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Massachusetts at a crossroads on Project Labor Agreements

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Luiza Mills

The last decade has been a prosperous one for both our industry in general, the open shop, and for fostering fair and equitable entrepreneurial development. A good economy translated to strong demand for construction services. At the state level, we benefitted from the tenure of governor Charlie Baker, a strong believer in fair and open competition.

However, change is inevitable. It can bring promise but can also bring us to a crossroads. Today the economy shows signs of slowing, language in a state economic development law passed last year may make it easier for state and local governments to use union-only project labor agreements, and as you are aware, governor Healey signed an executive order earlier this year calling on state agencies to conduct an analysis of whether PLAs are appropriate for their construction projects.

In Boston, mayor Michelle Wu recently signed a PLA with the Boston Building Trades Unions and the North Atlantic Regional Council of Carpenters for Boston Public Schools construction projects. The city's press release says PLAs would be considered on a case-by-case basis for each project, in accordance with the state economic development legislation language. We are at a crossroads.

As ABC MA president Greg Beeman said, "This PLA is an election year gift to the unions at the expense of Boston taxpayers. While Mayor Wu talks about inclusion and opportunity, the fact is that PLA union labor requirements effectively exclude over 80% of the workforce that chooses not to join a union, including the vast majority of minority contractors."

ABC MA has requested a copy of the PLA and a list of any projects that have been determined to be included under the PLA, as well as those under consideration at this time. ABC will review this and work hard to stay ahead of the issue.

The saying "Get into politics or get out of business" is familiar to many of our members, as it has long been one of our chapter's central messages. Today those words ring truer than ever.

ABC MA remains committed to open and fair opportunities and bidding without labor restrictions and will evaluate options regarding the Boston schools PLA. Your help and involvement are crucial. The Chapter has established a PLA Task Force to coordinate our efforts and leverage our companies' voice as employers of tens of thousands of Massachusetts workers.

Please consider becoming involved in the fight for our rights by joining the task force.

To learn more, please contact Greg Beeman at greg@abcma.org.

We thank you for helping us push for fair and equitable development, growth and opportunity.

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