

"This is just a political favor to unions by the Obama administration, and it's unfair," Fisher said.

Those who often cannot compete are minority firms and smaller businesses, he said.

But studies show project labor agreements, which exist on other construction jobs, don't have much effect on prices or who bids on the jobs, said Dale Belman, a Michigan State University professor of industrial relations who follows the construction industry.

The surveys also show union contractors use diversity when it comes to hiring African-Americans, but nonunion contractors employ far more immigrant Latinos, Belman said.

In Michigan, most big public construction projects already apply a "prevailing wage" standard to award contracts, said Mike Jackson, the executive secretary-treasurer of the Michigan Regional Council of Carpenters and Millwrights, which has about 18,000 members. That standard often means nonunion contractors pay similar wages as those paid by unions when they win contracts.

"That's why I don't think there is new uncompetitive pricing" with the Obama rules, Jackson said.

Unions also contend the labor agreements ensure a uniformity of quality in construction projects.

Applicable projects approved in Michigan include resurfacing U.S. 23 in Alcona and rebuilding 11 bridges over I-96 in Detroit.