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Maybe it should be called healthcare assurance.



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# CORRESPONDENCE

## IN BOSTON PUBLISHING, SKY'S STILL THE LIMIT

We may be tucked away in West Cambridge, but *Sky & Telescope* is the oldest, most successful consumer astronomy magazine on the planet! But surprisingly, there was no mention of *S&T* in your wonderful article about the state of magazine publishing in Boston ("Short shelf life," *CW*, Winter '04). Since 1940, *S&T* has been a profitable and growing venture. In addition to publishing the magazine, we publish two annuals (*SkyWatch* and *Beautiful Universe*), operate an astronomy-tour business, license our magazine to international partners, publish astronomy books, manufacture astronomy-related products, run an award-winning Web site with full e-commerce capability, and produce high-end gallery art of astronomical images. We are also developing a cell phone application, Mobile Sky Chart, which will be available via Verizon's Get It Now program. This spring, we will launch *Night Sky* magazine ([www.NightSkyMag.com](http://www.NightSkyMag.com)) to reach a broader audience of "beginner stargazers."

We are constantly in

"innovation mode," and I truly believe being independently rooted in Boston gives us a fresh and interesting perspective on the publishing business and the freedom to take risks. We ain't going noplac— Boston is our home.

Marcy Dill  
Vice President, Marketing &  
Business Development  
Sky & Telescope  
Cambridge

I wish your article on magazines, which also mentioned some newspapers, had mentioned *Women's Business*. Now in our sixth year, we believe we have a story that should be told. We have been successful since day one. Women are a leading source of business in the Boston community, and we recognize that and work to have businesses realize women's contributions. In Massachusetts, women are 55.9 percent of the population and hold the majority of the wealth, yet in the media they still don't get visibility. That's why *Women's Business* was born. I hope you'll keep your eye open for your issue of *Women's Business*.

Vicki Donlan  
Publisher  
Women's Business  
Hingham

In 1999, I moved from New York City, leaving an editorial job at Random House, to work for *Sail Magazine* here in Boston. *Sail* was started in 1970 on Commercial Wharf and has remained in Boston all this time. A nice pool of Radcliffe Publishing Course alumni have traipsed through as well, myself included. *Sail* is the highest



circulated marine magazine in the world, making more money than most more publicized mags like our ex-sister publication *New York*. I wish you had looked a little harder—we are right across the street from *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Elizabeth B. Wrightson  
Photo Editor  
SAIL Magazine  
Boston

Jeffrey Klineman's article about the Boston magazine landscape is an excellent read and one I can personally relate to since I've seen my share of start-ups over the years fail, one after the next. Meanwhile, my own publication, *Weekly Dig*—one that he neglected to mention—actually thrives in this environment and outlasts them all. In fact, we produce more content in a month than almost all of the monthlies and quarterlies mentioned combined; have attracted writers from the likes of *The Boston Globe* and the *Boston Phoenix*; and incubated our own writers who later went on to write for publications such as *Urb*, *Transworld Stance*, *Spin*, *Alternative Press*, and so on.

It's my opinion that the real problem with the Boston magazine scene is publications like *POV*, *DoubleTake*, and even *The Atlantic Monthly*, that live to be fiscally irresponsible, rely-





ing heavily on philanthropic bailouts instead of good business practices, while catering to the cultural elite simply for the sake of, well, catering to the cultural elite.

Maybe Klineman should read our interview with Errol Morris, or a recent submission by Howard Zinn, to see just how vibrant this great city's magazine scene can be, even if it lives in disguise as a weekly newspaper.

Jeff Lawrence  
President/Publisher  
Weekly Dig  
Boston

Just wanted to follow up regarding your story on Boston being a non-magazine town. Cape Cod Life Publications, while not headquartered in Boston, certainly is on the edges, and while our readers are primarily owners of homes on the Cape and or Islands, many of our readers own a home in Boston or the suburbs as well. From the feedback we get from our readers, I get the impression they look forward to receiving their issue of *Cape Cod Life* or *Cape & Islands Home* each and every month. Our increase in newsstand and subscriptions certainly indicates that as well.

So, from my perspective, while big publishing giants may not find a home (or success) in Boston and its surrounding areas, those committed to creative and unique editorial content, quality photography, and interesting information, do indeed have publishing opportunities. We at *Cape Cod Life* are looking for new opportunities all the time in and around the Boston and eastern Massachusetts area. Any ideas?

Rusty Piersons  
President  
Cape Cod Life Publications  
Pocasset

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# Rank injustice

*Civil Service hiring rules penalize the best and the brightest*

BY JOHN O'LEARY

**T**here is a public safety crisis in Massachusetts, a crisis of our own making. The quality of our workforce is not what it should be, and it's our own fault. At a time when public safety depends more than ever on a professional, educated workforce, the Commonwealth operates under a set of archaic rules that promote mediocrity among our police, fire, and corrections workers.

On a recent Civil Service exam for the Boston Police Department, 492 applicants scored 95 percent or above. Only one of these 492 top scorers landed in the first 75 positions on the hiring list. Civil Service laws prevent the state's largest city, and all other municipalities, from putting the best possible cops on the street.

Instead of hiring the best and the brightest, we hire according to a pecking order of "preferences" set by the Legislature. Instead of requiring education, we discourage applicants from getting a college degree. And instead of hiring on merit, we hire on the basis of nepotism, favoritism, and political influence.

To understand the crisis facing Massachusetts today, you have to understand the central organizing principle of the public safety workforce: the Civil Service system.

In the latter half of the 19th century, American government was dominated by patronage. New York's Tammany Hall and other political machines routinely fired public workers and replaced them with their supporters, however inept. There was widespread sentiment for reform.

The situation reached a tragic climax in 1881, when President James Garfield was shot dead by Charles Guiteau, who had worked in a small way for Garfield's election and felt he was owed a job for his efforts. ("What do you think of me for Consul-General at Paris?" he wrote the new president.) On July 2, Guiteau shot Garfield in Washington's Union Station. With a bullet lodged in his back, Garfield suffered for several weeks and finally died on September 19.

The nation was outraged. Guiteau came to represent the evils of patronage, and Garfield's assassination galvanized popular disgust at the spoils system. In short order, the federal government created a federal Civil Service based on merit testing. In 1884, Massachusetts (and most other states) followed suit by passing Civil Service statutes.

Civil Service governs two aspects of government employment. First, it is a merit-testing system that determines how individuals are hired and promoted. Second, it is a form of protection for employees against arbitrary dismissal or discipline. In theory, the two together should eliminate political patronage in the classical sense—newly elected officeholders removing government workers and replacing them with their own supporters. Unfortunately, in Civil Service today, protection remains, but merit is long gone.

In theory, Civil Service covers most state and local public employees—from janitors to accountants, from payroll clerks to database programmers. In practice, the state has abandoned Civil Service testing for most jobs except those in public safety. Approximately 30,000 positions in the executive branch of state government are Civil Service jobs, but for most job titles, the state's Human Resources Division hasn't given exams for years. Instead, 14,000 employees have been hired (or promoted) into these positions as "provisionals," without benefit of exams. By law, an individual is supposed to work for no more than one year under a provisional appointment, so more than one-fourth of the state's workforce is working "illegally." The same is true at the local level, though because data is not centralized, no one knows precisely how many provisional workers there are in municipal government.

**We promote mediocrity  
among public safety workers.**

As far as most government agencies are concerned, testing is gone—and for good reason. Testing for such a wide range of jobs is incredibly complex and costly. There would need to be separate tests for psychologists, budget analysts, and Web designers, to name just a few. It's not too much to say that the Civil Service test-based hiring system has been abandoned because it has become unworkable and too costly to administer.

The same is not true in public safety agencies, where the Civil Service hiring process is alive and well, exams included. Roughly 75 percent of police and fire personnel

are members of Civil Service, as is virtually everyone employed in corrections—about 28,000 public safety employees in all. The largest exception is the State Police, which conducts its own hiring and promotional exams, although troopers retain certain appeal rights to the Civil Service Commission. Just three job categories—police officer, firefighter, and corrections officer—cover virtually all the functions of the public safety workforce, and tests for these categories are given regularly. The problem is, performance on these tests counts for almost nothing in landing these Civil Service jobs.

### TOOTHLESS TEST SCORES

Civil Service is predicated on the Merit Principle, described in the Civil Service law as the “selecting and advancing of employees on the basis of their relative ability, knowledge and skills, including an open consideration of qualified applicants for initial appointing.” This is a noble principle. Like most noble principles, it is largely ignored.

The idea is simple. The state gives a Civil Service exam, then state and municipal agencies are allowed to hire from among a limited number of top scorers. But this simple idea has been butchered by decades of legislative tinkering. Today, applicants for public safety jobs still take Civil Service exams, but candidates are not selected from among the top scorers. In most cases, cities are prohibited from even considering those at the head of the class.

Take Boston, which in 2000 sought to hire 25 new firefighters. The good news is that 29 candidates scored 100 percent or better on the test. (Extra points given for education and experience make it possible to score above 100 percent.) The bad news is that none of these 29 top scorers made it into the top 200 on the hiring list.

In fact, none of the 100-percenters—including the smart but unfortunate fellow who landed at No. 1,837 on the hiring list—had any chance of getting a job. According to the “ $2n + 1$ ” rule, when hiring for 25 positions, Boston is allowed to consider only the top 51 interested candidates on the Civil Service hiring list. But the top of the most recent hiring list was loaded with candidates who earned mediocre scores. The list of 51 candidates eligible for hiring included only six of the top 200 scorers; 11 of the 51 had been outscored by 2,000 or more fellow applicants. The individual in the No. 22 spot on the hiring list had a score of 72, just two points above passing—and below 3,383 of the 3,429 candidates who passed the test. So much for the Merit Principle.

Hiring for police positions is similarly weak on merit, as determined by the Civil Service exam. On the 1997 exam for the Boston Police Department, 492 applicants scored 95 or above. Only one of these 492 high scorers landed in the first 75 positions on the hiring list.

By the way, when municipalities choose among the

potential candidates offered up by the Civil Service list, they have no idea how the candidates scored. The city or town doing the hiring is told only the candidate’s rank on the hiring list, not the test score. (In 1999, Secretary of State Bill Galvin’s office ruled that a candidate’s test scores are exempt from public records disclosure laws.) A town is required to present sufficient reasons if it doesn’t hire the top names from this hiring list, but it cannot consider what could be the soundest reason of all: a low test score.

### PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT

If test scores don’t determine rank on the hiring list, what does? The answer is “preferences.” Certain “absolute preferences,” determined by law and court order, allow some applicants with at least a passing grade of 70 to move ahead of everyone else. In fact, there are so many folks being ushered to the front of the line it actually requires an order of preferences to sort them all out. Here is a typical list of absolute preferences used to create a Civil Service hiring list in a Massachusetts city or town:

- minority applicants (in consent decree communities only)
- resident children of police officers or firefighters killed in the line of duty
- non-resident children of police officers or firefighters killed in the line of duty
- resident disabled veterans
- resident children of police officers or firefighters injured in the line of duty
- non-resident children of police officers or firefighters injured in the line of duty
- resident veterans
- resident widows or widowed mothers of veterans killed in the line of duty or dead from service-connected disabilities incurred in wartime service
- resident non-veterans
- non-resident disabled veterans
- non-resident veterans
- non-resident widows or widowed mothers of veterans killed in the line of duty or dead from service-connected disabilities incurred in wartime service
- non-resident non-veterans

Preferential treatment for minorities has excited the most public controversy, with white candidates for police or firefighter jobs complaining (or filing suit) when they lose out to lower-scoring minority applicants. But when it comes to undermining merit, racial preference would have limited impact were it not for the other forms of preference that apply at the same time.

Minority preferences are in force only in those communities where courts have issued a consent decree. Fifteen

communities, representing 25 percent of the state's population, are under such consent decrees for hiring police officers. Cambridge, for example, requires the first and each subsequent fourth candidate on the hiring list to be a designated minority candidate. In Boston, minority applicants are placed in the first position, third position, fifth position, etc., under a similar court consent decree.

These communities generally produce lots of high-scoring minority candidates. But these are not the ones who get the spots reserved for minorities. Because of other absolute preferences granted by statute, lower-scoring minority candidates are often the beneficiaries of these set-asides. For example, in 2003 there were 296 candidates who passed the Civil Service test and wanted to become Springfield police officers. Here are the top three candidates on the Civil Service hiring list and their test results:

HIRING LIST RANK	EXAM SCORE	TEST SCORE RANK
1	87%	172
2	74%	284
3	82%	241

Once again, the top candidates came from the middle of the barrel, if not the bottom. The first and third candidates

were, by consent decree, minority candidates. But many minority candidates with higher scores were pushed lower on the list to make room for these two, who were veterans. Candidate No. 2, a non-minority, was a disabled veteran who nabbed the top spot on the hiring list not reserved for a minority candidate, despite a very low passing score.

