

# Clinton softens favoritism for unions

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By Timothy Burn  
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President Clinton sent a memo to federal department heads yesterday "encouraging" them to use unionized contractors for government construction projects, backing off from the executive order that building industry leaders feared.

Industry associations had joined congressional Republicans in fighting the anticipated executive order, and they held up Alexis Herman's nomination as labor secretary earlier this year in protest.

For their efforts they got a memorandum with much softer language that is only in effect while the president remains in the White House. But the construction industry is still angry.

"I think it's unfortunate the president feels he has to do anything to help one group over another," said Charlie Hawkins, executive vice president of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), an association with 20,000 industry members.

"While this memo doesn't have the same effect of the proposed executive order, it is still unfortunate he feels he has to give union labor this kind of a plum," Mr. Hawkins said.

The executive order contained much stronger language and would have affected about 60,000 projects a year.

While labor leaders hailed the memo as a victory, Mr. Hawkins and others in the industry see it as a win for their side because it will only affect projects in excess of \$5 million each year, or about 500 projects, and will become null and void once the president leaves office.

"The memo is a drastic improvement over the executive order proposal, but I still think it is illegal under federal procurement laws," he said.

Though it will likely take months before any agencies write new rules, Mr. Hawkins said ABC is ready to challenge the memorandum if one of its members is ever denied the right to bid on a federal project.

In the memo, Mr. Clinton touts his administration's efforts to increase government efficiency.

"This presidential memorandum continues those efforts by encouraging departments and agencies in this administration to consider project labor agreements as another tool . . . to achieve economy and efficiency in federal construction projects," Mr. Clinton wrote.