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Robert Baldwin - president's message: Rhode Island Builders Association is ready. Are you?

December 08, 2011 - Rhode Island

As the Rhode Island Builders Association passes into its new fiscal year, I'm happy to report good news - for our trade association if not for our state. Indeed, the very dark cloud hanging over our state's economy might have a silver lining after all. While the housing market continues to, in the words of National Association of Home Builders economist Robert Denk, "bounce along the bottom," RIBA has taken steps to strengthen its own position to influence the situation in our state.

Take a look at the map on page 24 and you'll see that, nationally, we face an uneven recovery in the housing market. While Rhode Island isn't among the "red" states that are still deep in crisis, we do lag New England, especially Mass., whose recovery is way ahead of ours. As Denk rightly points out in the interview, if a state has an anti-business climate and tax structure, then new jobs will not be created, there will be fewer people working, and housing will remain depressed.

To be an effective force for our industry's battle to bring our state into recovery, RIBA first had to make sure its own house was in order. Over the past year, we have changed direction to become aggressively proactive rather than reactive. Whether legislative, regulatory or just economic, we are addressing situations before they become problems for our industry and your business.

For the first time in RIBA's 66-year history, we have a detailed, five-year business plan. We also have an energetic, young and engaged executive director, along with a trusted and experienced staff who have become "project managers" in putting that business plan into operation.

On November 1st, our board of directors adopted a 2011-2012 budget that stops any leaks. They also cast a unanimous vote to join Engage Rhode Island (engageri.org), a group dedicated to meaningful pension reform in the state.

In addition, our committees are being revitalized and, in some cases, new ones formed. Our Home Show Committee and Finance Subcommittee are among the new panels we have created. Among the teams being given new lives are our Political Action Committees, both federal and state. Many thanks to those who have volunteered to serve on these important committees!

We have launched a membership drive for the first time in decades, and we're expanding our huge collection of member benefits and discounts to save you money.

Another part of that silver lining is the fact that local banks and credit unions are lending money again, especially for remodeling projects and additions. That will only improve over the coming year. And here's where RIBA's legislative influence must come in. In R.I., the General Assembly must "take the bull by the horns" and fix this pension crisis. Unless they do so, taxes will skyrocket, the state will be even less business-friendly, people will go somewhere else, and the economic recovery (never mind housing recovery) will be reckoned in decades.

RIBA must tell the legislature once and for all: Fix this or you're fired. Come November 2012, you'll be out.

This is a trumpet call for all our members to get involved. It's not a matter of choice this time. Join RIBA in this struggle for our state's economic future because your own head and that of your business are on the chopping block. Get involved with your own state senator and representative, and get involved with RIBA's legislative committee. Communicate with executive director John Marcantonio if you have a relationship with any member of the General Assembly or if you have any questions about how you can help in this struggle. Contact him at jmarcantonio@ribuilders.org or at (401) 438-7400.

RIBA is ready. Are you?

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