
The Rosenberg Report

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Hello!

And Happy Holidays!

A lot of things have become common practice in American politics during the last few years -- attack ads and the politics of personal destruction unfortunately spring to mind. But something that has been conspicuously absent from our political discourse lately is attention to what I like to call the social contract, the idea that we help those in need, and that we make the sacrifices necessary to afford our children the same, or better, opportunities than we had. The contract has sustained and improved us for more than 200 years. But now, because we seem to be moving inexorably away from a we're-all-in-this-together societal view toward an everybody-for-themselves mode, we stand to become the first generation to break our promise to the future.

It is in the spirit of honoring the social contract that I am, once again, filing a bill that would add one cent to the state sales tax. The money raised by this increase -- about \$800 million a year -- would be earmarked specifically and exclusively for public education: preschool, K-12 and beyond.

There are a number of other reasons why I think this is necessary.

There is a lawsuit pending before the state Supreme Judicial Court charging that more must be done to assure the equal educational opportunities promoted in the Education Reform Act. The state Constitution, which states, in part: *"Wisdom, and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties; and as these depend on spreading the opportunities and advantages of education in the various parts of the country, and among the different orders of the people, it shall be the duty of legislatures and magistrates, in all future periods of this commonwealth, to cherish the interests of literature and the sciences, and all seminaries of them; especially the . . . public schools and grammar schools in the towns . . ."* Depending on the outcome of this case, the Legislature could be compelled to increase dramatically our investment in education.

Putting the public back in public education by investing more tax dollars sends the right message. Money alone will not solve all problems, but perpetual cutting certainly doesn't help either. By investing more in public education we, as a society, will show our education professionals and our students that we value their work, and that we expect results. Continuing to tell teachers and students to do more with less makes achieving high standards virtually impossible.

K-12 education is overly reliant on property taxes, an inherently regressive tax. When state government spending on education fails to keep pace with annual cost increases,

teachers are laid off, class sizes increase and property taxes go up. The less regressive penny on the sales tax plan would create a pool of money that would act as a barrier against ever increasing property taxes while maintaining the state's effort to fund education.

The most valuable resource in Massachusetts is our people. Education is the fuel that keeps our high-tech state economy running. An educated workforce earns higher salaries, which stimulates economic activity, which puts more tax dollars into the system, which enables us to continue investing in an educated workforce. Education doesn't cost. It pays. Anyone who has invested in their own education knows this.

A high-quality, second-to-none education system will better enable us to address the other challenges our state faces, from soaring health care costs to environmental preservation. These problems will be much harder to solve if we deny our children the best education possible.

And finally, we need to bridge the divide that currently separates our thinking on preschool, K-12 and higher education spending proposals. Instead, we should view our educational system as preK-bachelor's degree, and beyond. Higher education can no longer be considered a luxury. It is a necessity, and our funding strategies should reflect that reality.

Education is vital for our economic prosperity. But there's more to it than just preparing people to take their place in the economy. Education also holds the key to our civic and cultural prosperity. Each generation is responsible for preparing successive generations to be good citizens, to be active participants in all levels of their government, in their communities, in their schools, and so on. It is our duty, our sacred duty, to make the sacrifices necessary to prepare them well.

Public education began in Massachusetts. It would be a shame if our generation made it history.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a trailing "ton".

December Focus

2005 session bills

Here are some of the bills I'm filing, or co-sponsoring, for the upcoming legislative session, which begins January 5th.

Local government

I am re-filing two bills that would directly affect local governments. One would allow municipal governments to establish a local meals tax. The other would alter the Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program to include the value of buildings when assessing the value of the property.

(full text of meals tax bill)

<http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/st01812.htm>

(full text of PILOT bill)

<http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/st01813.htm>

Agriculture

I am joining chief sponsors Senator Stephen Brewer (D-Barre) and Representative Stephen Kulik (D-Worthington) that would help protect the viability of farmland in the state.

(full text click here)

<http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/st01194.htm>

County roads

I am filing legislation to deal with the issue of county roads across the Commonwealth. Some of these roads laid out by current and former Counties were transferred to the state when some counties were abolished several years ago. This has left a question about the legal status of these roads.

This legislation would clarify who owns the roads. It would also clarify who has responsibility for performing the traditional functions of the County Commissioners with regard to the discontinuance and alteration of these roads. In Hampshire and Franklin counties the Councils of Government will continue to serve these functions. This will ensure that local people are involved in any decision making about these roads. In areas with no county government and no successor organization, a regional board made up of representatives from the regional planning agency advisory boards and the district highway director will perform these functions.