Moving down the list, we see some minority candidates who outscored the non-minority candidates immediately above them on the hiring list.

HIRING LIST RANK	EXAM SCORE	CANDIDATE'S RACE
4	95%	Non-minority
5	96%	Minority
6	92%	Non-minority
7	94%	Minority
8	89%	Non-minority
9	92%	Minority
10	86%	Non-minority
11	91%	Minority

This chart may surprise those who see the racial preference as the root of all that ails Civil Service. Of far greater consequence is the system of absolute preferences baked into the Civil Service statute by the Legislature. In

"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 dear. That fire is genius."

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow  
(1807 - 1882)



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Springfield, 29 of the police candidates were eligible for absolute veterans' preferences, and another 99 rated absolute residents' preferences. As a result, Springfield's top two scorers—both of whom scored 99 percent—were way down at Nos. 146 (non-resident, non-minority veteran) and 167 (non-resident, non-minority, non-veteran) on the hiring list. The bottom line is that for new hires, Civil Service is a bizarre mechanism that sorts primarily on criteria other than test score.

### THREE WAYS IN

Competitive exams are supposed to guard the door to the Civil Service system, ensuring that the most meritorious candidates are hired for public service. But there are at least three legal ways to get around this gatekeeper. Let's consider each in turn.

*The VIP Entrance: Statutory Absolute Preferences.* As noted above, the Legislature has granted absolute preference to several groups, including the children of firefighters and police officers killed or disabled in the line of duty. Without question, these children deserve consideration of some sort for their family's sacrifice. But this institutionalized nepotism—favoring certain candidates based on who their parents are—flies in the face of the Merit Principle.

The absolute preference for veterans, while politically popular, likewise fails the merit test. It originally applied only to those who saw "wartime service." Since 1990, this is no longer the case. Now anyone can earn a preference by peeling potatoes in Fort Benning, Ga., for as few as 90 days. Why? Because the Legislature never declared an end to the Persian Gulf War. Wartime service is no longer necessary to receive an absolute veterans' preference; you can serve on the home front and still go to the front of the line.

The veterans' preference also has a troubling unintended consequence: disadvantaging candidates who have gone to college rather than joined the service. A 25-year-old with, say, an engineering degree from MIT, a master's degree in criminal justice from Harvard, an Olympic gold medal in pistol shooting, and a perfect score on the Civil Service exam does not stand a chance against a 19-year-old with a barely passing score who has spent two years in the Navy. The small educational points added to the exam score are irrelevant in the face of absolute preference, and anyone seeking a public safety job in Massachusetts would be well advised to forego college and join the service instead.

Other states don't allow military service to trump all other qualifications. Illinois, for example, gives the same five points of preference for a bachelor's degree and for an associate's degree in criminal justice or law as it does for military service. In California, veterans get no preference points; to become a Beverly Hills cop, you'll need an associate's degree. In Massachusetts, the Civil Service promotional exams work tolerably well because they do not grant



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these absolute preferences.

*The Side Door: Cadet Programs.* In several communities, there is a side door that allows favored individuals to obtain Civil Service jobs without competing on the exam at all. Five Massachusetts communities, including Boston and Springfield, have “police cadet” programs. Boston, for example, can name one-third of its new hires not from the Civil Service hiring list but straight out of the cadet program. Established by the Legislature, these cadet programs are a way for communities to bypass the competitive testing process—and to indulge in nepotism and patronage reminiscent of the 1880s. Once hired, these cadets are given the same Civil Service status and protections as those who were hired through the competitive exam list.

*The Hidden Passageway: Special Favor Legislation.* It sounds incredible, but it’s true. You can get a law passed just for you that will create a hidden passageway to the front of the hiring line. For example, Chapter 102 of the Acts of 2003, sponsored by Rep. John Rogers of Norwood (chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and a favorite of House Speaker Tom Finneran), states that “Jennifer Gover, the daughter of Thomas J. Gover, a deceased firefighter in the town of Norwood, shall have her name certified for original appointment for fire services in the town of Norwood before all other persons on the Civil Service eligibility list.” Individuals whose scores would have put them ahead of Gover have been pushed back from the door.

The Hidden Passageway cannot be found anywhere in the Massachusetts General Laws. It’s opened up by a special act of the Legislature. While the least common way to get past the merit gatekeeper (there may be only a handful of these special laws passed in any given year), this alternative route to a police, fire, or prison job is worth mentioning because it goes to the heart of the culture of public service in Massachusetts. Far from being based on merit, it is all about politics, whether it be favoritism for a particular individual or favoritism for a powerful lobby, such as the veterans.

## RESURRECTING MERIT

The Civil Service system is broken. How can we fix it? Three simple changes would have an enormous impact.

*Eliminate Civil Service for non-public-safety personnel covered by collective bargaining agreements.* This change would have two important effects. First, it would acknowledge the reality that Civil Service tests are no longer given in non-public-safety positions. “Provisional” hires and promotions would no longer be necessary. Three states—Florida, Georgia, and Texas—have already eliminated Civil Service in this manner with positive results. Second, this change would free up the Civil Service Commission to focus on cases involving public safety professionals. In the 1880s, dismissed employees had no protection against

the arbitrary actions of managers. Today, union contracts covering most public employees make Civil Service protections redundant. We can’t afford to maintain a belt-and-suspenders approach to protecting a group of employees that is already afforded ample protection.

*Replace absolute preferences with preference points.* The system of absolute preferences makes a mockery of the Merit Principle that is supposed to underlie Civil Service. At the same time, there is nothing wrong with giving some preference to those who have served their country, or who have lost a family member in public service. The compromise solution is to add up to 10 points to an applicant’s test score based on a range of worthy attributes. For example, a veteran might get two points, a disabled veteran four points, and the son or daughter of a slain police officer eight points. That would give certain applicants a leg up but ensure that merit would still matter: It would be impossible even for those given a preference to earn a spot on the hiring list without a competitive exam score. This idea has already been implemented by the State Police, which gives applicants with military service two extra points on their test scores. As a result, the Commonwealth’s elite law-enforcement group almost never hires anyone who has scored less than 95 percent on the entrance exam.

This reform would provide opportunity for those who have sacrificed for their country, but also improve the quality of our public safety workforce. Even in communities with consent decrees requiring racial preferences, this points-based preference approach would foster a strong link between test scores and placement on the hiring list.

*Eliminate noncompetitive cadet programs and special favor legislation.* The Civil Service system must apply to everyone equally. Special programs and special laws that favor the well-connected undermine the integrity of public service.

The old Civil Service system made tremendous sense in the 1880s. Then again, so did the Conestoga wagon. We need to acknowledge today’s realities and reshape our public sector workforce, particularly the public safety workforce, to accommodate this modern environment.

In the main hearing room of the Civil Service Commission, there hangs on the wall a picture of the assassination of James Garfield, as if to say, “By golly, we are not going to let this sort of thing happen ever again.” What is happening within Civil Service today, however, is a tragedy of a different sort. Until the Legislature takes the steps necessary to change our outdated system, we will be handcuffed in our ability to build a public safety workforce of the best and the brightest. The Commonwealth deserves no less. ■

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*John O’Leary is chairman of the Massachusetts Civil Service Commission.*



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# Reinventing the state budget

*Massachusetts should focus on outcomes, not allocations*

BY DAVID OSBORNE AND PETER HUTCHINSON

Since 2001, Gov. Mitt Romney and the Legislature have cut spending by almost \$3 billion. While also raising taxes and fees, the state has reduced Medicaid services, eliminated health insurance for some of the poor, decimated public health programs such as the anti-smoking campaign and drug prevention, virtually eliminated funding for outpatient mental health care and alcohol and drug treatment, and made deep cuts in higher education, K-12 schooling, and local aid. Local governments and school districts are reeling from the impact, laying off teachers and police officers and struggling to pass overrides to Proposition 2½.

Today an economic recovery is well underway. Yet the most respected independent forecaster in the state, the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, says the state still faces a gap of more than \$1 billion between projected revenues and spending in fiscal 2005. As a result, Romney's 2005 budget proposes further cuts in Medicaid, public health, mental health, corrections, child care, transit, and dozens of other programs.

Welcome to the permanent fiscal crisis.

Like every other state that does not enjoy significant oil or gas revenues, Massachusetts has a long-term structural deficit, a mismatch between projected revenues and projected spending levels. Economic growth will help, but unless we pass deeper spending cuts or larger tax increases, a similar picture will present itself in 2006, 2007, and probably beyond.

Why?

The answer lies in the confluence of four basic factors—what MTF has called a fiscal “perfect storm.” First, the rising cost of health care—mounting at a relentless 10 percent a year for the past 25 years—is eating government alive at every level. Nationally, Medicaid rose from \$40 billion and 11 percent of state budgets in 1985 to \$230 billion and more than 20 percent in 2002. Here in Massachusetts, total health care spending (including Medicaid, insurance for state employees, uncompensated care, and other programs) shot up from 25 percent of state spending in fiscal 2001 to 33 percent in 2004, according to MTF. Romney has recommended further cuts, but even if these

are approved, health care would still gobble up \$4 out of every \$10 of new revenue in his 2005 budget.

Second, the graying of the population—a primary force behind the increasing cost of health care—is also driving up public pension costs. Massachusetts has exacerbated the problem by cutting contributions to the state pension fund for the past three years. This year, facing a crisis, the governor and legislative leaders have agreed to put \$530 million into the pension fund, a 77 percent increase that will consume half of all new revenue.

Third, because Massachusetts has a high debt level, interest payments eat up 16 percent of all new revenue in Romney's budget.

After feeding those three budget busters, as former state senator Patricia McGovern used to call them, Romney has had to cut the rest of state government by 0.2 percent. Given an inflation rate of about 2 percent, that translates into a service-level cut of 2.2 percent.

But there is a fourth element of the perfect storm: a leaky revenue system. With the worst timing imaginable, the citizens of Massachusetts voted themselves an income tax cut in 2000, just as the economy turned south. And like most states, we still do not tax services, which have

**We must maximize the value of every tax dollar.**

grown from 40 percent of consumer spending in 1960 to 60 percent today. Imagine if state governments had chosen to tax only agricultural goods when they created their sales taxes, back in the 1930s, so as to protect the new manufacturing economy. We have been just as short-sighted by sparing the service sector today. In the last big fiscal crisis, the Legislature passed a bill to extend the sales tax to services, but Gov. William Weld succeeded in getting it repealed in 1991.

Since the fiscal storm broke, leaders have grabbed for any solution that could keep them afloat for another year. “Politicians,” says former Minnesota congressman Bill Frenzel, “have more tricks than the CFO of Enron.” Our leaders have been no exception. They have repeatedly bal-

anced the budget using one-time revenues and spending cuts, leaving the same holes to be closed again the following year. According to MTF, the 2004 budget was balanced using \$900 million in one-time revenues—which explains most of the structural deficit in 2005. The governor’s 2005 proposal relies on \$500 million in one-time revenues and savings, such as those that would come from merging the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority with MassHighway. Even if all these one-timers materialize, we will start 2006 at least half a billion dollars in the hole.

In contrast to the fiscal crisis of the early 1990s, today there is little hope of restoring these cuts through economic growth. At current tax levels health care, pensions, and interest will consume virtually all the revenue growth we can foresee.

To cope with this painful reality, we need reforms that go far deeper than those Romney has proposed. The solutions lie in three places: plugging the leaks in our revenue system, reinventing the way state services are delivered, and changing the way we spend the \$25 billion a year we continue to appropriate. In this article, we will focus on the third strategy: reinventing the budget process.

Nothing is more powerful in shaping state government than the way we divvy up our dollars—a process that

today drives us inevitably toward across-the-board cuts in spending affecting the poorest and least powerful among us. If we want different answers to our fiscal dilemmas, we must begin by asking different questions.

Most of the Sturm und Drang of budgeting involves the battle over what to cut. Instead, we must learn to focus on what we keep. We should shift the debate away from *how best to trim* 5, 10, or 15 percent of the budget toward *how best to spend* the 85, 90, or 95 percent that remains. We must rethink the way we spend the public’s money, not just to minimize the damage of funding shortfalls but to maximize the value of every tax dollar we collect.

### RULES OF THE BUDGET GAME

Consider how the budget process works today. The game begins when the budget office receives proposals from department heads. Virtually every budget request starts by proposing to spend what was spent last year. In state budgeting circles, this is often called the “base” or the “current services” level. It represents what is minimally necessary for agencies and departments to keep doing what they’ve been doing the way they’ve been doing it.

