

# ABAC NEWS

**MAY-JUNE 2009**

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*The Official Newsletter of the Auto Body Association of Connecticut*

## ***Members Gather for Annual ABAC Meeting***

**Attendees welcome guest speakers and Connecticut Attorney Gen. Richard Blumenthal**

The Auto Body Association of Connecticut held its Annual Meeting this past May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009 at the Country House Restaurant in East Haven. More than 80 guests were in attendance for an evening of education, information, interaction with other business owners and employees and an opportunity to hear from Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, our featured guest.



ABAC President Bob Skrip started off the evening by thanking everyone for their attendance and reminding shop owners about the importance of our ABAC News Supporting Vendors and the financial support that these vendors provide for the ABAC. Said Skrip, *"I hope everyone in this room (and the association) will make a commitment to these vendors to use their products and services and let them know that you, (the business owner) appreciate their sponsorship of this association. Help those that help us!"* Skrip then went over what events this night would offer.

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Board of Director Bill Romaniello then offered his thoughts on business, our industry, hope, influence and the difference that we, as individuals, can have to impact our lives and our businesses. It was quite a spirited and well put-together presentation. Great job Bill!

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(Continued from page 1)

Returning to the podium, Bob Skrip then recognized the sponsors for this ABAC Annual meeting:

- **ALLDATA**
- **BMW of Bridgeport**
- **Kent Automotive**
- **Paul Francis & Co.**
- **Hertz LHE**

Bob thanked these financial sponsors for their support and then introduced our first presenter of the evening, Mike Colantonio from ALLDATA, an OEM Information and Shop Management Company. Mike introduced his colleagues, Tom McGee, National Accounts Mgr., Dennis Rossi, Sales Representative and Mike Arrick, Field Service Representative. Colantonio gave us an overview on the history of ALLDATA. ALLDATA is the leading provider of OEM Automotive Repair, Auto Recalls,



**ABAC President Bob Skrip**



**ALLDATA's Mike Colantonio**

Automotive Software & Service Bulletins for the professional automotive service industry. Thousands of repair and collision shops across North America depend on ALLDATA for Service and Repair information, shop management and customer relations solutions. ALLDATA Collision is your **SINGLE SOURCE** for comprehensive factory-correct collision repair information. It is specifically designed to help collision shops increase productivity, improve customer satisfaction and enhance relationships with insurance partners. ALLDATA's new online product contains **OEM Collision Repair** information for 2000 and newer model year vehicles plus full **diagnosis and repair** content. (Source: [www.alldata.com](http://www.alldata.com)) There was much technical information covered by Mike & Tom during their presentation which is why we always stress the importance of attending these educational ABAC meetings.

Bob then introduced the legislative committee comprised of Bill Romaniello and Bill Denya. Romaniello brought us up-to-date on Senate Bill 457. (Current information on SB457 can be found on page 11 of this issue) Romaniello then asked ABAC Lobbyist Andy Markowski to address the audience. Mr. Markowski told everyone of the importance of supporting this Senate Bill and then along with ABAC Media Spokesperson Michael London suggested several ideas on how to get involved to contact the right people. Mark and Michael then fielded several questions from members.

Bill Romaniello then asked Attorney John Parese to give us an update on a petition being presented to US Attorney General Eric Holder about the anti-competitive practices and anti-trust issues that the insurance companies have placed on our industry. The main subject of Mr. Parese's comments was the 1963 Consent Decree which is still in force and effect but has not been enforced. With a new administration in Washington, DC it is hopeful that President Obama and the Department of Justice will start to enforce anti-trust laws.

Taking to the floor next was Tony Lombardozzi from the CCRE, (The Coalition for Collision Repair Excellence ([www.theccre.com](http://www.theccre.com))) who delved a bit further



**Board of Director Bill Romaniello**

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into the 1963 Consent Decree. Tony stressed that everyone visit [www.consentdecree.com](http://www.consentdecree.com) to learn even more.



