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Raimondo vows to back construction industry

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"When leaders lead and citizens become engaged, anything is possible."

That was the word from Rhode Island General Treasurer Gina Raimondo, who addressed the Rhode Island Builders Association's Board of Directors at their regular monthly meeting on March 6th.

Pulling out of the current economic doldrums will require cooperation at the state level that won't be easy to achieve, she added.

"I came to public life after 10 years in the private sector, where I worked in the financial end of a venture capital firm," Raimondo said. "The anti-business culture at the State House took me very much by surprise. It seems that any for-profit enterprise creates suspicion."

Raimondo worked for a decade as co-founder and general partner of Point Judith Capital, a venture capital firm. She also was senior vice president of fund development at Village Ventures. She has been involved in dozens of successful start-up companies, primarily in the health care industry.

Known for her leadership on public pension reform in Rhode Island, she called on RIBA to work with her and other pro-business state officials to make the state more business-friendly by streamlining regulations and restoring jobs.

"Without economic growth, we can't have job growth," she pointed out. "I also believe in the performance of government and a good return for our tax dollars."

Raimondo also explained how she is working with municipalities on local budget issues and local pension reform.

In turn, RIBA president Bob Baldwin and several directors explained to Raimondo the factors that are holding back a housing recovery in the state, including overregulation, local land-use road blocks, inconsistent enforcement, high fees and anti-growth local officials.

The general treasurer vowed to work with RIBA on these issues and to support appropriate legislation to solve the problems.

"Tell me what you need, and I will be willing to help," she said.

In other matters, directors heard reports on the International Builders Show and the progress of RIBA's educational programs. Executive director John Marcantonio updated directors on the association's progress toward the 2012 Home Show and other activities. There are tickets to several Providence Bruins hockey games available to members, he stated. Members can stop by the RIBA office during business hours (Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.) to pick them up.

Marcantonio also updated directors on positive results from recent meetings between officials of RIBA and the Dept. of Environmental Management on the issues of wetlands mitigation and buildable lot space.

The association's membership drive continues, and he encouraged all members to attend RIBA's 1st Annual Table Top Networking Night on May 9th at Rhodes on the Pawtuxet, Cranston and to

bring friends. In response to concerns from several directors about a need for selective recruiting of new members, the board agreed to form a committee to study the issue.

There was a brief update on legal and legislative issues, including proposals to restore the state's Historic Tax Credit for certain restoration projects.

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