But last year’s spending is only the starting point in defining each department’s base budget. Invariably, agen-

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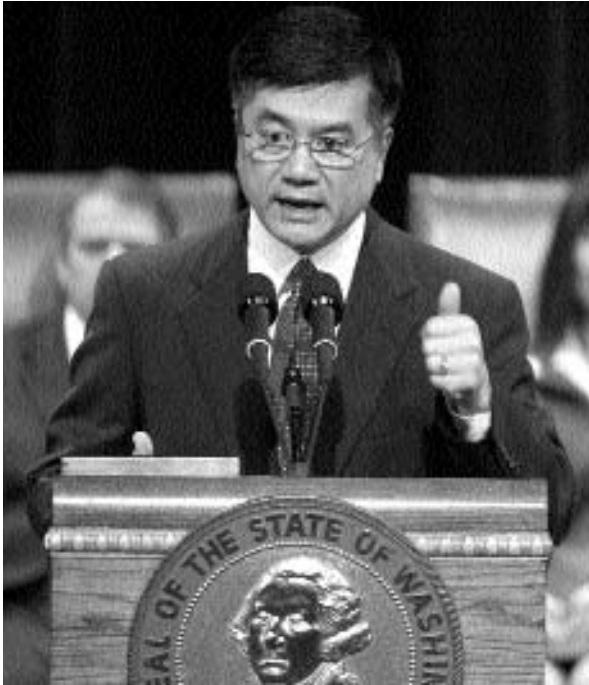
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*Washington Gov. Gary Locke faced a \$2.1 billion deficit.*

cies ask for more money to cover current service levels, on the grounds that inflation makes everything cost more; they may also project higher caseloads or plead that new laws mandate additional services.

Then there are the pre-emptive strikes that departments make to protect themselves from the inevitable cuts. Smart managers build in padding to ensure that, after trimming, they end up with what they feel they really need to operate effectively. Budget staff and elected officials play hide-and-seek with the departments, searching for the padding that can be cut. Meanwhile, policy-makers are bombarded by demands from vocal, entrenched defenders of programs. Unable to tell fat from fundamentals, they often resort to across-the-board cuts, cuts that penalize any administrator who files an honest budget.

What's worse, this whole game of budgetary cat-and-mouse is played out over programs rather than results. The budget is organized by who spends the money, not what outcomes that money buys. It is policy-making by organizational chart. At its best, this process burns up hundreds of thousands of nonproductive hours. Few people win, many lose, and there is plenty of blame to go around.

Now consider an alternative, which we call Budgeting for Outcomes. It has no concept of "base budget." Last year's appropriation is not an entitlement, so the argument is not about adding to or subtracting from it. Instead, budget talks start where the old process ends, with an agreed-upon spending level. Then the discussion revolves around how to buy the best possible results with the people's money.

## LESSONS FROM WASHINGTON STATE

How is this different than the standard budget process described above? Consider the experience of Washington state, the first to use Budgeting for Outcomes.

In its fiscal 2002-03 biennial budget, Washington hit the same fiscal wall that Massachusetts did. Halfway through the biennium, Democratic Gov. Gary Locke and the Washington Legislature were forced to trim \$1.5 billion and eliminate 1,340 jobs. But it wasn't the magnitude of the challenge that frustrated the governor and his staff. It was the futility of the exercise.

"Every step we took, we asked ourselves, why aren't we asking the right questions? Why are we so focused on the cuts and not on the keeps?" says Marty Brown, director of the Office of Financial Management. "We were missing something. We knew it in our guts."

Facing another \$2.1 billion deficit in the general fund in the upcoming biennium, plus an additional \$600 million shortfall in health-services funding, Locke was looking for an alternative to a 15 percent across-the-board cut. He wanted to focus on the big questions: What should state government do—and what should it stop doing?

"I don't want to thin the soup," Locke declared at the time. "I want state government to do a great job in fulfilling its highest priorities."

In August 2002, Locke's chief of staff asked our company, the Public Strategies Group, for help. We made him a proposal that was anything but reasonable. PSG proposed to start with the results citizens wanted, not the programs

## 'Why are we so focused on the cuts and not the keeps?'

the agencies operated. We urged the governor and his staff to focus not on how to cut 10 to 15 percent but on how to maximize the results produced with the 85 to 90 percent remaining. Locke decided that this unreasonable approach was the only reasonable thing to do.

PSG helped the governor's budget staff design a process to answer five key questions:

- Is the real problem short-term or long-term?
- How much are citizens willing to spend?
- What results do citizens want for their money?
- How much will the state spend to produce each of these results?
- How best can that money be spent to achieve each of the core results?

These five questions led to five key challenges.

### 1. GET A GRIP ON THE PROBLEM.

How you define a problem dictates how you approach the solution. Washington's fiscal staff defined the problem as

the convergence of three forces: a deep economic recession that slashed revenues; permanent limits on revenue and spending growth imposed by anti-tax activists through statewide initiatives; and rising costs for the core activities of the state (“education, medication, and incarceration,” as Marty Brown describes them). Of the three, only the recession’s impact on revenue could be termed cyclical, likely to turn around at some point. The other two were more or less permanent. Thus, the solutions had to be more or less permanent.

## 2. SET THE PRICE OF GOVERNMENT.

This was the purview of a Guidance Team, made up of senior policy people, plus several leaders from business and private think tanks. (Organized labor was invited to participate, but chose not to.) Its first big decision was to build the budget based on expected revenues under existing law, without new taxes. In November 2002, despite heavy lobbying by Locke, voters soundly defeated a gas tax increase to pay for long-needed transportation projects. This anti-tax reality—plus a fear that tax increases would further depress the state’s economy—led the team to advise the governor against raising taxes.

## 3. SET THE PRIORITIES OF GOVERNMENT.

Working with a team of senior staff from the state’s Office of Financial Management, the Guidance Team defined the results it believed Washington’s citizens most wanted from state government, boiled down to 10 “Priorities of Government,” as the governor declared them. These top priorities called for improvement in:

- student achievement in elementary, middle, and high schools;
- the quality and productivity of the workforce;
- the value of a state college or university education;
- the health of Washington’s citizens;
- the security of Washington’s vulnerable children and adults;
- the vitality of businesses and individuals;
- the statewide mobility of people, goods, information, and energy;
- the safety of people and property;
- the quality of Washington’s priceless natural resources; and
- cultural and recreational opportunities.

## 4. ALLOCATE AVAILABLE RESOURCES ACROSS THE PRIORITIES.

The next challenge was allocating the state’s entire \$54 billion budget (\$24 billion in the general fund and \$30 billion in other funds) across the 10 priorities. Setting aside 10 percent for overhead functions, such as pension contributions and administrative services, the Guidance and staff teams parceled out the rest among the 10 desired

results, trying to use a citizen’s point of view based on perceived value, rather than on past practice. In some areas their choices reflected existing patterns of spending, but in a few they made changes—allocating more resources to economic vitality, for example, and fewer to public safety.

This wasn’t easy. The teams wanted data on past spending patterns. We told them there wasn’t any, because budgets had always been organized by agency costs, not by the value of outcomes. On top of that, multiple programs and agencies contributed to each result. We asked them to put a price on each outcome, to express the relative value of each one.

## 5. DEVELOP A PURCHASING PLAN FOR EACH DESIRED RESULT.

These state leaders then put together Results Teams—one for each priority outcome, made up of knowledgeable people from agencies involved in that policy area. “We asked them to forget the loyalties they have to the agencies they represent,” said Locke. “‘Be like citizens,’ we said. ‘Tell us where to put the money, so we get the best results. Tell us what similar programs can be consolidated. Tell us what programs don’t make a large enough difference in getting the results we want.’”

The teams each chose three indicators that would measure progress toward their goals. Then they developed strategy maps, or explicit cause-and-effect diagrams showing what they considered to be the best ways to achieve the desired outcomes. And they had to articulate their “theory of what matters most”—how much the different activities they favored would contribute to the desired outcome.

Since the 10 priorities of government cut across departmental lines, so did the Results Teams. That led to predictable challenges. The mobility team, for instance, had responsibility for improving the movement of people, goods, information, and energy. But many of its members, with backgrounds in highways and public works, were accustomed to focusing on roads and bridges. As they wrestled with their charge, however, they came to see that the challenge was as much about telecommuting by World Wide Web as commuting by car. Ultimately, the team came to understand the fundamental distinction between pouring cement and moving people, ideas, goods, and energy efficiently.

Creating a strategy map required those involved to take a firm position on how activity adds up to results. Armed with a “theory of what matters most,” each Results Team identified five or six key strategies for producing its desired outcomes. This process stimulated a kind of creativity that is absent from traditional budget development. For example, the team dealing with K-12 education said the state needed to purchase more early childhood education, shift to a “pay for skills” compensation system for teachers, and move away from across-the-board school

funding toward targeted funding for those schools and kids most in need.

There is no one right way to create a cause-and-effect map and translate that diagram into funding priorities. But here is how the health team did it, beginning with their map (see below).

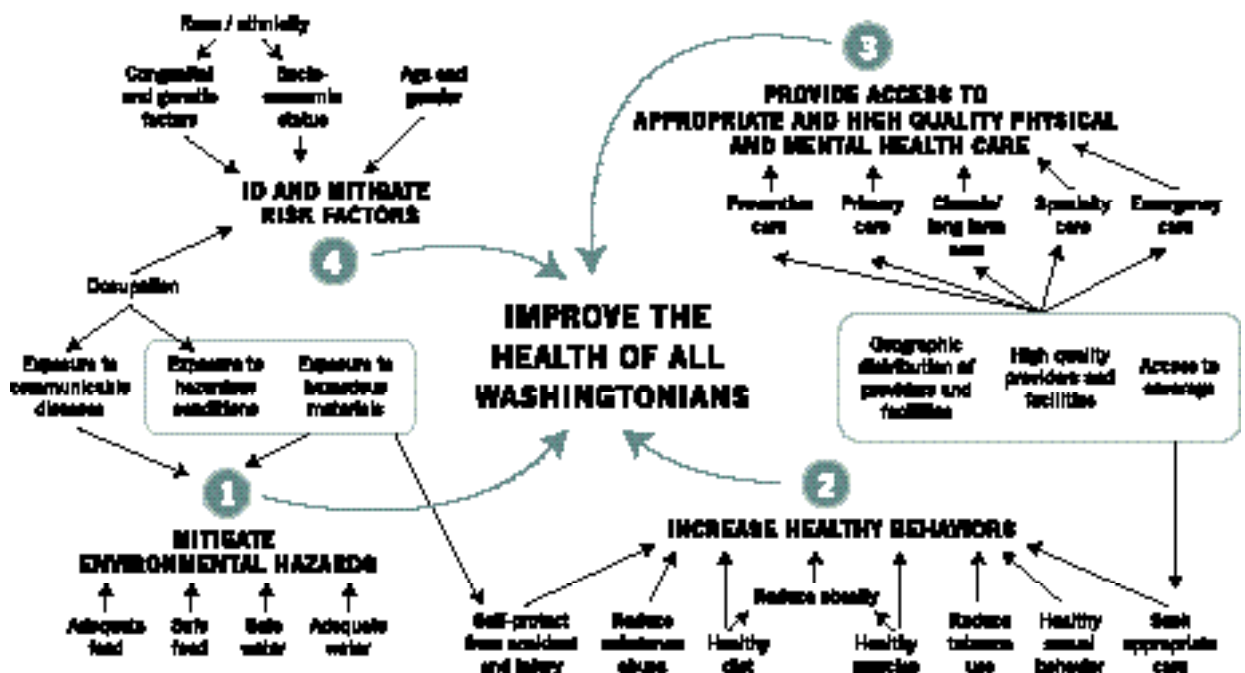
To achieve improved health for the citizens of Washington, the health team identified four possible strategies: increasing healthy behaviors among citizens (eating better, driving more safely, quitting smoking, and getting more exercise); mitigating environmental hazards (making water, air, and food cleaner and safer); identifying and mitigating risk factors related to gender, socioeconomic hardships, and genetic predispositions; and providing access to appropriate, high-quality medical and mental health treatment.

In ranking these strategies, mitigating environmental hazards was declared the most important, followed in order by promoting healthy behaviors, providing access to health care, and mitigating risk factors. Given the state's fiscal crunch, the team decided to give funding priority to the first two, even though that meant reduced spending on traditional (and expensive) medical care. In fact, the team's analysis of available data showed that these two strategies would yield a 16-to-1 return on the state's investment.

The old budget game would have given priority to the area of greatest spending—medical treatment—by protecting it from cuts as much as possible, even if that meant

shortchanging health promotion. (That's exactly what happened in Massachusetts, as the state all but eliminated prevention programs, while Medicaid spending continues to rise, even with service cutbacks.) But the new approach asked the health team to ignore last year's spending and figure out where the best results could be obtained for the available money. The "aha" moment came when a PSG consultant asked why team members weren't emphasizing personal choice and behavior by focusing on drugs, alcohol, and obesity. "Oh, we could never say that out loud," the team leader responded. But the consultant pushed back: If they truly thought investment in prevention would produce more health improvement than a comparable investment in treatment, they should say so. They did—and elevated health promotion over medical treatment for the first time in the state's history.

