# CommonWealth

PO IDEAS, AND

? LIFE

M A

CTTS

## BLACK POWER

WHY DOESN'T BOSTON HAVE MORE OF IT?



PLUS—WHY MIDDLE-CLASS FAMILIES GO BROKE

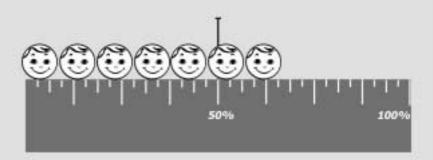
Clockwise from upper left: Mel King, Charles Yancey, Andrea Cabral, Bruce Bolling, Charlotte Richie, Jean McGuire, Marie St. Fleur, Chuck Turner, and Byron Rushing.

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Sources: Survey of Boston Parents, Boston's After-School for All Partnership, 2003 Survey of Boston Public School Parents, City of Boston, 1998

\* 1998 comparison based on public elementary and middle school students

For more results from the 2003 Parent Survey, visit www.afterschoolforall.org



Massachusetts 2020 is a non-profit foundation focused on expanding educational and economic opportunities for children and families across Massachusetts. Visit us at www.mass2020.org.

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For details, contact MassINC at (617) 742-6800 ext. 128 or the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities at (413) 584-8440

#### **Transcripts Available**

Transcripts of the forums, provided by State House News Service, can be found on the Internet (www.massinc.org).

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The mission of MassINC is to develop a public agenda for Massachusetts that promotes the growth and vitality of the middle class. We envision a growing, dynamic middle class as the cornerstone of a new commonwealth in which every citizen can live the American Dream. Our governing philosophy is rooted in the ideals embodied by the American Dream: equality of opportunity, personal responsibility, and a strong commonwealth. MassINC is a nonpartisan, evidence-based organization.

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Through the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project, GED graduates and adult diploma recipients can enroll at one of 25 participating adult learning centers located across New England to take free college preparation courses and receive educational and career planning counseling. They leave the program with improved academic and study skills, such as writing basic research papers and taking effective notes. Best of all, they can register at one of 30 colleges and universities that partner with the program.

Each year, the Project exceeds its goals: 60 percent complete the program; and 75 percent of these graduates go on to college.

By linking Adult Basic Education to post-secondary education, the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project gives non-traditional adult learners a chance to enrich their own and their families' lives.

To learn more, contact Jessica Spohn, Project Director, New England Literacy Resource Center, at (617) 482-9485, ext. 513, or through e-mail at jspohn@worlded.org. (The Project is funded by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation through the LiFELiNE initiative.)



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### CORRESPONDENCE

#### **AARP OFFERS MEMBERS** PLENTY OF CIVIC EXERCISE

I would like to correct some erroneous information about AARP that appeared in your conversation with Theda Skocpol ("Civic Dissociation," Summer 2003).

Skocpol uses AARP as an example of an organization that doesn't provide much opportunity for engagement among its members, saying, for example, that AARP "doesn't have chapters." This statement is incorrect. We have more than 3,000 chapters nationwide, including 52 here in Massachusetts. Some of these chapters are more active than others. Some are very engaged in the civic life of their communities, working with their local senior centers on a variety of projects and initiatives. Some are purely social clubs, while some have a strong slant toward advocacy. For example, in AARP's recent battle to save Prescription Advantage in Massachusetts, hundreds of chapter members from Salem, Brockton, Quincy, Braintree, and Peabody came to the State House to protest Gov. Romney's planned elimination of the program. Their presence and their voices put a human face on the issue, and I believe they made a positive difference.

In addition to chapters, we have nu-

merous volunteer opportunities for our members, from teaching driversafety classes for older drivers to educating voters during election seasons. AARP also has a fully staffed office in every state. This is a recent development, achieved only in the past few vears, but one which our all-volunteer board of directors, drawn from AARP membership, thought was a necessary step to more fully engage our members in the organization and its social mission of enhancing the quality of life for all as we age.

I thank you for the opportunity to set the record straight, and for MassINC's continuing leadership in this state.

> Deborah E. Banda State director AARP Massachusetts Boston



Having started a nonprofit organization called Social Capital, Inc., a year ago, I read with great interest your conversation with Theda Skocpol, which, in part, took issue with Robert Putnam's analysis of what's eroding civic life. SCI is developing a community-based model for building social



capital and increasing civic engagement. Our program areas include "Connecting Citizens to Information," "Developing Community Leaders," and "Promoting Youth Civic Engagement." We've started our programming here in my hometown of Woburn and are making plans to expand our work to additional communities.

Reading Bowling Alone was a key part of what led me to start SCI, yet my reading of your conversation with Skocpol reinforces the approach we are taking. A key part of SCI's strategy is to work collaboratively with existing community organizations to offer an



#### THE DEMOCRATS' DILEMMA: READERS WEIGH IN ONLINE

Elaine C. Kamarck's diagnosis of the Democratic Party's inability to win gubernatorial elections in Massachusetts ("Glass ceiling") generated strong reaction from CommonWealth readers, and we're doing what we can to keep the conversation going. In a CommonWealth Online Forum, we asked 13 prominent figures from across the political spectrum—ranging from Michael Dukakis to Ron Kaufman, Chris Gabrieli to Eric Fehrnstrom, and Robert Reich to Guy Glodis—to respond to Kamarck, offering their own take on a Democratic losing streak that began in 1990. Their responses are posted on our Web site (www.massinc.org), along with

comments from readers. You can add your own two cents' worth by e-mail, sent to demforum@massinc.org.

"amalgam of activities" that ranges from informal social events (such as a downtown Woburn concert series that started last summer) to activities designed to encourage political participation. While the informal activities might not automatically lead to civic engagement (though I believe there's a relationship), SCI believes that intentionally putting together an array of community activities puts us in a position to help translate informal social capital into engagement in political and social issues. We are, to some degree, working to counter the overspecialization in the civic sector that Skocpol talks about.

Anyway, thanks for the interesting article. I've got to pick up *Diminished Democracy* now!

David Crowley President and founder Social Capital, Inc. Woburn

## PRO-TRANSIT GROUP IS OFFSHOOT OF ANTI-HIGHWAY MOVEMENT

Regarding your Inquiry on Car-Free in Boston and the Association for Public Transportation ("Car-free guide is back on track"): For the record, the two groups that fought the proposed highways through and around Boston in the late 1960s and early 1970s were the Greater Boston Committee on the Transportation Crisis and Citizens for Rail Transportation. After their victory, they decided to go out of business and focus on improving public transportation. They met in the mid-1970s and formed the Association for Public Transportation. APT itself, while a worthy organization, had nothing to do with the anti-highway movement.

> Ann Hershfang Boston

## The CITIZENS'CIRCLE

MassINC is grateful to the very special individuals whose ideas, advice, and generosity support our work. Ronald M. Ansin Joan & John Bok Ian & Hannah Bowles Andrew J. Calamare Heather & Charles Campion Celine McDonald & Vin Cipolla Dorothy & Edward Colbert Thomas G. Davis Edward & Paula DeMore Tim Duncan Philip J. Edmundson Susan & William Elsbree Helen Evans Febbo & Al Febbo Marsha & David Feinberg Robert B. Fraser Chris & Hilary Gabrieli Darius W. Gaskins, Jr. Barbara & Steve Grossman Arnold Hiatt Jon B. Hurst **Robin & Tripp Jones** Sara & Hugh Jones Dennis M. Kelleher Julie & Mitchell Kertzman Stephen W. Kidder & Judith Malone Gloria & Allen Larson Peter & Rosanne Bacon Meade James T. Morris John E. Murphy, Jr. Fred Newman Bill Nigreen Paul C. O'Brien Hilary Pennington & Brian Bosworth Finley H. Perry, Jr. Colette A. M. Phillips Daniel A. Phillips Michael Pill Michael E. Porter Franscene & Charles Rodgers Barbara & Stephen Roop Ellen Roy & Bruce Herzfelder John Sasso Karen Schwartzman Alan D. Solomont & Susan Lewis Solomont Helen B. Spaulding Patricia & David F. Squire M. Joshua Tolkoff

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## Unconventional thinking

To capitalize on national exposure, Boston must tap its own civic energy

BY HUBIE JONES

olitical and civic leaders of smart, effective cities use big public events to achieve long-lasting development and social benefits. That's what I've learned from six years of visits to world-class metropolises in this country and abroad in search of models for civic development.

These benefits are achieved because hosting high-profile occasions forces these cities to produce results that are driven by fixed deadlines. The July 2004 Democratic National Convention provides Boston's civic leaders

with the opportunity to use this huge event to forge enduring progress for the city and the Commonwealth. It hasn't happened yet, but it's not too late to get started.

Every year since 1997, the City to City Program, which has taken Boston's government, corporate, and nonprofit leaders to other cities to learn best practices, has taught me this important lesson over and over again. Hosting this annual excursion along with Mayor Thomas Menino and Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce presi-

dent Paul Guzzi, I learned how Barcelona used the 1992 Olympic Summer Games to transform its blighted water-front into a magnificent recreational, commercial, and housing mecca. One of Barcelona's leaders told us that "public events must be used as an excuse to make progress." An inner-city road system was built to solve traffic gridlock, which had plagued the city for years. New parks and open spaces were brought into being as an antidote to population density. Venues for Olympic events were carefully placed around the city to enhance urban development in housing, recreation, and services throughout Barcelona. After the Summer Games, housing built for Olympic athletes, overlooking the transformed water-front, was turned into mixed-income housing. Currently, Barcelona is planning Cultural Forum 2004, which will

bring visitors from all over Europe and beyond to share cultural assets in many fields. The city has built a muchneeded convention center as the main venue for the forum.

Atlanta used the 1996 Olympic Summer Games as an excuse to build a large international terminal at its airport, which also lifted minority businesses to a new level of wealth through construction contracts and concessions. Fulfilling a major objective of black political leaders, 60 percent of the businesses at Atlanta's Hartsfield International Airport are minority-owned. In addition,

the major colleges were sites for newly constructed Olympic sports venues, later owned and used by these institutions of higher education. Atlanta leaders built state-of-the-art stadiums for football and baseball at the Summer Games, and they are now the homes of the Falcons and the Braves, the city's professional teams. Centennial Park, a gathering place for Olympic visitors, was built to spur physical renewal in a blighted area of the city.

the city.

Both Barcelona and Atlanta used the opportunity of the

Olympic Games to build more tourist-friendly services and amenities, sending positive messages about the advantages of their cities as the media beamed the events around the world. Consequently, both cities have experienced higher international name recognition and an exponential rise in tourism.

Boston leaders have a similar opportunity with 6,000 convention delegates, and five times that number in party and media hangers-on, about to descend on the city. Soon, our city and its FleetCenter will host one of the largest gatherings in the country. Through this opportunity, Boston and its leaders have the chance, even the imperative, to reinvent the Hub of the Universe as a more visitor-friendly city, and create a legacy of civic improvement that will last a generation.



MARK MORELLI FALL 2003 CommonWealth 9

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oston has long been a tourist destination for its beauty and its history. But it's never been an easy place to visit. Arrival and departure for guests by air, train, and bus are confusing and unpleasant. Those who try to drive here find the absence of clear street signage daunting. Here is an agenda for making our fair city navigable:

#### At Logan Airport:

- Install better signage on roadways and within the termi-
- Provide comfortable, creative waiting areas in response to the needs of parents with children, the elderly, and the handicapped;
- Establish an orderly system of taxi and private-car arrival at terminals to eliminate chaos at curbside baggage checkin and access points to terminal entrances;
- Require air carriers to provide information to arriving passengers about basic services available at Logan before
- Provide 21st-century Travelers Aid services for visitors in crisis or distress:
- Instruct airport taxi drivers on how to deliver their passengers to their destinations in a courteous, efficient way, and to provide important information and courtesies to visitors in a consumer-friendly manner;
- Provide better information services and travel assistance at the MBTA airport station on the Blue Line, including T and city maps.

#### At hotels:

South Hadley,

(Image: Loomis Communities,

- Upgrade arrival and check-in services;
- Provide excellent concierge services, including information about city transportation systems, cultural and historic venues, and major events;
- Experiment with a jitney service to get hotel guests to public transportation and from major MBTA stations to important venues. This could be the forerunner of a jitney service eventually available to the general public, a way to keep private cars out of the city and prevent downtown gridlock;
- Program the city's cable access channel to provide essential information and advice to visitors;
- · Inform hotel guests about organized tours of neighborhoods given by MYTOWN and other groups. Currently, out-of-town guests are discouraged from visiting neighborhoods outside downtown, but those neighborhoods include rich historic, cultural, and recreational resources.

#### At Boston's visitor centers:

• Use innovative technology to assist visitors in conducting self-guided tours through our very walkable city.

But these visitor amenities are just the start. The finan-

cial resources associated with the Democratic National Convention provide an opportunity to enhance our small and mid-sized arts and cultural institutions, which should serve as attractions for convention delegates and their families. These institutions are usually disadvantaged by philanthropy that is skewed toward large cultural organizations. We need to properly showcase such groups as the Museum of Afro-American History, the Boston History Collaborative and its creative tours of the Boston region by land and sea, MYTOWN, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, ArtsBoston and its BosTix service, the Boston Children's Museum, the Dorchester Arts Alliance, the ACT Roxbury Consortium, the Topf Center for Dance Education, and the Boston Children's Chorus. If we were to squander the opportunity to help such nonprofit groups in our preparation for this enormous public event, it would be utter folly.

Even if we were to properly showcase Boston's cultural assets, we would not be done yet. Creating a great legacy for the city of Boston means moving forward Boston's development agenda, both commercial and cultural. At the top of that agenda is the build-out of the new Seaport District in South Boston. There has never been a development opportunity this big or this important since the draining of the Back Bay.

The Democratic National Convention can be a vehicle to jump-start development and infrastructure improvements in this blossoming area of the city. Mayor Menino's decision to provide \$40 million in loans, backed by HUD Section 108 funding, to accelerate the building of hotels in the Seaport District is very smart. The viability of the new Convention Center, soon to be completed, depends on the availability and proximity of hotel rooms. Similarly, transportation officials need to use the Democratic convention as an excuse to launch transit initiatives more creative than the Silver Line, which is inadequate to the transportation needs in the Seaport District.

At the intersection of development and culture is the Institute for Contemporary Art, which will build a new magnificent museum in the Seaport District. The new ICA, situated on land donated by the Pritzker family, owners of the Hyatt Hotel Corp., is an example of the kind of collaboration needed to bring cultural and public facilities to an area of Boston that could attract the diverse peoples of the city, becoming a new neighborhood for all. Other private and public developers should take heed and donate land to nonprofit groups, which



## DON'T BE AN IDIOT

The ancient Greeks used the word "idiot" for someone who was not interested in public affairs.

At MassINC, we wouldn't go that far. But we do believe that our Commonwealth will not continue to thrive without informed, active. engaged citizens.

A body of research warns of growing apathy among voters, especially young people with weak ties to the community. Our recent Pursuit of Happiness survey identifies young professionals as the group most likely to consider leaving Massachusetts.

Our civic renewal initiative sees a different role for young adults, one that draws on their genius—for asking hard questions, for giving of themselves, for making things happen.

Thanks in part to a generous gift from the New Community Fund, MassINC will be expanding its work to give young professionals new ways to engage in civic life. We hope you'll join in the fun.

Look for more information about our civic renewal activities and upcoming events at www.massinc.org/civic.

## HOME **SWEET** HOME

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could create other attractive venues and programs for the public. If they take action prior to the convention, these landowners could announce such donations in a way that would show visitors a collaboration and generosity that will drive Boston in the 21st century.

Among these visitors will be media from around the world, many of them seeking to unearth stories concerning civic squabbles of all kinds. In the process of bringing the convention to Boston, city leaders have worked hard to convince the Democratic National Committee that Boston has moved beyond old matters of racial unrest. Boston is still far from racial nirvana; however, recent efforts to increase racial inclusion have been a healthy development. Nonetheless, race is not the last of our internecine squabbles, and we would do well to eliminate further matters of public contention so that Boston's assets can be fully appreciated and enjoyed.

City and state officials need to resolve differences regarding the building of the Rose Kennedy Greenway over the post-Big Dig Surface Artery, including plans for the Massachusetts Horticultural Society to build its Garden Under Glass at the seam joining the Financial District and the newly developed waterfront. Matthew Amorello, chairman of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, has recently proposed the creation of an independent, nonprofit conservancy to have authority for the maintenance and operation of the Greenway. The convention should give Gov. Romney, Mayor Menino, and the state Legislature an incentive to fashion an agreement concerning this matter of oversight and operational control over a new and key—public asset.

In the same vein, the Garden Under Glass initiative should not live or die based on the Massachusetts Horticultural Society's ability to fund it. Civic and political leaders should take responsibility for securing the required funding, or abandon it. Only collective action will raise the public and private dollars needed to ensure that this exciting venue anchors the Greenway. If it does not, placing the blame on a small nonprofit entity will be no excuse for leaving desolate the reclaimed land between downtown and the harbor.

t may be impolitic to say so, but in every major event, what's most prominently at stake is the spoils. Mayor Menino, through the operation of Boston 2004 Committee, has promised that the distribution of contracts for services associated with the convention will give businesses owned and operated by people of color unprecedented business opportunities. This, in itself, is a breakthrough. If the contract award system developed by the city achieves the promised results, it should be institutionalized and used by city and state governments, as

well as the managers of future public events and development projects, to spread prosperity through this city's multiracial entrepreneurial class. This could be one of the major civic legacies of the 2004 Democratic National Convention in Boston. Unless the creation of wealth for people of color in Boston becomes a civic priority, the vision of Boston becoming a world-class city within the next two decades will be stillborn.

But what happens before, and leading up to, the convention is only part of the civic renewal story. Smart, effective cities move quickly to achieve improvements made possible by the assets and leverage generated by such an event. Boston needs to do the same thing. We now need to put in place a credible body of civic and political leaders who are charged to begin their work the moment the Democratic National Convention adjourns. The civic agenda they should undertake includes the following:

- · Knit South Boston and the North End to the commercial core through creative building on the Greenway and in the Seaport District;
- · Make arts and cultural programs a high civic priority through greater private and public funding of small and mid-sized arts and cultural organizations;

- Use development projects to improve opportunities for entrepreneurs of color and small businesses;
- Ensure that public events in the city are enjoyed by the diverse peoples of the city and region;
- · Keep gentrification in city neighborhoods from eliminating affordable housing for the working class and the poor;
- · Create decent life chances for Boston's youth by providing better schooling, recreational programs, and jobs.

The Democratic National Convention can be the occasion for substantial progress on this civic agenda. However, no one public event, no matter how adroitly exploited, can help our leadership accomplish all of its unfinished business. Mayor Menino worked very hard for five years to have Boston chosen as the site for the Democratic National Convention because he believed that it could further the social and economic progress of the city. Corporate Boston joined this effort by donating millions of dollars to secure this monumental event. We dare not squander this collective investment in our city's civic progress.

Hubie Jones is dean emeritus of Boston University School of Social Work and former special assistant to the chancellor of University of Massachusetts-Boston.

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## Mother of reinvention

How Boston's economy has bounced back from decline, time and again

BY EDWARD L. GLAESER

hat a difference two decades make. In 1980, Boston was a city in decline, the Hub not of the universe but of a middle-income metropolitan area in a cold-weather state. The city's population had fallen from 758,000 in 1920 to 563,000, and real estate values had sunk so low that three-quarters of its homes were worth less than the bricks-and-mortar cost of constructing them. At that point, Boston seemed to be on its way to joining Rust Belt relics like Rochester, Newark, and Detroit on the dustbin of industrial history.

The Boston of today is a high-tech, culture-rich beacon of the future. The city's population has risen, if only slightly, in each of the decennial US Census counts since, 1990 and 2000. The metropolitan area is now the eighth richest in the country by per-capita income—the richest outside the New York and San Francisco regions. Housing prices —the surest sign of how badly people want to live someplace—have soared. In the 2000 census, a median housing value of \$233,000 made Boston the fourth most expensive metropolitan area outside New York and San Francisco (after Boulder, Colo.; Honolulu; and Orange County, Calif.). Of the 542 cities for which the Census Bureau has released data, four of the five cities with the fastest growth of housing prices between 1980 and 2000 were in this area: Somerville, Newton, Boston, and Cambridge.

What took place here in the last decades is well known. The region transformed itself from a declining manufacturing center into a burgeoning capital of the information age. We see this reinvention in the region's newly dominant sectors: high technology, professional and financial services, and higher education. Boston was able to accomplish this reinvention because of its skill base, not just relative to its Rust Belt peers like Detroit and Syracuse, but also compared to the nation as a whole. A region's skill base is among the strongest predictors of its growth rate, and today Boston is one of the most educated metropolitan areas of the country.

It is tempting to see the region's recent reinvention as a product of historical accident, a strong educational tradition fortuitously bumping into a new information age that gives education particular economic value. But rein-

venting itself is a Boston tradition that's nearly 400 years old. Time and again, Boston has faced economic crises that seemed to doom the city and its surrounding area to second-tier status, if not worse. Time and again, Boston has found new sources of productive growth.

Such crises of economic confidence are by no means unique to Boston. As world, national, and regional economies change over time, metropolitan centers are forced to change or face long-term eclipse. Boston's capacity for phoenix-like rebirth suggests basic lessons not only for New England's largest city but for cities everywhere. How it has accomplished this repeated reinvention also holds within it a cautionary tale for a city desperate not to lose this economic talent.

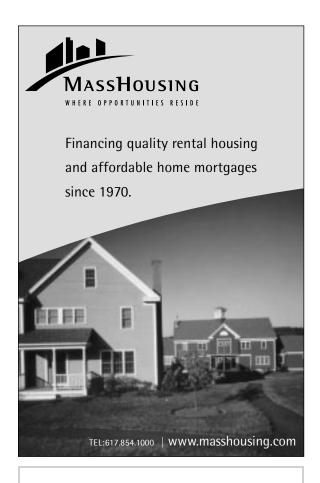
#### **BUSTS AND BOOMS**

Boston faced its first economic near-death experience within 20 years of the landing of the Mayflower. The Massachusetts Bay settlers initially survived on supplying goods to religiously oriented migrants seeking to settle in the New World. By 1640, however, the flow of British expatriates dried up, in part because of the political success of like-minded Protestants in England. Midway through the 17th century, Boston redefined itself as the center of a trade network that supplied the colonies of the Caribbean and the American South with food and basic provisions

## Boston seemed on its way to the dustbin of history.

(the southern plantation lands were too valuable growing sugar and tobacco to be wasted raising foodstuffs). This arrangement fueled the regional economy well into the next century.

In the latter half of the 18th century, however, Boston's population stagnated for 50 years while the colonies spread inland. New York and Philadelphia had greater proximity to the rich American hinterland and became far more important centers for shipping goods into and out of the 13 colonies. This led to a second major reinvention, when the city capitalized on a remarkable base of seafarers to



"All the means of action - the shapeless masses - the materials - lie everywhere about us. What we need is the celestial fire to change the flint into the transparent crystal, bright and clear. That fire is genius."

> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807 - 1882)



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become a center for global shipping and sailing in the early 19th century. In this economy, Boston's comparative advantage was not its port but its people, who crewed, captained, and owned ships. As the 19th century economy became more global, maritime talent overcame Boston's locational disadvantage and the city became the center of a vast mercantile and fishing empire stretching all the way to China.

But in 1840, at the height of its maritime supremacy, Boston's third crisis was already brewing. Steam technology was quickly improving and making clipper ships obsolete. Steam required both less human capital and different human capital than sails did and, as a result, Boston's maritime workforce lost much of its value, Boston, Salem, and New Bedford all suffered sharp economic dislocations. Salem and New Bedford never really recovered from the shift. But Boston, as a last product of its sailing supremacy, acquired a vast population of Irish immigrants. In what almost seems a freak of fortune, the Potato Famine coincided with the last decade of Boston's seafaring dominance. As a result of unusually cheap fares from Liverpool, large numbers of hungry Irish came to Boston. Had the famine happened 15 years later, the Irish would likely have bypassed the city entirely. Irish immigrants provided the human energy that—aided by merchant-made fortunes, a burgeoning rail network, and the rise of steampowered engines, which allowed factories to move from

## Staying true to a single model of development is a recipe for disaster.

rivers like the Merrimack to more central localesturned Boston from a maritime city to an industrial city between 1840 and 1890.

This heady period of growth was over by 1920. At that point begins the familiar story of Boston's-even New England's—slide into regional decline. From 1920 to 1950, the city's population remained flat, while the country's population grew by 50 percent, and then began to dwindle, bottoming out in 1980. This decline can be chalked up to at least four separate reasons. First, the climate was cold and harsh, when air conditioning, improvements in public health (such as draining America's swamps), and highway travel made the Sun Belt a much more attractive option. Second, as in other industrial towns, Boston's core manufacturing economy was declining as jobs moved to areas with cheaper labor and less regulation, especially in the South. Third, the automobile itself made Boston's dense urban form—and its pioneering public transportation system—somewhat obsolete, as growth spread to the suburbs. Finally, Boston suffered from high taxes and heavy regulation. Starting with mayors like James Michael Curley, who put Brahmin-baiting ahead of economic growth, Boston's city government began favoring higher taxes and more regulation.

Rather than signal Boston's final descent into economic and demographic oblivion, the long mid-century slide set the stage for Boston's reinvention as the high-tech economic juggernaut it is today. The current moment of recession hangover—and the even more severe dislocations of the early 1990s—notwithstanding, the Greater Boston/eastern Massachusetts area has developed an internal economic skeleton of technology and know-how that should sustain growth for years to come. That is, until the next structural crisis develops. When the crisis hits even more, before it does—it would serve us well to understand how to reinvent the local economy, as it has been reinvented before. Rather than looking for modern miracles to understand the modern Boston miracle, not to mention preparing for the inevitable next one, we should look to the factors that facilitated reinvention throughout Boston's history.

**1. INNOVATE OR STAGNATE.** The most obvious lesson of Boston's history is that metropolitan economies develop

along quirky, bumpy paths. Staying true to a single model of economic development is almost always a recipe for disaster. At each turning point during its long history, Boston has changed primary industries and revamped itself, from gateway for the Puritans to the first port of the Americas, from first port of the Americas to a center of global shipping, from shipping city to manufacturing city, from manufacturer to information master. For any city to survive as the economic core of a thriving region, such transformations are inevitable; indeed, as wrenching as they may be along the way, they should be welcomed and urged along, not dreaded and impeded.