Attorney John Parese

Bob Skrip commented on the efforts of Attorney Erica Eversman who has worked for the collision industry for many years and has spent the last two years formulating a “Code of Ethics” for the auto collision industry. States Skrip, *“Most professions have a Code of Ethics whether you’re a dentist, doctor, a plumber or a roofer. This industry (collision repair) has no code of ethics. Erica has spent much of her time writing this code of ethics which she is trying to get states to adopt and I’m very happy to say that Connecticut is the first state in the country to adopt this Code of Ethics. We brought this before our attorney, John Parese, and he took that code and followed the laws of the State of Connecticut and with input from Board of Directors Rob Birarelli, Bill Denya and Bill Romaniello shaped this code.”* Returning to the floor Mr. Parese in some of his statement said, *“The importance of this Code of Ethics is that it sets up a standard of not only professionalism, but ethical conduct and allows you (the shop owner) the possibility of*

*placing a plaque in your business stating that you stand by this Code of Ethics. It also opens the possibility for the ABAC to advertise that your shop follows this ABAC Code of Ethics. What a great message to consumers!”* The timing of Mr. Parese’s comments could not have been better as they coincided with the arrival of Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal. Bob Skrip then introduced the AG as **“A great friend of our industry”** to a standing ovation. Mr. Blumenthal thanked everyone for attending and how glad he was to be here at this meeting. In some of his comments Mr. Blumenthal said, *“I’ve talked with many of you over the last couple of months, over the past year and we’re determined to continue. We’ve made progress a little bit at a time and sometimes progress is hard to see but I’m just here to assure you that no matter how difficult the road I’m going to be there with you.”* The Attorney General then continued, *“You guys, (the ABAC) have been great, you have stuck with this cause even in the face of some discouragement. We’re going to all fight together because*



Connecticut Attorney General

*eventually we’re going to win. We’re going to win because you’re on the right side and I don’t mean just that it’s on the right side for you (the collision repairers) as a matter of fairness and justice, I mean it’s on the right side of the consumer and that’s why I’m proud to be on your side, our side.”* Mr. Blumenthal then took questions from members and attendees.

Bob Skrip then touched upon the First Responder’s Seminar which was being held on Saturday May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009. (Please see the First Responder’s article on Pages 8-9 of this issue)

The ABAC would like to thank Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, all of the presenters of the evening and the financial sponsors of this event for helping to make another important and educational meeting of the Auto Body Association of Connecticut successful!

## **ABAC President Delivers Strong Message on WTIC 30 News**

May 17th, 2009 – ABAC president Bob Skrip appeared on WTIC 30 “Connecticut Newsmakers,” hosted by anchorman Tom Monahan. During the course of the interview, Mr. Skrip discussed the importance of House Bill 457. This bill, presently in the Senate, will insure Connecticut consumers’ right to choose the collision repair facility of their choice when involved in an accident.

To many, it may seem that Connecticut’s existing “anti-steering” law should suffice to protect the consumers’ ability to select the repair facility of their choice, but Skrip was quick to point out that insurance companies continue to influence and coerce Connecticut consumers into having their vehicle repaired at one of their preferred shops. Bill 457 is designed to strengthen the existing “anti-steering” law, which would prohibit insurers from recommending, coercing or influencing a consumer’s right to choose a repair facility.

Skrip explained that, should this bill not pass, he fears that insurers will attempt to introduce an HMO-type program to policy holders, dictating one’s choice of repair facility within the policy itself. This, in essence, will completely eliminate any consumer’s right to choose. The consumer will not be aware of what shop will be fixing their vehicle, creating a nightmare for both the consumers themselves and independent collision repair shops. The only winners in a collision repair HMO program will be the insurance companies.

Considering the fact that WTIC 30 draws the attention of many Connecticut legislators, the ABAC took this opportunity to defend the rights of Connecticut consumers and the preservation of safe, quality collision repairs. As president Skrip claims, “We have a goal of repairing cars properly and safely...It’s your car, It’s your choice.”

**Watch Skrip’s interview on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mezzlgZUm9I): *http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mezzlgZUm9I***

## **ABAC Coming to Hartford**

The ABAC September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009 quarterly meeting will be held at the Chowder Pot restaurant in Hartford, CT. This is a very important meeting, as two representatives from the federal EPA will be on-hand to deliver a PowerPoint presentation pertaining to the new federal EPA regulations regarding the spraying of paint products. They will cover every detail of the new regulations, including the spraying of materials, cleaning of equipment, and a summary of other important information.

The directors of the state of Connecticut Technical School collision repair programs have also been invited so that they may disseminate this information down to those who are currently training to enter the collision repair industry. This is a must for any collision repair owners to attend. These regulations will become a federal mandate for compliance. As an association, we want to remain dedicated to staying in tune with current and future regulations. Please pay attention to additional information regarding this meeting, as details will be forthcoming through fax and e-mail. See you there!

