



Love song to labor

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Project labor agreements limit competition, drive up costs and exclude a majority of Bay State tradespeople from working on a particular public construction project. No wonder the Patrick administration is fumbling around for a credible defense for requiring a PLA on an overhaul of the UMass-Boston campus.

The UMass Building Authority voted this week for a PLA to govern the university's master plan - \$750 million in construction projects over the next 10 years - and Patrick's labor secretary told The Boston Globe that PLAs "do not cost any more money than an open-bid arrangement, and in fact are likely to present some cost savings."

That doesn't square with research by the Beacon Hill Institute, which found that PLAs drive up bidding and construction costs anywhere from 12 to 16 percent. But whatever!

Then came the suggestion by the building authority's director that any added costs associated with a PLA are worthwhile because they guard against costly work stoppages (in exchange for the guarantee of union labor under a PLA, the unions agree not to strike).

So which is it?

They don't cost more - or they cost more, but it's worth it?

It's a furious tap-dance by Patrick's team as it does the bidding of organized labor, while trying to sell taxpayers on a bad public policy.

Yes, for the next decade only those contractors who hire out of union halls will be allowed to bid on the UMass-Boston work. Open-shop workers will get to see their tax dollars spent on projects they are explicitly barred from working on. The inequity is breathtaking in prosperous times, never mind when unemployment is at record highs. Patrick's team can't settle on a strong rationale because there just isn't one.