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Chairman's message: Senate election and free enterprise

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On January 19th, Massachusetts voters sent a strong message to both Washington and Beacon Hill that the political status quo is unacceptable. It isn't an overstatement to say that Scott Brown's ascendancy to "The People's Seat" in the United States senate is one of the biggest electoral upsets in American political history.

Talk radio and cable television have poured over the "whys" and "hows" of senator Brown's victory; I will instead focus on how this election represents an important win for those who value the merit shop principles of free enterprise and open competition. It is interesting - and significant - that Scott Brown's message resonated with many union members. Recently, the AFL-CIO released the results of their internal polling that showed that that senator Brown received 49% of the vote among union households (compared to 46% for state attorney general Martha Coakley - Wall Street Journal, 1/22/2010.)

Senator Brown accurately sensed that people all across the Commonwealth are first and foremost concerned about basic, core issues - issues such as the economy and our national security. Whether we are in a union or not, we all want to be able to earn a living, support our families and remain safe in the country we love.

On the economy, senator Brown promoted the values of free enterprise. The fact remains that competition breeds innovation, advancement and, ultimately, success. Scott Brown appealed to both union and nonunion construction professionals because his words reflected the reality our industry is facing - work remains scarce and too many of our colleagues still aren't back to work.

We at ABC urge senator Brown to support common-sense policies that will enhance the economy and the entire construction industry, union and open shop. If there is any silver lining to this bad economy it is that some construction projects are going forward because costs have dropped. Let's not stifle this with competition-limiting policies such as project labor agreements (PLAs). PLAs, which require all labor to come from the unions, limit competition, drive up costs and stunt productivity and innovation. They will do no more good for the construction industry than would a policy requiring the use of only non-union workers.

While pundits will continue to debate the message delivered by Massachusetts voters, it's refreshingly clear to senator Brown and the vast majority of union and nonunion households that the way to put more boots back on the construction site is to focus on stimulating the economy. Now is the time to jump-start free enterprise and eliminate anti-competitive policies from our industry. We all benefit when we allow all qualified companies to compete on a level playing field....and may the best company win. The smart money is on one of ABC's highly trained, highly productive, safety-conscious contractors.

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