

# Lowell Sun

## Union decision shows state bias

The Lowell Sun

Updated: 06/21/2010 08:27:52 AM EDT

Gov. Deval Patrick and state government officials issued a harsh message to nonunion contractors: You need not apply for special public-building projects.

Patrick and his cronies at the 11-member University of Massachusetts Building Authority Board voted last week to exclude nonunion contractors to bid on the \$750 million construction and upgrade project at UMass Boston. Instead, they mandated that Project Labor Agreements be set firmly in place, guaranteeing that union contractors and workers totally dominate the project.

This is blatantly unfair to nonunion employees, who make up 80 percent of the state's building trades. Worse, it borders on government discrimination, eliminating a large segment of the work force that pays taxes in Massachusetts -- taxes that will fund the UMass project.

Don't union and nonunion workers alike have the right to put food on the table for their families? Why can't they compete for jobs or share the work?

Charlie Baker, Patrick's Republican challenger for governor, rightly criticized the exclusivity arrangement, noting that the decision will likely add \$100 million in higher labor costs to the project's bottom line.

How can the governor say he is pushing for government reform when he feeds big union interests with favoritism, asked Baker?

It's a good question.

With the three-way race for governor heating up, Patrick is turning to the Democratic Party's traditional union base to pull him through. That's how we see it.

But Patrick should watch his step. All across the nation, union-backed incumbents are falling by the electoral wayside, the victims of angry voters demanding an end to strong-armed political alliances that serve to burden taxpayers, not relieve them.

Patrick's contradictions are apparent and somewhat insulting.

On the one hand, the governor boasts of building an entrepreneurial and innovative business environment to attract newcomers to Massachusetts, then reverses field and endorses a lack of competition in the state's open-bidding laws.

The message is clear: Patrick's strategic growth model for Massachusetts is to sit down with union bosses and make sure their needs are met rather than to stand up for the private sector and demand equal treatment.