## ***Attorney General Underscores the Importance of Your Car, Your Choice at Annual SCRS Convention.***

The Society of Collision Repair Specialists (SCRS) held its annual convention in Hartford this year. Attorney General Blumenthal was invited to speak about collision repair issues. The Attorney General stood up for consumers and independent repair owners. “Your car, your choice!” he called out. Mr. Blumenthal reiterated the importance that repairs be free of interference from insurance companies. Mr. Blumenthal further commented that consumers should be made aware of the contractual arrangements between insurance companies and direct repair shops.

Mr. Blumenthal also discussed the various problems associated with steering (including “soft steering”), and particularly its adverse impact on consumers. The Attorney General encouraged support for State Senate Bill 457, which is designed to curb disparaging comments about non-DRP shops.

Mr. Blumenthal also talked about the anticompetitive practices plaguing the auto repair market. He said that he has been in touch with other Attorney Generals across the country, many of whom are “very informed about and interested in” this issue.

Mr. Blumenthal affirmed his commitment to continue working with repairers and consumers toward eliminating undue influence and interference from insurance companies as well as promoting more consumer awareness and choice.

Audience members were given the opportunity to make comments and ask questions of the Attorney General in a town hall style discussion. When asked about the benefits of cooperation between insurers and repairers, Mr. Blumenthal emphasized the dangers of insurer-repairer cooperation. In short, he said that consumers ultimately suffer from these kinds of cooperative relationships designed to protect insurer interests. According to ABAC legal counsel, John Parese, “cooperation between insurers and repairers could be illegal, particularly when it has the effect of fixing or controlling prices or allocating or dividing customers or markets.”

Several audience participants expressed frustration with their home state’s insurance department, particularly as to the department’s failure to enforce existing laws. Connecticut can certainly empathize with those concerns.

Ultimately, Mr. Blumenthal endorsed the fundamental principles, which the ABAC and its members have long been advocating: Get insurer manipulation and deception under control, restore fairer market conditions and give consumers better information and genuine choices.

The Attorney General has long been a friend of repairers and the motoring public. For his support, efforts and hard work, we all owe him a debt of gratitude.

## **National Anti-Trust Petition Gains Tremendous Momentum**

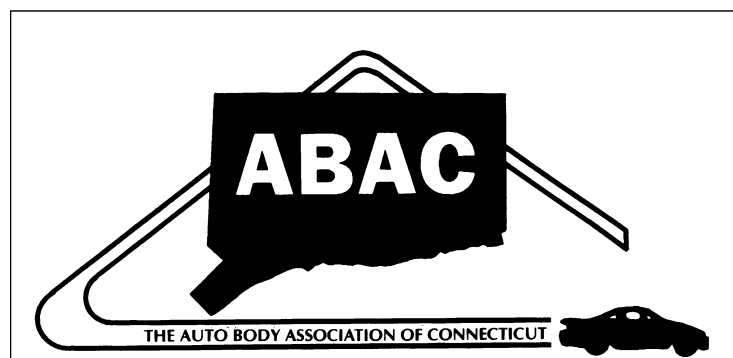
Initiated by the ABAC with the assistance of Attorney John Parese, the petition's message has spread through the industry like wildfire. Let's take our industry back! The petition was originally introduced this past April at the CIC NABC SCRS meetings. The majority of the concerned collision repair organization trade publications, message boards or blogs have helped to move the petition along at an unprecedented pace. On behalf of the ABAC, we thank you for all your efforts.

Every state that has responded thus far is on board and willing to assist our cause. At the time published, we have received 85% of the states and we are contacting the remaining states and are confident we will be completed soon. Shortly after this petition is completed, a follow up petition will be circulated for individuals working within the collision repair industry. This next petition will represent the voice of the collision repair population throughout the nation.

The ABAC respects you, your hard work and dedication to this industry. Let us help you to repair our industry.

**Voice your opinion, sign the petition.**

**Log on to  
www.abaconn.com  
to keep current with collision news  
and coming soon ... petition for individual collision  
repair employees, their families and friends**



## SCRS Asks U.S. Attorney General to Investigate Antitrust Violations

The Society of Collision Repair Specialists (SCRS) announced that it is joining the efforts of a number of collision repair organizations across the country in its request to the Department of Justice, and U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, to investigate violations of federal antitrust laws by automobile insurance companies.