Tax collection

I am re-filing a bill that would require corporations subject to the corporate excise tax in Massachusetts to engage in combined reporting. Under combined reporting, all entities subject to the corporate excise tax in the Commonwealth would be required to report on their tax returns all of the profits realized by all of their related subsidiaries in the United States, regardless of where those subsidiaries are located and regardless of where their accountants deem those profits to be earned. The Massachusetts apportionment formula would then be applied to the full amount of profits listed in the combined report in order to determine how much of those profits were generated, and are therefore taxable in Massachusetts.

(full text click here)

<http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/house/ht03825.htm>

Child welfare reform

I am part of a coalition of legislators -- most notably Representative Marie Parente (D-Milford) -- filing a package of a dozen bills to improve the state's child welfare system. Some of the reforms we are seeking include: providing medical screenings within the foster care system, improving safety inspections of foster homes, licensing and regulating au pair and nanny agencies, enhancing the protections for children in domestic violence cases, and reducing caseloads for Department of Social Services workers.

Health care

I am joining Senator Steven Tolman (D-Watertown) and others in support of a bill to establish the Massachusetts Health Care Trust-Single payer health care system.

(full text click here)

<http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/st00686.htm>

Pro democracy reform

I am continuing my effort to reform the state's ballot question process.

The two bills I've re-filed seek to address the contemporary problems with the initiative process while preserving the historic principles that created it. One bill would make changes to state law. The other would change the state constitution.

Some of the highlights of the bill that would change state law include:

- Requiring the Secretary of State to provide detailed financial information to voters about campaigns supporting and opposing ballot questions;
- Requiring campaigns to report contributions above \$2,500 within 24 hours during the last 45 days of the campaign;
- Creating a commission to draft titles and summary statements for use on petitions, ballot and voter guides; and require that public comment and public hearings be held during the drafting process;
- Creating a commission to draft a fiscal impact statement for all initiatives that will be included in the voter guide sent to households explaining the financial consequences of passage;
- Directing the Secretary of State to develop regulations to protect signatures from forgery and fraud, such as requiring ID's for paid gatherers and requiring a sworn oath by gatherers regarding the validity of signatures.

The bill making changes in the state constitution would stabilize the standard for the number of signatures required to place a question on the ballot by tying it to the total number of registered voters, not to the number of actual voters.

I realize that some people consider some of these proposals controversial, even undemocratic, and have suggested that I am trying to kill the ballot question process. I'm

not. Simply put, these proposals are designed to make the ballot question process more open, representative and accessible. Ballot questions are either/or propositions that are unencumbered by the sensitivities of the minority view. Legislators cannot make laws that way. Lawmakers in a democratic system must follow the path of negotiation, open discussion and thoughtful compromise to reach reasonable common ground so that the people we serve, whether they fall into the majority or minority camp, feel that the system has treated them fairly and respectfully. Balancing the will of the majority with the needs of the minority – that's what legislators do. I'm hoping to bring some of that balance to the ballot question process.

I am also re-filing a bill that would create a commission to take a look at voter participation and recommend ways to get more people involved.

(full text click here)

<http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/st00363.htm>

<http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/st00362.htm>

<http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/st00364.htm>

Trivia

Now for the answer to our previous question -- Name the last two Speakers of the House of Representatives (federal government) from Massachusetts.

The answer is: Tip O'Neill and John McCormack

And our winner is Donald F. from somewhere in cyberspace. We'll send Donald information on who to contact in my Boston office and we'll look forward to seeing him at the State House. Congratulations! And thanks to everybody who played along!

Now to this month's question and another chance to win lunch and a State House tour.

The word "Massachusetts" is Algonquin for which of the following phrases.

1. Great Hill
2. Endless Forest
3. Blue Bay
4. Land of the Four Seasons

Submit your answer to tumitch@sprynet.com and watch this space for the correct answer and the prize winner.

Links

Here are a few links. Until next time, happy surfing!

Join TeamRosenberg! <http://www.stanrosenberg.com/teamrosenberg.php>

Click here tumitch@sprynet.com if you want to be removed from our list.

Click here for our on-line feedback form www.stanrosenberg.com/form.html

Forward this link to a friend www.stanrosenberg.com/issues/rosenreportreg.html

Guide to Lawmaking -- <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/lawmkng.htm>

Massachusetts State Government Home Page – <http://mass.gov/>

The Legislature's web page – <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/>

Senate's Bill Text System – <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/billsrch.htm>

Legislative Tracking System – <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/ltsform.htm>

My personal website – <http://www.stanrosenberg.com/>

The Rosenberg Report (November, 2004, edition) --
<http://www.stanrosenberg.com/issues/nov2004.html>