But the budget wasn't done yet. Next, the Results Team leaders met to talk about what they could purchase from one another to achieve their goals. The higher education team decided to use some of its funds to pay for better K-12 education, to better prepare its incoming students. Two teams jointly bought increased efforts to protect water quality, to improve both health and natural resource outcomes. Because the Guidance Team had allocated resources to improving safety that fell well below the current costs for incarceration, the safety team planned to focus resources on the most threatening criminals and release 6,000 low-risk felons early. The economic vitality team felt that releasing so many offenders would adversely affect the state's



ability to attract business, however, so it contributed money to keep more of them in jail. This cross-team buying was necessary because the work of state government is interconnected: Spending in one area contributes to outcomes in others.

Finally, the process turned to existing state activities—the place a traditional budget process starts. Each Results Team was given a subset of the 1,300 state activities funded by the traditional budget. “Their mission,” the governor explained, “was to get more yield on less acreage.” To do so, they put together a detailed purchasing plan, indicating:

- what they would buy—both new and existing activities;
- what else they would buy if they had more money;
- what they would eliminate first if they had less money; and
- what they would not buy.

Using these and similar rankings provided by the agencies, the Guidance Team and other advisors made final recommendations to the governor—giving him, in effect, 10 strategic programs for state government that linked results, indicators, strategies, and purchase plans.

The governor generally followed these purchase plans in his budget proposal. Under each of his 10 priorities for government, his budget showed those activities that would be funded and those that would not—as the graphic at right demonstrates. It was clear and easy to understand, and it explained in simple terms why some activities continued and others were eliminated.

## NO PAIN, NO GAIN

That’s not to say that the fiscal 2004-05 budget, crafted at a time of extreme fiscal hardship, came easy. Locke had warned that his budget plan would be painful, and it was. Locke proposed to eliminate health insurance for nearly 60,000 of the working poor; dental, hearing, and optometric coverage for poor adults on Medicaid; and 2,500 state jobs. His budget eliminated cost-of-living increases for state employees and suspended teacher pay increases and a \$221 million class-size-reduction effort, both mandated by citizen initiatives. It also called for university tuition to rise by 9 percent a year for two years; for 1,200 low-risk felons to leave prison early; and for a number of smaller programs to be shut down altogether.

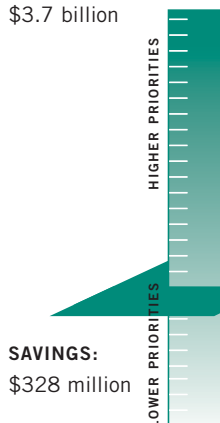
But rather than being denounced as a slash-and-burn exercise, Locke’s budget was accepted with relative equa-

nimity—and, more important, followed. As Joe Dear, the governor’s former chief of staff, put it, “Never has such bad news been received so well.”

“Gov. Gary Locke’s budget is a big step forward for Washington,” declared the *Seattle Times*. “Few Washingtonians will find much to like about the brutal state spending plan Gov. Gary Locke recommended Tuesday,” added the *Tacoma News Tribune*. “But as ugly as the result was, there’s a lot to like about the way Locke and his staff arrived at it, using a new process that forced hard choices about the core priorities of state government.”

Locke had not always been treated with this kind of deference. In his 2000 re-election campaign, Locke was slammed by John Carlson, his Republican opponent, for lack of leadership. Soon after Locke’s new budget was released, however, Carlson wrote a column declaring it “a

### HEALTH CARE SPENDING PLAN: \$3.7 billion



SAVINGS:  
\$328 million

### KEY PURCHASES:

- Medicaid health care for 908,600 vulnerable children and adults
- All current children’s health programs
- Statewide public health programs to protect all citizens
- Public health programs to ensure the health of babies and the safety of food
- Basic Health Plan insurance for 81,000 low-income people
- Expanded financial help to community health clinics

### WHAT’S NOT PURCHASED:

- Basic Health Plan coverage for 59,800 adults
- Health coverage for the medically indigent
- Optional Medicaid coverage for workers with disabilities
- Optional adult dental, vision, and hearing services

work of bold, impressive statecraft.” Carlson told the *Seattle Times*: “Genuine leadership is doing what must be done when you don’t want to do it. And I think the governor is doing that.”

Voters agreed. In a late January survey, 64 percent of respondents endorsed the following statement: “Whether or not I agree with all of the governor’s budget recommendations, I respect his leadership and vision to solve the current problem and get the state’s economy back on track.” Only 29 percent disagreed.

The Legislature, which is split between a Republican Senate and a Democratic House, also liked the new budget format. “It was astounding,” says Marty Brown, the state finance director. “I’ve never been to a set of hearings where the reception was so positive, despite the amount of bad news we had to deliver.”

In early April, when the Republican majority in the state Senate presented its own budget, the first slide was

titled following the governor's lead. Despite deep differences between the parties over taxes and budget cuts, the Legislature ultimately passed a budget that was remarkably close to Locke's proposal. Legislators approved Locke's early implementation of new sentencing guidelines that allowed 1,200 prisoners to be released, as well as his proposed delay in voter-approved initiatives to reduce class sizes and grant automatic pay increases to teachers. They also agreed to amend another public initiative-backed plan to expand coverage in the state's basic health plan, so that funding could go toward current programs. And they required that the next biennial budget be structured around the 10 Priorities of Government, with outcome measures to track progress against each one—along with outcome measures for each activity.

### UNFINISHED BUSINESS

In remaking its state budget, Washington has more to do. Some questions were too big to be tackled in one crisis-wracked budget cycle. Locke has proposed a joint legislative-executive study of the K-12 financing system, for instance, to examine the options more carefully and build the political support necessary for reform.

Nor did the Locke administration have time for one of

the final steps in the Outcome Budgeting process: soliciting offers to produce the desired results from all comers, public and private. Washington's Results Teams treated the past budget's 1,300 activities as the available universe of offers. But to maximize the impact of Budgeting for Outcomes, purchasing teams should solicit offers to see who can deliver the most results for the money.

This is the step that departs most radically from the old budget game. The purchasing teams incorporate the outcome, indicators, price, and purchasing strategies they have settled upon into one or more solicitations—let's call them "requests for results." The RFRs can be sent to all agencies and departments, to other governments, and to nonprofit and for-profit organizations. They ask each of these potential suppliers to identify how they would help deliver the expected results, and at what price.

In developing their responses, bidders need not, indeed must not, take anything for granted. They must assume that for each result there will be many proposals from many potential sellers, public and private. If they expect to get funded, they have to offer up proposals that deliver the needed results at a competitive price. Since one organization may choose to submit multiple proposals (for its various programs and activities), it is in a sense

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competing against itself. This, too, forces it to challenge its own practices, to examine whether they are the most cost-effective means to the end.

While the process is challenging to bidders, it also liberates them. They need not be limited by the past; the process encourages them to come up with new approaches and creative twists. Some will forge partnerships with other departments or agencies, with other governments, and with nongovernmental organizations. All will have incentives to use the many tools that help squeeze more value out of every dollar, such as rightsizing, consolidation, competition, information technology, customer choice, Total Quality Management, and Business Process Re-engineering.

Once the offers are in, purchasing teams rank them in terms of results delivered per dollar, moving down the list of desirable offers and buying according to priority until available funds have been exhausted. This buying plan becomes the budget proposal. It is a list of keeps, not cuts: positive choices for spending the citizens' resources to buy the citizens' results.

Those items ranked too far down the list to be purchased don't make the budget. For defenders of these programs, the challenge is clear: Improve your ranking. Demonstrate that your program will deliver better results (or the same results at a better price) than others being offered, or demonstrate that there are more-efficient ways for those at the top of the list to deliver their results, thereby making room for more purchases. Here again, the incentives are as they should be: better results for citizens, at a better price.

Also underdeveloped in Washington is the role of the Legislature in Outcome Budgeting. For fiscal '04-05, Locke developed his own budget proposal and submitted it to the Legislature. Ideally, with more time to prepare, the governor and legislative leaders would agree in advance on the price of government—what percent of personal income state government would raise in taxes, fees, and charges, and thus how much revenue it would have to spend. The two branches would also work together to define the outcomes most important to citizens. With that as a starting point, the governor and his budget staff would develop their budget proposal. Over time, the Legislature could shift its committee structure to reflect the key outcome goals, paralleling the administration's purchasing teams.

Data on results will never crowd out politics and interest group pressures in an elected legislature, but it can enter the mix. One way to make that happen is to involve legislators in the process of creating the outcome goals, so they develop some sense of ownership. Another is to demonstrate that improving outcomes matters to their constituents. Some states and nations publish scorecards showing annual progress on key goals, for example—scorecards that get significant attention from the media and the public.

Since the state of Washington pioneered Budgeting for Outcomes, the idea has begun to spread. Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack and Los Angeles Mayor Jim Hahn, both Democrats, have embarked on the process. But in Massachusetts, the budget process for fiscal '05 is well underway in traditional fashion, with its familiar bureaucratic—and political—attributes. Gov. Romney's budget is based largely on this year's spending plan, his priorities expressed only at the margins through incremental expansions and relative cutbacks. His "reforms" are mostly proposals for bureaucratic reshuffling that promise dubious savings. The Democratic Legislature stands poised to reject most of them and to substitute its own grab bag of funding preferences, but they differ from the governor's only at the edges. Meanwhile, the great beast of the state-government status quo lumbers on, unaltered and unchallenged. Absent from the entire exercise is any serious rethinking of what government does or how it does it.

This should come as no surprise. In government, as in most realms of life, we find it safer and easier to do what we've always done, simply because we've always done it. Only on rare occasions—usually in times of crisis—do we step back to gain a broader perspective, erase all our preconceived ideas and routine behaviors, and take a

fresh look at how to make the most of our limited time and resources. But if we, and our elected leaders, do not take the opportunity of fiscal crisis for this kind of rethinking, when will we do it?

Budgeting for Outcomes allows public leaders to do some of this big-picture, creative thinking *each time* they prepare a budget. In fact, the process demands it. The challenge for departments shifts from padding their base to proving that their programs produce desired outcomes for the best price. The job of the budget office shifts from playing truth-or-dare with department heads to comparing competing strategies to determine which ones offer the most bang for the citizen's buck. For everyone involved, from elected officials to budget analysts to department heads, being a public servant suddenly focuses on delivering results that citizens value at a price they are willing to pay. Is that not a change worth making? ■

*David Osborne and Peter Hutchinson are co-authors of a new book, The Price of Government: Getting the Results We Need in an Age of Permanent Fiscal Crisis, on which this article is based. Osborne, of Essex, Mass., is a senior partner and Hutchinson is founder and president of the Public Strategies Group (www.psg.us), based in St. Paul, Minn.*






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# Bean counter

*A Bay State expatriate holds President Bush's feet to the fiscal fire*

BY SHAWN ZELLER

Earlier this year, when President Bush proposed his budget for fiscal 2005, it surprised no one that the administration's spending plan was denounced by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal think tank traditionally concerned with the effects of federal spending—and especially the lack thereof—on the poor. More of a surprise was the liberal budget watchers' teaming up with the Concord Coalition, the group of deficit hawks co-founded by the late Sen. Paul Tsongas, to sound the alarm on what would be the largest annual deficit in history, warning of the consequences of the government's failure to prepare for the looming Social Security and Medicare needs of the baby boom generation.

But this is not the first time that the Center on Budget, as it's usually referred to in Washington, has rung the fiscal-discipline bell on Bush. In 2003, when the president proposed a dividend tax cut, the Center on Budget was the first to charge that the proposal would spring a leak in the treasuries of struggling state governments, many of which tie their own capital gains taxes to that of the federal government. Similarly, in 2001, when the Republican president proposed eliminating the estate (he calls it "death") tax, the center didn't wring its hands over federal anti-poverty programs starved for funds, but cried out on behalf of states that couple their own estate levies to the federal government's—and that don't have the federal government's luxury of running

deficits.

In the middle of this newfound fiscal responsibility is Robert Greenstein, the former Newton school-teacher who founded and is still executive director of the Center on Budget. And he admits that he takes his share of razzing from the liberal precincts of his old stomping grounds.

"A lot of my good friends in Boston think I'm becoming increasingly conservative," Greenstein says. "They say, 'Look at all the unmet needs in the country.'" Greenstein sees things differently. "I'm a fiscal conservative, but I remain a liberal on the role of the federal government. To me, the two fit together very well. If you're not a fiscal conservative, then there's not going to be any money to do the things we need to do to be a just and fair society."