"Stemming from the circulation of a petition designed for leaders of state associations, SCRS felt compelled to offer our support of the efforts underway," stated Barry Dorn, SCRS Chairman.

In April, the Auto Body Association of Connecticut began circulating a petition requesting that Attorney General Holder investigate insurers, appraisers and direct repair shops that may be conspiring to depress labor rates, steer work, organize boycotts and commit other violations.

"Our board believed that a letter from the only national trade association dedicated to representing the collision repairer which articulated similar perspectives as those outlined in the petition would help to highlight the importance of the issues raised," said Dorn.

SCRS Executive Director Aaron Schulenburg added, "SCRS has long claimed that our members and affiliate associations are the heartbeat of our organization. We are very confident in our approach and support of this issue because direct correspondences with those members have confirmed the importance of such efforts, and we believe that grassroots efforts such as those that demonstrate the unified voice of the collision repairer are an imperative element in moving this industry forward."

SCRS also pointed to a speech delivered on May 11 by Christine A. Varney, Assistant Attorney General of the Department of Justice Antitrust Division, who said the current administration is going to step up enforcement of antitrust law. The NY Times reported that Varney is hoping to encourage smaller companies in an array of industries to bring their complaints to the Justice Department about potentially improper business practices and that some of the biggest antitrust cases were initiated by complaints.

**(Source: [www.collisionweek.com](http://www.collisionweek.com))**



## ABAC Produces First Responders Seminar Provides Major Benefit to Emergency Personnel

The Auto Body Association of Connecticut under the leadership of President Bob Skrip held it's 1st annual training event designed to help provide the necessary education to police, fire, and other emergency people who are the first professionals to arrive at motor vehicle accident scenes. The seminar took place at the Prospect Volunteer Fire Department on May 16th in Prospect, CT. Nearly 100 of these First Responders representing cities and towns throughout Connecticut and surrounding states realized the tremendous importance of this training and attended the event.



The ABAC has always been dedicated to issues relating to ensuring the safety of Connecticut's motoring public. President Skrip invested his personal time and major efforts to completely organize the entire event to benefit all. Skrip stated "the new technologies incorporated into today's cars and trucks that are being produced can create dangerous situations for first responders. We want to do our part to help them be better prepared."



Todd Hoffman, ([sceneoftheaccident.org](http://sceneoftheaccident.org)), a nationally recognized First Response Instructor drove in from Missouri City, Texas to be the primary conductor of the seminar. Larry Montanez, former I-Car instructor, and presently a partner with the firm P & L Consultants from N. Babylon, N.Y. also was brought in to help with his vast experience in the auto collision repair industry. Hoffman and Montanez did a tremendous job teaching the emergency personnel. Specifically they explained that the Hybrid vehicles being produced have a high voltage battery system that carries up to 650 volts. There are specific procedures that must be followed to disable these

systems in the event of an accident. Cutting of battery cables, which was the normal procedure in vehicles built in the past, on a hybrid vehicle can cause extreme shock, electrocution, explosions, and fire, resulting in severe injuries or possible death not only to emergency people, but also to the



victims trapped inside of vehicles.

First responders are also experiencing difficulties in cutting through newer high strength steel components when attempting to remove occupants from a crashed vehicle. Specifics on exactly where to cut structural pillars and components were demonstrated in detail. New cutting equipment and technology to gain safe and efficient access to victims was brought forward. Also included in this educational segment was the fact that vehicles now have multiple air bags located in many of the areas including structural pillars. In the past, first responders would attempt to cut through these pillars. They now are aware of the extreme dangers of exploding air bags and can avoid these hazards in the future.



**WTNH Channel 8 News Reporter Bob Wilson volunteers as a victim!**

Robert McSherry, owner of North Haven Auto Body (R.J.M.Associates) was on hand to accompany Bob Skrip, with both offering their many years of auto collision repair experience and advice to the emergency attendees. McSherry also is the respected Fire Chief for the town of Bethany, Ct. Skrip, McSherry, and fellow ABAC director Rob Birarelli (Twin Lights Milford Body Shop), also attending were able to relate to all the first responders on a first hand basis. The valuable expertise they were able to share was well received.

