

# Film incentives make a big difference for workers

BY TOM O'DONNELL AND JOHN FORD

We've seen this scripted act of fiction before. Every year at this time, so-called "experts" from biased, politically motivated think tanks release a report concluding it is time to call "cut" on film, TV, and streaming program tax credits nationwide, as a columnist did in the July 26 issue of Crain's.

It's a tired tale rooted in falsehoods. More importantly, it's a story that fails to capture the real people impacted by the program credits — working-class people.

As the heads of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Teamsters in the New York region, the tens of thousands of working-class union members we represent are living testaments to the importance of the film and TV industry. Our members are blue-collar, working-class individuals who go to work every day and look to the film, television and streaming production industry as a pathway to the middle class. The steady, full-time jobs provided by scores of productions enable them to put food on the table, provide for their loved ones and get access to quality health care.

There are many industries that commonly receive tax incentives from states. Yet only the production incentive programs are flagged by conservative periodicals or pseudo-researchers, who deem the benefit exclusively to "liberal Hollywood" executives and major corporate interests.

The fact is that state production incentives only began after Canada and other countries offered them first two decades ago, siphoning off thousands of jobs in this uniquely indigenous industry. These production credits go to the bottom-line workers behind the scenes, from carpenters to camera operators to technicians and truck drivers. These workers are the backbone and pulse of the production industry, without whom the entertainment industry would not be able to function.

The increasing influx of new series and theatrical productions spurred by the emergence of new streaming channels and other platforms have provided increased opportunities for workers in these trades to continue earning a livelihood doing what they love. These growth opportunities would not be

possible without the various production incentive programs offered across the United States, in turn, creating job opportunities from Georgia to Hawaii.

For example, the numbers in New York paint an even clearer picture of the positive impact of these incentive programs. In 2017 alone, the state's incentive program supported 48,300 middle-class jobs, delivering \$4.3 billion in personal income and \$6.7 billion in local spending. Those jobs, income and revenue would not be there otherwise. New York is part of the expanding national trend focused on supporting initiatives that encourage the creation of incentives that benefit working-class people.

In their 2019 fiscal year, the industry generated \$2.9 billion in direct production spending into the Georgia economy. That was money that went back into the local community. Small businesses also reaped the benefits with Georgia paying on average \$693 million per year to vendors since 2015. The same story is in Massachusetts with the film and TV productions supporting more than 41,000 working class jobs and another 77,000 in Illinois.

The state-by-state reopenings across the country mark the return of entertainment

## WORKERS ARE THE BACKBONE AND PULSE OF THE PRODUCTION INDUSTRY.

productions and the jobs they provide. Fantastical claims from misinformed and misguided voices simply don't tell the truth and ignore the real-life impacts of these programs. There are few pleasures greater than being a part of the magic of movies or joining a family when working on TV shows. Our jobs support us and give us pride in making our state a unique cultural and economic hub. We give an ovation to lawmakers who have listened to the facts and said "Ready, Set, Action" to these programs.

*Tom O'Donnell is Motion Picture Division director of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and President of Teamsters Local 817. John Ford is a member of the executive board of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and President of IATSE Local 52.*

