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Chairman's message: Const. industry and the government

April 17, 2008 - Construction Design & Engineering

With a strong union supporter in the corner office to go along with a labor-friendly Legislature, ABC-Mass. must be particularly vigilant in our efforts to promote a level playing field within the construction industry. Recognizing the challenge, ramping up our political activity was one of the four priorities that came out of last fall's planning conference.

In the last few months, our government relations and political activism task force has taken a number of steps to act on that priority. ABC has built a strong relationship with the office of attorney general Martha Coakley, who was elected with Gov. Patrick in 2006. Chapter president Beeman has been deeply involved in discussions with that office regarding enforcement of the independent contractor law. Meetings that included high-level staff from the attorney general's office and a broad range of industry stakeholders have resulted in an enforcement policy that is tough but fair.

Work is also underway to get our message of fairness and inclusion out to the legislature. Among the legislators who have met with ABC in recent months are state representative Michael Rodrigues, house chair of the joint committee on consumer protection and professional licensure; state representative Charley Murphy, who was recently named house vice chair of the joint committee on bonding, capital expenditures and state assets; house minority leader Brad Jones and house minority whip George Peterson.

We have also developed a number of other ways to build relationships with the legislature. One of the ideas that emerged from the planning conference was a mentoring program. ABC lobbyist John Bartley, director of public affairs Matt Grew and politically active members are accompanying other members to meet their legislative representatives and become more familiar with the legislative process.

We have also ramped up our usage of Voter Voice, software that allows members to quickly and efficiently register their opinions on specific legislative proposals. Among the proposals for which it was used was one that would have mandated several union-only seats on the state electrical board. The proposal was defeated after more than 200 ABC members voiced their opposition.

Like the New England weather, the Mass. political climate is always changing. But by building relationships with our elected representatives in state government, ABC can continue to effectively make our case for fair and open competition in the commonwealth's construction industry.

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