**WTNH News Channel 8 provided complete coverage which aired on multiple news broadcasts.**

We wish to express a sincere “thank you” to the following companies for their support:

- **Connecticut Used Auto Parts:** Donated multiple used salvage vehicles for cutting demonstrations.
- **Honda of Watertown:** Provided a new 2010 Honda Insight Hybrid Vehicle for educational demonstration.
- **Prospect Service Center & Towing:** Provided complete towing of salvage vehicles to and from event site, and graciously handled entire cleanup of vehicle remains.
- **Enterprise Rent A Car:** Financial sponsor
- **Albert Kemperle Inc.:** Financial sponsor
- **Kent Industries:** Financial sponsor

*Without their generous commitments, this event would not have been possible.*

## **ABAC Code of Ethics**

In May, 2007, the ABAC hosted a gathering of representatives from several Auto Body Associations from New England, New York, New Jersey, & Pennsylvania. Attorney Erica Eversman from Vehicle Information Services of Ohio spoke that afternoon as she did that evening at the ABAC Annual Dinner. Ms. Eversman has a unique perspective of our industry having had clients that are auto owners, shop owners, and insurance representatives from all over the country. She proposed that a Code of Ethics be established for the industry.

Ms. Eversman had come to the conclusion that an overabundance of time was being taken by repairers to communicate the difference between safe or unsafe, necessary or not necessary, & right or wrong. She explained the importance that ethics play in her profession as well as others. She began to work with shop owners from throughout the country including ABAC Board of Directors members. 2 years followed of reviewing & editing the "Model Collision Repair Code of Ethics". The ABAC decided that it was time to take a stand and adapt this document and make it our own. After modifying the document to the structure of the ABAC, we passed it on to Attorney John Michael Parese for modifications based on Connecticut Law. Attorney Parese also restructured parts of the document to be grammatically correct. The document was read for final review by the ABAC Board of Directors, Attorney Erica Eversman, and Attorney Parese in time to present a copy to Attorney General Richard Blumenthal and the membership at the ABAC May Annual meeting. We now have a document that we can turn to that is based on our respective responsibilities and to whom our responsibilities are given. This document reaffirms our commitment to the motoring public. The document begins ***"The collision industry and collision repairers have the lives and safety of the motoring public in their hands. Recognizing that consumers typically have no experience with these repairs, they place their trust and confidence in the professional collision repairers to ensure that vehicles are safe and properly repaired. It takes knowledge, skill and expertise to properly repair a damaged motor vehicle. To ensure that consumers receive high quality repairs and to promote consumer confidence in those repairs, collision repairers must conform their practices to ethical standards."***

The ABAC thanks everyone who had a hand in forming this document, especially Attorney Eversman and Parese. We ask all repairers to please read and use this document to set the standard for behavior in our industry.

The ABAC Code of Ethics will be a downloadable document on the ABAC website shortly. If you would like a hard copy mailed to you, contact Rob Birarelli @ 203-878-8534 or [twin-lights@charter.net](mailto:twin-lights@charter.net).

## **State Tech Collision Repair Programs Graduate New Candidates**

Nearly 100 entry-level students will receive degrees in collision repair from the State of Connecticut Tech School programs located throughout the region. This will provide an opportunity for collision repair owners who are in need of hiring additional collision repair technicians. As ABAC President Bob Skrip simply stated, *"The fruit is ready to pick!"*

You may contact your local tech school for a list of available graduates in the field. To obtain a list of the state tech school nearest to you, visit our website at [www.abacomm.com](http://www.abacomm.com).

## Connecticut Senate Passes Bill 457

The Connecticut Senate passed Bill 457 by a unanimous vote of 36-0. For those who were previously unaware, the purpose of this bill is to strengthen Connecticut's anti-steering laws. Specifically, it will ensure that consumers have a right to choose their own auto repair facility and not a shop that is owned by, or has a contractual arrangement, with an insurance company. Bill 457 will also prevent insurers from telling consumers that they will face delays or lack of warranty if they take their vehicle to the shop of their choice, which is something that previous legislation on the matter did not cover.

We'd like to thank our members who took the time to make personal phone calls and send e-mails to their senators, urging them to support this bill, and making them aware that Bill 457 is in the best interests of consumer rights and motorist safety. Once again, your efforts and participation have made a difference.