It was 32 years ago that Greenstein left his job teaching history and headed to the nation's capital. Green-



and growing it from a staff of six and budget of \$50,000 in 1981 to a staff of nearly 80 and budget of more than \$8 million today. Funding from the Ford, Annie E. Casey, and Charles Stuart Mott foundations, among others, keeps the center afloat.

Even three decades later, however, the Hub's tug is strong. Though a Philadelphia native, Greenstein went to Harvard, studied social science and history, and graduated magna cum laude in 1967. After doing graduate work at the University of California at Berkeley and a summer in Washington working for Ralph Nader, he returned to teach at Newton South

## Robert Greenstein also takes his share of razzing from liberal precincts.

stein insists that Washington's gain wasn't exactly Newton South High School's loss. "I found it harder to be a good teacher than to run a government agency," he says, referring to his stint overseeing the Food Stamps program in President Jimmy Carter's agriculture department. Harder, too, he says, than working at the Community Nutrition Institute, his first job in Washington, and even harder than founding the Center on Budget

in 1969. Greenstein remembers fondly his time living in Cambridge's Central Square, and he still roots for the Red Sox.

The center he runs has other ties to the Bay State. Cindy Mann—an attorney formerly with the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute—worked for the center in the mid-1990s. Mann helped recruit Barbara Sard, an attorney with Greater Boston Legal Services, to run the center's housing

policy section from Boston.

Also in Boston is Jim St. George, who helped develop the center's State Fiscal Analysis Network. He moved to Boston in 1996 to run the Tax Equity Alliance of Massachusetts (TEAM), which had been created (in part thanks to US Rep. John Olver, when he was a state senator) in 1987 as a political counterweight to Citizens for Limited Taxation. St. George now works on the center's International Budget Project, which assists like-minded groups in the developing world advocate around budget policy.

Two years ago, TEAM changed its name to the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center ("Changing their name, but not their stripes," *CW*, Fall 2002), drawing it closer in bloodline to the Center on Budget, which is altogether appropriate. The Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center is one of 23 state groups that rely on

the center for technical assistance—and foundation funding.

"When we have questions on a complex policy issue like Medicaid they will have staffers who are leading researchers in that area," says Noah Berger, former state Senate president Thomas Birmingham's policy director until he joined the center last year, succeeding St. George. "I find them a great model for how to present a strong, clear voice on how budget policy impacts low- and moderate-income people."

And, in some cases, to change that policy, in ways that appeal to Democrats and Republicans alike. In the early 1990s, only six states offered an earned income tax credit to the working poor. Today, 17 states, including Massachusetts, do so, with more than 4 million people getting state credits. The center's advocacy for this program was not only relentless but savvy,

since the EITC first took form during the Ford administration and always had strong support in the GOP, where it was seen as rewarding poor people who work.

Similarly, the center has used the states' rights argument to put dents in the Bush tax cuts, which Greenstein and his team vehemently opposed. In an era when liberal groups are struggling to win any concessions in Washington, the center helped convince Congress last year to allow states to set their own tax rates on stock dividends and to provide \$20 billion in fiscal relief to the states. In addition, center advocacy prompted 17 states to decouple their estate taxes from that of the federal government, saving state governments, including Massachusetts, about \$24 billion.

But the center has fought the Bush Administration at every turn with "cold, hard analysis," never shrill dem-

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agoguery, says St. George. "You know you can rely on the numbers. They don't print mistakes." Accuracy, he says, "is as close to a religion at the center as you can get in an organization."

The Center on Budget also never hesitates to point out what it sees as hypocrisy. When the Republicans proposed to reauthorize the 1996 welfare reform bill, for example, they included a provision to increase by 30 percent the number of hours that single mothers on welfare would be required to work to receive benefits. But they included no extra money to help state governments provide child care, a point the center made loudly. Partly as a result, the reauthorization bill has been stymied for the past two years. More recently, when the Treasury Department wanted to impose new filing requirements on applicants for the EITC—presented as an effort to combat fraud—the center successfully lobbied to ease the new restrictions, warning that tough new regulations would prompt many eligible families not to apply.

"A lot of Republicans, of course,

their numbers. "Bob Greenstein would never do anything to harm his credibility," he says. On Social Security reform, for example, Greenstein says that payroll taxes will be necessary to provide for the boomers, but he doesn't avoid the unpleasant reality—as many liberals do—that benefit cuts are also in the cards.

As a result, even Grover Norquist, a leading Republican anti-tax activist in Washington, manages something like a compliment for Greenstein & Co. The center's policies would put the country "somewhere between France and East Germany," he says. However, he adds, "It's not that they aren't well thought out."

Democrats, by contrast, rely on the center heavily. When the Congressional Democratic Policy Committee wanted a briefing on the federal budget in January, Greenstein was one of the first they called to testify. More than a few Democratic presidential contenders used center reports as crib sheets during the winter primaries. "All the Democratic candidates were attacking the Bush tax

## The Center on Budget never hesitates to point out what it sees as hypocrisy.

cuts, and they have to get their data and viewpoints from somewhere," says Chris Edwards, head of fiscal policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute and a center adversary. "They get it from the center. It's a very effective group."

Still, in a Washington controlled by the GOP, keen on cutting taxes and seemingly unconcerned about ballooning deficits, Bay State bleeding-heart-turned-deficit-hawk Greenstein has his work cut out. "I strongly disagree with one policy after another, but the biggest disappointment is that Bush is not leading on these issues," he says. "Instead, the president is proposing to dig the fiscal hole deeper." ■

Haskins often disagrees with center positions, but he never doubts

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# An unlikely story

BY ROBERT KEOUGH

**T**he Pulitzer Prizes were due to be announced April 5, but in the best journalistic tradition, the list of finalists was leaked a month ahead of time, finding its way to the Web site of the trade journal *Editor & Publisher*, with *The Boston Globe* appearing twice among the nominations. So, by the time you read this, Patricia Wen's three-part series "Barbara's Story" may have won journalism's highest honor, adding to the 17 such prizes the *Globe* has hauled in since 1966. Even if not, this series, published in the dog days of summer (it can still be found online among the *Globe's* Special Reports, at [www.boston.com/news/specials](http://www.boston.com/news/specials); it's probably on more prominent display if the Pulitzer came through), is worth reading, and taking note of.

"Barbara's Story" tells the tale of Barbara Paul, an impoverished 38-year-old single mother of two boys she adores, but cannot, in truth, care for. Employed sporadically, homeless occasionally, subject to bouts of depression and frightening flashbacks from a rape at knifepoint, Barbara has a tough enough time caring for herself. Having been pushed off the welfare rolls in 1998, she maintains a threadbare and chaotic, though loving, home for her two sons, who are ages 16 and 11 when the story opens—and Barbara is faced with the wrenching decision of whether to sign away her rights to them as a mother.

Barbara came to the attention of the Department of Social Services, the state's child-protection agency, by 1994, when the boys began to show signs of neglect. As of 1997, Joe and Art (they are identified only by middle names) had

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become the legal responsibility of DSS, though they continued to live with Barbara. In 1999, a new social worker—one of many over the years—arrived to find the Fitchburg apartment unkempt and unsanitary. Before long, the boys were removed and placed in foster care.

In October 2000, the state began the long process that would end Barbara's parental rights. In 2002, facing a final court battle, Barbara was led toward a compromise of sorts: giving up her legal rights as a mother in exchange for two visits a year. She would no longer be the boys' mother, but neither would they be lost to her forever. Rather than risk all, Barbara agreed. In the final installment of the series, the boys are learning to love their new life with Anne and Jim, their adoptive parents, and Barbara, her life stabilized by a subsidized apartment and federal disability payments, meets the boys who are no longer hers in a heartwarming post-adoption visit.

This brief summary hardly does justice to "Barbara's Story," which is remarkable in a number of ways. It's not every day, or week, that the *Globe* or any other newspaper prints a 12,000-word narrative, especially one with no news hook—indeed, no news at all. This kind of space and play is usually reserved for Spotlight investigations and other exposés. While eye-opening in its own way, "Barbara's

Story" does not shock. Indeed, its drama derives from its vivid, sympathetic, but clear-eyed portrait of a damaged but good-hearted woman struggling not to lose the only things in her life worth caring about, her children.

It's also remarkable to read a story of government action that, in the end, comes to pretty much the best ending one could hope for. DSS, of all state agencies, is most often put in an inherently no-win situation. When it removes children from homes where the danger is less than clear, it's breaking up families; when it leaves youngsters in questionable homes, it's flirting with disaster. This is tough, inherently ambiguous work, where the mistakes are painfully obvious, but only after the fact.

In "Barbara's Story," DSS doesn't do everything right. Social workers come and go, services sometimes seem directed at the wrong problems, and, ultimately, the boys get to be nearly full-grown before they find their way to a permanent home fit to be raised in. But in the end, everything works out for the best, for Joe and Art, for Jim and Anne, even for Barbara herself, thanks, in large measure, to an overwhelmed and much maligned state agency.

In today's knock-'em-over-the-head media culture, that wouldn't normally be considered newsworthy. But in this case, it turned out to be a helluva story. ■

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# Final frontier

*Devens residents weigh the cost of independence*

BY JASON LEFFERTS

DEVENS—Leslie Doolittle and Eric Edwards loved their town-house the day they moved there in May 2002, but within a year they were ready for something bigger. They looked no further than just down the street, choosing one of the red brick Colonials that had housed officers and their families on the former Fort Devens military base. The price was right compared with similar homes in the area, and they love their new community. But Devens is a community with an uncertain future. It's an unincorporated territory, the last of its type in Massachusetts.

Residents, state administrators, and officials in surrounding towns are considering whether Devens should become the first new town in Massachusetts since East Brookfield was incorporated in 1920. There are plenty of complicating issues, from restrictions on housing to the delivery of municipal services. Doolittle and Edwards are specifically concerned about educating their son, Augustus, and the baby on the way, due this spring.

"This town could become part of New Hampshire, as long as we have good schools," Edwards says. "I just want a good school. That's all I care about."

The state is now running studies to determine whether an independent Devens would be viable financially. At the same time, it's calculating how much more it would cost an abutting municipality to take over—and provide services to—part or all of the area. A specific recommendation is

due by the middle of next year.

Turning from Route 2 onto Jackson Road, one encounters a sign reading welcome to *devens*, a planned community. The planning has gone faster than anyone expected when the state took over the military base in 1994. Almost 30 years ahead of the deadline set by the Legislature to formalize the area's future, Devens has already outgrown phase one. There are three options: return the property to Ayer, Harvard, and Shirley along the original town lines; redivide the territory among some or all of the

Selectmen (comprising the boards from Ayer, Harvard, and Shirley), plus a committee of Devens residents elected to an advisory board late in 2003. A recommendation will lead to a nonbinding referendum in November 2005, with residents of Ayer, Harvard, Shirley, and Devens all voting on the matter. MassDevelopment will study the results of the vote before moving forward.

The agency took over the area in 1996, after the Army closed the 4,400-acre base as part of a nationwide base relocation and closure process. William Burke, a vice president for MassDevelopment, says that the military is now almost completely gone from Devens, with just a small fenced-in complex near the center of the area used for training reservists. The base's small airport hasn't been used since the military left, but the state agency has turned an old golf course into one of the best in the region.

Most of the first civilians drawn to Devens live on Elm or Walnut roads, each about a half-mile long. The 80 townhouses, ranches, and Colonials face streets lined with mature trees and

## Will Devens become the state's 352nd municipality?

towns; or allow Devens to become a new incorporated community.

MassDevelopment, a quasi-public state agency charged with overseeing the redevelopment of Devens, expects to study the issue over the next year, with input from the Joint Boards of

lights that look like gas lamps. On the other side of Rogers Field are 23 bungalows that line quarter-mile-long Auman Street. Rogers Field, covering 44 acres, serves as a de facto town common, home to hundreds of athletic events a year and an extension of



the front lawn for many homeowners. A 25-acre downtown area will, when completed, include a lunch spot, gas station, hotel, conference center, and other services for those who work and live at Devens, according to MassDevelopment plans. Away from the center, industrial and high-technology businesses have moved in since the military moved out.

When the Legislature approved the reconstruction of Devens, it gave MassDevelopment and the town until 2033 to remake the base and decide its eventual fate. But things moved at a more rapid pace. The first tenant, Gillette, was signed before MassDevelopment officially purchased the property from the US Army for \$17 million. Gillette was anxious to find a location, and MassDevelopment was eager to land a big-name company to spur on other interested companies.

"The concept was, if you get Gillette in here, you get your anchor," Burke says.

Having sunk that anchor, Devens quickly grew its industrial base. There are now more than 70 businesses in the area, drawing more than 3,000 employees a day. Burke estimates that the business development portion of the plan is running eight to 10 years ahead of schedule.