What is it that makes economic change—for the good—happen? Every one of Boston's rebirths has been led by smart, ambitious people who had access to capital and who wanted to stay in or come to Boston despite other options that were available to them. Cities make themselves smart by educating their own and attracting the highly skilled from elsewhere. Now and in the future, Boston's success hinges critically on the quality of its schools and on its ability to attract high-skilled residents, even against the tough competition of warmer climes. For many other reasons, as we shall see, education and attraction are key components of Boston's economic success, but perhaps

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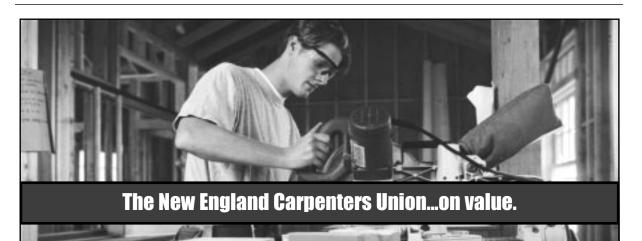
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their biggest role is in ensuring a steady supply of entrepreneurs to drive future reinventions.

Government policy also matters, but not in the typical forms of enticement and giveaway, or even in giving the free market free rein. Rather, the key is to have a system of regulation that is relaxed enough to permit innovation, but active enough to protect investors and to preserve Boston as an attractive place to live. In housing markets, for example, it is important to have regulation to make sure the city's beauty is not squandered, but also enough freedom to allow sufficient new construction to relieve the dramatic rise in housing prices. Complete laissez-faire is unlikely to produce attractive cities, provide good schools, or offer safeguards for investors, while excessive regulation will stymie entrepreneurs and builders, preventing them from creating the solutions our changing economy requires. In my work on housing regulation and prices with Joseph Gyourko, we have found that high housing prices in the US are to a large extent the result of restrictions on new construction. Many communities in the Boston area have among the toughest restrictions on new construction in the nation. What's needed is a regulatory middle road—hard to find, and even harder to follow, but necessary for Boston's future.

One sure sign that a policy is a mistake is if its principal purpose is to preserve and perpetuate the past. Economic reinvention inevitably involves dislocation and hardship. It is surely tempting to try to bolster declining industries to ease the pain that accompanies decline. But given the necessity of reinvention, such attempts are urban suicide. If Boston had taxed the information economy heavily to keep its dying candy factories afloat, we would not have saved the candy industry, but rather killed the region's economic future.

2. VALUE DIVERSITY AND COMPLEXITY. Reinventing a local economy requires diversity. That's because, in general, reinvention doesn't mean starting new industries from scratch, but rather expanding industries that were always there, but much smaller, and in a position to grow when they prove a more promising fit for a changing economy. Such economic diversity enables cities to switch horses when their primary industries decline. For instance, there has always been manufacturing in Boston—before it was a manufacturing center, and even now, in the post-manufacturing age. The city's transformation from a shipping center in 1840 to a manufacturing region in 1890 was built on an older tradition of Yankee craftsmanship. Similarly,



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technology, professional services, and higher education have been parts of the Boston economy for centuries. They did not have to be imported, or grown from seed, to enable the switch from manufacturing to these more productive sectors over the past 20 years. The broader a city's portfolio of industries, the better it can adapt to shifts in the international economy.

Apart from allowing a city to hedge against a particular industry's decline, diversity seems to engender growth in its own right. Many social scientists, from Jane Jacobs to Martin Weitzman, argue that new ideas come from combining older ideas. Jacobs's famous example is the brassiere, which was invented by a dressmaker, not a lingerie producer. Today, Starbucks is a concept that combines the European café with American fast food. Most of the Internet innovations of the past decade simply combine online

## **Economic diversity** seems to engender growth in its own right.

access with traditional business functions (auction house, bookstore, travel agent). If innovation means combining ideas from diverse sources, then urban diversity ensures there are a lot of old ideas around to combine. Moreover, a diverse economy means infrastructure is in place to support these industrial interactions, as well as suppliers who can cater to new start-ups.

Boston's advantage in economic diversity—and its corollary, complexity—can be traced back to colonial days. Virginia's tobacco trade was simple, hinging on vast plantations. Boats would come down the river to pay cash for bales of tobacco. Since the trade was simple and enormously profitable, there was no reason for cities or mercantile infrastructure to develop. Conversely, Massachusetts had few products that were worth shipping to England. To make up for this weakness, the colonial merchants developed a complex trading system to handle a variety of commodities, which were shipped to four separate countries. One third of Boston's population was directly involved in the shipping trades. At the time, Virginians were much richer. But in the long run, the institutions that developed around the diverse and complex Boston economy were much more conducive to economic growth.

Boston's elite grouped together to share risks and information about prices and shipments. Since Massachusetts exports required workmanship, especially ships and other wood products, Boston became a center of this form of manufacturing, transforming New England lumber into finished goods. In addition, as a teeming city, Boston also provided support services, such as taverns and boarding

houses, for the sailors. The various ingredients of this motley economy would provide the seeds for Boston's eventual triumph over the single-crop economies of the American South.

3. ATTRACT PEOPLE, NOT COMPANIES. Increasingly, urbanists draw a distinction between producer cities and consumer cities. Producer cities grow because of the desire of firms to locate in a particular place where economic returns are higher, while consumer cities thrive because people want to live there. Over the past 50 years, consumer cities have enjoyed increasing success, largely at the expense of producer cities.

Consumer cities are particularly conducive to the process of reinvention. If the only reason people live in a particular place is because of its proximity to some productive asset, such as anthracite coal mines or the Merrimack River, then that locale loses its charm if that asset loses its value. Indeed, Pennsylvania coal country is a vast graveyard of once-prosperous towns telling stories of past economic grandeur. But if a place exists because people want to live there, then the people who live there can respond to economic downturns by innovating to make their chosen environment productive once again, rather than moving.

Boston, almost alone among America's earliest colonies, was a consumer colony. No one came to Virginia because they wanted to live there; they came to get rich. But the early migrants to Boston were founding a "city on a hill," a shining beacon for its Christian community, and did not come simply because of its material prosperity. From early times, Boston merchants didn't immediately head south in response to economic downturns, but rather expended effort to make the city viable by figuring out new opportunities for trade.

Later, when Boston became the first city of Irish America, Boston's appeal was never primarily high wages. At first, the city capitalized on cheap fares from Liverpool, but after that, its success depended on its thriving Irish community. The churches, clubs, pubs, and neighborhoods that were built by the early migrants from Ireland attracted later ones, even when New York boasted cheaper fares and higher wages. Once wealthy Bostonians could see the profits in employing this vast force of Irish laborers, the industrialization of Boston took off.

Today, Boston is a center for the knowledge economy in part because people want to live here. Boston may not have exactly the same amenities as the Bay Area; it certainly doesn't have the weather. But if Boston isn't Palo Alto, it isn't Detroit either. Its changing seasons, ready access to Atlantic beaches, and rich history continue to attract residents as well as visitors. This allure is crucial for the city's continued economic success. But, the most evident seed of Boston's next economic crisis is its high housing costs, which are starting to price the next generation of reinventors out of the market.

4. INVEST IN EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL. The fact that Massachusetts settlers saw themselves as permanent residents led the new colony to create a number of important legal, social, and educational institutions. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of early Boston was its focus on education. The Boston Latin School was founded in 1635 and Harvard College was founded with government money, it's worth noting—the next year. The Calvinist attention to literacy surely mattered, but the more complex Massachusetts economy also demanded more widespread learning than did the tobacco culture of the South. Harvard's earliest graduates were men of the cloth, but increasingly a Harvard education provided valuable background for merchants and lawyers in a world where knowledge increased earnings. Education was not a luxury, as it was for Southern aristocrats; it was a central ingredient in the evolving economy.

Human capital has been Boston's strongest asset throughout its 400-year history. Skills with sailing ships enabled the city to reinvent itself as a global maritime center in the early 19th century. Yankee technology and Irish labor together fueled industrialization. And today

more than ever, Boston's skills provide the impetus for economic success in technology, professional services, and higher education.

oston will never be anything other than what it is. It will never have the climate of Los Angeles or the developable land of North Carolina; it will never have oil wells or uranium mines. What has always made Boston dynamic—and does so to this day—is its reinventiveness, its ability to find new ways to fit into an evolving national economy. The economic power of education and cultural dynamism is news to some people note the recent success of Richard Florida's book The Rise of the Creative Class—but it's old news to Boston. Still, the Bay State's long tradition and first-rate institutions should not lull us into complacency. Even as we look to reap further rewards from the information-age economy of today, there's no time like the present for laying the groundwork for Boston's next rebirth. ■

Edward L. Glaeser is a professor of economics at Harvard *University.* This article is drawn from a forthcoming report by the Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

### Mapping School Choice in Massachusetts: Data and Findings 2003





In recent years, the Commonwealth has offered students and their families a variety of school choice options, but very little funding has been dedicated to studying the impact, availability and enrollment trends of school choice. As a result, policymakers are forced to shape a policy agenda based upon conjecture rather than evidence. The Center for Education Research & Policy, with the generous support of the Boston Foundation, commissioned this school choice mapping research to fill the informational gap.

This report describes various school choice options in Massachusetts and details the extent to which each school choice option is available and exercised.

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### WASHINGTON NOTEBOOK

## Hazardous duty

From the Big Dig to Iraq, Natsios takes on the tough assignments

BY SHAWN ZELLER

resident George W. Bush's hopes for re-election are now riding on turning Iraq, a country riven by ethnic and religious factions with no memory of anything but dictatorship, into a stable, thriving democracy. In that daunting task, the president is counting not only on the US military, which has suffered more casualties from guerrilla attacks since the declared May 1 end of the anti-Saddam war than during it. He's also relying on Andrew Natsios, head of the United States Agency for International Development and the man charged with rebuilding the war-torn country.

"The president took a big risk to do the right thing," says Natsios, "and we have to make sure this [reconstruction] works."

It won't be Natsios's first salvage operation. Natsios was secretary of administration and finance under Gov. Paul Cellucci when the Big Dig cost overruns came to light, and Cellucci gave Natsios the job of restoring public-and Federal Highway Administration—confidence in the nation's largest public-works project through a combination of tough management and open communication. But even the Big Dig mop-up was light duty for a man whose career has bounced between the Massachusetts State House and the nation's capital, where he has specialized in international disasters. When he took over the Central Artery/Tunnel Project in 2000, he joked to a Boston Herald reporter, "I know it won't kill me."

Natsios began public life representing Holliston in the state Legislature from 1975 to 1987, diligently toiling in the political wilderness then occupied by Massachusetts Republicans; Natsios also served as state GOP chairman. In 1980, he worked on the first (unsuccessful) presidential campaign of George H.W. Bush alongside fellow Republican lawmakers Cellucci, now US ambassador to Canada, and Andrew Card, now White House chief of staff. When the elder Bush, who was Ronald Reagan's vice president, defeated Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis in 1988 to become president, Natsios left for Washington, where he was named head of USAID's office of foreign disaster assistance. After Bill Clinton defeated Bush in 1992, Natsios became vice president of World Vision, a humanitarian relief organization based in Washington. It was exciting —at times terrifying—work. Natsios was shot at in Sarajevo, taken prison-



for another President Bush, offering him the top job at USAID.

But Natsios could not have predicted how much of his internationaldevelopment work would revolve around the war against terrorism. Less than a year after his arrival at USAID, Natsios was one of the first officials to travel to Afghanistan, arriving even as the United States fought for control of the country. And in June of this year, Natsios traveled to Iraq, touring the country from north to south for six days. He visited broken-down power plants, palaces that had been looted, foulsmelling sewer treatment facilities, understaffed health clinics, and burned-out government buildings. He also saw some examples of what the United States' deep pockets can

## Natsios was shot at in Sarajevo and taken prisoner by Sudanese thugs.

er by Sudanese thugs, and witness to the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, he says.

Natsios returned to Boston in 1999, signing on with his old friend Cellucci, first as budget chief and then taking over the Big Dig as chairman of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority. But another old Massachusetts hand, Andy Card, lured Natsios back to Washington in 2001 to work do for the new Iraq: a refurbished school, a newly reopened courthouse, a fire station rescued from looters.

Of all the things Natsios saw during his whirlwind tour, the one that stuck out most, he says, was a grave-yard. Traveling with a television crew from the cable station C-SPAN, Natsios visited the arid Al Hilla region of southern Iraq, where it is believed that thousands of Shiite

Muslims were executed by Hussein's henchmen after the 1991 Gulf War. Since the United States took over Iraq in April, volunteers have uncovered many of the bodies, removing clothes and personal effects from the bones and placing them in white plastic bags atop the graves, so that relatives can try to identify them.

Natsios spoke with one woman who said that 50 of her family members had been taken away by Saddam's henchmen. "She thinks they are coming back," says Natsios, sadly. "She never saw them get killed. She never saw the mass graves."

xperiences like that have redoubled Natsios's determination not only to succeed in rebuilding Iraq but also to bring economic development to the rest of the world's developing nations. If the

United States is ever to eliminate terrorism abroad, he believes, those efforts have to succeed.

"For a conservative Republican who believes in less government and limited taxation, he's very compassionate," says Cellucci. "He's determined tance has failed to lift developing countries out of poverty. In the 1990s, the percentage of the federal budget going to foreign aid hit a new low, placing the United States behind 21 other countries in its generosity toward the developing world. In

## His latest mission: Remake foreign aid.

to help poor people around the world have a better life, and he's dedicated a good portion of his life to it."

That determination has put Natsios in the middle of another Bush administration initiative: remaking foreign aid. Though less explosive than Iraq, foreign aid is nobody's idea of a popular issue on Capitol Hill. Members of Congress have always found it difficult to justify foreign aid to their constituents, especially because of the general perception—mostly correct—that such financial assis2000, debating Al Gore, Republican nominee Bush openly mocked the idea of using US resources for "nationbuilding" in foreign lands.

But September 11, and the recognition that poor countries provide ready breeding grounds for terrorist networks, changed Bush's attitude. So now Natsios finds himself not only the manager of billion-dollar reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also a critical player in the Bush administration's drive to boost foreign aid 50 percent by 2006 - and

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to recast entirely the way that the United States divvies it up.

In response to the widespread view in Washington that much foreign aid has gone to waste at the hands of corrupt foreign governments, Natsios helped design a new mechanism, called the Millennium Challenge Account, that would force developing countries to compete for funds. Only countries judged to be promoting democracy, human rights, and economic development would have a shot at the money, and only those that use the funds effectively would receive continued assistance. This kind of performance assessment, if approved, would be the first of its kind in foreign aid.

Congress seems willing to give the Millennium Challenge Account a try. Both the House and the Senate Foreign Relations committees have approved, by wide bipartisan majorities, bills to create the fund. Observers say that Natsios's tireless lobbying has helped move the proposal along.

"Andrew has always had a let'sget-this-accomplished attitude," says Catherine Bertini, undersecretary for management of the United Nations and a longtime colleague. "He knows what he wants to achieve, and he's very aggressive."

"It goes back to the time when he was a young state representative," says Leon Lombardi, who served with Natsios in the Legislature. "He just has a very good knack for looking at a larger picture and having a focus and consistent philosophy. He knows how to work hard to achieve his goal."

He'll have to. In Iraq, his agency is overseeing nine contracts to do everything from rebuilding infrastructure to promoting democratic institutions. Still, Natsios says the work itself is nothing out of the ordinary for USAID, whose 2,000 employees are used to toiling in the most dysfunctional countries in the world. The difference is, "it's on a much, much larger scale," he says. "We've never

spent this much money [in one country] since the Marshall Plan."

Natsios says the agency has made progress more quickly in Iraq than in any of 12 prior reconstruction efforts in which he's taken part. But that hasn't kept USAID from drawing fire for both the pace and effectiveness of its efforts. In April, Newt Gingrich, the former Republican US House Speaker, called for USAID's abolition, describing the agency's relief work in Afghanistan as listless and overly bureaucratic. And in Iraq, USAID has come under fire—and congressional investigation—for limiting competition on its reconstruction contracts. In all cases but one, the agency limited the bidding to a few firms. The most substantial contract went to San Francisco-based Bechtel, the Big Dig's major contractor.

Finally, the prominent role of the US military in the reconstruction of Iraq bothers many humanitarian relief groups, some of which have refused to work in the country because of it. J. Brian Atwood, who headed USAID for six years during the Clinton administration, says the aid agency needs to be more independent of the military. "It's a dangerous thing for USAID to be pushed around by the White House and the Pentagon," says Atwood, who has since worked for former congressman Joe Kennedy's Citizens Energy Corp. in Boston and is now dean of the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota.

But Natsios says the real threat to his work in Iraq is impatience. "The biggest problem that USAID and the US government face is rising expectations that are not realistic," he says. "People think the United States in two weeks can rebuild a society. It doesn't take two weeks. It takes months and years." With the presidential election just 12 months away, whether Natsios—and his boss —will get those months and years remains to be seen.

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### TOWN MEETING MONITOR

## Fringe benefits

A \$5 raise proves costly to one town and its moderator

#### BY VICTORIA GROVES

STONEHAM—Five bucks can't even get you into a movie in most places, but it can still buy a lot of trouble in Stoneham. Moderator Michael Rotondi won an annual pay raise of \$5 from town meeting in May, but two months later the voters snatched it back, with some claiming they never realized just how valuable the salary increase was.

otondi, who had been earning \$200 a year as town moderator, wanted the 2.5 percent raise to strengthen his bid for a pension from this small suburb north of Boston. Evidently, this was not made clear to everyone who first voted on it. "I felt duped because we trusted Mr. Rotondi," says Edie Previdi, a town resident who initially voted for the raise and later helped lead the charge for rescinding the increase.

For his part, Rotondi says that he is entitled to a pension with the raise or without it. "The word 'discrimination' comes to mind," he says. "This is [part] of a brewing conflict between me and the [Stoneham] retirement board."

Rotondi, 33, has been town moderator, presiding over Stoneham's open town meeting, for 10 years. After he was re-elected to the post this spring, he approached the Stoneham retirement board and asked to be admitted into the town's retirement system. Gaining such entry would bolster Rotondi's claim on public-employee benefits in the future. Currently, Rotondi gets 85 percent of his Blue Cross Blue Shield health insurance policy covered by the town.

Formerly a director of municipal services for the state's Department of Environmental Protection, Rotondi expected he would eventually earn a pension from the state. Laid off from that position, Rotondi ran unsuccessfully for state representative as a Republican in 2000, then went to graduate school—all the while assuming that his continuing tenure as town moderator would count toward the 10 years of public service he needs to accumulate to gain retirement benefits from the state.

He would not be the first to credit his time as an elected town official in a less-than-full-time position toward

"This will help me fill in these gaps of service," says Rotondi, who's now unemployed. "I did all my homework, and state law and facts have backed me up." If accepted into the town's retirement plan and his service as moderator is counted toward the 10year service requirement, Rotondi will become eligible for a pension based on the average of his three highest annual salaries while working in the public sector (in this case, those would be years working at his state job), plus health benefits. What percentage of this average he receives will depend on the age at which he retires.

Rotondi's claim hangs in the balance of conflicting passages in Chapter 32, the statute that determines eligibility in any city or town's retirement or pension system. One portion of the law states that part-time or temporary municipal employees who make more than \$200 a year are eligible for membership in a municipality's retirement system, but that employees who make less "shall not

## Rotondi says he is entitled to a pension with or without the raise.

state benefits. In 2001, former Gov. Paul Cellucci qualified for an early pension on the grounds of 30 years of government service, and he was able to count six years that he served on Hudson's board of selectmen in the 1970s—a post that paid \$1,000 to \$1,500 a year—even as he served as US ambassador to Canada (See "Pension liabilities," CW, Spring 2002).

be eligible for membership except by vote of the board." With Rotondi's salary meeting, but not exceeding, the \$200 threshold, the board hesitated, tabling Rotondi's request for a pension at three separate meetings this spring.

But the Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission (PERAC), a state agency created to oversee and regulate the state's 106 public pension systems, has sided with Rotondi, pointing to another section of the same state law, one that stipulates that an individual elected by popular vote to municipal office has 90 days after the election to join the town's pension system, regardless of his or her compensation.

"The dollar amount is irrelevant, and that's the point [the Stoneham retirement board] is missing," says Joseph E. Connarton, PERAC's executive director. "There is nothing in the law that mandates full-time service, and [Rotondi] qualifies because he was voted into office by a direct vote of the people."

Michael Sacco, attorney for the

ment board is flouting the state standard for the compensation of town officials. "I know it's been done," Rotondi says of his bid to join Stoneham's pension system. "Chapter 32 is riddled with elected officials who are allowed to access the pension fund." Though unwilling to give any specifics, Rotondi hints that he may be the victim of personal grudges. "When you've been serving in town government and when you're from a family that has been in town a long time...people can let their personal opinions override the correct application of the law," he says.

But it's not at all clear how common Rotondi's situa-

STONEHAM

Incorporated as a town: 1725

Population: 22,219

Town Meeting: Open

FACTS:

Stoneham covers 6.7 square miles and is located nine miles west of Lynn and 13 miles north of Boston.

The median age in Stoneham is 40.6 years, and 28 percent of the households include residents under 18.

The town's median household income is \$56,605, and its median home value is \$227,900.

Stoneham was a center for shoe manufacturing from the 1850s through the early 20th century, but today it is principally a commuter town. The town's leading attraction is the Stone Zoo, operated by the Commonwealth Zoological Corporation.

Stoneham retirement board, counters that Rotondi may be an elected official, but his primary role is that of a temporary town employee. "The board does not dispute that elected officials who are compensated may elect to join the retirement [plan] within 90 days of assuming office," Sacco says, then proceeding to dispute precisely that point. "The board's past practice for at least the last 25 years [is that] any employee or elected official who earns \$200 or less is not eligible for membership in the retirement system absent a specific vote [by the retirement board]."

Not surprisingly, Rotondi agrees with PERAC, claiming that the retire-

tion is. Town moderators in nearby Reading and Winchester, for example, receive no stipends at all and thus do not receive health benefits and have not been granted eligibility for a pension. (Under Chapter 32, any municipal officials who work at least 20 hours a week and receive any kind of compensation are eligible for the town's group health insurance.) In addition, as town governments look for savings during the state's current fiscal crisis, there's likely to be more scrutiny of compensation for elected town officials, particularly those who maintain full-time jobs in the private sector.

"The Rotondi case is somewhat of

an anomaly," says Connarton. "I've been in this position six years, and this is the first time I've seen this specific issue crop up. But there should be a broad-based debate on the current pension system as we know it today. [Cities and towns] should be discussing Chapter 32 as it relates to their citizens."

rying to force the retirement board to take him in, Rotondi turned to the people who elected him to office, asking them for a \$5 raise at the annual town meeting in May. The proposal passed without debate, and without any explanation of why Rotondi wanted the extra five bucks. A few days later, town residents Previdi and Terri Ghannam discovered the reason for the raise when a curious Ghannam requested an explanation of why Rotondi asked for only \$5. Feeling hoodwinked, the two women circulated a petition and received 297 signatures, well over the necessary 200, to bring the issue back to the floor at a special town meeting in late July.

Previdi says that if Rotondi had provided full disclosure at the spring town meeting, the issue might not have become such a brouhaha. "I've been here for 37 years and I've never [organized a petition]," she says. "If [Rotondi had]... explained the issue, people like him enough that we would have voted for it."

At the special town meeting, Stoneham's finance board released a statement that called "the lack of explanation and disclosure" before the original vote to be "significantly troubling." The finance board also slammed the town's selectmen for not publicly explaining the matter, even if Rotondi chose not to.

"The Board of Selectmen should not be allowed to act carelessly with the motions of the voters of Stoneham," the written statement continued. "In this regard, the process short-changed Town Meeting voters." (According to the Stoneham Sun, Rotondi did not directly notify the board of selectmen why he wanted the raise until after the town meeting. Rotondi, however, says that he discussed the reason for the raise with town manager David Berry and simply assumed that the selectmen were made aware of the issue. Berry could not be reached for comment.)

In the end, all but a handful of town meeting goers voted to rescind Rotondi's \$5 increase. "Putting a price on public service means the service is less than the best," former selectman Jack Mahoney said at the meeting. "If someone is looking to get compensated for public service, we're going to look for someone else."

Rotondi believes that, by the time his case came back to town meeting, the deck was stacked against him. "The issue just snowballed," he says.

The next day, the retirement board once again declined Rotondi's bid for a pension.

"While I cannot speak for all the retirement boards in the Commonwealth, it is my understanding that most retirement boards universally reject membership for those individuals who earn \$200 or less," Sacco said. "There may be some who do not follow this principle, but the fact that other retirement boards may not apply the provisions of [Chapter 32] to elected officials does not mean that it is a correct application of the law."

Whether Rotondi got the short end of the stick or his just deserts is still a matter of dispute among town residents. For now, he is planning to appeal the decision with the Contributory Retirement Appeal Board, and according to PERAC, the process could take as long as 18 months. (In the meantime, PERAC has sent a memo to cities and towns across Massachusetts reiterating its interpretation of the law.) By then, Rotondi, should he choose to run, will be seeking his sixth term as town moderator.

Rotondi may see himself as the victim of a personal grudge match, but the final judgment will be made by Stoneham voters. "The special town meeting [was] not about the \$5," Previdi says. "We want integrity brought back to town meeting. And it would be very hard to trust [Rotondi] in the future if we let this go."

For his part, Rotondi maintains that he is right on principle but could have handled the politics differently. "It's easy to play Monday morning quarterback," he says, "but if [voters] don't like me now, they can take that up at the ballot box." ■

Victoria Groves is a freelance writer living in Chelmsford.

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## For new leader, Senate budget cuts are unkindest of all

BY MICHAEL JONAS

taking their ground as defenders of an already frayed social safety net, Beacon Hill lawmakers voted over the summer to override hundreds of Gov. Mitt Romney's budget vetoes, restoring spending for everything from legal assistance programs to school breakfasts. One veto, however, remained untouched by lawmakers, though it was an item near and dear to their hearts: a \$1.2 million increase legislators had proposed for operation of the state Senate, which was facing a \$2 million budget gap.

Since overrides must begin in the House, taking a pass on this one raised the question of whether Speaker Thomas Finneran was hanging his freshly minted counterpart, Senate President Robert Travaglini, out to dry.

Travaglini pours cold water on that theory. "We chose not to seek an override," says the East Boston Democrat, referring to the 40-member Senate. "It's our problem and we'll deal with it."