While this may seem like good news, it should be made clear that Bill 457 must still be passed by the House of Representatives. Unfortunately, the House has literally hundreds of bills to consider before the time is up. Many of these bills will simply die because there is no time left for them to be voted into law. Hopefully, the continued efforts of our members contacting their state representatives will provide a better chance for this bill to move forward. Let's keep our fingers crossed and hope for the best!

## AUTO BODY SHOPS - IMPORTANT COMPLIANCE REMINDER

**EXISTING SHOPS MUST COMPLY BY JANUARY 10, 2011**

**NEW SHOPS (OPENING AFTER SEPTEMBER 17, 2007) MUST COMPLY ON STARTUP**

Summary of new federal EPA regulations (40 CFR 63, Subpart HHHHHH) for businesses that spray-apply coatings to vehicles became effective January 9, 2008:

1. Painters must be certified as they complete training in proper spray application of surface coatings, setup & maintenance of spray equipment. (includes booths, filters, spray guns, gun cleaners, etc.)
2. Spray apply coatings in a spray booth, prep station, or mobile enclosure meeting certain requirements & use an HVLP spray gun or other approved technologies.
3. Prevent atomized mist & avoid spraying solvent or paint residue in cleaning spray guns.
4. Submit Initial Notification to EPA by January 11, 2010 for existing shops and for new shops by 180 days from start up or by January 9, 2008, whichever is later.
5. Submit notification of Compliance Status to EPA. Existing sources not able to demonstrate compliance in their Initial Notification must submit it by March 10, 2011. New sources must submit Notification of Compliance Status when they submit their Initial Notification.
6. Keep records to demonstrate compliance.

Please note: Review thoroughly. You can apply to be exempted from the new rule if you eliminate use of coatings containing chromium, lead, cadmium, nickel, or manganese. If you use a product containing methylene chloride to strip or remove paint you are subject to additional requirements.

*For more information and to download example notification, visit: [www.epa.gov/ne/auto](http://www.epa.gov/ne/auto)*

## In Memoriam

Mr. Francis D. Civitello, 46, of Waterbury died unexpectedly at his residence. Franny was born on April 29, 1963. He graduated from Kennedy High School in 1981. Franny worked as the Parts Manager for Bradshaw Jeep in Oakville for more than 10 years. The ABAC would like to send their condolences to Franny's family.

**ABAC OFFICERS 2009****PRESIDENT****BOB SKRIP**

SKRIP'S AUTO BODY, PROSPECT

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T&amp;J AUTO BODY, EAST HARTFORD

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**MARIO DIMICHELE**

Jake's Auto Body - Waterbury

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**RONALD POIDOMANI**

Town Line Body Shop - Monroe

**WILLIAM ROMANIELLO**

All Pro Collision Repair - Plantsville

**RICK RONDEAU**

P&amp;B Auto Body - Bristol

**THORTON J. SCOTT (Scotty)**

Family Garage - Bridgeport

**MICHAEL WILKOWSKI**

Stanley's Auto Body - Waterbury

*The goal of the ABAC News is to provide a forum for the free expression of ideas. The opinions and ideas appearing in this publication are not necessarily representations of the ABAC and should not be construed as legal advice.*



# **Breaking News!**

## **Legislative Update**

SB457 passed through the House

Wednesday, June 3 with a unanimous vote 150-0!

We extend our thanks to all ABAC members, colleagues, families and friends whose efforts support and commitment turned an insurance industry introduced bill into a solid foundation to begin to eliminate the deceptive referrals (steering) and discontinue the HMO-type policies from being used in our state.

The last step is up to the Governor. With a 35-0 pass through the Senate and a 150-0 in the House it is very likely the Governor will sign this into law. We should be able to forward the actual language and legal intent for all to view within three business days. Keep in mind this will not become actual law until January, 2010. History would show that insurers would likely exploit these next six months in an attempt to minimize our gains and deter our continued efforts to take back our industry. Do not lose faith during these tough economic conditions; the benefits of all your hard work will soon be evident.

Again, thanks for all your support and efforts. Please take the time to contact your Senators and Representatives and thank them for their support.

## **A SINCERE THANK YOU**

*To our sponsors whose financial contributions helped make our  
May 2009 ABAC Quarterly Meeting  
A GREAT SUCCESS!*

**ALLDATA****Paul Francis  
& Co.****BMW of  
Bridgeport****Hertz  
LHE****Kent  
Automotive**