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ABC supporting eight common-sense legislative bills

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By Thomas Descoteaux

Despite the fact that we represent well over 80% of the Massachusetts construction workforce, the merit shop has long been on the defensive politically, hoping only to fend off union efforts to tilt the industry playing field further in their favor. But several years of successful work to define our own message on Beacon Hill rather than allowing organized labor to do it for (or to) us is beginning to pay off.

This year, instead of solely playing defense, ABC is supporting eight common-sense bills this legislative session that would promote fair and open competition in the construction industry.

Two of the bills address union-only project labor agreements. One would prohibit government from determining who can work on a state job based on labor affiliation, and the other requires all awarding authorities to justify a decision to require a PLA, which codifies a decision by the commonwealth's Supreme Judicial Court.

Greg Beeman recently wrote a column in the Boston Herald about shenanigans at the Lowell Housing Authority as a result of a practice known as "force account," which allows authorities to complete small projects or repairs using their own employees, sometimes with the help of outside labor. One of the bills would end use of the practice by housing authorities.

ABC is supporting a bill that would allow a prevailing wage deduction for apprenticeship training, one that would require all collective bargaining agreements to be accessible on line, and legislation that would clarify the common-law definition should be used for fraud.

A final bill would promote fairness on the boards of registration that are so important when it comes to setting the rules for licensed trades. The legislation would require that each board have both signatory and non-signatory members.

The bills are attracting bipartisan support and several of them were filed by Democratic legislators.

All of us owe a special debt of gratitude to Leon Asadoorian, who heads ABC's government affairs committee, ABC president Greg Beeman, public affairs director Chuck Borstel and lobbyist John Bartley. Thanks to their work, with the help of our members, we are beginning to see the tide turn on Beacon Hill.

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