The residential side is progressing less quickly. MassDevelopment officials admit that bringing residents to Devens took a back seat to business development, which was riding the roaring economy of the late 1990s. However, housing advocates put pressure on the agency to renovate the hundreds of homes on the former base and get them into a market that was struggling to meet demand. A local television station stepped into the issue, showing off the homes and

asking why MassDevelopment was not making them available.

The pressure worked, and by 2002 new families were moving in. Before long, there were nearly 100 families at Devens, settling what had become the Bay State's final frontier.

There are 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts. When the first residents of Devens moved into their homes two years ago, many quickly wanted their new community to become the 352nd. Partly, the desire to form a new municipality arose out of enthusiasm for creating a new community. But it also reflected the confusing situation Devens residents found themselves in.

Devens residents have an Ayer zip code (which will change to the Devens-only zip 01434 in July). Their children go to Shirley schools. They vote in the



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town that originally owned the property (mostly in Harvard). Devens relies on State Police for law enforcement, but has its own fire department.

The relationship between MassDevelopment and the towns surrounding Devens has been up-and-down all along, with the influx of residents adding fuel to the fire. Many of the new residents were insulted that Harvard—with one of the best school systems in the state—did not open its doors to Devens children. (Instead, the Shirley school system agreed to educate Devens children under contract, with MassDevelopment providing compensation.)

“People first lived here and wanted their children to go to Harvard, but they got turned off” by Harvard’s attitude, says Michael Boucher, a member of the residents’ advisory committee elected by Devens citizens in December to have a say in the disposition process. “I don’t want to be somebody’s poor brother.”

The bad feelings over the school question spilled over into other matters, making independence increasingly attractive to many residents. And that made things sticky for everyone involved in what was supposed to be a leisurely process of deciding the community’s future.

“There is a cloud over our heads. It’s hindering what direction we’re going in,” says Kyle Keady, executive secretary for the town of Shirley. “We have to set a course.”

The question that must be resolved before setting that course is this: Can Devens support itself?

MassDevelopment officials say they will pay close attention to the residents—most of whom would like Devens to become independent—but they are basing their decision mostly on the numbers. “We won’t do it [independence] if it means charging \$100 per \$1,000” of valuation in property taxes, says Burke.

But at this point, no one is sure

how much a homeowner or business would have to pay in order to support a new town’s services. That uncertainty has some Devens pioneers reconsidering their earlier enthusiasm for independence.

“I think there are a lot of people acting emotionally,” Devens resident Doolittle says. “It’s dangerous to make an emotional decision.”

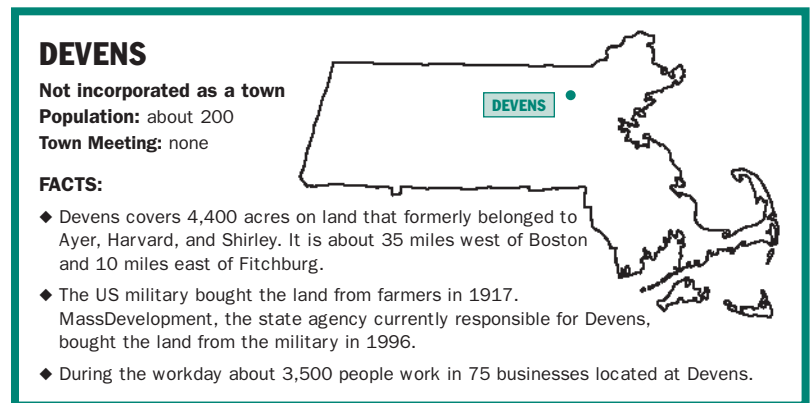
Richard Leonhardt, another Devens resident, says it’s not all a matter of money. He also wonders whether the new town could run itself in typical town meeting fashion, with various boards and committees made up of volunteers.

“There’s a certain number of boards and a certain number of people on those boards,” Leonhardt says. “I don’t

go on to four-year schools. They say Harvard students consistently do better in MCAS scores than students in either Ayer or Shirley. Boucher says he would fight “tooth and bone” any attempt to move Devens into Shirley or Ayer.

As MassDevelopment crunches its numbers, the surrounding communities are doing the same. Each must consider the cost of extending its services into territory it hasn’t been responsible for since the military bought the land in 1917. For different towns, it may mean beefing up police patrols, adding a fire facility, and taking on miles of roadway for repairs and snow plowing.

If the pre-Devens boundaries were restored, Harvard would include



think Devens has the population to sustain a government. We might have enough to start out, but it’s not a lifetime job.”

But if Devens rejoins its ancestral towns, the question becomes: Which one? Boucher’s house, like most, sits on land that used to be in Harvard. He wouldn’t mind becoming a Harvard resident, he says, but he would fight being transferred to Ayer or Shirley—towns that many Devens residents consider less desirable, especially in terms of education. Doolittle and Edwards offer statistics showing that Ayer High School graduates often go on to two-year or technical colleges, while Harvard students more often

most of the housing and a number of the business properties on the former base, but town manager Paul Cohen is already sure that Harvard would have a tough time extending its services.

“If you look at what it’s costing us to provide services and then [add] Devens, it would not be financially sustainable,” he says. The major concern, Cohen says, is that if Harvard were to take back its portion of Devens, it would be responsible for maintaining too much open space around industrial parks and other businesses.

The three towns will have their say in the November 2005 referen-

dum, with the Harvard ballots looming particularly large. "The majority of the land is in Harvard," says Burke. "If they say 'no,' it has an impact." But he also says that the Devens votes shouldn't be discounted, even though residents now account for fewer than 200 voters, compared with some 8,500 registered in the three towns. "My gut says that by November 2005, the residents [of Devens] are also going to have a significant impact," says Burke.

Even if all parties agree, forming a new municipality won't be easy, as the Legislature would have to approve a bill creating the town. And even with legislative approval, there would have to be a transition period of several years—up to 10, perhaps—as MassDevelopment creates a framework for government and slowly pulls out.

That interim period could pro-

duce some of the touchiest moments between MassDevelopment and the surrounding towns. Currently, the Devens Reuse Plan allows the towns a good deal of input on decisions affecting the area, influence they might lose in the process of establishing an independent Devens.

One example is housing. The Reuse Plan sets a target of 282 units of housing in Devens. About 100 already exist, and a developer is close to signing on to create the rest in an area along Grant Road, which used to be home to military housing. MassDevelopment is already talking about going beyond the target, since most observers believe Devens can't support itself without a larger residential section.

"To be its own community, it needs more than 282," admits Keady, Shirley's executive director. "If it's going to be its own community, then

we clearly understand there needs to be more housing." But in terms of traffic and other environmental issues, more housing in Devens would also affect its neighbors.

Anita Scheipers, town administrator for Ayer, says it's unlikely that the Reuse Plan—which can only be changed by a "super town meeting" involving Devens and all three neighbors—would continue to make sense if Devens started down the path to independence. Still, she assumes that Ayer would continue to have some kind of a voice on planning in Devens, and she hopes that major issues such as housing are largely settled before next November's referendum.

"Nothing gets left behind," says Scheipers. "Any and all concerns have to get settled now." ■

*Jason Lefferts is a reporter at the Lowell Sun.*



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# Greenway deal remains Big Dig's final project

BY PHIL PRIMACK

**B**y the time this article appears, an agreement may finally be in place about how to govern and maintain the 27 acres of downtown land now opening up in Boston as the steel cloud of the Central Artery disappears. Then again, maybe not. The complicated mix of public and private parties that for nearly 15 years has been unable to agree may still be haggling.

Welcome to the Rose Kennedy Greenway, which, as Boston Mayor Thomas Menino has said, “has a potential even Paris would envy.” And welcome to a lesson in how business does—or doesn’t—get done on major projects in Massachusetts.

“There was a huge time frame when [the various players] were caught up in whether the space would be used for parks or buildings,” says Patrice Todisco, executive director of the Boston GreenSpace Alliance. “Now those issues have been largely resolved. Everyone, including the business community, sees this as parks and open spaces, with structures that support those uses. So why can’t people move the ball forward? Everyone has multiple agendas and all of these groups are so interwoven that it’s not as simple as going from A to B to C. People just haven’t learned how to share the glory of creating this thing.”

They’ve certainly long understood the glory. An official City of Boston document filed as part of initial Big Dig approvals back in 1991 put it this way: “The centerpiece of the plan for the Central Artery is a park system... whose effect on the quality of life in the city will be as dramatic as that of the Esplanade or the Emerald Necklace.”

The problem lies in overlapping jurisdictions and dueling missions. The Greenway lies in the middle of Boston. But it is owned by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority. The city wants a controlling say in how the land will be used, but it has been unwilling or unable to pledge the funding to take care of it. The turnpike authority is willing to maintain the new parks, at least for five years, but as a transportation agency, its primary responsibility is to the very expensive road beneath the Greenway, not to the open space above it. The Legislature has shown occasional interest, and the



*Out with the old, in with the new: making way for the Rose Kennedy Greenway.*

Romney administration says it has its own plan, but to date it has only said that it would take over the parkland after the authority’s five-year run. (Further complicating matters is that Romney now has Matt Amorello, chairman of the turnpike authority, in his crosshairs.) And literally in the middle of it all is a range of private and public abutters.

So as years ticked by and the Big Dig got dug, the Greenway turned into the legacy everyone wanted but no one quite owned, politically or otherwise. But now that the turnpike authority has issued a request for design proposals for the Wharf parcel, the last and most contentious of the Greenway pieces, the once-distant future is here.

“Until the steel started coming down, the reality had been remote enough that no one had to make the tough decisions that are necessary for the politics to come together in the right way,” says Rebecca Barnes, chief planner for the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

The ticking clock will push the players toward agreement, she hopes. But if not? “We’re in default territory now,” says Barnes. “In the absence of something else, the Turnpike will run and operate these parks.”

Amorello is prepared to do so. “If we don’t reach [a governance] agreement—and I think we will—the turnpike

authority is fully capable of maintaining park parcels in cooperation with the city as something we do in the course of our regular operations,” he says, noting that the authority has open or under design 300 acres of downtown Boston parks, including 125 acres on Spectacle Island and smaller parks in East Boston, the North End, and elsewhere. “I know there’s concern we won’t do it right, but we have the talent and we have hired a world-class firm to design these parks.”

But who will pay for it all? Amorello is pushing for a non-profit foundation modeled after those that run Central Park and Prospect Park in New York City. The city and the turnpike authority would appoint the board of such a Boston conservancy, which would depend upon donations to run the parks.

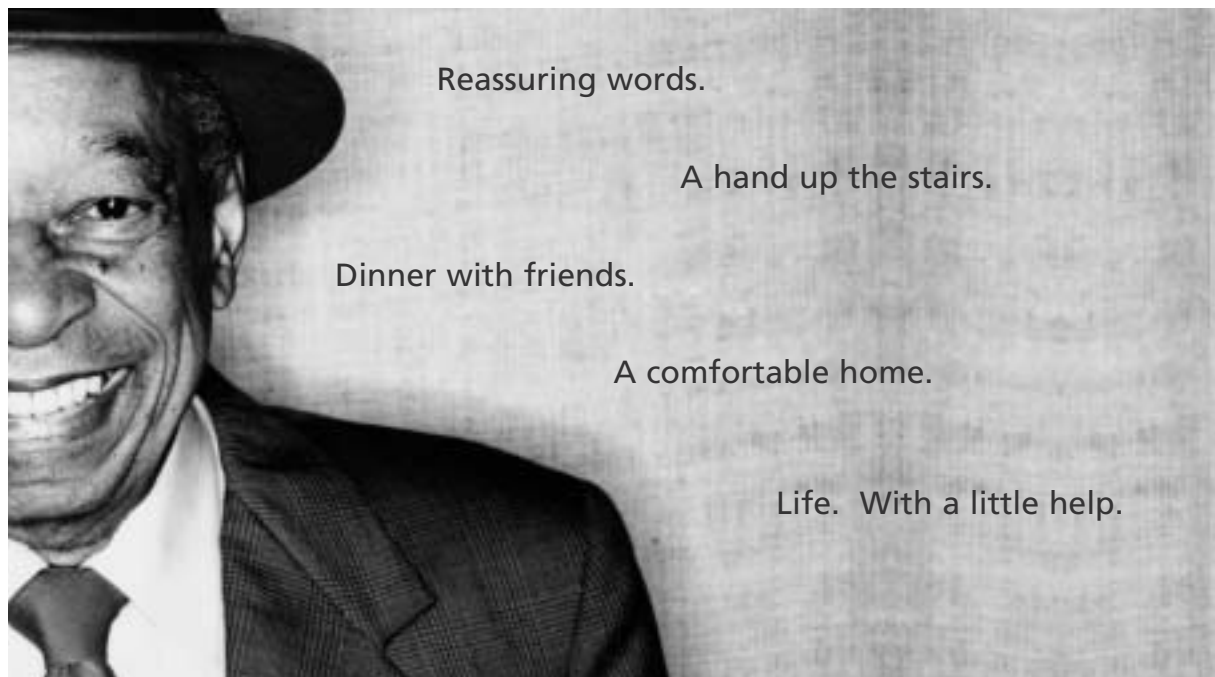
A conservancy proposal died in the Legislature two years ago after being opposed by a range of interests, including the Artery Business Committee. While ABC president Rick Dimino praises Amorello “for grabbing the ball and moving it forward,” he also thinks it’s time “to think simpler. A public agency should have the primary responsibility for being the custodian for the Greenway. The Turnpike owns it now and unless there’s some intervention to change that—

which I don’t quite see on the horizon—then it’s incumbent upon all of us to work with the Pike to help it become an enlightened owner and developer of the Rose Kennedy Greenway and to push for more money for them to do so.”