Part of the problem is political. Senators surely would have preferred to be spared the ordeal of laying off their own staff, as they would have been had Romney signed off on the higher appropriation. But once the governor vetoed the money—Romney declared that every part of state government must make sacrifices—pushing an override at a time when social service programs were suffering painful cuts

would have been an embarrassment for legislators. "Given the budget crisis that's going on in the state, I don't think [an override vote] was ever really entertained," says Sen. Robert O'Leary, a Barnstable Democrat.

But the alternative has proven to be a wrenching ordeal for the Legislature's upper chamber, and not least for its new leader. Travaglini has eliminated 23 jobs that fell under the jurisdiction of his office, which includes the Senate personnel office, legislative education office, and court officers for the branch. His fellow senators have had to let longtime staffers go and figure out ways to get their office workload done with fewer hands on board.

Even though Travaglini has cast votes on such weighty matters as the death penalty and spending for critical education and health services, the reductions in the Senate budget—and staffing levels—have assumed a singular significance for him.

"It's been the most difficult exercise I've been confronted with in my tenure as an elected official," says Travaglini. "I had a personal relationship with a significant portion of these people that were unfortunately asked to leave."

When it was revealed in July, the budget shortfall became the focus of a tense back-and-forth between Travaglini and his predecessor, Thomas Birmingham. Travaglini's office claimed that the problem was created by Birmingham, who left office in January, midway through last fiscal year. Birmingham shot back a letter to senators, telling them he



Finneran (left) could have solved the Senate's budget woes, but Travaglini said not to.

had fully briefed Travaglini on the Senate's budget woes.

If there's a silver lining, say some senators, it is that Travaglini has used the episode to equalize budgets for all members. There had been wide disparities in senators' budgets, with some members allocated more than \$300,000 to staff their offices, while others received less than \$200,000, according a *Boston Globe* report.

"I hate to see people laid off," says Sen. Jack Hart, a first-

term Boston Democrat whose office budget had been among the lowest. But he credits Travaglini for bringing "some parity" to office allocations.

"It's about fairness, it's about equity, it's about changing the way we do business," says Travaglini, who has pledged to bring a more open style of leadership to the Senate.

But one of the ways Travaglini has always done business is by placing friends and allies in jobs. While others may rail against patronage, the one-time precinct captain for Boston mayor Kevin White has always been one of its proudest defenders, a fact that lends great irony to the Grim Reaper role he has had to assume.

"Most people here are in the business of helping people," says one Senate staffer. "They don't like laying people off, especially Trav."

"I'm not going to offer any apologies for being a resourceful individual," Travaglini says of his reputation for finding work for loyalists—such as Anthony Marmo, his 85-year-old former campaign manager, who, the Globe reported, was on the Senate payroll, collecting \$400 a month for helping out in Travaglini's district office.

"Tony Marmo is a good individual," says Travaglini, sadness creeping into his voice. "He's one of the ones we had to lav off."

Then, ever resourceful, the Senate president adds, "We'll see if we can be helpful to Tony in another way." ■

## What we don't know about teaching teachers

t a time when the federal No Child Left Behind law is requiring a "highly qualified teacher" at the front of every public school classroom, there is more confusion than ever about what it takes to make a good teacher.

A report released in July claims that the research on teacher training done to date provides little guidance as to what methods produce the best teachers. The study conducted by the Education Commission of the States, a nonprofit consortium founded in 1965 by governors, lawmakers, and education leaders from across the countryanalyzed more than 500 research studies and found no better than "moderate" or "limited" evidence that any one of the prevailing preparation strategies is more effective than the others.

"The lack of research does not necessarily mean the proponents [of various preparation methods] are wrong," the ECS report concludes, "but the available evidence simply does not justify the strength with which some advocates insist on the absolute and exclusive correctness of their point of view."

In Eight Questions on Teacher Preparation, ECS reviewers looked at research queries on such propositions as whether the amount of subject matter study determined teacher quality, and whether traditional teacher-prep programs were more successful than "alternative" routes to certification. They found few definitive answers. For instance, the report found "moderate" support for the importance of a

## THE DATA ON TRAINING **METHODS: "INCONCLUSIVE."**

solid subject-matter background, but considered "inconclusive" the evidence that such preparation required an undergraduate major or a graduate degree in the discipline. In addition, the report found the research on student teaching, the backbone of many programs, to be "inconclusive" as to what constitutes effective pre-service field experience. The report also found limited support for other strategies, such as specialized training for teaching in urban, low-performing schools, but mostly sounded a call for more research to address such questions directly—and definitively.

The report's equivocal findings strike a chord with some prominent teacher educators. "Right now we have a lot of convictions, and a lot of them are contradictory," says Joseph Cronin, interim dean of Lesley University's School of Education. "Do BC and BU and Lesley know exactly if what they did was effective three years down the line? The answer is no. Most schools don't know."

But others take issue with ECS's conclusions, especially those concerning the approaches tentatively endorsed based on "limited evidence."

"This report samples an extremely narrow level of research," says Dennis Shirley, an associate professor at Boston College's Lynch School of Education. "So much is screened out of a report like this, like focus groups with parents...or comments from other teachers about our graduates."

Shirley, who founded the Massachusetts Coalition for Student Achievement and Teacher Quality four years ago, is an outspoken critic of alternative routes to certification, which allow professionals to join the teaching ranks through accelerated programs—one model the ECS report regarded with general approval.

"Overall, the research provides limited support for the conclusion that there are indeed alternative programs that produce cohorts of teachers who are ultimately as effective as traditionally trained teachers," according to the report, which also finds the evidence that teachers trained through alternative programs drop out of the profession at a greater rate to be "inconclusive."

But Shirley says the Lynch School will soon finish a report evaluating the Bay State's alternative routes to certification showing that graduates of the Massachusetts Institute for New Teachers (MINT), a summer-long accelerated certification program, are less confident as teachers than are graduates of two-year and four-year programs. "Six-week programs are fine if you just have great schools [to teach in]," says Shirley, "but we know that's [often] not the case."

The report's coolness toward student teaching troubles Peter Dittami, a retired high school principal who now coordinates field placement for the state's largest teacher program, at Framingham State College. "It is perhaps the most important dimension of our program," Dittami says. "Students are supervised throughout the process," which can be tailored according to a student's professional aspirations, such as teaching in an urban school, he adds.

Michael Allen, ECS program director and author of the report, denies that he looked at the data selectively. "We looked at the whole body of the research to make overall conclusions, so I'll stand by the report," says Allen. "We actually used more qualitative research than quantitative."

The real problem, says Allen, is the quality of research on teacher training. Even among the 92 studies selected for careful scrutiny, from a review of 500, Allen's team of researchers found few that could be deemed reliable. "Many evaluations are not independent because they are sponsored by the schools themselves, so there is some vested interest there," says Allen. "Most are not peer-reviewed. And finally, they are just plain bad."

Even education-school leaders acknowledge that more research on teacher training needs to be done—and put to better use.

"I'd welcome any available research, always," says James Fraser, dean of the Northeastern University School of Education. "And there does need to be more done to encourage our faculty to make the research more accessible. Higher education has not done a good job of asking itself, 'Has the research helped all the stakeholders involved?"



Kyla Bennett: in the thick of the auto-testing scandal.

# This whistleblower knows how to get agencies' attention

BY MICHAEL JONAS

hen a federal subpoena seeking thousands of documents on the state's automobile emissions testing program landed in the offices of the Department of Environmental Protection over the summer, state officials started to scramble. And nothing could have made Kyla Bennett any happier.

"I was very, very pleased," says Bennett, director of the New England chapter of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, a private, Washington, DC-based nonprofit organization that acts as a clearinghouse for whistleblowers inside environmental agencies. "It's the first step in getting to the bottom of this."

The controversy—now the focus of a criminal probe by the US attorney's office—centers on the failure of the stateapproved emissions tests to accurately measure tailpipe pollutants as mandated under the federal Clean Air Act, and on charges that the state adjusted the test without notifying federal officials. And PEER has been in the thick of it.

Earlier this year, PEER obtained internal DEP documents and e-mail correspondence on the auto emissions program, which it shared with The Boston Globe, under a Freedom of Information Act request. The group knew exactly what to ask for, thanks to a DEP employee who contacted PEER. The whistleblowing organization also helped DEP employees connect with the state Inspector General's office, which has issued two reports on flaws in the state emissions testing program and asked federal officials to investigate.

To Bennett, spilling the beans is part of an environmental bureaucrat's public duty, but one that requires an act of bravery. "Some people think these whistleblowers are just whiners who are not getting their way," Bennett says of dime-dropping public employees. "It takes an incredible amount of courage to come forward. Without those people

## "ZEALOUS IS THE KINDEST WORD...TO DESCRIBE HER."

on the inside, the citizens of the Commonwealth and the citizens of this country would be in severe trouble."

An attorney who has a PhD in ecology, the 42-year-old Bennett got herself into trouble as a government employee. In 1994, Bennett was working in the Boston office of the federal Environmental Protection Agency when she was targeted for transfer, she says, because of questions she was raising about permits for a proposed cargo port on a pristine island off the Maine coast. Bennett says then-EPA regional administrator John DeVillars was eager to push her off the project, which had strong backing from Maine Sen. George Mitchell. She filed a complaint with the Department of Labor, and EPA officials quickly backed down. Bennett says she continued to clash with DeVillars over handling of wetlands cases, however, and finally left EPA in 1999.

DeVillars, now working in the private sector, says he recalls few details of the employment controversy, but he has no trouble remembering Bennett herself. "Zealous," he says, is "the kindest word I've heard used to describe her." He calls PEER "a fringe group bordering on the irrelevant."

Eric Wingerter, national field director at PEER's Wash-

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ington office, has heard the charge before. "I think it's in the agencies' interests most of the time to label us extremist," he says.

For her part, Bennett seems more than willing to play the skunk at the bureaucrats' garden party. "I don't enjoy being labeled a troublemaker, but I have come to accept it," says Bennett. "It's the business we're in."

Bennett has pursued that business with relish. Last year, PEER issued a report slamming the MBTA's plans to extend commuter rail service to New Bedford and Fall River by routing trains through Hockomock Swamp in Easton, the largest freshwater wetland in the state. Calling the rail line an "ecological train wreck," PEER charged that the T failed to carry out tests that would show potential damage to several rare or endangered species of animal life, and that state environmental officials bowed to pressure from South Coast officials by signing off on the transit agency's environmental impact report.

Jon Carlisle, a spokesman for the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction, acknowledges that the project will have environmental impacts, but insists that the route is the best available option for extending rail service

to an area that needs it. As to PEER's tactics, Carlisle chooses his words carefully. "Bomb throwing can compel us as public officials to keep an eye on our activities," Carlisle acknowledges, but adds that it can also "diminish [the] credibility" of those leveling the charges.

But Inspector General Gregory Sullivan says the bombs PEER has been throwing at the emissions program have been on target, and have given him valuable ammunition for his agency's investigation. "PEER was very instrumental in helping us to get the cooperation of internal employees at DEP," says Sullivan. Without the help of these insiders, he says, his office wouldn't have been able to "even begin to breach the veil, because of the level of technical complication" in scrutinizing the program.

Bennett earns \$50,000 a year to staff PEER's one-woman New England office, almost \$20,000 less than she earned at EPA. "Not everyone turns into an Erin Brockovich," she says. "Not everyone becomes rich and famous and ends up on the cover of Newsweek and has a movie made about them."

Indeed, relying on foundations and individual donors to support its national staff of 17, PEER scrambles for every dollar. One of its fundraising schemes: selling boxer shorts



featuring the PEER logo on one leg, and UNDERCOVER ACTIVIST across the seat.

Do people really wear them? Bennett isn't sure. But that's the whole idea. "They can wear them to office and no one will know," she says. ■

## Scorned in elections, women pols gather to plot a comeback

BY MICHAEL JONAS

t one point, 2002 was shaping up as a banner year for women in Massachusetts politics. With Acting Gov. Jane Swift poised to run for the office she had inherited from fellow Republican Paul Cellucci, and state Treasurer Shannon O'Brien holding the pole posi- tion in the contest for the Democratic nomination, the buzz was about a possible governor's race that couldn't help but put a woman in the State House corner office.

But the year of the woman it wasn't. Battered by early missteps in office and swamped by a looming budget deficit, Swift bowed out of the race, while O'Brien seized the Democratic nomination but lost the general election to Republican newcomer Mitt Romney. Today, instead of celebrating breakthrough success in electing the state's first female governor, some are bracing for the fallout that could come from a double dose of disappointment.

"I predict, unless we do something about it, there could be a backlash against women running for governor," says Carol Hardy-Fanta, director of the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts-Boston. Hardy-Fanta worries that last year's experience could feed a can't-do perception of women candidates, the last thing needed, she says, in a state that lags its New England neighbors, and much of the country, in electing women to office.

Hoping to stave off such a turn—and to ignite interest in promoting more women candidates—the UMass center is hosting a "New England Women's Political Summit," October 26 and 27, at the John F. Kennedy Library.

With lineup of speakers that includes former Democratic vice presidential nominee Geraldine Ferraro, California Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez, and former Vermont governor Madeleine Kunin—as well as Lt. Gov. Kerry Healey and former acting governor Swift—organizers want activists from the six New England states to go home full of information and inspiration that will help women win political offices.

Especially attendees from Massachusetts. Despite a national reputation for free-thinking liberalism, in politics, at least, the Bay State remains a boys' state. While Maine has two women US senators and a woman state Senate president; New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Vermont have all had women governors; and Connecticut's current state Senate president and House Speaker are both women, Massachusetts has yet to elect a woman to any of those positions, and has not sent a woman to the US House for 20 years.

"Politics has been such a male sport in Massachusetts," says Brookline philanthropist Barbara Lee, whose family foundation funded a report two years ago, entitled Keys to the Governor's Office, that detailed the barriers women face when they run for governor in any state. Further tilting the playing field against women in Massachusetts, says Hardy-Fanta, is one-party domination by Democrats, which limits the avenues of political entry and movement.

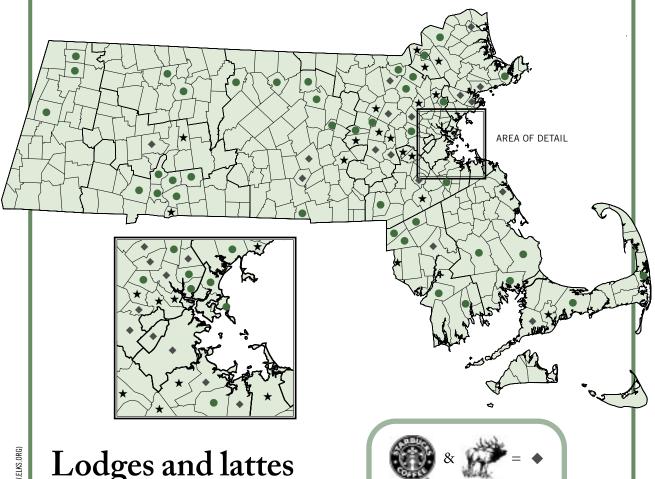
Apparently, exclusion begins at the bottom of the electoral ladder: More than one-third of the Commonwealth's cities and towns don't have a single woman on their city council or board of selectmen, according to research by the UMass women's center. Hardy-Fanta chalks that up, in part,

## "POLITICS HAS BEEN **SUCH A MALE SPORT."**

to what might be called a self-importance gap. "Women say, 'Oh, I think I should know about budgets before I run for city council," says Hardy-Fanta. "Men don't say that. They say, 'I want to run for something important."

If women set higher standards for themselves, so, says Lee, do voters, who apply conflicting standards to female candidates. "Women need to be able to have insider contacts, but people still want to see them as outsiders," she says. "Women need to show that they have compassion and care enough about families, but they also have to show that they're tough enough for the job." The antidote, says Lee, is more women running, winning, and holding office.

That will only happen, says Hardy-Fanta, if there are women politicians waiting in the wings. "When Ted Kennedy retires, who's ready?" asks Hardy-Fanta. As for the state's allmale congressional delegation, she says, "We should have someone lined up for every one of those seats."



## Lodges and lattes

In our last issue, sociologist Theda Skocpol lamented the decline of fraternal organizations in America ("Civic Dissociation," CW, Summer 2003), saying that such groups appeal to "people from a wide variety of social backgrounds." Those organizations are still around in Massachusetts, and among the strongest is the Elks, which has 75 lodges in the Bay State.

But in some communities the Internet seems to have taken over the function of bringing neighbors together. We looked at Meetup.com, the Web site that gained much publicity this summer when supporters of presidential candidate Howard Dean used it to pull together volunteers. Meetup isn't just for politics; it gathers poker players, dachshund owners, wine enthusiasts, and many others. Among urban areas, Boston has the nation's fourth-highest number of Meetup users. Where do they, well, meet up? Starbucks cafés, for the most part.

Our map indicates which cities and towns host Elks lodges, Starbucks locations, or both. The Elks are especially strong in older cities and towns outside Boston's immediate orbit. There are just two lodges in Boston but three in Berkshire County (which has less than onequarter the population) and six in Springfield's Hampden County. Though not shown on our map, the Eagles (with 24 "aeries") and the Moose (with 22 lodges) follow a similar geographic pattern.

Municipalities that favor lattes over lodges tend to be more affluent and better-educated communities near Boston (which has 40 Starbucks locations by itself). These include Belmont, Cambridge, Somerville, and Wellesley. Whether upscale cafés work as well as fraternal lodges in welcoming people from a "wide variety of social backgrounds" is a matter of opinion.

In some locales, fraternal orders and espresso orders coexist peacefully—most notably along Route 128. ■



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### STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT

#### BY ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

#### **BOSTON'S HEALTHY ECONOMY**

Boston is at the vanguard of America's health care economy, according to an August study by the Milken Institute (www.milkeninstitute.org). The study ranks 317 metropolitan areas according to both the size of its health care workforce (i.e., the percentage of all US health care workers that work in that region) and the health care industry's importance to the local economy (i.e., the percentage of all workers in the region that work in health care). The Boston area, which includes Worcester, edged out New York City to take first place, with Philadelphia a close third. The study further broke down health care jobs into 13 categories, and Boston scored best in the "nursing and personal care facilities" and in "offices and clinics of medical doctors." The region finished among the top 20 in every category except "offices of osteopathic physicians," where it was a strikingly weak 100th.

Other metro areas in the Bay State were much further down the list. Springfield ranked 70th, Barnstable-Yarmouth was 133rd, Pittsfield was 177th, and Fitchburg-Leominster was 226th. Outside of Boston, the most important health care center in New England is New Haven, Conn., which ranks 16th.

The report also ranked the 50 states according to the percentage of the workforce claimed by the health care industry. Massachusetts placed third by this measure, behind Pennsylvania and Rhode Island.

The prognosis for the health care economy is for continued growth. The Milken study notes that "health care consumption doubled from 7 percent of US GDP in 1970 to more than 14 percent in 2002," and it predicts that the figure will hit 17 percent by 2011.

#### FITCHBURG'S HAIRY ECONOMY

After discovering the Web site for the state's Department for Professional Licensure (www.state. ma.us/reg), we wondered how other professions are distributed across the Commonwealth. We started with hair care (a nicer version of the cutting and snipping associated with hospitals), and the department informed us that 7,181 salons are currently licensed to cut in the Bay State. That averages out to one hair salon per 884 people. In general, hair salons are most concentrated in the western part of the state and on Cape Cod. East Longmeadow ranks first, with one salon per

294 people. But the Fitchburg area is particularly thick with hair stylists, with Lunenberg (one salon for every 362 people) and Leominster (one for every 390) coming in second and third. Though not among the top 10, Gardner, with a salon for every 462 people, and Fitchburg itself, one per 521, also have more than their share of hair stylists. Deerfield, East Brookfield, Lenox, Orleans, Great Barrington, and Provincetown round out the list of salon havens.

The biggest community without a hair salon is Carlisle, which has 4,717 residents. Among cities, the most tonsorially challenged is Chelsea, which has a mere 27 hair salons for a population of 35,080.

### AN "F" IN STATISTICS FOR UNIVERSITY CHANCELLOR

According to a recent study by the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, Boston is the 13th most literate city in America, tied with Las Vegas, which no one would associate with bookishness. In America's Most Literate Cities (www.uww.edu/cities), university chancellor Jack Miller gave Boston high marks for newspaper readership and for the number of publications based here. But the Hub did poorly in the number of bookstores per capita, ranking 43rd—just behind Long Beach, Calif. Las Vegas, by the way, finished eighth, thanks to such establishments as the Gamblers Bookshop, Fantasy World, and Sin City Adult Superstore. (If only we hadn't dismantled the Combat Zone...) Overall, Minneapolis and Seattle were named the most literate cities; the nation's publishing capital, New York, was a miserable 47th.

But when it comes to Boston, anyway, Miller was a bit too literal in his tally, counting only bookstores within the city limits, even though many Bostonians get their reading material across the river in Cambridge. On a state-by-state basis, Massachusetts does better. Using the same sources as the University of Wisconsin study (the American Booksellers Association and the Internet Yellow Pages), we calculated that the Bay State—which ranked first in the percentage of college graduates in the 2000 Censusplaces ninth in bookstores per capita, with 553 sellers for a population of 6.3 million. Ranking just above the Bay State is Colorado (the second most educated state), with 377

bookstores for a population of 4.3 million.

By this measure, the three most literate states are all in New England: Vermont, Maine, and New Hampshire, which have 400 bookstores for a combined population of only 3.1 million.

#### **OLD CAPE COD**

Barnstable County is getting grayer and grayer. While the overall population of the county went up by 19.1 percent in the 1990s, the number of residents more than 65 years old rose by 24.6 percent and the number of residents between 20 and 35 dropped by 21.2 percent. You can find these numbers—and a lot more about the region's demographics, economy, and environment—in a report published in August by the Cape Cod Sustainability Indicators Council (available at www.sustaincapecod.org), which combines data from the US Census, state agencies, and local sources.

The report also notes that the number of residents who commute to jobs outside of Barnstable County went up by 38.7 percent during the 1990s. (The number of people crossing the Cape Cod Canal every day jumped from 10,446 to 14,493.) At the same time, the number of self-employed people on the Cape went up 28.7 percent, from 9,766 to 12,573.

Housing costs have become more of a problem. From 1998 to 2002, the median income for Cape Cod households went up 26 percent, from \$44,700 to \$56,500, but the income needed for a median-priced home shot up by 73 percent, from \$46,000 to \$79,375. (By last year, the median-priced home was up to \$296,375.) Renters haven't experienced as much sticker shock: The income needed for a two-bedroom apartment rose from \$42,000 to \$55,200.

#### **DOWNHILL FOR MASS TRANSIT**

The MBTA isn't the only mass transit agency that's losing riders. According to the American Public Transportation Association (www.apta.com), overall ridership on the nation's 14 subway systems fell by 2.2 percent in the first three months of this year, compared with the first quarter of 2002—which made Boston's 2.0 percent drop seem like par for the course. Only two systems reported slight increases in ridership (Miami and Philadelphia), while five systems reported declines of more than 10 percent (lead by a 15 percent falloff in Los Angeles and Atlanta).

Metropolitan Boston's 0.5 percent rise in commuter-rail ridership contrasted with an overall drop of 1.0 percent among the nation's 17 commuter-rail systems. And the T's 0.4 percent decline in bus ridership wasn't as bad as the 2.3 percent fall among the 32 major bus agencies counted by the APTA.

The only major component of the MBTA that compared unfavorably with national figures was light rail. Ridership dropped by 9.2 percent on Boston's Green Line and Mattapan trolley, while national light-rail ridership increased by 0.3 percent.

Suburban sprawl and the fear of terrorism are possible reasons for the recent drop in mass transit's popularity. According to the APTA, national ridership rose in every month from December 1996 through August 2001, right before the terrorist attacks of September 11, but it fell in 15 of the next 19 months.

#### **ALL POLITICS IS NATIONAL?**

In Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, Harvard professor Robert Putnam made the case that Americans have lost interest in civic life. But he tries to be more optimistic in his new book Better Together: Restoring the American Community (co-authored with Lewis M. Feldstein), listing several possible replacements for those late, lamented bowling leagues. One example is www.craigslist.org, the Web site that began in San Francisco and now has affiliates in dozens of other cities, including Boston. Craigslist is great for someone seeking a roommate or a ride to a Phish concert, but how successful is it at encouraging civic dialogue?

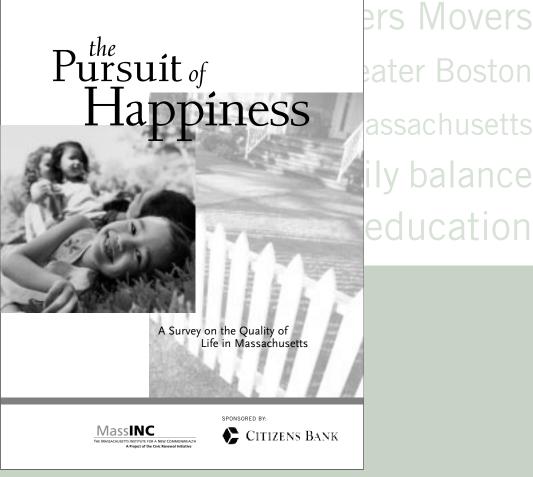
Of the 100 newest postings in the "Politics" section of Boston's craigslist on September 1, only 12 included the word "Massachusetts" or any proper name referring to a Bay State community, institution, or public figure. Five of those postings were about funding levels for public education, two touted the presidential campaign of Sen. John Kerry, one announced a debate among the candidates for mayor of Somerville, one announced a meeting of the Green Party, and the remaining three mentioned the state only as an aside in discussing national politics. ("I live in Massachusetts, I've seen the damage Democrats can do.") The other 88 postings—dominated by a half-dozen or so posters—were about national politics and the national media, with subjects lines like "Why Liberals Are Peckerheads" and "Why All Conservatives Are Stupid Fascists." On that date, at least, craigslist read a lot like the transcript of a national talk-radio show.

On the same day, there were nine postings in the "Groups" section from people wanting to start book, writing, or poetry clubs, so perhaps craigelist is doing better at promoting lifelong learning.

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# Givers and receivers

Much has been made of Massachusetts becoming a branchoffice economy and the threat that poses to local charities dependent on corporate largesse. But so far, at least, the Bay State is holding its own in big companies and big charities alike. Fifteen of this year's Forbes 500 companies are headquartered in the Bay State, putting us in a tie for ninth place among the 50 states (seventh on a per-capita basis). The state's largest public companies (based on sales, profits, assets, and market value) are in banking and insurance: FleetBoston Financial at 46th, State Street Corp. at 108th, and John Hancock Financial Services at 114th. Further down the list are high-tech and biotech companies including Genzyme Corp. at 451st, Biogen Corp. at 465th, and Thermo Electron Corp. at 494th

Less well known is the Chronicle of Philanthropy's annual Philanthropic 400 report, which lists the country's largest nonprofits by the private donations they receive. We rank fourth in the number of organizations making this list (second, per-capita), led by the Fidelity Investments Charitable Gift Fund, a sort of United Way for mutual-fund investors. (Members make tax-deductible donations to mutual funds and direct the earnings to charitable groups.) The Fidelity fund is the second largest philanthropy in the nation, behind the Salvation Army. About one-third of the Philanthropic 400 are educational institutions, and Massachusetts ranks first in this subcategory with 14 entries—led by Harvard at seventh and MIT at 50th.

