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Chairman's message: Time to put all workers back to work!

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Normally, Massachusetts house speaker Robert DeLeo's unveiling of legislation that calls for building two resort casinos would be welcome news for a battered Massachusetts construction industry that lost 18% of its jobs last year alone. Unfortunately, the announcement comes in the midst of an election year in which an unpopular governor is counting on support from construction unions.

In a speech before the Building Trades Conference in March, governor Patrick made it clear that he believes there is no place for you and for open competition in the Massachusetts construction industry. He bragged about signing a state card check law and urged Congress to pass similar legislation, which would take the right to a secret-ballot election away from employees deciding whether to unionize and subject workers to union coercion and intimidation.

He went on to make it clear how he intends to build those casinos, declaring "That's why we push so hard for destination resort casinos, with union jobs at union wages and benefits during construction..."

That's not all. Patrick declared that the Commonwealth would use a project labor agreement on the new \$150 million science facility and other capital improvements at the UMass Boston campus. He identified the Salem State College library, a courthouse in Lowell, a UMass Amherst academic building and the second phase of restoration of the Longfellow Bridge, which connects Boston and Cambridge, as additional PLA candidates.

Nowhere in the speech did he mention that the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court has placed strict limits on the use of PLAs. Philadelphia mayor Michael Nutter said it best when he described project labor agreements as creating "an environment of economic apartheid."

Today, 80% of Massachusetts construction workers choose not to affiliate with a union. But as governor Patrick proudly noted in his building trades speech, approximately 80% of the construction spending under his control is being carried out by union workers. On the Commonwealth's biggest project, the \$300 million undertaking at Worcester State Hospital, 96% of the construction spending is being carried out by union members.

Even with Massachusetts entering the third year of a deep fiscal crisis, the administration is unconcerned about paying the hefty premium associated with union-only construction. But taxpayers sure are. When asked in a recent Suffolk University/7 News poll if private contractors should be compelled to hire all their workers through unions, respondents said "NO" by a resounding 69-24% margin.

The bad news is tempered with hope. As Scott Brown's January election to the U.S. Senate so clearly demonstrated, voters are in no mood for politics as usual. With the campaign heating up, it's time for our political leaders to understand the value of putting all our workers back to work, not just the ones who choose to affiliate with unions.

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