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## **ABC has made government relations a top priority - by Joe Barbone**

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Joe Barbone, Methuen Const.

Government affairs are probably not in the front of your mind each day as you work to run your businesses and retain qualified workers, but public policy decisions have a huge impact on your ability to do those things. In recent years, ABC has made government relations a top priority, and I'm happy to report that our return on that investment is growing.

We've made great progress in just the last few months. Governor Baker's reorganization of construction-related functions within state government is now a reality. Under his plan, most construction functions are now under the Department of Professional Licensure, creating one-stop shopping for ABC member companies and other contractors. As an added benefit, the department is headed by former ABC public affairs director Chuck Borstel.

The Baker administration continues to be sensitive to our issues. In the past, too many companies have run afoul of the state prevailing wage law, despite their best efforts to comply. The administration is addressing that by bringing more transparency and structure to the application of prevailing wage, so member firms know exactly what it requires.

Since taking office, Gov. Baker has consistently worked to include merit shop representation on the trade boards and commissions that directly affect our work. This as a welcome change after the merit shop was virtually shut out of these bodies under Gov. Patrick.

State grant money was also largely unavailable in the past, but that too is changing. A grant was recently approved to help ABC's Merit Apprenticeship Program (MAP) develop a pre-apprenticeship program aimed at increasing opportunities for minorities in the construction industry.

This progress is the product of an administration that welcomes our input. In a recent meeting with ABC leaders, Gov. Baker reaffirmed his commitment to growing the state economy and upholding our shared belief in fair and open competition without regard to labor affiliation.

Whether it's supporting MAP, having trade boards fairly reflect the industry's make-up or growing the economy, a number of the recent advances we've made on the government affairs front will help us address our biggest current challenge: Attracting and retaining the qualified professionals our growing industry needs to continue to thrive.

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