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President Biden supports union-only policies for industry - by Kyle Reagan

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Kyle Reagan

President Biden has sent clear signals that he supports union-only policies for our industry, and the signals have emboldened construction unions here and around the country. The latest local example is the building of a new Holyoke Soldiers Home.

You might remember that the Soldiers Home was in the headlines at the beginning of the pandemic last year, when a COVID-19 outbreak tragically took the lives of 77 veterans.

Now a new Soldiers Home needs to be built and the legislation to do so is on a fast track so it can be signed in time to take advantage of a federal Veterans Administration matching grant that will soon expire.

Despite the need to act quickly, a state legislative committee slapped a last-minute project labor agreement on the legislation. PLAs require that all labor on a project come from unions. Since well over 80% of Massachusetts construction workers choose not to affiliate with unions, the amendment would prohibit more than four out of every five Massachusetts construction worker from working on the project.

Preventing the vast majority of workers from having access to a public project translates to far fewer bidders. Fewer bidders mean less competition, and that means taxpayers pay more.

A 2010 study from New Jersey's Department of Labor and Workforce Development is but one of countless reports that confirm the PLA premium. It found that projects with PLAs cost over 30% more and took 28% longer than those built using open competition.

ABC has registered its opposition to the PLA in a CommonWealth Magazine column, and in state legislative testimony.

Massachusetts is fortunate to have tremendous talent on both the union and open-shop sides of its construction industry. The two sectors routinely work side by side with no problems on both public and private construction projects.

In 2012, then President Obama famously reminded us that "elections have consequences," meaning those elected are given a mandate to govern in the best interest of their party. At the Holyoke Soldiers Home, we are seeing some of these "consequences" in action as the left is governing in their best interest by using a union-only PLA to assure work is only available to those who supported them. We are seeing similar language in President Biden's recently proposed \$2 trillion infrastructure plan.

Now more than ever, ABC needs to stand tall in the face of this to not fall victim of these "consequences" but rather be given the same opportunity to win work and provide for their families as union members have. We represent many of the best contractors in America and the fact that those who choose to work on a merit-shop environment will not be allowed to contribute to such an

important project is a “consequence” we cannot easily accept.

If there was ever a public-sector project on which the two sides should work in harmony, this is this one. Qualified contractors and tradespeople of all stripes should have the opportunity to contribute to building a facility that serves Massachusetts veterans and would replace one that was the site of such tragedy in the initial days of the pandemic.

ABC has fought successfully for open competition in a wide range of political climates over many years. The Holyoke Soldiers Home is just the latest example of us standing up for our organization’s values, because we believe they’re the same ones on which our country was founded.

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