Noting that Boston is not New York City, Barnes also has doubts about the foundation approach. She also worries that a key city priority is getting overlooked: what the new park will be used for. “Many people who work with public space understand that good programming and the social character of the park is just as important as good operation and maintenance,” says Barnes. “In Boston, we haven’t talked much at all about that part of the responsibility.”

So can these parties even agree on the i’s and t’s, let alone dot and cross them? Or is it just human nature to wait until the very last minute to reach agreement? “It’s human nature in the Boston context,” says Barnes. “It’s so familiar in terms of how we do business here. We do get stuff done, but it’s with many strongly held points of view until everyone has to decide that they are getting the best deal they can possibly get.” ■

*Phil Primack is a freelance writer in Medford.*



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# A civic connector packs his papers

BY MICHAEL JONAS

**I**t may have been a native son of Cambridge who proclaimed all politics is local, but that has not always seemed the guiding principle at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. The renowned graduate school of policy and politics regularly plays host to leaders from the national and world stage, but rarely from across the river or down the road. Lately, however, the ambassadors and prime ministers who descend on JFK Street might find themselves bumping into a Somerville alderman or a mayor from Medford.

Credit the Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston, launched four years ago with a \$2.75 million bequest from Boston developer Jerome Rappaport. Convening forums on topics ranging from barriers to housing construction to regional transportation strategy, and publishing a series of book-length "field guides" to the cast of characters, institutions, and interest groups that make Greater Boston tick, the Rappaport Institute has become a source of fresh thinking on public policy dilemmas.

Much of this locally focused energy has emanated from the institute's founding executive director, Charles Euchner, a former Holy Cross and Northeastern University political scientist who blends civic optimism with a pragmatism born of toiling in the trenches of municipal government himself.

"I used to say in order to understand a problem you had to write about it," says Euchner, 43, who worked at the Boston Redevelopment Authority before arriving at Harvard. "Now I say that in order to understand something you have to try to change it."

"Charlie's been great," says Somerville Mayor Joseph Curtatone, who started attending Rappaport Institute sessions as an alderman. "I find it like a continuing education model for governmental officials." Influenced by Euchner's enthusiasm for CitiStat, a tracking system for municipal services developed by the city of Baltimore, Curtatone, who was elected mayor last fall, is planning to set up a similar accountability scheme in his city.

Euchner will be leaving the Rappaport Institute at the beginning of June to pursue book-writing projects. A search for his replacement is underway, but the institute's benefactor says Euchner will be a hard act to follow. "It's hard for



*Euchner: stepping down after making a mark.*

me to imagine anyone who could have committed more creative energy, more intellectual discipline, more objectivity and a sense of excitement than he did," says Rappaport.

Euchner's departure also comes as Rappaport's initial funding commitment draws to an end, next year. An evaluation of the institute's first four years will take place this fall, but Rappaport says his family foundation is likely to make a "primary financial contribution" toward a permanent endowment.

Some may see irony in Rappaport's funding of a public policy center devoted to regional development and governance. After all, he is best known as the hardnosed developer whose signature project, Charles River Park, was built on the ruins of Boston's working-class West End neighborhood, often cited as a case of urban renewal gone wrong. But he says he's "very comfortable" with the project that made him notorious. "It's very easy to have hindsight," says Rappaport, 76. "One has to look at what the city was in the 1950s and the hopelessness that existed."

Less widely known are Rappaport's roots in reformist politics. Fresh out of Harvard—the Bronx-born whiz kid received undergraduate and law degrees by age 21—he worked on the 1949 John Hynes campaign that toppled legendary Boston Mayor James Michael Curley. He then helped to start a regional citizen group that was instrumental in establishing the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. Rappaport says he hopes the institute that bears his name will continue the search for solutions to local problems.

"Most public policy hits the pavement at the local level," says Rappaport. "This represents an opportunity to have this interplay between ideas and vision and reality and experience." ■

## Visa cap worries Cape businesses

BY JENNIFER C. BERKSHIRE

Every summer, Chuck Rigg, owner of The Commons, in Provincetown, counts on an influx of Jamaican workers to staff the 19th-century hotel and bistro he operates with partner Carl Draper. But a surprise decision by the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services to limit the number of foreign workers admitted to the US under the H-2B visa program is likely to catch inn owners like him short-handed. In March, the

bureau, formerly known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service and now part of the Department of Homeland Security, announced that it was enforcing a previously ignored quota of 66,000 temporary workers, and that applications received after March 9 were being returned.

"We're very concerned," says Rigg. "We've applied to bring in 10 workers and haven't heard anything. If we can't get the help we need, it's definitely going to affect our business."

Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce CEO Wendy K. Northcross has been compiling a list of local restaurants, inns, and retail outlets that are likely to be affected by the visa cap. "I've heard from more than 70 businesses, and that number is growing each day," says Northcross. On the outer cape, the shortage of workers is likely to be particularly intense, she notes. "It used to be that young people who lived here took these jobs," says Northcross, who once worked as a chambermaid in a West Dennis inn herself. "But demographic change is against us, and on parts of the Cape where the population is small to begin with there are nowhere near enough people to fill these temporary jobs."

Island life could be affected as well. The Nantucket



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Regional Transit Authority relies on seasonal employees from Eastern Europe to drive buses each summer but can't get them because of the cap. "Some of our larger employers are being hurt by this," says Matt Fee, a Nantucket selectman and owner of the Something Natural eatery.

While no official reason has been given for the policy change—and immigration officials are not talking—Fee and others suggest that the decision to limit visas for foreign workers is fueled by politics, reflecting mounting concerns about American jobs that are moving overseas. "People have to understand that these temporary workers are not taking jobs away from Americans," says Fee, noting that all of the jobs filled by H-2B visa holders must first be advertised locally. "The visa program is not a source of cheap labor, and these are not sweatshop jobs."

For now, employers on the Cape and the islands are waiting for word on the status of their visa applications. They caution that the visa cap, far from just an abstract political issue, will be felt directly by consumers and residents this summer. Says Paul Souza, owner of Bayberry Gardens in Truro, "Everybody will find out what's going on when we don't have enough help to service the accounts." ■

*Jennifer C. Berkshire is a freelance writer in Arlington.*

## Beset by beavers, rural lawmakers try to escape trap ban

BY STACIE N. GALANG

**D**amned if they do—and dammed if they don't. That's how lawmakers feel about their attempts to modify a voter-approved ban on wildlife traps, even though a burgeoning beaver population is plugging their hometown storm sewers. And with spring in the air, municipal officials are worried about the havoc those the busy beavers are wreaking on municipal budgets.

Rep. Mark Carron, a Southbridge Democrat, acknowledges that he is a "human-beings-first type of person" but insists that the 1996 ballot question that prohibited the use of leg-hold traps, however well-intentioned, has been a practical failure. "We're so compromised and mired with the ineffectiveness of the law the way it is," Carron says.

Leg-hold mechanisms, which animal-rights activists

denounced as cruel, were overwhelmingly banned by voters, but many are now blaming the law for increasingly problematic wildlife activity. Besides beavers plugging up storm drains and flooding streets, recent reports of coyote attacks on pets in rural and suburban backyards have spurred calls for modification, if not repeal, of the trap-ban.

"You can't control where a dam is going to be built or where a development is going to occur," says Carron, who's sponsoring legislation that would abolish the restriction on leg-hold traps. "You can't tell beavers to build only on state property."

Virginia Fuller, one of the architects of the ballot measure, says current law allows for all sorts of solutions to health hazards, flooding, and property damage caused by pests. These measures include water-control devices that deter beavers from building their dams.

John Clarke, director of advocacy at Massachusetts Audubon Society, agrees that there are non-lethal means available to those truly concerned with the beaver problem. "That's what you have to look at," says Clarke. Are these alternative methods "being enforced and taken advantage of?"

But Carron says local officials are losing ground as the unhunted animals multiply like rabbits. Fuller agrees that the beaver population is on the rise, but he says that it's because of earlier efforts by the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife to bring back the beaver, not because of the trap ban.

In any case, communities discover the animals' presence—and their handiwork—only after the floods begin. In Gardner, which has more than 40 culverts, city workers are at a loss to know when and where beavers will plug up the works. Gardner state Rep. Brian Knuuttila says towns like his simply can't afford to install anti-beaver devices all over the city, and they haven't always proved effective. In the fall, Gardner had to reroute a number of school buses because of flooding caused by beaver dams.

Dane Arnold, the city's public works chief, estimates that his department spends 52 days a year undoing the work of the beavers. And each time city workers use a metal claw to break down and remove dams in culverts, it damages the walls of the pipe, he says.

After many years of stalemate, however, Knuuttila and Carron have come up with a compromise proposal that would allow the rascally critters to be captured once again, but only within specific geographical parameters and on specific dates. The pilot program would be overseen by the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

"We're willing to do anything to get something through so we can manage the population," says Knuuttila. ■

*Stacie N. Galang is a writer living in West Newton.*



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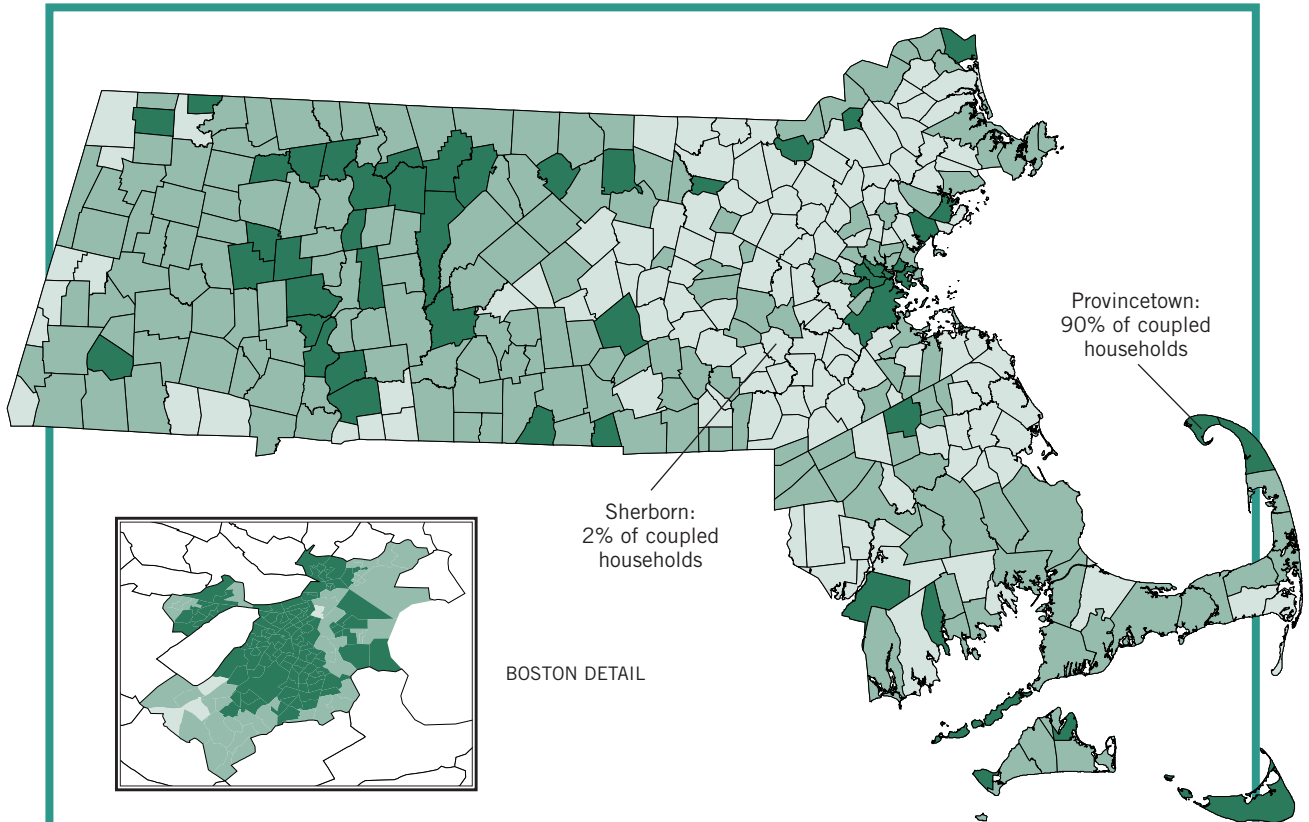
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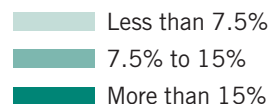
## Without a hitch

Unmarried couples remain a relative rarity in Massachusetts, according to the 2000 US Census. Of the 1.33 million households headed by self-described couples, only 130,919 are headed by unmarried partners. Among those living together without benefit of marriage are 7,943 gay male couples and 9,156 lesbian couples.

