



## Challenging Labor

By Boston Herald Editorial Staff | Wednesday, August 11, 2010

The Patrick administration's decision to exclude non-union contractors from \$750 million worth of construction projects at UMass-Boston over the next decade is, frankly, indefensible.

According to a group that represents non-union tradespeople, it's also ethically suspect.

The Merit Construction Alliance has filed a formal complaint with the state Ethics Commission, arguing that it was improper for two members of the UMass Building Authority - both union leaders and Patrick appointees - to vote on the proposed "project labor agreement," which effectively boxes out "open shop" contractors for the duration of the 10-year building plan.

The Alliance argues that Francis X. Callahan Jr., president of the Massachusetts Building Trades Council, and Edward W. Collins Jr., representative of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, should have recused themselves from voting on the proposed PLA in June because their employers had a "clearly foreseeable financial interest" in its adoption.

It will be up to the Ethics Commission to determine whether a true conflict of interest exists, though on the surface it certainly seems fishy. A reversal of the authority's vote would be the ideal outcome.

But if the complaint serves simply to renew focus on this horrendous policy decision - which amounts to a giveaway to organized labor that leaves thousands of out-of-work tradespeople still out of work and taxpayers on the hook for millions in unnecessary additional costs - then it will have served a useful purpose.

And if it prompts Gov. Deval Patrick to rethink his plan to expand the use of project labor agreements - which steer public construction work exclusively to unions in exchange for labor "harmony" - then all the better.

Unfortunately for taxpayers and unemployed tradespeople, that seems the unlikeliest of outcomes.