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Collaboration from elected leaders keeps momentum going

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Quonset Business Park today is home to over 175 companies in a variety of industries, employing more than 9,500 people in full and part-time jobs. The Port of Davisville is one of the top ten auto importers in North America, and Quonset is one of the leading drivers of economic growth and job creation in Rhode Island.

In order to maintain a climate where businesses can grow and create more jobs for Rhode Islanders, Quonset relies on timely and consistent investments in infrastructure by the state and federal government. In recent years, over 3,500 new jobs have been created here, while businesses have more than doubled the amount of public sector investment, resulting in more than \$1.5 billion in investment by our tenant companies.

In 2012, the Rhode Island Congressional delegation and Governor Chafee announced a new investment of \$6 million by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA). The grant was given to reconstruct a bulkhead, which was built in 1941 and severely damaged by Hurricane Irene in 2011. The bulkhead helps to protect three marine trade industry businesses from waterfront storm surges. As a condition of the grant, the Quonset Development Corp. was required to provide a \$1.5 million match to the federal funds.

Recently, these critical funds were in jeopardy when an inadvertent conflict between state apprenticeship programs and federal law was discovered. While the state law is helpful in promoting the training of a future workforce, the federal government found that it might be unreasonable to require a contractor to meet it in order to qualify to bid.

Fortunately, the General Assembly moved quickly to resolve the matter with legislation that made state requirements subject to federal law and regulations pertaining to federal aid contracts. Had the correction not been made by May 1, the \$6 million grant would have been forfeited, and the necessary repairs to the storm-damaged bulkhead would not have been possible and the operations of the three businesses would have been seriously impaired.

I would like to thank the General Assembly for their timely resolution of this issue, particularly: Rep. Robert Craven, who introduced the legislation (H-7964) in the House; Sen. Roger Picard, who sponsored the legislation (S-2854) in the state Senate; and, Rep. Joe Shekarchi, Chairman of the House Labor Committee, who made passage of the legislation through his committee a priority. I also want to thank Rep. Doreen Costa, Rep. Mia Ackerman, Rep. Donald Lally, Sen. Jim Sheehan, Sen. Frank Lombardi, Sen. Josh Miller, and Sen. Dominick Ruggerio, who all co-sponsored of the legislation in their respective chambers.

Once the bill was passed by both bodies, the Senate and House leadership acted quickly to deliver the legislation to Governor Chafee for his prompt signature on April 17, 2014.

Our efforts at Quonset have been made possible by the active support of elected leaders from every level of government. This is one more example of that successful collaboration.

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