In big givers, however, we are not so well represented. The Bay State ranks 10th in the number of residents (13th, per-capita) among the Forbes 400 wealthiest Americans, with Newton's Sumner Redstone (18th) and Boston's Abigail Johnson (19th) setting the pace. But our superrich don't seem to give their money away, at least not in big chunks. The Chronicle of Philanthropy publishes an annual list of what it estimates to be the 60 biggest such donations, and only three Massachusetts gifts (and givers) have made the roster in the past three years: Peter and Virginia Nicholas's \$25 million pledge to Duke University in 2002; John and Shelley Blais's \$16 million pledge to the University of Massachusetts-Worcester, the state's medical school, and Peter and Carolyn Lynch's promise of \$10 million to the Archdiocese of Boston, both in 2001. ■

- Five Forbes 500 companies are headquartered in the District of Columbia, and two are headquartered in Puerto Rico.
- \*\* Nineteen Philanthropic 400 organizations are headquartered in the District of Columbia.
- \*\*\* Three of the Forbes 400 currently live in the District of Columbia, and seven live abroad.

RANK / STATE		NUMBER OF Forbes 500 Companies (Per Capita Rank)*		PHILAN 400 No	NUMBER OF PHILANTHROPIC 400 NONPROFITS (PER CAPITA RANK)**		FORBES 400 RICHEST AMERICANS (PER CAPITA RANK)***	
1.	California	64	(14)	40	(17)	90	(3)	
2.	New York	62	(2)	67	(1)	48	(4)	
3.	Texas	38	(18)	20	(25)	37	(10)	
4.	Illinois	31	(5)	19	(10)	16	(18)	
5.	Ohio	26	(9)	13	(22)	7	(35)	
	Pennsylvania	26	(10)	15	(15)	15	(19)	
7.	New Jersey	21	(6)	3	(41)	6	(32)	
8.	Michigan	16	(23)	8	(31)	12	(20)	
9.	Connecticut	15	(1)	3	(28)	6	(11)	
	Georgia	15	(17)	18	(6)	8	(26)	
	Massachusetts	15	(7)	22	(2)	11	(13)	
12.	Minnesota	14	(3)	6	(16)	9	(9)	
	Virginia	14	(12)	23	(3)	4	(37)	
14.	North Carolina	13	(22)	8	(24)	5	(34)	
15.	Florida	10	(37)	13	(29)	22	(14)	
	Missouri	10	(19)	10	(7)	6	(24)	
	Washington	10	(21)	8	(13)	13	(6)	
	Wisconsin	10	(15)	3	(37)	7	(17)	
	Alabama	9	(11)	5	(23)	1	(39)	
	Tennessee	9	(24)	8	(12)	6	(25)	
	Colorado	8	(16)	10	(5)	12	(2)	
	Indiana	8	(28)	7	(21)	4	(33)	
23.	Kentucky	5	(29)	5	(14)	0	(NA)	
	Maryland	5	(32)	9	(8)	4	(31)	
25.	Arizona	4	(33)	6	(18)		(21)	
	Arkansas	4	(26)	2	(33)	6	(5)	
	Iowa	4	(27)	2	(36)	0	(NA)	
	Oklahoma	4	(30)	5	(11)	2	(36)	
29.	Idaho	3	(8)	0	(NA)	1	(30)	
	Louisiana	3	(36)		(42)	0	(NA)	
	Nebraska	3	(20)	2	(20)	3	(12)	
32.	Delaware	2	(4)	2	(4)	0	(NA)	
	Kansas	2	(34)	2	(34)		(22)	
	Maine	2	(25)	1	(32)	0	(NA)	
	Mississippi		(35)	2	(35)		(NA)	
	Nevada	2	(31)	0	(NA)	6	(1)	
	Rhode Island	2	(13)	1	(26)	2	(8)	
38.	Oregon	1	(39)	4	(19)		(27)	
	Utah	1	(38)	2	(27)	3	(15)	
40.	Alaska	0	(NA)		(NA)	0	(NA)	
	Hawaii		(NA)		(NA)		(28)	
	Montana		(NA)		(NA)		(23)	
	New Hampshir		(NA)		(30)	1	(29)	
	New Mexico		(NA)		(39)		(NA)	
	North Dakota		(NA)		(NA)		(NA)	
	South Carolina	0	(NA)	2	(40)	1	(38)	
	South Dakota	0	(NA)	0	(NA)	1	(16)	
	Vermont	0	(NA)	1	(9)	0	(NA)	
	West Virginia	0	(NA)	1	(38)	0	(NA)	
	Wyoming	0	(NA)	0	(NA)	1	(7)	



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### Unchartered waters

Barnstable looks to improve its schools by setting them free

#### BY MICHELLE BATES DEAKIN

t a time when school districts across the Commonwealth are feeling the triple squeeze of the federal No Child Left Behind law, MCAS tests, and shrinking budgets, officials in the Cape Cod town of Barnstable are taking an unusual tack. Rather than tightening their grip on teachers and principals, they're loosening it, encouraging each public

school to determine the best course to meeting stricter federal and state standards. Their solution? Charter schools.

There are already two charter schools in town, and last year the Barnstable School Committee voted unanimously to encourage the other 11 schools in its jurisdiction to follow the same model. This year, three of Barnstable's elementary schools are preparing to apply to the state Department of Education to become Horace Mann charter schools—a middle ground between traditional public schools and Commonwealth charter schools, which are accountable to no one but the state. Five more schools—including the town's middle school and high school—are exploring the possibility of conversion for the following year.

Although the words "charter school" raise the *Teache* hackles of many teachers and administrators, others view the concept as an opportunity for innovation and choice (see "Multiple Choice," *CW*, Winter 2003). By embracing, however tentatively, this notion of schoolhouse autonomy for an entire school district, Barnstable has

jumped to the forefront of education reform in Massachusetts—and, by some measures, the country.

Best known for its beaches and summer homes, Barnstable seems an unlikely candidate for radical change. But the school district is larger than Everett's or Revere's; with 7,000 students, it's about the size of Chicopee's. Its students are enrolled in nine elementary schools; the Barnstable Horace Mann Charter School, for grades five and six; a middle school, for grades seven and eight; and Barnstable High School. There's also the Sturgis Charter High School, created with the state's other charter school model, the Commonwealth charter. Barnstable's MCAS scores put it

smack in the middle of the state, ranking 117th out of 212 districts on the spring 2002 exam. Per pupil spending is \$5,651.

The Barnstable district is part suburban, part urban, and part rural, with seven villages spread out over 76 square miles. But those villages have striking disparities in income and educational levels. Osterville sits at one



Teachers' union president Jack McLeod: an unlikely charter cheerleader.

end of the spectrum, with old-money elegance, milliondollar seaside homes, and gated communities. Hyannis, with a more urban feel and a highly transient immigrant population, sits on the other. Barnstable is dense with retirees, but it is also attracting growing numbers of young families with children.

Even with this odd demographic mix, Barnstable wasn't seen as a particularly troubled school system when it unveiled plans for reform that many see as cutting-edge. Local officials say the town is in a hurry, but not in a panic.

"We are not in crisis mode," says superintendent Andre Ravenelle. "We're in development mode."

#### **CHARTER OF A DIFFERENT COLOR**

The push for Horace Mann charter schools in Barnstable began with an unlikely character: the president of the teachers' union. Seven years ago, Jack McLeod, head of the Barnstable Teachers Association, attended a Massachusetts Teachers Association conference about this new breed of charter school. Until then, Massachusetts offered only Commonwealth charters, which were anathema to the teachers' unions. Commonwealth charters operate independently of school districts, they can hire non-union teachers, and they don't abide by collective bargaining agreements. Horace Mann charters, on the other hand, were created with input from the MTA, and they require the approval of the school district, the school committee, and the local teachers' union before they can even file charter applications.

They have not exactly caught on, however. Since 1997, just seven Horace Mann charters have been issued, even though current legislation allows for as many as 48 statewide. This compares with 46 Commonwealth charter schools. But these union-approved alternatives to Commonwealth charter schools caught McLeod's attention. At the MTA conference, McLeod listened to how Horace Mann schools required innovation and featured alternative methods of instruction, school design, and management.

# Horace Mann charters have not caught on statewide.

"All I could think about was Tom McDonald," recalls McLeod, referring to the principal of what was then the town's fifth-grade school. "He's a very innovative, can-do kind of principal. He already had a Main Streets Learning Program in place that partnered with local businesses. He'd even marketed a board game, developed with students and staff, which was featured on the *Today* show. I thought it was a perfect match."

As it turns out, so did McDonald. With his distinctive entrepreneurial spirit, McDonald started searching for local supporters, including his own teachers, to help develop a model the town could run with. It turned out that Barnstable also had a charter school expert living in town. Managing director and co-founder of the Apple-Tree Institute for Education Innovation, a nonprofit education foundation, Jack McCarthy co-founded the Boston Renaissance Charter School in 1995. He created a charter school incubator in Washington, DC, that launched two college-prep charter schools in that city, and he was a founding director of the Massachusetts Charter School Association. Needless to say, McCarthy was eager to join the cause.

McDonald led a two-pronged campaign to win support for a conversion to a Horace Mann charter. Inside the school, he let the staff decide on a reform model. They chose the Modern Red Schoolhouse, a restructuring plan that focuses on traditional school subjects and high academic standards, as well as finance, technology, and community and professional involvement. The school's teachers developed a single curriculum for the entire school. That means that each of the 24 fifth-grade classrooms follow the same lesson plan, and all students take the same test at the end of each unit and complete the same "culminating activity" to show they've mastered the material. At the start of each unit, parents receive an



Principal Tom McDonald recruited townspeople, including his own teachers, to put together a charter model the town could run with.

overview of what their children will be learning, along with tips on home activities they can do to reinforce the lessons. Last year, the school added an online component that allows parents to log in and monitor their children's grades and progress.

Outside the school, McDonald, McLeod, and McCarthy focused on winning the support of the school committee, the teachers' union, and the parents. They enlisted facilitators to run community meetings to build a consensus, and they won the necessary support to apply for a charter. With union and school committee approval, Barnstable applied for its first Horace Mann charter in 1997 and two years later opened a districtwide school that served the entire fifth grade. In September, Barnstable Horace Mann also opened its doors to sixth-graders as well.

#### **UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT**

On the outside, the school resembles countless others across the state. It's on the inside that the school stands

apart, with significant differences in finances, curriculum, and attention to student achievement.

Each June, the charter school receives its annual funding in a lump sum from the town of Barnstable. While traditional public schools get their costs, such as payroll, covered by the district's central office (which also manages purchasing for all the schools), administrators at Barnstable Horace Mann invest their appropriation, typically depositing the funds into money market accounts and certificates of deposit, then dole it out as needed. In each of the last several years, the school's investments have yielded about \$50,000 in interest, and that money is reinvested in instruction, professional development, and teaching

To make the most of this fiscal authority, the school has a director of management and finance, a sort of CFO for the school. Susan Dahn, who has held that title for five years, believes the financial independence of the school has a direct impact on the quality of the education it provides. "The needs of the student population are increasing, but in most schools, there aren't the resources to meet those needs," she says. "But if you have control over budgets and teacher training, you're in a much better position to react."

That control means that Barnstable Horace Mann administrators can spend where they like and save where they can. In the past four years, Barnstable Horace Mann has banked \$1 million in anticipation of a larger fifthgrade class in 2003. Traditional public schools can't save like that, so a year of smaller classes can mean layoffs, followed by the need to rehire and retrain when enrollment swells.

That long-range planning appeals to teachers, who, like parents, are often disgruntled over the perennial shuffling in response to budgetary swings. Teachers have also relished the chance to help create the new school.

"We had close to 100 percent buy-in," says McLeod. The school has also set aside money for professional development that is in line with its new curriculum. At a weeklong paid "summer institute," Barnstable Horace Mann teachers earn graduate-level credits in courses tailormade to their school's educational approach.

All these tools help the administration keep the focus on accountability and performance. "The MCAS has caused all the schools to focus on standards, data, and annual progress, but it hasn't told you how to do it," says McCarthy. "But under the Horace Mann charter, we have to focus on performance. And it gives us control over the



We bring investment solutions from New England to the world planning and management." Under their charters, Horace Mann schools must file accountability plans and make annual reports to the public. And like Commonwealth charters, their charters come up for renewal every five years.

The success of the Barnstable Horace Mann—both financially and academically—has propelled the district to explore how to replicate it in its other schools. Fifthgraders' performances on the Stanford 9 tests have been

improving steadily, while MCAS scores across the district remain just above the state average. Meanwhile, the district's demographic trends pose an increasing challenge. Although the number of singleparent families is holding steady in Massachusetts, that group is on the rise in Barnstable. As the rate of poverty decreases statewide, it remains even in Barnstable. And as the number of parents who are college graduates—the leading predictor of student achievement —increases across the state, it's declining in Barnstable.

When Superintendent Ravenelle first eyed the Barnstable Horace Mann charter, he observed that one of the key elements was site-based management—something he believed the district's

other schools should have, too. At the same time, two distinct but parallel movements were underway in the district. The Barnstable Horace Mann's strategic planning group was meeting to determine how to expand its initiative and pass along its best practices. And the school district launched a strategic planning committee to set long-term objectives for the schools. The committees appeared to be heading in the same direction, so they formed a joint committee to see how the ideas could be integrated.

Two major outcomes emerged. The first was to explore creating more Horace Mann charters in the district. That eventually led to the school committee's resolution to encourage all its schools to become Horace Mann charters. "I absolutely do not feel that for any district to be a success it has to have all Horace Mann charters," says Ravenelle, but the superintendent wants all of his schools to exercise that option if they want. Toward that end, Barnstable created the Horace Mann Resource Center earlier this year to assist the district's traditional public schools in preparing charter applications. McCarthy now serves as a consultant to that center.

Ravenelle relishes the conversations that have ensued from the exploration of more charter conversions. "Stimulating educational plans are a rarity today, because you're spending all your time on budget conversations," says Ravenelle. "It's hard to bring a group of educators together and really talk about the delivery of education. So much of what we do is really a reaction to financial problems and other social ills. But this process has offered us a wonderful opportunity to dialogue about ways to

educate kids and get greater accountability and success."

The second outcome was more of a question, and it remains unanswered today: Would Barnstable become a charter district, or a district of charter schools? "The Legislature allows for the creation of individual charter schools, but it does not recognize a charter district," says Ravenelle.



Susan Dahn took on the duties of a CFO.

#### **CUTTING KNOTS**

Though Barnstable's emerging charter district is an anomaly in Massachusetts, it is not without precedent in other parts of the country. The interest in charter schools has snowballed into scattered districts in which most or all public schools are charters. They bear scant resemblance to

traditional school districts. Instead, these districts enter into contracts with individuals or groups to run the schools, and the roles of the school committee and super-

# "So much of what we do is a reaction to financial problems."

intendent shift from quotidian concerns—such as hiring custodians—to big-picture issues, such as the schools' missions, standards, and performance.

"Charter districts haven't quite risen to the level of a trend," says Todd Ziebarth, program director of the Education Commission of the States' National Center on Governing America's Schools, based in Denver, although he notes pockets of charter-district activity from coast to coast. Small and mid-sized school districts in California, Georgia, and Pennsylvania have converted all or most of their schools to charter or contract status. And cities such as Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia are creating strata of charter schools that operate almost like districts within districts.



Superintendent Ravenelle: working toward a charter district?

"Charters are appealing to districts for several reasons," says charter school proponent Paul T. Hill, director of the Center for Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington and author of the book Reinventing Public Education. Primarily, he notes, chartering puts schools on a performance contingency. "It says that the school exists only if it meets performance expectations,

and only if parents choose to go there." Money is a second reason, with charter schools having funds much more concentrated at the school level, as opposed to a districtwide office. In true charter districts, Hill envisions diminished central offices that consume less money and spend less time dictating to the individual schools. Third, Hill says that charter districts have an advantage in their largely autonomous schools' ability to hire the teachers they want, rather than taking on staff according to elaborate, districtwide "bidding and bumping" rules.

Hill acknowledges that, theoretically, traditionally organized schools could have performance contingencies, control over money, and freedom to hire. But this hasn't happened, and for good reason, he says. "There are so many barriers—collective bargaining, the job rights of people in the central office, categorical funding schemes," he says. "But chartering is a Gordian knot cutter. Instead of negotiating issues one by one, you create a whole new system."

Barnstable's plan can't cut through all of Hill's Gordian knots, nor is it intended to. Accountability and fiscal autonomy, yes. But not the end of collective bargaining, at least not yet. For that reason, Hill believes that Barnstable won't be able to go far enough to make an educational



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"The Horace Mann charter is a counterchange initiative," says Hill. "It's a way to say you have charters, but you don't. It's a false front, a Potemkin village," he says, referring to the elaborate cardboard facades built to mask shabby Russian villages before Catherine the Great rode through.

Hill would prefer to see the spread of Commonwealth charters. But even advocates like McCarthy have taken note of the hostility and resistance toward Commonwealth charter schools, which are routinely accused of siphoning money away from traditional schools. Glenn Koocher, executive director of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, puts it this way: "Charters, like cholesterol, have good and bad forms. Horace Mann programs are far superior."

That's certainly the view the MTA has taken. A staunch opponent of Commonwealth charters, the group is supportive of

Barnstable's efforts because the district is using a charter model the association helped create. "We're very open to their charter district proposal because we support the philosophy that underlies them," says MTA president Catherine A. Boudreau. "You can't complain about that which you helped found."

#### **BRAVE NEW SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Exactly what a charter district will look like if it's established throughout Barnstable is an open question. Indeed, since the existing Horace Mann school serves all the town's fifth- and sixth-graders, the district hasn't even addressed the potentially thorny question of choice. But as three of the town's nine elementary schools ready their applications for Horace Mann status this year, the town will have to face the issue head on. Individual elementary schools may adopt reform models that appeal to some parents but not to others. For example, one might follow a Montessori model, while a school across town might pursue a curriculum centered on technology. School choice has proven complex even in cities with extensive transportation services; how choice will play out in more bucolic Barnstable is a looming question.

The duties of the superintendent and school committee are also certain to change. In a charter district, the school committee would set the policy and vision for the district, approve school improvement plans, and carry out strategic planning. The superintendent would hire and fire district administrators, oversee district funding, and act as a liaison to the district's charter office. But at



Charter expert Jack McCarthy: "We have to focus on performance."

each school, the principal would act as CEO, hiring and firing his or her own staff (within the constraints of union contracts) and overseeing data collection and reporting. The principal would have to serve many masters, reporting to the state Department of Education, the individual school's board of trustees, and the town's schools superintendent.

James Peyser, chairman of the state Board of Education, hopes that Barnstable's experiment will stimulate more interest in Horace Mann charters. "Barnstable's initiative to encourage all of its schools to become Horace Mann charters is certainly a good one, and it's encouraging to see, since there has been very little movement on the Horace Mann front since the law was put into place."

# "Charters, like cholesterol, have good and bad forms."

At the same time, Peyser does not want to see Barnstable create charter schools in cookie-cutter fashion, merely mimicking the existing Horace Mann school in the district. "It's important that the Horace Mann model is not simply used as a vehicle for institutionalizing school-based management and gaining access to some additional funds that are available [through grants] for charter schools. They need to be used to drive reform and change in the classroom."

David Driscoll, the state's education commissioner, is optimistic about Barnstable's efforts but doubtful about

the precedent it's setting. "It's not for everyone," he says. "Quite frankly, it may not be for anyone. It's one thing to have a school within a district that you give some authority to, but it's quite another to declare that you're going to be a complete charter district." The impediments he cites range from issues of state legislation to local politics. The Legislature created school committees to govern local schools, he notes; if a school committee doesn't do that, it may require special legislation.

Then there are the teachers' unions. So far, with union president Jack McLeod one of the framers of the Horace Mann initiative, they haven't been a problem in Barnstable. It helps that the only existing Horace Mann school encompasses all of the town's fifth- and sixth-graders and their teachers. If elementary schools start to convert, however, problems may arise, especially if layoffs occur and teachers exercise their seniority rights to claim a post in another school. That development would erode a charter school's ability to hire teachers of its choice and build a faculty committed to and trained in its unique mission. Currently, the school committee and the teachers' association have negotiated some exceptions for the teachers at Barnstable Horace Mann. Theoretically, the teachers' association will have to renegotiate with each new charter school that opens on hours of operation, flex time, and training.

But these hurdles don't deter the Barnstable team. "A lot of what we're doing now is making lists of the difficulties and the concerns as we move forward," says superintendent Ravenelle. In addition to helping more schools apply for charters, the Horace Mann Resource Center is also helping to identify and address issues that arise in the transitions. These range from longstanding concerns, like collective bargaining, to future opportunities, like giving charter schools more latitude in bidding for competitive services in areas such as food service or supplies.

If recent history is any indicator, Barnstable will iron out these difficulties, as Horace Mann proponents have done to date, using professional facilitators to work with teachers, parents, and business leaders toward a consensus. "Everyone has to feel that they have a buy-in into the process," says McCarthy. "You can't force people to do this."

And if all schools don't convert, that's okay with Ravenelle, too. "I've seen ongoing student success in schools all over Massachusetts without the framework of the Commonwealth or the Horace Mann charter," says the Barnstable superintendent. "What's important is that every school should be constantly asking whether they can make the better the best."

Michelle Bates Deakin is a freelance writer based in Arlington.

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# JOD (dIS) qualifications

Now widely disseminated, criminal records make it hard for ex-offenders to go straight

BY DAVID S. BERNSTEIN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK MORELLI



# "My thing was shoplifting for drug money,"

Angela Flonory says. "I would just go into stores with a duffel bag, take some sheet sets, lingerie. One time I took a big comforter. Anything I knew I could sell quick, so I could buy crack."

Flonory, 35, squirms a little with embarrassment but speaks firmly about her past as she reclines on a comfortable leather sofa in the Brockton apartment she shares with her fiancé. Part of her addiction recovery, she says, is to own up to her past mistakes. "I made a lot of bad choices in my life, and I regret them," she says.

She may regret them, but she cannot hide them. Her CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) report shows all of the 20 charges she has faced in Massachusetts, right up through her last shoplifting spree at a CVS store in 2000. And every employer she could work for, as a nursing assistant, can get a copy of that record.

CORI reports provide details of an individual's history with law enforcement, and strict regulations limit access to those certified by the state as eligible to view them. But Flonory, like many ex-offenders, keeps running across her record everywhere she applies for work. All she wants is a chance to prove that she has changed. After bottoming out three years ago, she went through a one-year "tough love" substance-abuse program at Griffin House, in Dorchester, studied at Children's Services in Roxbury, and passed her Certified Nurse Assistant test in 2001. She goes to AA meetings, and she has a sponsor and her fiancé for support. She also does "commitments," speaking to women about what she has been through.

Last November, she landed a job in Brockton caring for elderly patients, but was let go as soon as her CORI report arrived. Ditto a job in Taunton. And again at a third company. "Then I started just letting them know upfront, this is what you're going to see on my CORI," Flonory says. Her candor hasn't helped.

Flonory is bright and articulate. She has done exactly what society asked her to do: clean up her act, stay off drugs, obey the law, learn some skills, get a job. Except that the last bit—getting a job—has been tough, in no small part due to the ready access prospective employers have to her criminal record.

The CORI system was created, three decades ago, to restrict that access to circumstances where public safety

executive director Barry LaCroix. By 2000, the board was answering 42,000 inquiries. Today, the figure is close to 100,000 a month. Every year some 1,000 new entities—including public offices, state-funded agencies, and private companies—receive the certification that allows them to receive CORI reports on prospective employees.

Presumably, making employers aware of their applicants' criminal histories ought to guard against crimes committed in the workplace. But crime on the job, especially violent crime, is a relatively minor societal danger. Workplace homicides are rare (roughly 700 a year nationally), and the vast majority result from robberies. According to the

# "CORI may be flawed, but it's the best way to find out if someone is dangerous."

clearly outweighed the criminal offender's privacy. But to Flonory, and thousands of ex-offenders like her, privacy is not the issue. She just wants a chance to work for a living.

These days, criminal-record checks have become a widespread employment practice, and even mandatory for jobs at schools, youth-services agencies, nursing homes, and financial institutions. It is largely left to employers to figure out what, if anything, to do with the information produced by these record checks. The result may be greater vigilance, in terms of keeping known criminals out of job placements that might be risky. But it also means more obstacles to the straight and narrow for ex-cons, who find themselves shut out of jobs in growing sectors of the economy. That's a tradeoff society may end up paying for in other ways.

#### A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE

Here's why we need CORI: Earlier this year, in Key West, Fla., Christopher Lamont Bennett gained custody of his 5-year-old son on the recommendation of the state's Department of Children and Families. Unfortunately, DCF failed to do a background check that would have revealed Bennett's alleged history of selling cocaine, stalking, and assault and battery. On April 15, according to police, Bennett beat little Zachary to death.

"Checking references and former employers is not the best way to discern a person's violent history," says one veteran Bay State prosecutor. "CORI may be flawed, but it's by far the best way to find out if someone is dangerous."

The Florida case notwithstanding, an increasing number of people, especially employers, are finding out a lot —indeed, more than they may know what to do with—about criminal records. In the early 1990s, the Criminal History Systems Board (CHSB) processed 10,000 non-law-enforcement-related CORI reports a month, according to

National Crime Victimization Survey, just 2.1 percent of rapes, 3.2 percent of attempted rapes, and 4.2 percent of stabbings take place at a commercial establishment other than a restaurant or bar, and only a fraction of those are committed by employees.

If keeping ex-cons out of the workplace has benefits in safety that seem marginal, however, the dangers of keeping former criminals out of gainful employment are manifest. Hiring ex-offenders "is a risk. That's real, and the employer needs to know," says Sheriff Frank Cousins of Essex County. "But it's important that when they leave prison the inmate has the opportunity to get a job, to have a little money and a place to live."

