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President's message: Educate your state/local lawmakers

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As February rolls in, we can see just how new this new year really is. There's a new president in the White House. The Rhode Island General Assembly has started its new session. Gov. Donald Carcieri has made some new proposals to fix the state's budget crisis.

They aren't the only ones who have to get a new start. The Rhode Island Builders Association has to "get new" too! As your new president, I have to tell you that if we sit this one out - this economic crisis and this legislative session - not only will there be no new solutions for our industry, but the economy in general and our businesses in particular will suffer.

Every year we urge you to hook up with your state and local lawmakers and educate them about what our industry, and your business, need. We even print an article in each January issue of The Rhode Island Builder Report that tells you how to do it.

If you didn't take us up on this plea in past years, now is the time to do so! If you think you're too busy to join us in safeguarding our industry's interests this year, you could be a lot less busy next year! Remember: We're not just lobbying, we're educating. Few of our state and local lawmakers really know anything substantial about the shelter industry. Yet, they're the ones making the rules for our industry in Rhode Island. If we don't educate them about it, the only people they get their information from could be anti-growth forces or people who are simply ignorant about Rhode Island's housing needs.

We need to pay close attention to everything our state and local legislators propose, especially when it affects our industry. Many well meaning proposals could have deep ramifications for the industry. And if it harms the industry, it will harm your business and your family.

Again, you can refer to the "How to Talk to Your Legislators" article in the January issue. If you don't have a copy, the article is posted at www.ribuilders.org. Look for the link on the main page.

Keep in mind that these legislators work for us, and that most of them do want to hear from their constituents!

On another matter, we're in what is historically the coldest month of the year in Rhode Island. See that your crews are prepared for the weather, and think safety! Check your staging, ladders, safety harnesses, etc., especially if conditions are icy.

You also can use this time to get ready for April and all that exterior work that we hope is coming. Meanwhile, watch The Rhode Island Builder Report for future articles about our new workers' compensation safety program, and some new insurance offerings we're planning that will help save you money!

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