

## Reader Response: PLAs Are Not The Answer

By Ron Cogliano

Special to the Worcester Business Journal

03/30/09

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Mary Vogel's latest piece of propaganda in the Worcester Business Journal ("PLA Order Is Good For Workers and Taxpayers," WBJ, March 16, 2009) is replete with falsehoods, omissions of facts and misinformation.

For starters, President Obama's order allowing federal agencies to use union-only Project Labor Agreements on federally funded construction projects valued at \$25 million or more is all about political payback. The unions pumped more than \$400 million into Obama's campaign and now they want a return on their investment.

Whether you like President Bush or not, he never told union workers they couldn't work on projects funded with taxpayer dollars. But President Obama has told non-union workers they need not apply. Bush allowed all qualified and capable workers to participate on federal projects — Obama will not.

### **The Other Side Of The Story**

Ms. Vogel's infers that Worcester's Union Station Garage and the Worcester courthouse project were constructed under a PLA willingly. In reality, heavy pressure from unions on elected leaders led to both PLAs.

If private companies choose to use PLAs, wasting shareholder money and capitulating to union demands, that is their choice. But when it comes to taxpayer money, public officials must not play favorites with special interests.

PLAs do not guarantee better wages, benefits or a safer working environment. They may prevent strikes, harassment, violence or other disruptions to a job site by unions but they guarantee nothing more. Furthermore, PLAs do not guarantee a quality project on time or on budget. The union-built Big Dig is all the proof anyone needs there.

Ms. Vogel continues her verbal high-wire act by leaving out several important points and deceiving readers in the process. For one, the so-called “robust study” she references was commissioned by the Electri-Institute, a union-sponsored, union-run organization. Second, non-union contractors cannot bid on PLA jobs because they would have to fire their workers and hire all their labor from the union halls, making it impractical if not impossible for merit shops to bid.

According to 2008 federal data, non-union construction workers made up 80 percent of the industry in Massachusetts. Open-shop construction is clearly the preferred choice of both construction workers and their customers. Shouldn't the state's best-trained, most-qualified and most-capable construction workers deserve a fair chance to bid on public work?

Vogel points out that PLAs have been in place since World War I, but nostalgia can be painful. Back then, sadly, “Separate but Equal” was also the law of the land.

Today, many public officials oppose PLAs, such as Philadelphia's Mayor Michael Nutter who calls them “economic apartheid.” Not everything in our past should be resurrected.

Ms. Vogel's tactics and the lengths she will go to discredit merit shop contractors are unsurprising for those who follow her trail of misinformation and deception. The only truth to be discerned from Ms. Vogel's words is that she and her union colleagues oppose fair and open competition.

Any project requiring a PLA means taxpayers, including businesses and workers, lose.

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