Making it possible for ex-offenders to get jobs and places to live was the whole idea behind limiting access to criminal records. Prior to 1972, when the CORI law was enacted, pretty much anybody could call up the state Department of Correction and the Parole Board and get criminal records on anyone in the state, says Dan LeClair, former research director for the Department of Correction and now professor of criminal justice at Boston University. "It was routine," he says.

That year, Massachusetts created the CHSB to collect the data in a single repository—and to safeguard its dissemination. Then-Gov. Francis Sargent and his successor, Michael Dukakis, believed in a process of community reintegration for ex-offenders. That included a range of programs, including furloughs, work release, and "graduated movement" from higher- to lower-security prisons as the offender prepared for release. One aspect of that strategy was the restriction of access to individual criminal records, in order to keep opportunities open to ex-offenders. The CHSB stood in the path of those seeking those records, placing the onus on the employer to demonstrate that the danger of

putting an ex-con to work outweighed the applicant's right to privacy—and the chance for a fresh start.

#### **RECORDS SWAP**

Then, in 1988, came the infamous Willie Horton case, which drove a stake through the heart of the reintegration model, turning public attitudes against the idea of giving second chances to ex-offenders, especially if such chances put the law-abiding public at risk. One casualty was the privacyprotecting purpose of CORI.

The CORI law says that reports should go only to criminal justice agencies, armed services agencies, and agencies and individuals "where it has been determined that the public interest...clearly outweighs the interest in security and cants. The CHSB also identifies 80 "general grant" categories, ranging from public libraries to fortune-teller licensing authorities, that qualify for CORI privileges. In 1996, the state Executive Office of Health and Human Services barred all human services providers that receive state funding from hiring candidates with certain criminal histories. Some crimes brought a lifetime ban, others a fiveor 10-year prohibition. (After a backlash that included a sitin led by Boston City Councilor Chuck Turner and court challenges, the harshest aspects of the EOHHS rules have been modified. Most importantly, the hiring entity must now provide the banned individual some means of appeal.)

The priest sex-abuse scandal further heightened the public's fear of anyone who comes near children. In another

> major change, which passed last November and went into effect in February, school districts must now run CORI checks on all employees and school volunteers; summer camps must do the same for their staff and volunteers.

> And lawmakers may not be done. Various bills and budget amendments proposed this year would require CORI checks on all trolley and subway drivers; all commercial motor bus drivers; all adult members of households providing foster care for adults; all applicants for state retirement benefits; all school bus monitors; and all school bus drivers. Others would give CORI access to all 24-hour businesses located on state highways; all private investigators; and all assisted-living and continuingcare facilities. Local housing authorities would be guaranteed CORI records on current and prospective tenants, and schools could check on all subcontractors and other nonemployees working on school

grounds. Still other bills seek to require national criminal background checks on all Department of Mental Retardation staff; provide direct CORI data access to the Board of Registration in Medicine; designate the Division of Banks as a law enforcement agency for purposes of access to CORI data; add criminal records from other states to CORI reports; and give school superintendents the right to screen students enrolling in their districts by CORI checks.



Barry LaCroix: His agency handles 100,000 requests for CORI reports each month.

privacy." Amendments to the law have since extended the right to obtain criminal-record information to those serving the elderly or disabled; child-support agencies; insurance companies; long-term care providers; the state racing commission; and school committees and superintendents. Credit providers can now check CORI records of applicants. Housing authorities and Section 8 housing providers can petition for CORI records to screen appliIn addition, more employers are becoming aware of the CORI check as a pre-employment option. Massachusetts General Hospital only started doing CORI checks in 1997, when the Department of Mental Health began pushing it, says Jeff Davis, vice president of human resources for the hospital. Increasingly, the private sector is catching on to CORI. "Small employers are doing it more and more now, because [the state has] educated employers to know to do it," says Donna Hobart, executive director of Spectra Management Services, an ex-offender services agency in Springfield, and past president of the Correctional Association of Massachusetts.

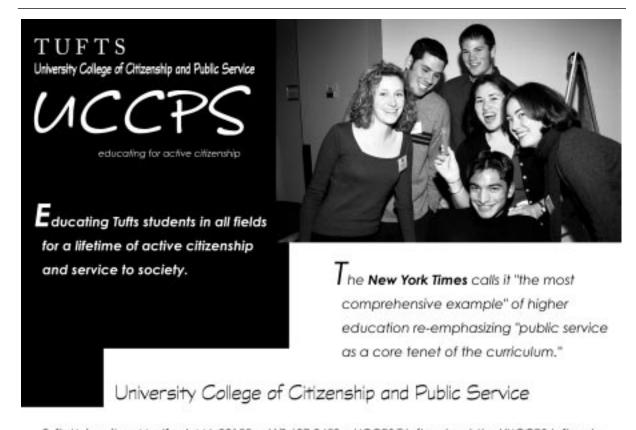
#### JUDGMENT CALLS

Except in some specific cases where ex-cons are banned from a particular occupation, a CORI record is not meant as a bar to employment—that's the ruling of various state court decisions. Rather, even when they are mandated by the state, CORI records are only meant to be taken into account in hiring decisions. But how they should be taken into account remains unclear. In one statute concerning misdemeanor offenses in foster-care placement, a lengthy paragraph orders the consideration of elapsed time; seriousness and circumstances; number and nature; offender's

age; references; reports from parole or probation officers; police reports; and the probable effect of the misdemeanor on the applicant's ability to fulfill required duties. That's a lot of factors for managers to weigh in a hiring decision. "I think the employers try to be fair about it, but they don't have a lot of time," Hobart says.

In many cases, they have trouble enough just understanding the information they're given. A CORI report is a dry, chronologically arranged printout filled with code and jargon. Readers need a page-long list of 45 abbreviations just to decipher the disposition codes—that is, to distinguish DISM (dismissed) from SS (suspended sentence) from CWOF (continued without a finding). And that still assumes that the reader understands the terms themselves, such as *nol. pros.*, or "bound over." And that's just the disposition. The reader also must understand the nature of the charges, distinguish felonies from misdemeanors, and spot other subtleties such as multiple charges resulting from a single offense.

"They were meant to be read by people experienced in the criminal justice system," says LaCroix, of the Criminal History Systems Board. "We fully recognize that as more agencies are accessing our data, we have a greater obligation in training people on how to use the CORI record." A Web-



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based tutorial is in the works.

One solution could be to simplify the report, ranking offenses by disposition or nature of the offense rather than chronology. But LaCroix is loath to tamper with the formal record. "Then we've become an interpreting agency, rather than a reporting agency," he says.

But there are already value judgments inherent in the information provided to various petitioners. Simple public-access CORI reports include only convictions, while CORI reports given to entities with "general grant" status receive information on all offenses that went to arraignment, regardless of their outcomes, usually for the last 10 years. Certain types of employers, specified by state law, get whole lifetime records. Some agencies, such as the Department of Social Services and the Department of Youth Services, even get sealed records and juvenile records.

Finally, it is left to the recipient to decipher, interpret, and apply the CORI record. In the case of Angela Flonory, with her record of shoplifting, the justification for a CORI report might go as follows: At a health care facility, she would have unsupervised access to the old and infirm, whose possessions would be easy pickings. That line of argument might make virtually any jobs at a health care facility off-limits to a former criminal—and they are.

"In a hospital, it would be hard to draw a line," says Davis, of Massachusetts General Hospital. "Almost any employee would have contact with the elderly or children."



JobNet's Rosemary Alexander: Employers are "winging it" in evaluating CORI reports.

the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, more than half the callers to MLRI's CORI hotline are women — most with children, many living in shelters and facing the termination of their benefits or finding that their CORI report prevents them from getting a job or Section 8 housing.

Sheriff Cousins says he has had success speaking to local chambers of commerce, convincing them to participate in his work-release programs, then to employ ex-cons. "Most of the businesspeople are eager to participate" once he speaks with them one-on-one, Cousins says. But larger business groups have been reluctant to set standards for

# No company wants to take the risk that it will be sued if an employee does some harm.

It comes down to one word, which you hear over and over: liability. No company wants to take the risk that it will be sued if an employee does some great harm and a court decides that the employer should have known the person was a risk because of his criminal record.

#### NO EX-CONS NEED APPLY

Not all people with criminal records are what you would think of as dangerous people. According to Fran Fajama, of

CORI use. Turner and other activists took their case to the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce two years ago, asking the group to survey its member companies about current CORI policies, but were turned down. (A Chamber spokesperson said that CORI "is not an issue we deal with or get involved in.")

The lack of employment standards leaves individuals with even minor criminal records in a murky world, where they have no idea how their past affects their hopes for employment. "Different companies do different things," says Rosemary Alexander, executive director of the JobNet One Stop Career Center, in Boston. "I think they're winging it."

The fatalism that comes from knowing that criminal records are common knowledge among prospective employers may prevent ex-offenders from applying for jobs that they actually could get. At Massachusetts General Hospital, Davis says that most CORI records do not disqualify a job applicant from consideration. Still, he's seeing fewer applicants with criminal records, even though the number of ex-cons in the population is up. Davis estimates that only 4 percent of his CORI checks show a criminal

in with relatives—out of their developments. Two of the largest public housing developments in Springfield, for instance, are purportedly very restrictive, banning almost anyone with charges on their record regardless of how long ago, whether time was served, and whether the individual has kept his nose clean since. Such screening presumably creates a safer environment for the residents but leaves many exoffenders without roofs over their heads.

Increasingly, former offenders are consigned to the few occupations and the few neighborhoods that will take them. As a result, they're congregating in a small number of innercity neighborhoods, hanging out with other ex-cons, barely

# "You're telling people that, 'No matter what you do, you can't access the American Dream."

history, down from roughly 10 percent a few years ago. "I think word gets out that this is an institution that checks, so they don't apply," Davis says.

And not only at Mass. General. CORI threatens to block off entire industries from ex-cons. Health care. Hotels. Security. Transportation. Banks. Insurance. "I've got people who are paramedics, who can never do that work again that they're trained for," says Hobart. "It's a tremendous waste of a person."

The CORI cloud also discourages offenders from going through job training programs. "You're going to train people for employment and when [companies] ask if they have a record they won't hire them," says playwright Haywood Fennel, a longtime Boston activist for minority and veterans' rights. "Training is a waste of money. And what kind of job can they have if they're not trained?"

"If CORI becomes a blanket that covers everyone, then you're telling people that 'No matter what you do, you cannot access the American Dream,'" says Benjamin Thompson, executive director of Boston STRIVE, a jobtraining company that prepares ex-convicts and others for employment. Thompson served 10 months in prison for armed robbery in the early 1970s, but ran a Boston prison facility in the early '80s.

Employers are not the only ones using criminal histories to make decisions that affect the ex-con's life. A federal law blocks financial assistance to college students with drug convictions, denying them the opportunity to pursue the education that could keep them on the straight and narrow. "It is an example of our excessively punitive attitude about drugs," says US Rep. Barney Frank, who has been trying to change the law.

Public housing authorities also check CORIs, to keep potential troublemakers—including those trying to move making their way. And that costs the taxpayer: A survey conducted by the Northeastern University School of Law's Culture and Difference Program found that 38 percent of exoffenders receive state benefits to supplement their income.

Even worse, they may have no way to resist the lure of the street. "Now they're ready to go back to their criminal ways," Fennel says.

"A society that does not look at life after incarceration is a society that is creating more societal problems for itself in the future," says Turner, the Boston city councilor.

#### **MISTAKEN IDENTITIES**

Jaason Smith, a lanky 22-year-old, reveals a tattoo on his long right arm as he warmly shakes hands. Smith was born and raised in Roxbury's Mission Hill, where two things saved him from going down the path of trouble chosen by so many of his peers: his talent on the basketball court and the encouragement of folks at the Tobin Community Center. Combined, the two got him into George Washington University, where he was a star center and graduated with a degree in sociology and criminal justice.

Drafted and offered the chance to play ball in Europe, Smith instead returned to Mission Hill, where his old mentors at the Tobin Center gave him a temporary job. But two weeks later, Smith was fired, his supervisor escorting him out of the building. Smith's CORI report had arrived, with a list of offenses as long as Smith's tattooed arm. As a state-funded agency catering to children, Tobin could not, by law, employ someone with his record of violent and drug-related crimes.

Smith was baffled. He had never once been arrested. Not only that but all the crimes on the CORI report had taken place when Smith was away at GWU—some on days he was playing hoops.

Smith had been tripped up by the "alias" problem. His record is linked in the records database with another person of the same or similar name. These identity mix-ups happen often enough that the CHSB warns of them in the Frequently Asked Questions page of its Web site.

In Smith's case, another young man from his neighborhood, knowing that Smith was out of state, had been giving the college student's name when stopped by police. Although the offenses (entered into the system later, at arraignment) are logged correctly on the other man's record, they are also included in Smith's report. For Smith, that has meant a world of trouble in his chosen field.

"I definitely want to work with kids," Smith says. "I just want to help kids the way people helped me. But I can't, because of all this stuff on my CORI I didn't do." To clear his record Smith will have to go to court to get the CHSB to separate the two records. A woman with the same problem has been working for two years to clear her record, according to the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute.

The CORI data have gotten more accurate in recent years, particularly in response to the demands of the new sex offender registry, also a CHSB responsibility. As an increasing number of both felonies and drug-related misdemeanors have fingerprints attached, future reports figure to be still more reliable.

But officially, CHSB washes its hands of responsibility for cases of mistaken identity, placing the burden on those that receive the information to make sure the match is accurate. "It is up to the requesting organization to determine whether the criminal record received is in fact the record of the person being screened," declares CHSB's Web site.

In addition, any efforts to improve accuracy may be swamped by the increase in requests, which LaCroix estimates could jump 50 percent just from the changes to the law made last year. In about 70 percent of requests, name and birth date are enough to yield a single, precise match. The remaining 30 percent require a CHSB employee to manually sift through a list of "close matches" to determine which, if any, are the intended record.

State Sen. Dianne Wilkerson is pushing a bill aimed at ensuring accuracy in CORI reports. The Roxbury Democrat's solution is to require more complete matching of personal data—including Social Security number and mother's maiden name, which is currently not required and is often unavailable. The extra level of diligence would guard against mix-ups but further overburden the CHSB's manual checkers. Wilkerson's bill also calls for the CHSB to send the CORI first to the subject of the report, giving that person 10 days to raise objections before the report goes to the requesting agency. This, too, may be less practical than it first appears; an individual could put a hiring or housing-authority decision in a lengthy limbo just by claiming a corrupted CORI. A provision like this would

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have helped Jaason Smith, since the Tobin Center would have kept him employed, perhaps indefinitely, while Smith battled the courts to clear his record. But what if he had really been a violent drug dealer?

#### LIVING WITH CORI

According to a new report from the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics, as of 2001 more than 5.6 million people— one out of every 37 adults—had served time in state or federal prison, an increase of 2.4 million living former prisoners since 1974. Among black men, 16.6 percent had spent some time behind bars; among Hispanic males, 7.7 percent. And if incarceration rates remain unchanged, BJS projects that 32 percent of black males born in 2001 and 17 percent of Hispanic men will be sent to prison sometime in their lifetimes. That's a lot of criminal records to complicate job applications for years to come.

And such complications are not limited to serious criminal histories, as Victor and Julia (who did not want their last names used)—a white, home-owning, professional couple in Watertown—can testify. A year ago, they enrolled their 4-year-old daughter, Grace, in a cooperative preschool that requires parents to help teach once a month. When the new law mandating CORI checks of volunteers went into

effect in February, the school's director was notified about Victor's old drug charges—minor ones, all of them dismissed—from his college days. If Victor had been barred from volunteering because of his CORI, Grace would have been out of preschool. Victor got the chance to explain the situation to the executive director's satisfaction, but the episode showed how CORI can make even a slightly checkered past a scarlet letter.

"When I talk to young people in schools," says Sheriff Cousins, "I tell them if you get a restraining order, or a drunk driving charge, guess what? It's going to haunt you for a long, long time."

Some activists and legislative reformers would like to change that. One bill introduced in the Legislature this year would limit data in CORI reports given to non-law-enforcement entities to convictions and pending cases only. It would also place time limits on the records, and require CORI recipients to share the report with the person in question.

Others hope to convince businesses that ex-offenders can be a good investment, for them and society. "We need to tell CEOs the value—not just the social value but the good business value" of hiring ex-cons, says Thompson of Boston STRIVE, who suggests that former offenders are often ex-

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emplary employees because they know they cannot afford to screw up again. So far, the tactic has not produced results. A tax credit for employers who hire ex-offenders has also been proposed.

In the meantime, agencies like Thompson's try to help ex-offenders cope with the record that follows them around. STRIVE has run a class for 11 ex-offenders, and nine of them landed jobs within two months. The Massachusetts Law Reform Institute helps people get their old records sealed or incorrect criminal histories fixed. At JobNet, Rosemary Alexander started CORI workshops when she saw more and more people getting turned down because of their records.

"It was happening so frequently, we felt we had to do something about it," says Alexander. "We have homeless vets, blue-collar laborers, white-collar workers—all come to the sessions."

Agencies like Alexander's can also serve as a sort of thirdparty reference, providing assurances to employers that an offender is a good bet. JobNet is even planning to bond the individual for the first six months of employment—guaranteeing to compensate the employer if the worker screws up—to relieve the employer of risk.

LeClair says that's a tempting idea, but one that carries with it the danger of abuse. A similar effort several years ago in this state to bond prisoners on work release allowed employers to use these workers risk-free—and then let them go as soon as the bonding period expired. "Just as people exploit illegal immigrants, they now exploit exoffenders," he says.

Indeed, advocates hear stories about ex-cons volunteering for weeks, and even months, to prove themselves to prospective employers. Fennel tells of other ex-cons who are trapped in lousy jobs, knowing—as do their employers—that their records will prevent them from getting work elsewhere.

One thing that's not likely to happen is putting the CORI genie back in the bottle. But with ever-growing numbers of ex-offenders back on the street and looking for work— 3,300 inmates were released from state custody in 2001, and thousands more from county facilities—other problems will arise if a criminal record becomes an absolute ban from every workplace. If nothing else, the state could help employers make informed and sensible use of the CORI information the law allows them to get—and take steps to prevent the kind of misuse that banishes ex-offenders from lawful jobs.

"I think the goal should not be to hide the fact that they've been in jail," says Turner. "It should be to change attitudes." ■

David S. Bernstein recently joined the Boston Phoenix as a staff writer.



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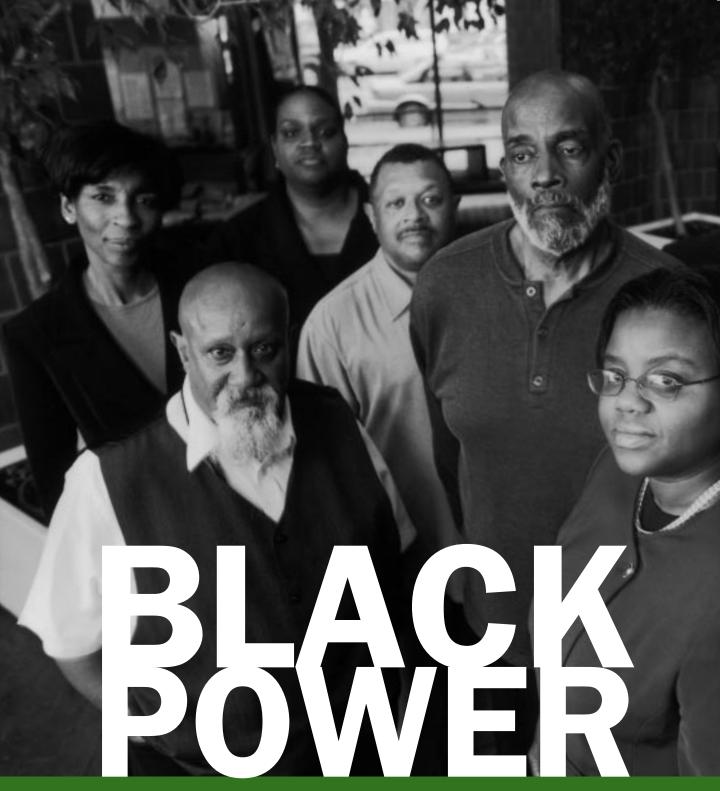
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Why are African-Americans still struggling to get ahead in Boston politics?

BY MICHAEL JONAS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK OSTOW



Black elected officials from Boston's past and present. Clockwise from upper left: Charlotte Richie, Andrea Cabral, Bruce Bolling, Mel King, Byron Rushing, Jean McGuire, Charles Yancey, Marie St. Fleur, and Chuck Turner.

he ballroom on the top floor of the Parker House hotel in downtown Boston was overflowing, and it seemed that the world of Boston politics was being turned on its head. When the results of the preliminary election for mayor rolled in on a crisp October night in 1983, Mel King, a former state representative and veteran community activist, became the first black candidate in Boston history to win one of the two spots on the final election ballot for mayor. With supporters jamming the hotel lobby and spilling out onto the sidewalks, King led his exuberant followers down from the ballroom and onto Tremont Street.

"There were so many people outside who couldn't get in [the ballroom] that it didn't make sense for some of us to be inside," King says of the scene that made good on the "bring the city together" theme of his campaign. King led his followers in an impromptu march to City Hall, where his "rainbow coalition" celebrated on a public plaza where only seven years earlier a very different image of Boston had been seared into the national memory, as a black architect in a business suit was attacked by a white tough wielding an American flag as a weapon. "I think people felt that they had changed Boston," King says of the campaign of 20 years ago. King's victory that night was "a glorious moment," says Janis Pryor, a veteran black political operative and consultant. "I felt it was a real turning point for Boston."

Today, Boston is preparing itself for another turn in the national spotlight, one that local leaders desperately hope will finally retire the city's reputation as a place of hostility toward blacks and other minorities. When the Democratic National Convention comes to town next summer, officials hope, the delegates and the media will find a Boston very different from the city torn apart by busing in the 1970s. It will be a Boston where race relations are less strained, where minorities have made inroads in business and professional circles, and where the population of blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and other minorities now accounts for fully half of the city's residents. But two decades after the King breakthrough, what stands out to many veteran activists is how little political progress African-Americans have made since.

"I would say the state of black politics is dismal," says Hubie Jones, former dean of the Boston University School of Social Work. "We have no black congressman, we have no black at-large city councilor. We have no black mayor, [and] we're

not in shouting distance of getting one in the near future."

Ted Landsmark, who gained unwanted fame as the man on the receiving end of the flagpole attack on City Hall Plaza, echoes Jones's disappointment. "Black political empowerment has regressed substantially since Mel King ran for mayor 20 years ago," says Landsmark, who served in City Hall under mayors Ray Flynn and Tom Menino.

"I think there was a pretty broad assumption that this would be kind of the beginning of the flourishing of blacks making inroads in the electoral arena," says Ken Wade, who worked on the King campaign and now directs a nonprofit housing agency. But that's not the way it worked out. Rather, what many saw as the dawn of a new day remains the high point of black advancement in electoral politics.

The complaints of a political deck stacked against blacks have remained largely unchanged over the years. The numbers just aren't there, say advocates: Blacks in Boston constitute only one-quarter of the city's population, not enough to wield the kind of electoral clout held by African-Americans in other large cities. Meanwhile, they say, white voters still shun black candidates, much as they did in 1983 when King barely expanded his share of the vote from the preliminary election to the final, losing to Ray Flynn by a margin of 2-to-1. And some say ethnic and racial voting habits remain too strong here for nonwhite candidates to succeed as they have in Denver or Seattle, where black mayors have been elected despite black populations far smaller than Boston's. So smoldering resentment against perceived disenfranchisement has been channeled into legalistic challenges. For example, the recent redistricting of state representative seats is being contested in federal court by several groups who charge that the new lines dilute minority

voting strength in Boston and elsewhere. And the redrawing of Boston's city council districts last year drew fire from minority leaders who pushed for the creation of a district with greater Hispanic voting strength.

But if there remain material obstacles to black political advancement, the

woes of black politicos may be, at least in part, of their own making. Many black officials in lower-tier state and city offices have remained fixed in place, neither climbing to higher posts nor moving out of the way to make room for a new generation of leaders. On the municipal level, few black candidates of stature have even bothered to test the citywide political waters—and when such candidates have come forward, they have not found the unity that bolstered King's run for mayor. And for all the complaints about disadvantageous redistricting, there have also been huge opportunities created by newly drawn lines that have come and gone without credible black candidates taking advantage. As a result, 20 years after Mel King's historic run for mayor, the

most closely watched race involving African-American candidates is a showdown for the modest prize of a city council seat in a predominantly black district, a contest pitting a 20-year incumbent defending the only office he has ever held against a young challenger who says a change of leadership is long overdue.

"The state of black politics in Boston is a direct reflection of the community's voice in aggregate," says former city councilor Bruce Bolling. "You can't look outside of the community and point the finger. The community having a strong voice is 99 percent dependent on what the community does or does not do. It's not external at this point; it's wholly internal."

#### LOSING GROUND

In 1983, the stage seemed to be set for a long—even notso-long—march of Boston's black community into the political spotlight. Not only had King, even in defeat, set a new standard for black electoral achievement, but Boston had partly replaced the citywide election of municipal officials—which worked against minorities who were outnumbered in the population as a whole—with district representation, where the concentration (not to say, segregation) of blacks in some neighborhoods gave them presumptive claim to certain seats.

That year, the city retired its nine-member city council and five-member school committee, reconstituting each with 13 members, four elected at large and one from each of nine geographic districts. Once the lines were drawn, blacks were virtually guaranteed two seats on each body, from districts based in Roxbury and Dorchester/Mattapan. From that secure base, it was assumed that the demographic

# **FEW CANDIDATES OF STATURE** HAVE TESTED THE WATERS.

changes that, over time, have made whites a minority of city residents (the figure was 49.5 percent in the 2000 Census but has almost certainly dropped since then) would translate into increased political strength for people of color in general, and African-Americans, as the city's largest and largely native-born minority group, in particular.

But onward-and-upward into the political mainstream did not turn out to be the trajectory of the black community in the 1980s. On the grassroots level, the new push was for withdrawal from the Boston power structure, not assimilation into it. Decrying what they said was unfair control of city resources, black activists waged unsuccessful campaigns for two successive city ballot referenda calling for



Mayoral candidate Mel King celebrates on primary night in 1983. "I think people felt they had changed Boston," he says now.

predominantly black neighborhoods to secede from Boston. "Quit going hat in hand, and let's go make a hat," is how Curtis Davis, one of the leaders of the drive to create an independent municipality known as Mandela, describes it. The nonbinding question appeared on the ballot in 10 state legislative districts in 1986 and was defeated 3-to-1. In 1988, it was placed on the ballot in six districts and was rejected 2-to-1, with opponents not even waging a campaign to defeat it. But those who worked hard to defeat the proposal at the polls in 1986—among them Mayor Flynn and the black community leaders, including clergy, he recruited to the anti-Mandela cause—saw it as a distraction.

