exciting part about this conference, other than the things that I just told you about, you saw on the video that epic parade. The banner parade is everything.

And you're probably saying, What is that? Well, let me tell you. Have you ever seen 3,300 tradeswomen marching -- I mean, we marching. We got our union banners in complete solidarity proud to be union. We're happy to be together, happy to have opportunities to break bread with our sisters.

Last year in Las Vegas, people were stopping us, asking us what were we celebrating with a smile on our faces and with our chest stood out we told them we were celebrating being union tradeswomen. There is nothing better for our.

Movement than to go to the street celebrating.

So if you are not sending your women Roofers, you need to. Not only should you send them, you should also send them with a little union swag. Let me give you a few ideas. I got time today.

(Laughter.)

We got T-shirts with our local numbers, right, Sisters? We want to wear some T-shirts, right. Stickers, banners, and we got to have some nice pins. Thank you. Thank you, Sister, for my pin.

You know what, Brothers and Sisters, like what do you bring here for the Convention. And not to call you all out or anything but remember I was giving stats earlier so I got to keep it 100 with you, right? Do you want to know the numbers of your registrations for this year so far? 14. Last year you had 35 but we got time. We got seven more weeks to get the registration up so you can send some of these bad rock star chicks that represent every day, that are proud Roofers to send them to this amazing conference.

So go back to your locals after this Convention and hopefully you can look at sending

more of your own tradeswomen. We want to see as many as tradeswomen in attendance as we can.

Right, Sisters?

(Applause.)

So first, if you need some help with registration, you can always contact Erin. Also, there is registration on the NABTU's registration -- on the website you can find registration forms and hotel room blocks. I can promise you your tradeswomen would love the support and will come back energized and ready to take on the world. I did and I still do.

Thank you so much for inviting me and I hope to see you all in Washington, D.C.

Organize.

(Standing ovation.)