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Chairman's message: Our power in numbers will help us face challenges

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I'd like to use one of my last messages as chairman of the Massachusetts chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc., to address some very important political and economic issues.

Massachusetts continues to be a difficult state for businesses to grow and prosper. Small businesses cannot seem to grow and many larger, more established construction businesses can no longer afford to remain here. My daughter has been trying to expand her own business and hire more help over the past year, but has encountered such a cumbersome permitting process that she wonders if the expansion is really worth the trouble, particularly given the economic climate.

In 2008 we saw the state Legislature raise corporate taxes. In 2009 they increased the state sales tax by 25%. We have thrown hundreds of millions of dollars in tax credits at the film and biotech industries yet the funding has fallen through for the Plymouth Rock Studios proposal and the Governor beseeched biotech executives some months ago to hire more union labor. Mixed messages and misguided priorities are not the way to get Massachusetts back on track.

Private sector companies have to institute massive layoffs to meet their bottom line, while too many public employee unions continue to stand pat and refuse to make any concessions. When will the Governor and state Legislature step up and give themselves a 10% pay cut? Unfortunately, too many of us know someone that has either lost their job completely or taken a pay cut much larger than 10%.

The construction industry remains one of the hardest hit by the recession. There are too many workers, union and nonunion alike, sitting on the sidelines waiting to get back to work. The failure of expected federal stimulus funds to materialize has done little to provide workers with any hope of getting back to work soon.

Our state is desperate for leadership. We are desperate for individuals from both the public and private sectors who are willing to make difficult decisions and provide us with the answers we need. Over this next year, I ask that you do all you can to engage yourself more with your local community as well as the state. Watch the news, read the newspapers, and show up at community events. I am sure that those who are not working have already begun to do so. And those of us fortunate enough to have a job need to remain mindful that things can change very quickly.

For the coming year, ABC has a plan to focus on our core issues and rededicate ourselves to working together to help get through these challenging times. We cannot underestimate the power of a strong group with a meaningful cause. It's what has grown ABC from seven firms in Baltimore in 1950 to a national group 30,000 businesses strong. It's what will help give us a much better shot against our current challenges than going it alone. It's what we should not ever forget.

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