"We didn't need to organize and struggle to be marginalized," says the Rev. Charles Stith, who later served as US ambassador to Tanzania in the Clinton administration. Stith says the agenda for black Boston ought to have been "how do we more fully become part of the broader economy, the broader political mix, the broader cultural mix of the city?"

And Boston blacks lost an important political foothold when the elected school committee was abolished in 1991. In pushing for a school committee appointed by the mayor, Flynn argued that the move would make the mayor accountable for improving the schools—an argument that ap-

pealed to black religious leaders who provided key support for the ballot question, which won narrow approval citywide. The new arrangement set the stage for Flynn's successor, Thomas Menino, and his handpicked superintendent, Thomas Payzant, to conduct the most concerted effort to reform Boston's schools since the turmoil of busing (see "Marathon Man," *CW* Education Reform Extra, 2002). But black political leaders fought the proposal vociferously, arguing that it ceded the black community's role in the governance of a school system whose population consisted overwhelmingly of minority children.

To this day, King cites the elimination of the elected school committee as his biggest disappointment in the 20 years since his run for mayor. "They just went and essentially sold out the power of the community," says King of the black ministers who sided with Flynn, including Stith.

On the level of pure politics, wiping out these 13 elective offices—four were held by blacks at the time—also cut off one route into public life for aspiring minority politicos. "When you cut off the school committee, you cut off the training ground," says Jean McGuire, who served as an atlarge school committee member from 1981 to the end. "That's the farm team."

State Sen. Dianne Wilkerson: the new face of 1992, hampered by tax troubles in '98.

Even district representation did not turn out to be the political catalyst it was expected to be. Although the new system placed black representatives in two new district seats on the city council, it cost the black community its one citywide representative, when incumbent Bruce Bolling chose to claim the new Roxbury-based district seat rather than compete for the diminished number of atlarge spots. Since then, not a single black or other minority candidate has been elected to one of the four at-large seats. (Felix Arroyo, who finished fifth in 2001 and became the first Latino at-large city councilor when Francis "Mickey" Roache resigned his seat earlier this year to become Suffolk County Register of Deeds, has a chance to break the white monopoly on at-large election this fall, when he tries to win the seat outright from a position of incumbency.) Only on the school committee did blacks win both district and at-large seats, posts that disappeared with the elective body.

Bolling considers his decision to play it safe in 1983 the "biggest mistake" of his political career. The excitement of King's mayoral campaign could have been "the basis on which broad-based support for my candidacy citywide could be propelled," says



#### SHOWDOWN AHEAD FOR NEW SHERIFF

Appointed Suffolk County sheriff last November, Andrea Cabral now faces a challenge every bit as daunting as managing a corrections system rife with scandal and mismanagement: winning election to her job next fall.

Previously chief of district-court prosecution under former Suffolk County district attorney Ralph Martin, Cabral is the first black woman to serve as sheriff in Massachusetts. Her background as a prosecutor and administrator gave Cabral strong credentials for the job. But in the wards and precincts of Suffolk County, the sheen of her résumé may count for less than the quality of her political connections.

"I think she's doing a hell of a job," says Martin, her former boss. "The question is, can she translate the success she's having as sheriff into political momentum?"

The jury is out. When named to the job by acting governor Jane Swift, Cabral agreed to run for office under the GOP banner. It was a scenario that Martin followed to success nearly a decade ago. Appointed in 1992 to fill the vacant district attorney's position by then-Gov. William Weld, the state's first black DA pinned on a Republican badge and beat back a Democratic challenger two years later, boosted by significant support from key Democrats, including Mayor Thomas Menino.

But earlier this year, Cabral announced she was switching her allegiance to the Democrats—who, not coincidentally, predominate in Suffolk County. It was a move that may not have been as smart as it looked. As a Republican, Cabral would have faced any Democratic opponent in next year's presidential election in November, when minority and liberal turnout tends to be highest. Now, she faces the prospect of a Democratic challenger in the September primary, a predictably lowturnout affair that favors the candidate best able to pull their supporters to the polls.

"It would not have been my recommendation, but I don't think it's fatal," Martin says of Cabral's party swap.

Already eyeing the race is Boston City Councilor Stephen Murphy, whose well-oiled political organization is perfectly suited for a primary challenge. Boston police officer Gerard McHale has also said that he plans to run in the Democratic primary. One hope now for Cabral might be a crowded field of Democratic hopefuls who split the votes.

For her part, Cabral says she understands that the race will be "very much a ground game" and claims she'll be ready for it. Bolling, who now directs an organization that assists minority- and women-owned construction contractors. At-large councilors have no more formal power than those holding district seats—which is to say, very little, under Boston's strong-mayor form of government. But a few terms in a citywide seat—and a few campaigns through which to build a citywide political and organizational base—would have given Bolling a better launching pad for other political openings, including the one that opened up in City Hall in 1993.

#### MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

That summer, Flynn resigned to become US ambassador to the Vatican, setting off the first open race for mayor since he and King squared off 10 years earlier. City Council President Tom Menino, who represented a district based in Hyde Park, took the reins as acting mayor and quickly consolidated support for his bid for the office that fall. But that didn't stop a big field of contenders from throwing their hats in the ring—including Bolling, the son of a prominent Roxbury political family and a moderate voice in the city's black community.

Two years before, in 1991, Bolling had finally made the citywide run for council he regrets not having done in 1983. He placed fifth in the race for four seats but then assumed an at-large seat the following September upon the death of longtime councilor Christopher Iannella.

When Bolling sought to parlay his newly acquired citywide standing into a mayoral run the following summer, his

candidacy failed to ignite the passions of the city's black community. Indeed, several prominent ministers urged him to drop out of the race. "We could not afford another situation where hopes got raised and then dashed," says one of those ministers, the Rev. Ray Hammond. "I think the feeling was that that would set us back. We'd been through that to some extent with Mel's candidacy. People got very excited and then very let down."

Still, so acute was that sense of opportunity that some black leaders urged state Sen. Dianne Wilkerson to consider running, though she had been in office for less than a year. Wilkerson decided not to run, and not to back Bolling either. Instead, she endorsed Dorchester state Rep. James Brett, who advanced to the mayoral final election before losing decisively to Menino.

"I didn't believe then and I don't believe now that he was the kind of candidate that was going to create that kind of excitement and dynamism that existed in '83," Wilkerson says of Bolling, who finished fifth in the preliminary election for mayor.

Wilkerson herself might well have been that kind of candidate for the next big opportunity to come down the political pike. In 1998, US Rep. Joseph Kennedy gave up his seat in the 8th Congressional District, which he had represented since 1986. For more than 60 years the storied seat—held before Kennedy by House Speaker Tip O'Neill; by Joe's uncle, John F. Kennedy; and by legendary Boston mayor James Michael Curley—symbolized the Irish domination of

"I'm well aware of the challenges that exist, and I'm building what I believe is a strong grass-roots organization," says Cabral.

It won't hurt if US Sen. Edward Kennedy, with whom Cabral met before changing party labels, comes through with fundraising help. But Cabral also needs to corral support from key political figures across the county, which includes, along with Boston, the blue-collar communities of Chelsea, Winthrop, and Revere.

Eddie Jenkins, a black Boston attorney who waged an unsuccessful bid last year for district attorney, learned that lesson firsthand. Jenkins, who was recently appointed by state Treasurer Timothy Cahill to head the Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission, faced off last fall against former Boston city councilor Daniel Conley, who had been appointed earlier in the year to fill the DA position Martin resigned to enter private practice. Not only did Conley have the advantage of incumbency, he had the backing of key figures like Menino, who had been instrumental in getting him the appointment to begin with.

"He had all the mayor's people, and you go to East Boston and he had [state Sen. Robert] Travaglini," now Senate president, says Jenkins. "You can't put a figure on that."

For her part, Cabral has not exactly hit it off with Menino,

the 800-pound gorilla of Boston politics. Tensions between the mayor and the new sheriff surfaced early in her tenure over responsibility for a \$10 million judgment the sheriff's department was left with after female inmates sued her predecessor, Richard Rouse, over improper strip-search procedures.

Judy Meredith, a longtime human services lobbyist and Boston political activist, says if she's on the ball, Cabral will woo Menino early and often. "Smart book learning, smart lawyering, is one thing," says Meredith. "Smart politics is another."

Meanwhile, with the Democratic National Convention landing here next July, others say there will be pressure on Menino to prove his diversity bona fides by backing Cabral. "This is the next test case," says Jenkins.

Cabral says she wants to win the mayor's support but is determined to first prove herself on the job. "I earn what I ask for," she says.

So far, Menino is playing it coy. "I'm going to see what happens," he says. "I'm not going to back a person because they're black, yellow, or pink. I have to make sure they're effective."

-MICHAEL JONAS



United Leaders co-founder Larry Harris.

for Wilkerson's Senate campaign.

But a year before the congressional seat opened up, Wilkerson's promising career careened off the tracks when she pleaded guilty to federal charges of failing to file income taxes from 1991 to 1994.

As 10 candidates competed for the Democratic nomination to succeed Kennedy—tantamount to election in the overwhelmingly Democratic district—Wilkerson could only watch from the sidelines. Indeed, as the race unfolded, she was sentenced to serve 30 days in a halfway house after violating the terms of her original sentence. The lone black candidate in the race was Charles Yancey, a district city councilor from Dorchester who had run failed campaigns for state auditor in 1986 and, most quixotically, against Kennedy himself in 1992. Victory went to Michael Capuano, then mayor of Somerville, who won with just 23 percent of the primary vote. Yancey finished seventh.

"That was a very big moment, and it was blown, to put it bluntly," says Janis Pryor, the veteran political consultant and operative.

Some think another opportunity

for black political advancement came and went last year, when new district boundaries for state legislative seats took effect. Under Wilkerson's leadership, state senators agreed to a radical remaking of the South Boston-based state Senate seat that had most recently been held by Stephen Lynch, who

Boston politics. But under pressure from minority leaders, redistricting in 1992 resulted in a district in which minorities accounted for nearly 40 percent of the overall population and about 34 percent of the voting-age residents, providing a legitimate chance for a strong black candidate.

By the mid-1990s, that candidate ought to have been Dianne Wilkerson. A bright Boston College Law School graduate, Wilkerson had made a big mark in the late '80s and early '90s as the lead attorney in the local NAACP's lawsuit that forced the desegregation of Boston's public housing developments.

In 1992, Wilkerson took the local political world by storm by sweeping veteran state Sen. Bill Owens from office with the campaign slogan WE CAN DO BETTER.

"Dianne was looked upon as fresh, young, new blood—smart and, most importantly, [she] had the fire in her belly that she wanted to be a player," says Ron Homer, the former CEO of the Boston Bank of Commerce, who raised money

# THE RACE IN THE 8th "WAS BLOWN, TO PUT IT BLUNTLY."

ascended to the late Joe Moakley's congressional seat. Jack Hart, a three-term state representative from South Boston, won the special election to finish out Lynch's unexpired term in the Senate, under the old district boundaries. Under the new lines, however, the district shifted to include virtually all of Dorchester and Mattapan. Though by no means a lock for any black candidate, the district was now 61 percent non-

white by population. Even considering that the voting-age population was not nearly that strongly minority—and that voter turnout in South Boston is legendary—the new district was at least within reach of the right candidate of color.

At first, all eyes turned to state Rep. Marie St. Fleur of Dorchester. An attorney and former state prosecutor who arrived in this country as a young girl, St. Fleur became the first Haitian-American elected to any state legislature when she won office in 1999. A moderate Democrat with an upby-the-bootstraps attitude toward issues like MCAS, which she supports, St. Fleur appeared to be just the type of candidate who could make a play for the seat. If not St. Fleur, some looked to her predecessor in that House seat, Charlotte Richie, who had been an emerging black leader in the Legislature until she left to become chief of neighborhood development for Mayor Menino. But in the end, neither St. Fleur nor Richie took the plunge—and neither did any other black leader of stature.

After winning the battle to create the potential for a second minority state Senate district, Wilkerson says it was a big disappointment to lose the war, especially by forfeit. "It was a missed opportunity," she says.

State Rep. Byron Rushing of the South End sounds a similar note of frustration. "It didn't have to be her," Rushing says, referring to St. Fleur. "But it was nobody."

#### POLITICAL BRAIN DRAIN

Why it was "nobody" may have to do not only with the state of black politics in Boston but also with the state of black opportunities. "I used to give speeches in the 1970s about the black brain drain—all the talent that was educated and trained in the universities here who would get the hell out as soon as they got their degrees," says Hubie Jones. "That's changed."

"We're producing impressive numbers of African-American professionals in law, medicine, business, and education who, for the first time, are thinking of making their careers in Boston rather than returning to New York or North Carolina or California or Illinois," says Harvard Law School professor Charles Ogletree.

But that career ambition isn't getting channeled into political life. Benaree Wiley, who directs The Partnership, a 16-year-old organization focused on supporting minority professionals in Boston, remains optimistic that it will be. "If we can build a critical mass of people of color who are succeeding in the economic mainstream of the city, then we also build a leadership base for having a role in the social and political fabric of the city," she says.

Jones is not so sure. Rather, he sees a level of political disengagement among minority up-and-comers more akin to their white peers than to their trailblazing predecessors. "You're dealing with a phenomenon that goes beyond the black community and the Latino community," says Jones. "You've got a phenomenon here where smart, young, effec-

tive people don't see the political system as a way to really get things done."

Larry Harris and Jesse Levey made the same observation while undergraduates at Tufts University. In 1999, Harris and Levey founded United Leaders, a nonprofit organization devoted to getting college students, who are flocking to volunteer opportunities, to stake a claim in the political process as well. While United Leaders isn't aimed specifically at minority students, Harris, a black Washington, DC, native who is now working toward a master's degree at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, sees an acute need in the African-American community for the work the group is doing.

"You have the private sector actively recruiting talented young black students," says Harris. "The public sector doesn't really have a mechanism to regenerate itself. What we're doing is trying to recruit and train the next generation of leaders."

Boston's black community is one place where nearly everyone agrees there is a desperate need to do just that.

"Cultivating the next level of leadership—that's where we're lacking," says political consultant Joyce Ferriabough. After going through the list of black elected officials in Greater Boston, she says, "When I can't find or think of someone younger than the folks I've mentioned, who are all 40plus, that's bothersome."

The inertia in black politics in Boston is the result of "our own internal failure to nurture the next generation of leaders," says Ted Landsmark. But he also sees a built-in obstacle: Boston's tight municipal boundaries, which don't include nearby communities—such as Cambridge, Brookline, and Milton—that attract many black professionals. As blacks move up in their careers, they often move out of Boston, he says, leaving the city and its political life behind in ways that wouldn't happen in sprawling metropolises like Atlanta and Chicago.

Then there is the matter of a clogged political pipeline. With higher offices largely out of reach and, in many cases, fewer lucrative job offers in the private sector, many black politicos hit a glass ceiling and stay put.

"They move up and out," says former bank CEO Homer, referring to white pols. "We just settle in."

Of the four black state representatives from Boston, the three other than St. Fleur, who is 41, are all the same age— 61—and have been in office at least 15 years. City Councilor Charles Yancey, age 54, has held his district seat since its creation in 1983. The most recently elected black official in the city is Roxbury district councilor Chuck Turner, age 63, elected four years ago. "When Chuck Turner is your fresh face, then you've got an issue," says one former elected official.

Turner himself might not quarrel with that assertion. The Harvard-educated community organizer, who spent more than 30 years as an in-the-streets activist, says he sought public office because no other political leadership was coming forward. "In 1999, I chose to run because...activism in the community had reached an all-time low," says Turner. "I said, let's see if I can use the office of city councilor to reinvigorate politics."

The bearded, bald-headed firebrand has certainly shaken things up in City Hall and in his district, where he has opened a storefront office and convened monthly roundtable discussions. But Turner hardly represents the future of black politics.

"I don't think we've done a good job in the African-American community to bring the next generation of leadership along," says Ken Wade. "I don't think anybody's done a good job at creating vehicles and opportunities for them to get engaged."

#### MAYOR REALITY

One political career track that the black community has availed itself of is the sprawling government apparatus controlled by Boston's mayors. Despite hard feelings lingering from the 1983 election, Ray Flynn drew an impressive cohort of black leaders into top city positions, including city treasurer, auditor, housing authority administrator, and director of the mayor's jobs and community service office.

Menino has continued to appoint blacks to top positions, including some who appeared to be rising stars on the political scene before they signed on with the administration. For example, Juanita Wade—a top lieutenant in Mel King's mayoral campaign who later served as a member of the elected school committee—is chief of human services in Menino's cabinet. Charlotte Richie resigned her seat in the

state House of Representatives to take the helm of the city's department of neighborhood development in 1999.

Landsmark, who himself directed offices in City Hall under Flynn and Menino, says these city posts cut both ways, putting blacks in positions of influence but not of political visibility.

Thus, he says, mayoral sign-ons like Wade and Richie have "largely been very effective as managers and largely anonymous as future political leaders."

But better that than shut high-octane blacks out of City Hall jobs, others say. If Menino weren't "hiring talented black people, folks would be whining on the other side," says the Rev. Eugene Rivers, a founder of Boston's clergy-led Ten Point Coalition.

As Menino sees it, black political clout goes beyond elected offices and City Hall appointments. "Political leadership doesn't mean just elected officials. It means getting things done," Menino says. "Take a look at Blue Hill Avenue. Take a look at Sister Virginia at the Grove Hall CDC and the Mecca Mall," he says, referring to a \$13 million retail plaza

developed, with the city's help, in a depressed Roxbury business district by a local nonprofit community development corporation headed by Sister Virginia Morrison. "How many people thought that would get done?"

Indeed, Menino gets high marks for the investments he has made in black neighborhoods, even from those who see the mayor as leveraging those investments for political loyalty. "He's been very good in terms of resources," says Turner, the Roxbury district city councilor. "I think he's tried to share resources in an equitable way. But in terms of the issues of power and control, he makes it very clear that he doesn't want any challenges to his way of doing things or thinking."

Menino has also been known to use his influence to bolster minority candidates for office, giving crucial help to Ralph Martin in his 1994 race for district attorney and to former City Hall staffer Jeffrey Sanchez, a Latino son of the Mission Main housing development, who won a state representative seat last year. "I think the decision to help these individuals was good for our city," says Menino.

But the allies Menino has come to rely on most in the black community are the clergy. Ministers have long been key players in black political life, but Menino, like Flynn before him, has forged ties with black clergy that some say have come at the expense of elected black leaders.

"It's clear the mayor has made a political alliance with the ministers, and I think part of that is to have a base of power independent of the black political leadership," says Turner. "I think in some instances there's been a marginalization, a kind of bypassing, of elected officials," says former city councilor Bolling.

If clergy are playing a more prominent role, says Rivers,

# BLACK POLITICAL LEADERS SAY THEY'VE BEEN "MARGINALIZED."

that's in part because black elected officials have abdicated responsibility when the issues have not fit the traditional interest-group politics they practice.

"Black political leadership never showed up, reported for duty, on the public safety issue," says Rivers. "There was not a strategy for dealing with increased violent crime or a crack epidemic, as well as increasing, accelerating, out-of-wedlock births—the internal sources of inequality and oppression."

Menino concedes that the black clergy have become the "go-to group" in some circumstances, but denies that he sidesteps elected leaders. "The elected officials have their place in what happens, and the ministers have their place," he says diplomatically.



Dorchester city council candidate Ego Ezedi is trying to revive the "We can do better" slogan in challenging a 20-year incumbent.

#### SHOCK OF THE NEW

About a hundred people are standing in a parking lot behind a brick storefront building on Blue Hill Avenue in Mattapan. A hush comes over the gathering as the Rev. John Borders of the Morning Star Baptist Church takes the makeshift stage. "The changing of the guard is always a solemn observance," says Borders.

Not for nothing does Borders appear to be presiding alternately over a funeral and a revival. The crowd is gathered on a hot Saturday morning in July for the campaign kick-off of Ego Ezedi, a 30-year-old associate minister at Borders's church who has taken a leave from his position as an aide to US Rep. Michael Capuano to mount a challenge to a 20-year city council incumbent. The Dorchester/Mattapan council district contest has been played up as a clash between old and new, and that's just the way Ezedi likes it. "It is, many sense, old guard—new guard, old thought—new thought, old approach—new approach," says Ezedi, in an interview. "We can do better," he adds, making a knowing reference to the campaign theme used by Wilkerson 11 years ago when she unseated another veteran black politician.

Charles Yancey, the target of Ezedi's political insurgency, does little to dispel the challenger's characterization of Yancey's "vigilante activism politics" at his re-election launch a few weeks later. At another Blue Hill Avenue storefront, less than a mile from Ezedi's campaign office, Yancey rails against the city's businesses, and against its nonprofit institutions

in education and health care, for giving too little back to the community. "I don't believe that the tokenistic gestures we've been receiving are enough," Yancey declares.

But it's Wilkerson, a Yancey backer, who defines the campaign's meaning to the two dozen loyalists in the room. "This is a race about more than Charles Yancey," says Wilkerson. It's about "the right to determine our own destiny."

Enjoying support from several key Menino loyalists as well as three of Yancey's white colleagues on the city council—an unusual breach of protocol—Ezedi's challenge has convinced some black leaders that Yancey's reelection is a matter of preserving an independent voice for the black community. Two weeks before the preliminary election, that tension erupted in an ugly scene, when Ezedi crashed a Yancey campaign powwow at Dorchester's Temple Baptist Church, charging Yancey and his forces with spreading the idea "that I'm the mayor's candidate, that I'm the white man's candidate," according to coverage in *The Boston Globe*.

Despite the overwrought overtones, in the end, the Yancey-Ezedi clash is a zero-sum game, an internecine struggle over a seat that will remain safely in black hands no matter who wins. But the contest could prove to have broader changing-of-the-guard significance even if Ezedi fails to unseat the incumbent.

"We see in Ego a reflection of ourselves," says Sean Daughtry, a 34-year-old MIT-trained chemist. Daughtry is

a member of a new group of young black professionals called Boston's Urban Progressives. The group initially formed to organize social get-togethers and networking events. But the organization, which claims a membership list of about 150, decided earlier this year to train its sights on the political world. In June, the group held a fund-raiser that drew about 300 people and raised more than \$3,000 for Ezedi. Daughtry and other organizers say that most had never before donated to a political campaign.

The group proclaimed in its press release advertising the fundraiser that its members are "dissatisfied with the grooming process for emerging leaders of color and have decided to combine their intellect, financial means, and voting power with the goal of revolutionizing Boston politics." That manifesto suggests a generational difference in thinking about black politics.

Michael Curry, a health insurance lobbyist and a leader of the new group, says he appreciates the role played by Chuck Turner and other black politicians who play the agitator role. "We have them and we need them," he says. "There just has been a void of 'the other'—the Egos."

Ken Wade, the former Mel King campaign soldier, says that kind of shift is natural. "Most of the old activists came of age in the '60s, and that time has gone," he says. "The next

generation didn't grow up in that period, so I do think they will not look like nor act like they're back in that period—nor should they. It's a different day."

But whose day is it? Maybe Will Dorcena's. The 30-yearold Haitian-American served as Marie St. Fleur's campaign manager in her 1999 race for state representative. Dorcena went on to co-found the city's first Haitian newspaper and now serves as community outreach director for Boston 2004, the local committee coordinating the festivities surrounding next summer's Democratic National Convention.

"It's not about the protest movement anymore," says Dorcena. Indeed, when Dorcena talks about the growing interest in politics among Haitians, he sounds like someone explaining voter turnout in middle-class suburbs. "Once you buy a home, you're a homeowner or may have a small business, you begin to feel you're really part of the fabric of the society," he says. "You naturally want to move into politics."

"When people think about black folks getting involved [in politics], either we're marching or we're holding these huge meetings or we're holding a press conference or what have you," says St. Fleur. "But these folks don't want to do that," she says of the blacks she sees dipping their toes into politics. "They're doing it just like the Irish and the Italians used to. We think of ourselves as mainstream, and we want

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to be involved in the mainstream. Yes, we're black, but we want to be at the table just like everyone else."

#### MOBILIZING A NEW MAJORITY

This political generation gap in the black community is emerging just when an increasing presence of minorities in civic affairs might be expected. The 2000 US Census certified that nonwhites now constitute just over half of the city's population, leading to use of the awkward term "majority minority" to describe the city's new racial makeup. How this increasing strength in numbers will translate into political clout for people of color is far from certain.

# THERE IS A DIVERSITY THAT DIDN'T EXIST 20 YEARS AGO.

The low voter turnout that has long diluted minority power shows signs of turning around. Organizations such as BostonVote and Dunk-the-Vote, which focus on improving voter participation in predominantly minority neighborhoods, have boosted voting rates in the last three elections. In the 2002 gubernatorial election, targeted districts in Dorchester, Mattapan, and Roxbury increased participation more than 25 percent compared with four years before; in Chinatown, the jump was 70 percent.

But the city's demographic changes have hardly favored African-Americans. Blacks remain the largest minority group in the city, at 24 percent of the population, but the Hispanic and Asian communities, now 14 and 7 percent, respectively, are gaining—and growing at a faster rate. As the city's black population grew by 18,000 from 1980 to 2000, the Hispanic population increased by nearly 50,000, while the number of Asians rose by 29,000.

Even within the black community there is now a diversity that didn't exist 20 years ago, as an influx of Haitians and immigrants from other Caribbean countries, as well as from Africa, has dramatically changed the makeup of black Boston. In 1970, 7 percent of blacks in Greater Boston were foreign-born; today, more than 25 percent fit that category.

Many of the new Bostonians are not yet citizens, so the voting strength represented by the city's "new majority" is not as great as its raw numbers. But in the future, the city's expanding communities of color will become increasingly important constellations in the political firmament.

"The work now is around bringing together those groups, more than a focus on the black community," says Mel King, who, along with city councilors Chuck Turner and Felix Arroyo, has been helping plan an October conference at the University of Massachusetts—Boston titled "The New

Majority: Uniting Boston's Communities of Color," which is sponsored by the campus institutes focusing on African-American, Latino, and Asian studies.

In a way, that statement brings things full circle, back to King's Rainbow Coalition of 20 years ago, when he spoke of "bringing people together" to open the doors of city government to all. But even with minorities in a stronger position in terms of sheer numbers—and perhaps because of that stronger presence—it seems less clear that there is a common agenda they could push today. King says his 1983 effort drew people together in part because it came "on the heels of a united effort to deal with the desegregation

[crisis]." It's hard to see what issue could unite today's more disparate minority population.

That's not to say that a strong minority candidate couldn't excite the city's diverse communities of color and at the same time appeal to white voters who are at ease with, and even embrac-

ing of, the racial melting pot Boston has become. But should Tom Menino give up the reins of the mayor's office in two years, or (a more likely scenario) in six years after serving another term, who would step forward?

Could it be Ralph Martin, who left office last year after 10 years as Suffolk County District Attorney? "I feel like I have another run in me, but I don't know what the circumstances would be," says Martin, noncommittally.

Some look hopefully to St. Fleur, who has several years to continue burnishing her leadership credentials, or to Charlotte Richie, hoping she might trade her City Hall department head hat for a return to the political mix.

The one black political figure who doesn't hide her ambitions for the mayor's office is one for whom a run would be an act not only of ambition, but also of redemption. "I've been contemplating" a future campaign for mayor, says state Sen. Dianne Wilkerson. She thinks she's recovering from her tax-offense setback. "I have spent the last six years working overtime to get back to where I was," says Wilkerson.

Meanwhile, the challenge for Boston's black political community is to recapture the energy it had 20 years ago.

"The stakes are too high for government to be a spectator sport," said the late Texas congresswoman Barbara Jordan. But so far, the stakes have not been high enough to change the racial dynamics of Boston politics.

"I'm not discouraged because it could happen if we wanted to make it happen," says Hubie Jones. "There are not insurmountable obstacles to making it happen, but we've got to energize and help figure out some people who will devote themselves to doing it."

Adds Harvard law professor Charles Olgetree: "The door isn't closed; it's just we haven't walked through it." ■





# Doubling

Rather than making families more financially secure, the trend toward two incomes has increased their odds of going broke, says bankruptcy expert Elizabeth Warren. And what extravagances are breaking the family piggy bank? Housing and education.

hether used as an income bracket, a collection of values and attitudes, or a state of mind, "middle class" is a pretty broad category. But at its core, middle class connotes material comfort born of personal responsibility. The luxuries associated with a middle-class lifestyle are contingent, the fruit of effort, not entitlement. And if financial security is a key objective of middle-class striving, the building blocks of such assurance are not the portfolios and trust funds of the wealthy, nor the government safety net that the poor rely on, however tenuously, for their backstop. The middle class earns its economic peace-ofmind paycheck by paycheck. That makes it a particularly precarious form of security, one that could evaporate with the next round of layoffs. Now, according to Harvard Law School professor Elizabeth Warren, middle-class worriers have something more to worry about: bankruptcy.

Warren has studied the bankruptcy system in the United States for 25 years. One of her discoveries, made in the course of writing her first book, As We Forgive Our Debtors, published in 1989, was that declaring bankruptcy—a legal process that allows individuals and families to be relieved of debts they cannot pay—is largely a refuge of the middle class. Warren and her two sociologist co-authors had expected to find bankruptcy filers who were "among the marginal in society—maids, day laborers, people who have no job skills, no

PHOTOGRAPHS BY FRANK CURRAN

decent jobs," she says. But in the court records, she says, "We kept coming across home mortgages. We kept coming across people whose incomes had been above the median income. There was a lot of indirect evidence that we might be dealing with a much more middle-class population, the middle class on the ropes." Warren and her colleagues returned to the bankruptcy courts with a more detailed questionnaire for filers, followed up by telephone interviews. The result, in 2001, was *The Fragile Middle Class*, which documented an alarming rise in bankruptcy filings, typically triggered by job loss, catastrophic illness, and divorce.

In her new book, The Two-Income Trap, Warren teams up with her business-consultant daughter, Amelia Warren Tyagi, to look more deeply into the causes of middle-class financial collapse. Reviewing yet again her voluminous data set on bankruptcy filings, what stuck out for Warren was the number of women filing for debt relief in 1999 nearly half a million, up from only 69,000 in 1981. Even if women's financial distress could be traced to divorce, it wouldn't explain why their vulnerability was increasing, Warren reasoned. "Indeed, the economics of divorce should actually be easier than it was a generation ago," says Warren. "Women are better educated. They have better workforce experience. They can make more money on their own, and that was supposed to save them from the economic consequences of a divorce. Moreover, ex-husbands are paying more and paying more consistently than they did a generation ago, especially in the middle class."

The problem was that "the family itself has become a more vulnerable economic unit," says Warren. "So when it breaks apart in divorce, it's a lot more likely today to file for bankruptcy than it was a generation ago. Even if it doesn't break apart in divorce, it's a lot more likely to end up in bankruptcy than it was a generation ago. To understand the vulnerability of the family we decided to start where they spend their money."

To find out why today's two-income household is more tapped out than the old one-income family ever was, I spent an hour talking home economics with Warren in her Cambridge office. What follows is an edited transcript.

—ROBERT KEOUGH

CommonWealth: You come up with a number of fairly startling comparisons about the risk of bankruptcy. You say more people will file for bankruptcy this year than have heart attacks or get diagnosed with cancer. More will file for bankruptcy this year than will file for divorce. More will go bankrupt than graduate from college. Not only that, you say that for every person who files for bankruptcy, probably seven more ought to file to get relief from their debts because they are in pretty similar financial conditions. What's more, you say that's not so much because of the tough economic times that we've been in recently. In fact, these trends emerged

during the 1990s, which was the longest economic expansion since World War II. So why the bankruptcy boom?

Warren: It's because of structural changes in the economy and in the family itself. The two are intertwined. When I took my first job, my husband routinely referred to the money I made as pin money. Today, that's an insult beyond measure. No woman would sit still for a characterization like that—and rightly so, because it no longer reflects the economics. When I was first married, we bought a house, we bought groceries, we committed to a car payment, based exclusively on my husband's income. In that sense, [my income] really was pin money. It was extra money—money to re-carpet, money to take a vacation, money to buy a new couch. But it was not money to live on, day to day. American families today...spend both paychecks. And those two paychecks are committed to long-term financial obligations mortgages, car payments, health insurance. That means there's now no cushion anywhere. They're desperately committed to hanging on to both of those incomes. If something happens—either a job loss or a medical problem that causes one of them to drop out of the workforce—their income plummets. And here's what strikes me about this: If families had spent mom's paycheck on frivolous items, if they'd blown it on computer toys and fancy vacations and eating out, they wouldn't be in a precarious financial posi-

# "[Both] paychecks are committed to long-term financial obligations."

tion. It's the fact that they committed that income to core expenses—homes, health insurance, cars—that makes the impact of losing that income so much more harmful to family economics.

**CommonWealth:** In this, you part company with other analysts of why middle-class families are in tough financial straits. Folks like Juliet Schor, author of *The Overspent American*, and John De Graaf, of *Affluenza*, charge that rampant consumerism has us all spending beyond our means. Instead, you say that in real dollars Americans aren't spending much more on luxury items than we were a generation ago, and are, in fact, spending a good deal less than our parents on such items as major appliances, canceling out any excess that we might be spending on other things. The example that struck me was about spending on food. Yes,



we're spending a lot more on restaurant meals than our parents did, but we're saving so much, or spending so much less, in the grocery store that in total we're shelling out less money on food than our parents did.

Warren: That's not supposed to be so, right? We've told ourselves this story for an entire generation now: American families are collective spendthrifts. They're out there buying designer water and high-end tennis shoes until they go straight to the poorhouse. I'm not just talking about De Graaf and Schor. Pick up any newspaper article, run a Google search or a Nexis search on newspaper articles on consumer spending. It's presented as a factual assertion that needs no backing up because we all know it to be true. Until we look at the numbers. The numbers say that, for the median-income, two-parent, two-child family, the conventional wisdom is flatly false. These families have been collectively defamed about their spending habits. Why have they been defamed? Why is this myth so rock solid in our collective consciousness? First, I think it's because some people are spending like crazy. The top 20 percent of the income spectrum is really buying a lot of stuff. The granite countertops, the spa bathrooms, and the media room in the new house—that's all going to the top end. It's not going to the middle. Look at housing for middle-income families. More middle-income families live in houses that are more than 25 years old than ever before. Housing size

for these families has increased by less than half a room, from 5.7 rooms to 6.1 rooms [from 1975 to 1997]. It's not McMansion status. So part of it is what captures lots of attention in the press and our collective conscience (and what's frankly more fun to look at) are those high-end houses. It's a lot more fun to talk about the can-you-believe-the-latest-household-amenity than it is to talk about the fact that most families are struggling to buy a 40-year-old house with three bedrooms and one and a half baths.

So that's part of it. The second part of it is that we desperately want it to be true. I would have liked to have found that these families were overspending on eating out and designer underwear and too many movies, because if that were so, I could say to these families: no more eating out, no more designer underwear, and no more movies. If you do that, I promise you, you'll be safe financially. Instead, these data tell us that middle-income folks have spent in the most responsible way possible, and yet bankruptcy filings are doubling, and doubling again, and doubling once again. That's a heartbreaking piece of news. It means the correction is something a whole lot tougher than "No more Red Lobster for you."

**CommonWealth:** Still, the additional income from that second earner in the household is going somewhere. You suggest that it's getting put to fairly insidious use, in what you call a "bidding war in the suburbs." What is it that suburbanites are bidding up, and why?

Warren: More than anything else, they're bidding up the price of housing in zip codes that have decent schools. Families with children shop with one thought in mind: Where will my children go to school? Every other decision they make flows from that. What will happen to my little ones if I buy this house? That's, of course, because school assignments go entirely by zip codes. Once that happens, it means that the value of a house in a decent school district—not extraordinary, but a decent school district starts moving up relative to the price of housing in weaker school districts. Housing specialists can describe the average price of housing as only increasing 5 percent, but the disaggregated data show that inflation-adjusted housing costs for people with children and for people with no children have diverged substantially in a generation. That's the best evidence of what's going on. And then there are the studies where, over and over, a 5-point difference in test scores for a school will be reflected immediately in housing prices.

The Philadelphia example is my favorite. The University of Pennsylvania struggled to keep the neighborhood around it from plunging into complete collapse. Penn poured money into that neighborhood with very marginal results—until they built an elementary school. Once they built an elemen-

tary school, prices tripled in that neighborhood, while they went up only modestly in the rest of Philadelphia. It's the same old crumbling houses [in the Penn neighborhood], the same narrow backyards, and the same peeling paint. But it now comes with a decent elementary school. [Prices went up because] parents rushed in to try to get a home where their children could go to good schools.

If the education system were getting better and better all around America, [housing prices] wouldn't be an issue. But that's not how parents perceive the educational world. Their confidence in the public school system is in shambles. It's crumbled. So parents are trying to pick among the ruins to find the school districts they believe represent a decent chance for their children to make it safely through school, get a good education, and launch them toward college. But as it becomes harder and harder to find good school districts, the prices in those particular zip codes keep going up.

**CommonWealth:** That explains a lot about what's happening in the greater Boston area, where the suburban real estate market remains red hot despite the fact that our population is barely growing at all.

Warren: It makes no sense, does it?



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CommonWealth: But there certainly is something that's driving the prices up in places people consider desirable, and they consider them desirable principally based on the kind of school system it has.

Warren: Schools, schools, schools. What's ironic about this is that people aren't moving to far-out suburbs because everybody wants to [have a long] drive into downtown Boston. We focus on housing costs, but the economic effects of parents trying to buy into school districts echo everywhere else in the family's financial budget and in its time budget. We focus on housing because it's the most tangible and the easiest way to look at it, but it's there elsewhere, too. Hours

# "The economic effects of parents trying to buy into school districts echo everywhere."

are cut out of parents' lives [because of commuting] solely so that they can keep their children in schools that are an hour, an hour and a half, from where they work.

**CommonWealth:** So how do you disentangle this nexus of school and location to give parents a chance to opt out of the bidding war?

Warren: Boy, we struggled with this one, and struggled with whether or not to talk about solutions in the book, whether we could just stop there and say it's a problem. You know, we wondered if we could be like [rocket scientist] Wernher von Braun—where they come down is not my department. But our editor jumped all over us and said, you must have some idea of what should happen. We both said, sure: Decouple school assignment and zip code. If there were metropolitan-wide school choice for all parents and if schools were permitted to admit children based on test scores, talents, lotteries—anything but zip codes—then the economic pressure on families would be released almost immediately. If the divorced woman with two children could live in an apartment four miles away from the school her children had been in and still keep those children in that school, then the chances she would go bankrupt would drop like a rock. It really is that straightforward. I want to emphasize here, we're talking about parent choice, giving all parents the choice they're looking for. Parents have choices now. It's just that they exercise that choice with \$250,000 [home] purchases. Those who can't make a \$250,000 purchase just have a much narrower range of choices. And those who can make \$900,000 purchases have a much wider range of choices. Taxpayers pay for education. Parents ought to be able to make the same school choices [no matter where they live]. Zip codes should not act as barbed-wire fences to keep out children whose parents cannot afford homes in that district.

**CommonWealth:** But it isn't just in access to suburban schools that education drives the middle-class bidding war. It's in higher education, too. In public institutions, as well as private, the price of higher education has risen far faster than the rate of inflation. Not because it has to, you say, but because the colleges have found out that they can get away with raising their prices pretty much with impunity. For a Harvard professor, that seems like biting the hand that feeds you.

Warren: That is the advantage of tenure. Don't tell [Harvard president] Larry Summers I said that.

CommonWealth: So what should be done to halt the academic arms race that's forcing middle-class families to bid in to a college education they really can't afford for their kids?

Warren: Universities, particularly publicly supported universities, must refocus on educating the students rather than on fielding the fanciest academic team. Legislatures have a right to demand more access and better education for the children of their citizens, of their constituents, in return for more funding. On one level, this one isn't even hard. If my taxes are going to support a public university, then my legislators have an obligation to make sure that the public university is devoting adequate funds to educating those children and to opening enough slots in the system so that all of the children of the state can be educated. Ultimately, my view is private colleges can do what they want to do. But public colleges are paid for with my tax dollars and your tax dollars, and that means the public has a right to demand something in return. Now, I want to make clear, if public universities were more financially accountable, the effects would echo right through the private universities. Harvard may still be able to do whatever Harvard wants. But public universities and private universities are in the same competition for students and for faculty. If there's more accountability on the public side, there will be a demand for more accountability on the private side as well, by the parents of the children who apply to their schools. No one is going to pay a private college five times what they pay a public college if the public college is offering a first-rate education. Ultimately, I think that's how reform works.

**CommonWealth:** Isn't that how the bidding war begins? Isn't that why public institutions try to land big-name scholars,

the high-flying folks, to bolster their reputations and justify their rising costs?

Warren: You put your finger on it. Think how the world would look if the question legislators asked was not how many professors do you have who are ranked as having among the 100 most publications in the last five years, but instead asked, how many students have you educated and what can they do when they leave here? Find some criteria for evaluating whether the colleges are meeting their educational mission, not their scholastic prestige mission or their sports prestige mission. Universities will do what the Legislature demands that they do or what the parents demand that they do. Right now, the people who pay the bill, parents and state legislatures, ask for prestige—academic prestige and sports teams that win. So long as that's the case, that's what the universities are going to provide. If the customer asks for something very different—a good education at a reasonable price for the students who come here—that's what the schools are going to provide. There's a lot of indication that that is happening some places. Public colleges, in particular, but also some private colleges are re-examining their mission—whether their mission is to put on sports shows or whether their mission is to train terrific engineers and sociologists. There's a debate out there that exists independently of us. What we're bringing to the debate is our area of expertise: the economic effects on families of failing to fix these problems. What's our new insight on the public education system, for grades K through 12? It's the economic impact on the family of a failing public school system. What's our insight on college? It's the economic effect on families of failing to hold costs under control.

CommonWealth: So having two incomes has gotten families financially overextended and fueled bidding wars around the goods that are most precious to them. But you say it's not only the two incomes that have gotten families overextended; it's also how we've leveraged those incomes into crushing amounts of debt. You trace the debt explosion to two root causes. One is the deregulation of lending in the 1980s. But the other is the push toward what has been called the "democratization of credit," which you say has simply given people the right to get in over their heads.

**Warren:** It just sets my teeth on edge. It's almost a marketing slogan: We now steal from everyone.

**CommonWealth:** So how do these two factors get middle-class America to the point of jumbo mortgages and a fistful of credit cards all maxed out?

**Warren:** Credit has become a product just like any other, like toasters. Only credit is deregulated and toasters are deeply



regulated. Manufacturers are not permitted to market toasters in the United States that have a one-in-12 chance of bursting into flames. Credit purveyors are permitted to market home mortgage loans that have a one-in-12 chance of throwing a family into bankruptcy. That's the principal difference. When the credit industry was deregulated, it quickly learned that it could pour money into marketing debt to marginal families and increase its profits even as the number of families who ended up in default grew. When credit was regulated [a generation ago], lenders examined their borrowers closely. That was because the profits in lending were modest, so lenders made profits by getting paid back. Today, that whole calculation is out the window. The way to make profits is by lending lots of money at very high interest rates to very risky people. Some borrowers will never pay back, but most will make a lot of minimum monthly payments at huge rates of interest. The same thing is true in the mortgage business—lend a lot to struggling families. So you get two reinforcing events: Families that feel increasing pressure financially to get into those homes and good school districts meet the lenders, who have every incentive to dole out as much credit as they humanly can. When the two run into each other, the result is a wreck for the economics of the American family and high profits for the consumer credit industry—profits now measured in the tens of billions of dollars. That's tens of billions of dollars that are drained out of the pockets not of the wealthy—and not of the poor, interestingly enough—but drained out of the pockets of middle-income, hardworking families.

CommonWealth: You got a pretty stark lesson in that during your one day of consulting with Citibank, didn't you? You couldn't talk them out of giving credit cards to people who were in no position to carry the debt.

**Warren:** Exactly. And just to expand beyond the story in the book, Fair Isaac, the financial consulting company, has been marketing a product for four or five years now, which they claim could cut the bankruptcy losses for every credit card issuer in America by more than 50 percent. It's a computer screening program to pluck out the most vulnerable borrowers, the ones who are most bankruptcy-prone. Have the credit card companies done this? They're not interested, because...the most profitable families are the families that look just like the bankrupt families but are not quite financially dead yet. Actually, I should add, many bankrupt families also produce net profits for their lenders. The high loan-to-value-ratio mortgages, the credit cards that these families paid on for years and years before they filed for

# "Bankrupt families can be very profitable" for credit companies.

bankruptcy, have already produced a profitable return on investment by the time the family files for bankruptcy. The reason, of course, is the family has been paying large amounts of interest and tiny amounts of principal for years. Sure, the credit companies wish no one would go bankrupt and everyone would continue to pay forever and ever, but even bankrupt families can be very profitable for them.

**CommonWealth:** Your solution for this certainly goes against the tide, which would be to re-impose regulation on interest rates. But you suggest tying interest-rate limits to the prime interest rate. That way, interest rates can rise and fall with the market but still restrict the margin between prime and consumer loan rates.

**Warren:** You put your finger exactly on the key. It's the margin — the difference between what lenders must pay in order to get money (the wholesale cost of funds) and what lenders are permitted to charge consumers (the retail cost of funds). As long as we have a modest margin that lenders can impose on home mortgage loans, on car loans, on credit card loans—and they could be different for those three lenders will have an incentive to screen borrowers and not to lend to families already in financial trouble. When margins are five times higher than the cost of funds—that is,

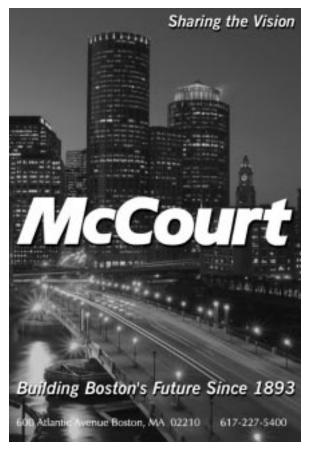
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when the cost of funds is down around 5 percent and lenders can get 25 percent on the loans—it's like leaving money on the sidewalk. Someone is going to come along and pick it up. If it's possible to create that [huge] margin, then some creditor is going to come in and try to lend to those families no matter how much financial trouble they are in.

**CommonWealth:** Even with the bidding war for housing, the inflated college tuitions, and overextended credit, it's usually loss of a job, debilitating illness, or divorce that disrupts the two-income equilibrium keeping families afloat. It's then that a middle-class family finds itself faced with the prospect of declaring bankruptcy. But when we hear about personal bankruptcy in the news, it's usually in the context of efforts in Congress to tighten up rules to thwart unscrupulous borrowers who want to escape financial responsibility for their debts. Is bankruptcy law in need of reform?

Warren: Yes, but bankruptcy law should be modified to give families more help, not to squeeze them harder. What we hear in the news about the bankruptcy system and the need for bankruptcy reform is driven by a well-financed campaign sponsored by the credit industry. There is no money to sponsor a campaign on the other side. Families in finan-

cial trouble have no political action committee. They have no \$500-an-hour lobbyists in Washington. They have no one to tell their story. Massachusetts has been a leader on the political front in Washington in trying to preserve protection for families in financial trouble. Sen. Kennedy, Sen. Kerry, and Congressman Delahunt have been aggressive in fighting against changes in the bankruptcy laws [that would weaken protection for debtors and trying to propose changes that would maximize protection for the most desperate families. I wish that were the case for every single person sitting in Washington, but unfortunately it's not.

CommonWealth: So what would you propose in terms of public policy reforms that would help families out of the two-income trap?

Warren: Number one is to re-impose usury regulations [strict legal limits on loan interest rates]. Usury laws have been around since biblical times, and there was a reason for them. They had it right in Deuteronomy—am I a family-values girl or what? Usury laws were also around in Colonial times. In the early 1980s, the credit industry was deregulated without a single public discussion about the economic impact of such a move. Now the credit industry has become a mon-



ster, a monster that is devouring middle-income families. Restoring usury laws would be my first proposal.

My second proposal would be to provide short-term disability insurance. The entire national conversation about money and medical problems today is about health insurance. We should have a national conversation about health insurance. But we should also have a national conversation about disability insurance. Today's worker has a one-in-four chance of becoming disabled and without income sometime during his or her working years. Middle-income families can't bear that kind of risk. Fewer families have protection from disability than from medical bills.... The third proposal would be to give parents metropolitan-wide school choice, to permit schools to admit children and parents to select schools, based on some criteria other than zip code. School assignment based on zip code is killing the American family.

CommonWealth: In the meantime, what advice do you have for middle-class families about avoiding bankruptcy?

Warren: Take a hard look at fixed expenses. It's fixed expenses -mortgages, car loans, health insurance—that sink families, not trips to McDonald's and expensive sneakers. Have a plan if something goes wrong. For every purchase, think about what it means if dad is laid off or one of the kids gets really sick or the family breaks up.... A family that has a plan, that has set aside four mortgage payments or that knows that they could sell this house and move in with mom, is a family that has a chance to weather the storm. We propose in the book the notion of a financial fire drill. Families have to think hard about the risks they run, and they need an escape route laid out in case one of those bad things comes their way. Here's [another] one. For families thinking about buying a house, who are told, over and over, to stretch and commit both incomes, because housing prices only rise: Think once, think twice, and think one more time before taking that plunge. Buying a house is an inexorable commitment. The demand for payment arrives the first of every month no matter what, no matter who's working, no matter who's sick, no matter who is getting divorced.

And think about collective action. Our politicians have overlooked middle-income families. They've focused on all kinds of subgroups, all kinds of groups that have lobbyists and make campaign contributions, and they have looked right past the heart of America. Those families need to speak and they need to speak loudly. No, those families don't need to speak; they need to shout. It's time to look at what's happening to us. A consumer credit industry run amok is not hurting high-income people. It's hurting those [middle-income] families, and it's time for those families to say to their politicians: Choose between me and the banks. You can represent one of us or the other of us, but you're not going to represent both of us. ■

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# In auto insurance, consumers need choice

#### BY ANNE PAULSEN AND JOHN HAYES

he automobile insurance system in Massachusetts is a mess. Let us count the ways:

- 1. Massachusetts has the fourth highest average auto insurance rates in the country and the insurance companies have requested a 12 percent increase for next year.
- 2. Urban motorists pay well over the state average, with some current premiums between \$2,000 and \$3,000 per year.
- 3. High rates encourage illegal activity, such as registering cars in lower-rated parts of the state or in neighboring states, and even driving uninsured.
- 4. A harsh and inflexible merit rating system inflicts surcharges that last as long as six years for even minor infractions.
- 5. The number of companies offering auto insurance in Massachusetts is now down to 20, fewest of all the states, with many of the largest auto insurers refusing to do business here.

We have a complex problem and the Legislature can fix it. Part of the problem is that Massachusetts is the only state where the rates are set not by competition in the marketplace but by the insurance commissioner. Every year, the insurance companies come in asking for a rate increase based on what they think they need to do business, the attorney general comes in calling for a rate reduction based on what his office thinks is warranted, and the insurance commissioner splits the difference. But none of these interests neither industry nor public—really knows what the insurance market would bear, and could live with, under the pressure of competition. The Legislature should immediately establish a commission to investigate ways to provide for a more competitive system of auto insurance that does not allow urban rates to skyrocket, as happened in 1977 when competition was briefly introduced.

The larger part of the Massachusetts problem lies in the way we provide personal injury insurance protection for drivers. Ours is a hybrid arrangement that is partly tort liability and partly weak no-fault—but wholly unsatisfactory.

Tort liability is the traditional approach to assigning financial responsibility for bodily injuries incurred in an auto accident, based on lawsuits. It is a court proceeding that, either through negotiation or judicial decisions, establishes which party is at fault for the accident and which party is entitled to compensation for bodily injuries, compensation that typically includes not only actual economic costs, such as medical costs and loss of wages, but also "pain and suffering," plus attorney's fees.

No-fault is the common name for a personal injury protection plan in which a party is compensated by his/her own insurance company for the actual cost of injuries without the need to resort to litigation. As a result, no-fault can pay out less—and offer considerable savings in insurance rates—but at the cost of the right to sue for pain and suffering. For instance, North Dakota, a no-fault state, has the lowest costs in the United States.

The Massachusetts system is a hybrid of the two, no-fault up to a monetary or verbal (specific categories of serious injury) threshold, when the tort system kicks in for any further compensation for personal injury. It was established as a compromise between a complete no-fault system and a complete tort system. Up to \$2,000 in bills related to an accident-related injury are paid strictly on a no-fault basis. With between \$2,000 and \$8,000 in costs, an injured party can be compensated by their insurance company or they can file suit against the other party. For compensation of more than \$8,000, however, the injured party must sue. Lawsuits are expensive, requiring the retention of legal counsel, and time consuming, sometimes taking two or three years to result in any recovery. A stronger no-fault system would provide timely payments for injuries sustained but forfeit compensation for pain and suffering.

The no-fault element of the Massachusetts auto-insurance hybrid has eroded over time. Given medical costs today, it doesn't take much to reach the \$2,000 threshold. Insurance companies are aware that injured parties can easily edge their economic losses up to meet those thresholds and then sue for further payments including pain-and-suffering as well as legal fees, up to the limits of the responsible party's coverage. In anticipation of these tactics, insurers push for ever-higher premiums to protect themselves. For claimants, however, these insurance bonanzas are no sure things. According to a 2003 report by the Joint Economic Committee of the US Congress, "Auto insurance in most states is like a lottery system. If someone...suffers minor or no injuries, they can collect significant pain and suffering payments by abusing the system. However, if individuals are seriously injured, then they can expect to recover only a portion of their economic losses...and frequently will not see a dime for pain and suffering."

All in all, it's a Rube Goldberg system. Many consumers would prefer to have their economic losses covered in case of an accident, and not worry about the pain-and-suffering payments they might forfeit (along with expensive legal fees), in order to pay lower premiums today. Others might prefer to preserve their legal recourse to sue for full compensation and pay present-day premiums. But under our present system, this choice is not available to them.

We can change our auto insurance system, allowing consumers to make a choice between our present hybrid system and a new, stronger no-fault option. This approach extends a number of real benefits to Massachusetts drivers. The 2003 Joint Economic Committee Study states that the average savings under a strong no-fault option would be \$333 annually, with urban car owners saving 40 percent or more on their insurance bills. These savings could bring down Massachusetts auto-insurance rates, lowering the cost of living for many families. These savings also mean that less affluent families can have easier access to jobs beyond convenient public transportation, especially in rural areas. A recent Catholic Charities report listed auto insurance as a serious financial burden for many low-income families and advocated for a more flexible system. A choice system would provide that flexibility.

These savings could also translate into higher levels of coverage for those who choose the no-fault option. In the event of a serious accident, \$100,000 readily available from your own insurer under no-fault is of more use than \$13,333 (the \$20,000 minimum required coverage, minus a one-third contingency fees that goes to your lawyer) from the other party's insurance carrier—if you win the lawsuit it will take to get it. In addition, a stronger no-fault option would cover single-car accidents as well. Currently, if you get hurt in an accident involving only your own car, there's no one to sue.

The current hybrid system, weak and equivocal as it is, recognizes that the right to sue when you've been wronged is a big thing to give up. But common sense tells us that litigation costs eventually come out of our premiums, and that a system that avoids, or at least minimizes, litigation will provide premium savings or greater compensation for victims, or both. Not everyone will want to take the gamble, but everyone should have the choice.

The Massachusetts Legislature can offer that choice. The choice/no-fault approach is before the Joint Committee on

Insurance in a bill entitled "Consumer Choice," co-sponsored by 16 representatives and senators from across the political spectrum. Moreover, this call for reform is already part of the state Democratic Party platform, which states: "We call for genuine consumer-oriented automobile insurance reform and rate relief, including close regulatory scrutiny of industry rate proposals and a 'Consumer Choice' system that would empower car owners with a choice of coverage options to best fit their needs."

To provide the best for our citizens and the Commonwealth, Massachusetts needs consumer-oriented auto-insurance reform. Let consumers decide.

Anne Paulsen is a Democratic state representative from Belmont. John Hayes is a citizen activist for automobile insurance reform.

### COUNTERPOINTS

# Competition offers the only true choice

BY FRANK O'BRIEN

he automobile insurance market in Massachusetts is severely stressed. The signs of this stress are readily apparent: an ever-decreasing number of insurance companies writing policies; auto-insurance writers that are successful elsewhere refusing to enter the market; a highly concentrated distribution of market share; and the increasing unease with which companies, regulators, and legislators alike view the current arrangements. In short, the continued viability and sustainability of this system is in doubt.

What's wrong is that the Massachusetts automobile insurance market is the most highly and intrusively regulated in the country. Only by reducing burdensome regulation and boosting competition can we cure our auto insurance woes.

Massachusetts is the only state in the nation that gives the insurance commissioner authority to "fix and establish"

automobile insurance rates when the market is deemed "uncompetitive." It has been almost 30 years since a commissioner deemed the market "competitive," so, for all practical purposes, the rates are state-made. The way those rates are set, and the way the residual market for high-risk policies is managed, are driving the Massachusetts auto insurance system over the cliff.

A residual market is a tool insurers use to pool losses from higher-risk policies in order to spread the loss over a greater number of insurers. The key to making this work is to spread losses fairly and to charge a premium that reflects this higher risk. This is not the way it works in Massachusetts. Unlike residual markets in any other state, drivers covered through Commonwealth Automobile Reinsurers (CAR) pay rates that are no different than those paid by lower-risk drivers in the voluntary market. In addition, the way CAR distributes residual-market risk results in an unfair distribution of losses among the companies—a position recently taken by Attorney General Thomas Reilly. The solution is to make CAR more reflective of residual markets in other states, spreading the losses more fairly and charging a premium that reflects the higher risk.

Most importantly, though, the "fix and establish" rate setting system must be phased out. Massachusetts has long assumed that little or no competition exists in automobile insurance, even though there actually is some competition and could be much more. But with the strict rate setting system we have, there is no incentive for an insurer to enter this market and make it more competitive. As a result, Massachusetts has the dubious distinction of having fewer automobile insurers writing policies here than in any other state. While there are 60 to 120 insurers on average writing in other states, only about 20 do business here—and the number is steadily falling.

Some feel that competition is not the answer. They point to the Commonwealth's short-lived 1977 experiment with a competitive rating system as proof that competition won't work. But the most important lesson from 1977 is that a hastily implemented change is likely to fail. The Alliance of American Insurers supports a methodical, phased-in approach that will, over time, through a consensus-building and confidence-building process, allow the competition and innovation that heretofore have been suppressed by the fix-and-establish system to take hold.

These two reforms—eliminating the fix-and-establish rate system and making CAR more reflective of residual markets in other states—would bring Massachusetts automobile insurance back into the mainstream.



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Others want to tinker with the Commonwealth's unique "no-fault" system for providing personal injury protection. That system is far from ideal, but scrapping it in favor of so-called "choice," as Paulsen and Hayes propose, would be no panacea. The only states with choice no-fault systems are Kentucky, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Of those, the two most urbanized states, and therefore most comparable to Massachusetts, are New Jersey and Pennsylvania. For a variety of reasons, both have experienced urban affordability problems for years.

What's more significant is that New Jersey took steps this year to streamline and modernize its long-troubled auto insurance rating system, making the state a more attractive market for insurers and promoting increased competition. A major California-based auto insurer has already decided to enter the New Jersey market. *This* is the example to be emulated in Massachusetts.

Many view any attempt to reform Massachusetts automobile insurance as a Sisyphean task. Indeed, many have tried to roll this rock up the hill, only to have it crash back down. We believe the time has come once again to set ourselves to the task, this time getting that rock to the top for good. The way to do so is with less regulation and more competition.

Frank O'Brien is vice president and New England regional manager for the Alliance of American Insurers, a national trade association representing more than 340 property/casualty insurers.

# Drivers lose under "choice" proposal

BY KATHLEEN M. O'DONNELL

nder the choice no-fault system proposed by Rep. Anne Paulsen and John Hayes, irresponsible drivers would be immunized from being held accountable for their actions, consumers would pay more for less coverage, and insurance companies would make more money. That's a wonderful system—for insurance companies.

Unfortunately, the reality is that, regardless of what insurance system is in place, auto insurance premiums will be high in Massachusetts. Automobile insurance is a major expense for consumers in our state and in all states where there is a lot of traffic on congested streets in heavily populated areas. Legislators have been grappling with the issue of high automobile insurance rates for decades.

More than 30 years ago, then-Rep. Michael Dukakis

teamed up with the father of no-fault, Jeffrey O'Connell, and convinced our Legislature to enact the first no-fault automobile insurance system in this country. They promised that such a system would result in dramatic long-term rate savings for consumers. That promise was not kept. By the mid-1980s, Prof. O'Connell acknowledged that a no-fault system did not result in savings for consumers. In a 1986 Virginia Law Review article, he stated, "A key purpose of auto insurance is to compensate accident victims, and increased payouts mean greater compensation... Because no-fault makes many persons eligible for benefits who are ineligible under traditional insurance, for example, one-car accident victims, the total payout under no-fault insurance is greater than under traditional systems." O'Connell also observed that "nofault thresholds arguably encourage victims to inflate their claims to exceed the threshold for bringing a lawsuit" and reported that "the average total amount of BI [Bodily Injury] damages per victim is larger in no-fault states than in a traditional state" (emphasis added).

Logically, it makes sense that a no-fault system of compensation for personal injury would be more expensive. Under such an arrangement, at-fault drivers as well as innocent drivers are reimbursed for their lost wages and their medical expenses, resulting in significantly more claims. During the 1990s, the premiums in no-fault states were 20 percent higher than in those states that never adopted no-fault, according to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners. Not only that, but insurance companies made more money on no-fault policies—56 percent more profit per auto insurance policy in no-fault states. Not surprisingly, insurance companies like no-fault. They collect more in insurance premiums and their payouts are more predictable. Because no-fault did not deliver on its promise to reduce rates, however, very few states adopted this system. Therefore, insurance companies and other no-fault proponents re-packaged and re-marketed no-fault under the name of "choice."

"Choice" is a misnomer for two reasons. First, the system is so difficult to understand that most consumers select the default option, whatever the Legislature determines it to be. In New Jersey, where the default option was the no-fault system, most consumers ended up in the no-fault system. Conversely, in Pennsylvania, where the default was the traditional tort system, the majority of consumers ended up in that system. In other states that studied various "choice" proposals, panels of experts concluded that such a system was incomprehensible even to them.

Statistics over a 30-year period establish that no-fault systems are more expensive than tort systems. Yet, proponents of the choice no-fault plan say those choosing the no-fault option will lower their rates by one-third. What this really means is that those "choosing" the tort option will pay more. That's because they have to pay a premium to protect

themselves and their families in case they are injured by someone who has chosen the no-fault option, since those choosing no-fault are immunized from being held responsible when they cause a collision. For most people, purchasing auto insurance is an economic hardship; they will not have the option of choosing the tort system for the simple reason that it costs more. Consequently, the proponents of no-fault are making the choice for most people. In the end, the insurance companies win. They have a system in place where they still collect and invest millions of dollars in insurance premiums and the payouts on auto insurance claims will be predictable and lower.

Legislators grapple with difficult auto insurance issues annually; their constituents demand relief. Usually, legislation is enacted when the insurance crisis peaks. Historically, reforms have promised a specific reduction in premiums. Thus the preamble to the auto-insurance reform passed in 1988 promised an 18.7 percent reduction. Before the ink was dry, however, insurance companies said they couldn't live with such a cut and they threatened to leave the state. As a result, consumers never saw the promised reduction; most got about a 9 percent savings. This was a pretty good deal for insurers, since the coverage consumers got was reduced tremendously, about 50 percent. Within a few years, premiums were back up by 27 percent. The net result for consumers? They were paying more for much less coverage. The net result for insurers? Their profits skyrocketed during the next decade; consequently, insurers were happy to write policies in Massachusetts.

There is no magic solution to the auto insurance problem in Massachusetts. Regardless of what is done by the Legislature, rates will remain high. Over the long term, rates would stabilize if the Legislature would repeal no-fault insurance altogether. In the period between 1988 and 1999, health care costs in the United States rose by 75 percent. No-fault insurance brings health care into the automobile insurance system. Clearly, this is not an efficient way to deal with the myriad of issues related to health care costs. Auto insurers should not be in the business of providing or coordinating health care for their insureds.

Massachusetts should return to the tort system. When New Jersey enacted a choice no-fault system it ended up with the highest auto insurance costs in the nation. Is that the goal of auto-insurance reform in Massachusetts?

Kathleen M. O'Donnell is an attorney in Lowell. She is a former president of the Massachusetts Academy of Trial Attorneys and has lectured and testified across the country on auto insurance issues.

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## Some children left behind

No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning By Abigail Thernstrom and Stephan Thernstrom Simon & Schuster, New York, 334 pages

REVIEWED BY CHARLES L. GLENN

his is a useful and timely, though ultimately somewhat disappointing, book by a prominent husbandand-wife team: a member of the Massachusetts Board of Education (and senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute) and a distinguished historian who has specialized in ethnic and urban issues in American life.

The book is useful because it brings together in readable form the most important results of a number of recent studies on the stubbornly persistent lag in educational outcomes for black (and, to a lesser degree, Hispanic) youth. Many readers will be encouraged to turn to such sources as Laurence Steinberg's Beyond the Classroom and the essays collected by Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips in The Black-White Test Score Gap for further analysis of this crucial academic disjunction.

And it is timely because it comes just as the federal No Child Left Behind law has ensured that educators and state policy-makers will no longer be able to conceal the hard facts of this achievement gap. School districts and states are now required to show evidence of adequate yearly progress for each of the racial/ethnic groups in each school, so that the sharp disparities in test scores between white and Asian students, on the one hand, and black and Hispanic students, on the other, will no longer be simply a matter of national statistics to be deplored but a reality that administrators and teachers in thousands of schools will be forced to confront, with serious consequences for failure.

It is timely also because the recent decisions of the Supreme Court in the University of Michigan affirmative action cases are sure to heighten the debate over what can be done to eliminate what many universities and em-

ployers see as the need for racial preferences to ensure a diverse enrollment or workforce.

The disappointment with No Excuses comes in its prescriptions, or lack thereof. Having identified the problems, both in school practices and in the culture prevalent among black and Hispanic youth, and having demon-

strated the futility of simply spending more money on a failing educational system, as well as the powerful barriers to reform of that system, they offer little reason to think "the racial gap in learning" will be closed. Nor do they identify clearly the elements that should go into a strategy to educate vulnerable youth more effectively. After a powerful buildup, the Thernstroms deliver a letdown.

The book starts off reminding us that, in a culture of low educational standards, the amount of schooling completed does not necessarily translate into skills and knowledge acquired. "The employer hiring the typical black high school graduate

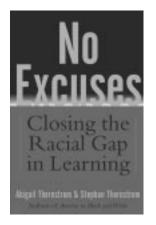
(or the college that admits the average black student) is, in effect, choosing a youngster who has made it only through the eighth grade," the Thernstroms write. "He or she will have a high school diploma, but not the skills that should come with it .... Hispanics do only a little better than African Americans."

> Referring to the most recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, they add, "In science and math, a mere 3 percent of black students were able to display more than a 'partial mastery' of the 'knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work' at the twelfth-grade level,

in contrast to seven to ten times as many whites and Asians."

These damning statistics might not move the many educators who dismiss tests as a means of assessing how successfully schools have done their work, so the Thernstroms carefully demonstrate that the learning deficiencies shown by the tests have consequences in real life.

For example, they cite a large national sample of 1988 eighthgraders followed for 12 years, by which time "an identical 76.5 percent of whites and of blacks had gone on to some form of postsecondary education." But at that point, their paths diverged. While three out of four



African-Americans entered college, only one in six finished. "The problem is not getting in but staying and graduating," the Thernstroms accurately conclude. Tests are, of course, not a perfect measure of what students learn, but the gap in test scores translates into a gap in life outcomes.

After this dose of gloom, the authors take an upbeat detour into a handful of schools that are teaching black and Hispanic youth to high levels, maintaining high expectations and an engaging school culture. But their exceptional nature is itself a cause for concern.

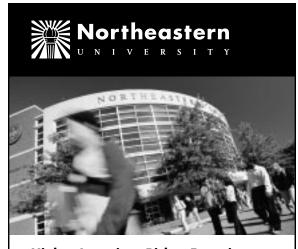
"Most of the best schools are the inspiration of young idealists who want to work with the disadvantaged. They are missionaries with a sense of calling," the authors note. "But if good schools depend on such exceptional people, there won't be many of them. And thus the question

becomes: If we can't spread magic into every classroom, can we take steps that will make a real difference? For if not, good schools are a hopeless project."

In their conclusion, the Thernstroms return to the example of these inspired schools, highlighting their institutional autonomy. They suggest that the achievement gap can be closed by making every urban public school a charter school and providing vouchers for attendance at faith-based nonpublic schools as well. I happen to agree that the Thernstroms have identified an essential reform, but look in vain for the concrete policy frameworks and incentives that would enable the American educational system to evolve in the direction of more choice and autonomy. As my Belgian colleague Jan de Groof and I have shown in Finding the Right Balance,

our study of how 26 countries fund and regulate educational freedom including, in most cases, faith-based schools—the devil is in the details, and the Thernstroms are notably short on them.

fter this excursion into exemplary schools, the Thernstroms turn to culture as an uncomfort-11 able, but unavoidable, factor in academic achievement. They summarize the now-familiar evidence that Asian-American students are doing remarkably well in school (and in subsequent life), that Hispanic students show some encouraging signs of following the trajectory of previous immigrant groups (although many are held back by living in communities where continuing in-migration limits their development of English proficiency), and that African-



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American students exhibit a performance deficit that cannot be explained by the usually cited factors of social deprivation. Most distressingly, the authors point out that "the disparity in academic performance between black and white children of highly educated parents is actually larger than it is for the whole student population. If all black and all white parents were college graduates, the racial gap would be even greater than it is now."

This is a subject on which it is easy to cause offense. But it is difficult to see how advocates for black and Hispanic youth could be unmoved by the powerful evidence the Thernstroms marshal that African-American and Hispanic children enter school with educational deficits that only become compounded as the years go on. As the authors call for changes in the cultural or attitudinal determinants of black underachievementsaying that black youth need to be convinced to make a more persistent effort to achieve academic successthey merely echo what black social scientists have been saying for more than a decade, and leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Jesse Jackson for much longer.

While I believe they dismiss too quickly John Ogbu's work on this issue (including his recent book, Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb), which shows how often the attitudes of even those black vouth from successful families undercut their school success, they cannot be accused by any fair-minded person of "blaming the victim." More to the point, they insist that schools must take on the responsibility of counteracting the cultural drag their minority students come in with, rather than latching onto it as a rationalization for their own mediocrity.

The Thernstroms then proceed to dispose of an assortment of educational remedies they see as failed. First to be dismissed is the claim that what's needed is more government spending to make up the gap in resources between schools attended by black pupils and those attended by white pupils. The authors do not oppose more money for education, but they see little evidence that funding discrepancies tell the achievement tale.

In a refutation of Jonathan Kozol's Savage Inequalities, they make the case that his "contrast between the poor, largely minority schools of Camden and the affluent, largely white schools of Princeton" (both communities in New Jersey) was no longer accurate: "By the 2000-2001 academic year...the student-teacher ratio at Princeton High School was a very low 11.8; at Camden High it had become an even lower 11.5!" In hard dollars, as well, the college town had no edge on the impoverished city, they insist: "Princeton was spending a very comfortable \$12,583 per pupil;

to reduce racial isolation. This is where, in the name of full disclosure, I must reveal that, a dozen years ago, Abigail Thernstrom published a book that sharply criticized my efforts, as the state official responsible for educational equity, to promote racial integration through parental choice of schools, and we had a public dispute over it. But the discussion in No Excuses strikes me as carefully balanced, and I would agree with their conclusion that, although "racial clustering-in housing, in the workplace, and in schools—is not good for the fabric of American society," racial integration by itself is unlikely to have a direct effect on academic achievement. I would, however, place greater emphasis than they do on the value, for students acquiring English, of regular exposure to classmates from homes where English is used in an accurate and elaborated form, and

### The authors see little evidence that funding discrepancies matter.

Camden was spending \$400 more, with no payoff in terms of student test scores."

For us in Massachusetts, the example that hits close to home is Cambridge, which the Thernstroms note spends a "staggering" \$17,000 a year per pupil. Still, only 49 percent of black 10th-graders passed the MCAS English test on their first try in 2002, contrasted with 63 percent for black students statewide; in mathematics, 35 percent of black Cambridge students passed the MCAS the first time around, compared with 55 percent statewide. If spending more money, eliminating tracking, and otherwise adopting every new educational fad could lead to positive results for black pupils, Cambridge should be way ahead of, rather than behind, the rest of the state.

Then the authors turn to efforts

in general on social class integration as an educational plus that, in a good school, helps to maintain high expectations for all.

The Thernstroms also debunk the claim that non-Asian minority students need teachers of the same race to succeed in school. They cite a 2001 Harris poll finding that, in response to the question "How good do your teachers expect your work to be?," the proportion of black students replying "excellent" was significantly higher than that of white students, suggesting that concerns about low expectations on the part of white teachers have been exaggerated.

Similarly, as Maureen Stone and others have pointed out for years, they note that the idea that the achievement of black students suffers because of low self-esteem has no basis in fact: A National Center for

Education Statistics study of eighthgraders in 1988 found that "just 19 percent of black students but 40 percent of whites had low self-esteem, and that 49 percent of blacks were in the top group in self-esteem, compared with just a third of whites."

As many studies have pointed out, what is crucial for minority achievement is that students have teachers who are themselves well educated, and who know how to teach with confidence and flexibility. It would obviously be wonderful if more of such excellent teachers were also black or Hispanic, but at present there is a conflict between that goal and the very important effort to raise standards for entry to the teaching profession, and the authors draw attention to that fact.

The tests that screen applicants to teacher preparation programs and, once they complete these (not very demanding) programs, to determine which candidates can be state-licensed currently eliminate a high proportion of blacks who wish to become teachers. If the passing scores for these tests were raised to make teaching a more selective career, as it is in other Western nations, and thereby to improve the quality of instruction, it would further reduce the proportion of black teachers (though such a move might over time have the opposite effect, as it ensured that black students completed school better prepared to clear such hurdles).

But most prominent among the failed remedies explored by the Thernstroms are Head Start and Title I. Since 1965, the federal government has spent nearly \$200 billion on these targeted efforts to provide compensatory and pre-school education, programs that are defended fiercely even though, in both cases, the indications of success have been very limited. A mountain of evaluations and meta-evaluations has brought forth evidence of no more than a mouse of

improvement, leaving program defenders to insist, in the case of Head Start, that the only "developmentally appropriate" goal was "social and emotional growth." This claim is a convenient way, of course, to excuse the failure to prepare kids to learn to read!

When it comes to the current "standards movement," the authors observe—correctly, in my view—that neither schools nor students are likely to do what is necessary to make education a success without real and significant consequences. Being from Massachusetts, the authors point out that "when the tenth-grade MCAS started to count [as a requirement of graduation], scores began to climb dramatically." A study of four urban high schools here found that three-

could be better are resistant to significant change." While this characterization exaggerates the situation—I would estimate that it might apply to one school in five across the country—it expresses well enough the frustrations of trying to achieve reform in those schools that are most obviously failing.

Unfortunately, the book does not tell us how to go about changing the conditions of teaching on a wide enough scale to make a real difference in American education. Readers who are convinced by the Thernstroms' account of the failure of our present educational system, but frustrated by the vagueness of their proposed remedies, will want to consider the detailed prescriptions for structural reform in *Reinventing* 

# They debunk the idea that students need teachers of the same race.

quarters of the students who failed "thought that missing school 'a lot' was a 'big reason,' and 64 percent admitted that they had not put 'enough effort into school and homework." The Thernstroms add that "flunking had a salutary effect on their behavior; 67 percent said that they were now working harder at their studies."

But no matter what the remedy, making schools change is no easy feat, and the Thernstroms devote a full chapter to considering the "road-blocks to change" that stand in the way of closing the learning gap.

"Teaching in a regular public school," the authors argue, "is a profession for saints, masochists, or low-aspiring civil servants. To do the job splendidly asks too much in the way of sacrifice; simply to meet minimum standards asks too little in terms of skills, knowledge, imagination, and dedication. Moreover, those who do it splendidly tend to be educational isolates, while those who

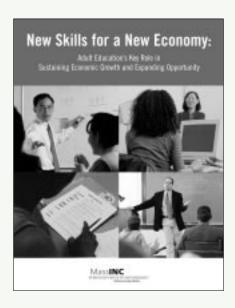
Public Education, by Paul Thomas Hill, Lawrence Pierce, and James Guthrie. They should also read and take to heart the most important book to date on what should be done to make autonomous and accountable schools really effective, E.D. Hirsch Jr.'s The Schools We Need: And Why We Don't Have Them.

No Excuses deserves to be widely read for its evidence of a persistent racial achievement gap, and for its well-documented discussion of why the educational system is so stubbornly resistant to reform. If it increases the pressure for fundamental changes, the book will be well worth the Thernstroms' efforts. But those who want to work for such changes will have to look elsewhere for blueprints. ■

Charles L. Glenn is professor of educational policy at Boston University. From 1970 to 1991 he was responsible for urban education and civil rights at the Massachusetts Department of Education.

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# Poetic license

#### TWO POEMS BY H. PETER KAROFF

#### **PLAY ON WORDS**

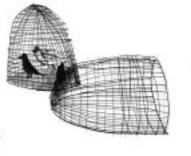
In a good play on words Ideas seem to just emerge, Fully formed long lyrical lines From the chamber of a brilliant mind.

Hah! Don't believe it my friends! Chaos—thousands, thousands of words, Ideas, theories, notions carom off walls, Tumble off the backs of one another. Some drift lazily like hot-air balloons, Bump gently up against the ceiling Or as bats do hang upside down. Others dash madly about like sperm In passionate search of an egg to fertilize, While those deemed worthless fall away And die a slow lingering death. How sad is the dismembered idea!

Once in a great while an event occurs. Call it metamorphosis, transformation, Inspiration out of the incomprehensible— An idea is born and pops into plain view. Such joy in the chamber of the mind that night As all of those still stuck in chaos party In everlasting hope their turn will come. The birth of a good idea is rare indeed. Even rarer are those who have the gift. To those who do, we say Salut!







#### WILL

It's a matter of will This game of life Is inner rather than outer

Conception is nice But doesn't express will While execution—oh yes

No prescription here Yet focus drives Closure

Organizations are built Survive and prosper Based on will one or multiple

Governments fail from lack Fortunes rise and fall And great art is made by force of

You won't find will in résumés It isn't always noisy And often lies deep

Obsession while not will Is part of the intensity Which is a precondition

The ah ha components are Passion and huge ambition All over a good idea

Will unromanticized Along with love It is our most powerful

H. Peter Karoff is founder and chairman of The Philanthropic Initiative.



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