Not surprisingly, Provincetown is the least matrimonial community in the Bay State, with 90 percent of declared couples living without a license. That rate is bound to decline this summer, assuming gay marriages become legal, since Provincetown is the only locality in the state where most unmarried partners are of the same-sex variety. Overall, unmarried-partner households are concentrated in affluent resort areas, sparsely populated communities in the western part of the state, and low-income cities with large nonwhite populations (notably Lawrence, Lowell, and Springfield).

Boston ranks seventh, with 22 percent of its couples unhitched. The inset map, which breaks the city down by US Census tract, shows that unmarried partners are concentrated in the downtown, South End, Jamaica Plain, Roxbury, and Charlestown neighborhoods—and not so much in South Boston, West Roxbury, and parts of

### Unmarried Partner Households as % of All Coupled Households



Dorchester. (The little square near the center with unusually high marriage rates, by the way, is Chinatown.) Same-sex couples—or at least, same-sex couples willing to tell all to the US Census—account for 21 percent of unmarried households. That translates to 1,951 gay male couples, or one-quarter of all gay male couples in the state. Lesbian couples are less Boston-centric; only 13 percent live in the Hub.

Cities and towns with low numbers of unmarried partners tend to be part of the big “C” around Boston that is also noted for high incomes, high educational levels, and strong support for gay marriage opponent Mitt Romney in the 2002 gubernatorial election. Sherborn is at the bottom of the list, with only 2.2 percent of its couples living outside of wedlock, closely followed by Weston, Westwood, Longmeadow, and Wenham. ■

—ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN



# STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT

BY ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

## SWAN SONG FOR THE TWILIGHT MOTH?

State wildlife officials are singing the blues over the Twilight Moth, believed to be near extinction in Massachusetts. They're proposing to add the moth, last seen near the former Devens army base, to the list of endangered species in the state, along with the Precious Underwing Moth and the Barrens Tiger Beetle, plus five plant species in the western part of the state (including Fogg's Goosefoot) at the mercy of weeds and boat propellers. The additions to the list could be approved as early as this spring, following a public comment period.



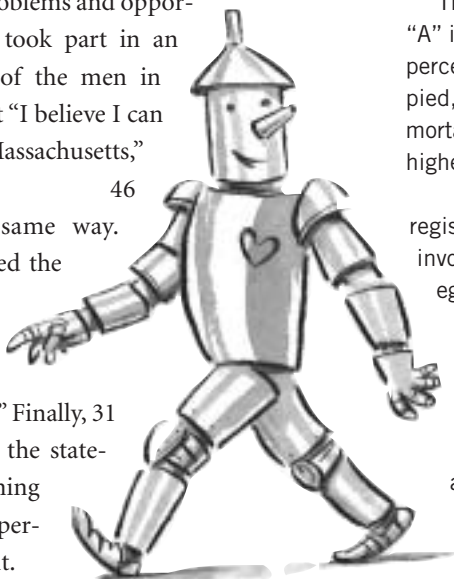
There are currently 448 plants and animals on the state's list of "endangered, threatened and special concern species," which is overseen by the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife. Among the best known are the Piping Plover, whose nearly invisible eggs are frequently crushed by pedestrians on sandy beaches (the state has erected little wire fences around some nests), and the Peregrine Falcon, now seen only around tall buildings in Boston and Springfield. But the state is also keeping an eye on the Threespine Stickleback, an "armored" fish known for its "zigzag" mating dance, and the Southern Bog Lemming, a "chunky" rodent pretty much limited to the Belchertown Bog in

## MEN ARE FROM OZ, WOMEN ARE FROM KANSAS

A 2003 study suggests that men take an Emerald City view of their household finances, while women look at the checkbooks and see the Dust Bowl. Jay Zagorsky, a Brookline-based economist and research scientist with Ohio State University's Center for Human Resource Research, studied survey responses from 1,195 couples and discovered that the typical husband says the couple earns 5 percent more income and has 10 percent more in total wealth than his wife reports. For her part, the typical wife says that household debt is about \$500 more than reported by her husband.

These different attitudes may help explain some of the responses at "RealTalk: Making Massachusetts Work for You," a January forum for young professionals sponsored by MassINC and United Leaders. More than 350 participants talked about problems and opportunities in the Bay State, and also took part in an instant survey. Sixty-eight percent of the men in attendance agreed with the statement "I believe I can settle down and raise a family in Massachusetts,"

but only 46 percent of the women felt the same way. Similarly, 54 percent of the men rated the quality of life in Massachusetts as "very good" or "excellent," but only 35 percent of the women agreed, with more of them settling for "good." Finally, 31 percent of the men concurred with the statement that "Massachusetts is a welcoming place for newcomers," but only 18 percent of women echoed that sentiment.



## SORT-OF-HAPPY VALLEY

"Good, but not perfect." That's life for the people of Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire counties, according to an exhaustive study recently published by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission ([www.pvpc.org](http://www.pvpc.org)). *2003 State of the People for the Pioneer Valley* includes town-by-town data on 36 measures of health, education, and employment, among other areas. "Particularly positive is the quality of civics, arts, and recreation," the authors write in their introduction, before warning that "our economic security appears fragile."

The report gives the Pioneer Valley an "A" in five indicators: home ownership (63 percent of housing units are owner-occupied, up two points since 1990); infant mortality (the region no longer has rates higher than the state as a whole); MCAS proficiency in the 10th grade; voter registration; and support for student involvement in the arts. In only two categories did the report give an "F": child abuse and neglect (rates 40 percent higher than for the state as a whole); and the poverty rate as of 1999 (at 12.9 percent, more than three points higher than for the state as a whole).



## NOTES FROM THE RACKET SQUAD

New York City recently marked the first anniversary of its “311” hotline, a 24-hour service that fields complaints from citizens on just about anything. The city reported 6.5 million calls during its first year (or almost one call per resident) and claimed that the average wait to talk to a live operator was nine seconds. A report on the system’s inaugural year noted that the most frequent type of call involved noise complaints (255,000 of them), followed by gripes about landlords (245,000). Potholes, often seen as the prototypical urban complaint, ranked ninth, accounting for only 29,000 calls.

Would such a system work in Massachusetts cities? It’s hard to say, since New York apparently doesn’t have to deal with what would be the most frequent complaint in Boston during the winter season: lawn chairs occupying parking spaces for weeks after a snowstorm.

## WE LOVE THE ARTS—THE CHEAP SEATS, ANYWAY

Bostonians have a high regard for the performing arts, especially if they’re not driving or paying for the tickets, according to a report from the Performing Arts Research Coalition (a collaborative project that includes the Urban Institute and the Pew Charitable Trusts). The report is based on 2002 polling of approximately 800 residents in each of 10 areas: the state of Alaska and the metropolitan areas of Austin, Boston, Cincinnati, Denver, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Pittsburgh, Sarasota, Seattle, and Washington, DC. (It’s available at [www.operaamerica.org/parc](http://www.operaamerica.org/parc).)

Boston-area residents were most likely to feel that performing arts improve the quality of life in their community. Sixty-four percent of all respondents “strongly agreed” with the statement—though less than half of those under 25 shared this view. The most tepid support for the statement came in Cincinnati, where only 47 percent agreed.

Seventy-eight percent of Boston-area respondents reported having attended at least one performing arts event in the previous 12 months, more than any other region. Boston was first in attendance at the theater (62 percent), dance (40 percent), and the symphony (38 percent) but was only fifth in attendance at the opera (10 percent). By comparison, 56 percent reported attending a professional sports event during the same period, putting Boston in fifth place. (Denver and Seattle tied for first, with 60 percent.)

But those ticket prices sting: 35 percent of Bostonians said that the cost of admission was a “big reason” why they do not attend more arts events, higher than in any other area. Not surprisingly, people from households earning less than \$25,000 a year were most likely to agree with the statement, but 26 percent of those from households earning more than \$100,000 shared the complaint. Boston also tied for second with Pittsburgh (and behind Seattle) in the number of people who said that transportation or parking difficulties were big impediments to attending events. Twenty-three percent of all respondents,

## YOU ARE WHERE YOU READ

It’s a little disconcerting to realize that businesses are compiling such detailed information about their customers, but we couldn’t resist spelunking in the Amazon.com Web site to find out which politically oriented books are selling where in Massachusetts this spring. According to the online retailer, Boston is especially interested in *Street Soldier: My Life as an Enforcer for Whitey Bulger and the Irish Mob* and *The Prince of Providence: The True Story of Buddy Cianci*, while Cambridge is curling up with *An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Education Research* and Worcester is engrossed in *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*. In Somerville, which happens to have a new mayor, there’s been a lot of interest in two classics of urban planning, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*.

The Bay State also reflects the left-vs.-right wars on the national best-seller lists. While Al Franken’s liberal *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them* is doing well across the state, Michael Moore’s *Dude, Where’s My Country?* is especially popular in Acton, Jamaica Plain, and Westford. On the other side of the spectrum, Ann Coulter’s *Treason* is big in Billerica, Foxborough, Leominster, Marlborough, and Norwell.



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## Who cares?

Massachusetts became a kinder and gentler state during the 1990s, at least according to the United Way of America's State of Caring Index, which was updated last December and includes 35 indicators—from the percentage of citizens living below the poverty level to voter turnout for presidential elections. The Bay State jumped from 18th to fifth on the Index, the biggest gain for any state. (Hawaii, plagued by a weak economy, took the biggest dive, from 10th to 33rd.) The improvement was partly due to good timing. The previous Index was compiled in 1991, when the Bay State was in the depths of recession and had the third-highest unemployment rate in the country. But the update primarily uses data from 2001, when Massachusetts had less joblessness than all but nine states. (By 2003, the pendulum had already swung back, and 29 states had lower unemployment rates.) Decreases in crime over the same period pushed Massachusetts from 30th to 17th in the Index's "safety" category.

Some of the Bay State's strengths seem more permanent. We've consistently had among the lowest infant mortality rates and injury-related death rates, among the lowest pupil-teacher ratios in public schools, and extraordinarily high financial support from our citizens for non-profit groups (though, curiously, per-capita donations to the United Way are only average). The Bay State's teenage pregnancy rate has steadily dropped and is now the fifth lowest in the nation. But almost as a reminder that statewide statistics can mask real problems at the local level, the *Berkshire Eagle* reported in February that the teenage pregnancy rate in Pittsfield has been on the rise and is now twice the rate for Massachusetts as a whole.

A couple of the Index's health-related measures indicate that Massachusetts may be losing some longtime advantages, however. From 1995 to 2001, the percentage of children aged 19 to 35 months who have been immunized against diphtheria and four other diseases rose from 71 percent to 77 percent, but the state's ranking by this criterion fell from second to 19th. As for economics, while the Bay State rose from eighth to fifth in median household income from 1991 to 2001, it dropped from 30th to 43rd in income inequality, as indicated by the narrowness of the gap between the top fifth and bottom fifth of earners. And in the category of "we'll take whatever good news we can get," Massachusetts improved its ranking in apartment rental affordability—from 50th to 48th.

—ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

### UNITED WAY'S STATE OF CARING INDEX

STATE RANK, 1991	STATE RANK, 2001
1. Iowa	1. Minnesota
2. Nebraska	2. Vermont
3. New Hampshire	3. Connecticut
4. Connecticut	4. Iowa
5. North Dakota	<b>5. Massachusetts</b>
6. Wisconsin	6. Maine
7. Vermont	New Hampshire
8. Minnesota	8. South Dakota
9. Maine	9. Wisconsin
10. Hawaii	10. North Dakota
11. South Dakota	11. Virginia
12. Kansas	12. Alaska
13. New Jersey	13. Nebraska
14. Wyoming	14. Delaware
15. Pennsylvania	15. New Jersey
16. Alaska	16. Pennsylvania
Virginia	17. Rhode Island
<b>18. Massachusetts</b>	Wyoming
19. Montana	19. Indiana
20. Rhode Island	20. Kansas
21. Delaware	21. Ohio
Washington	22. Michigan
23. Colorado	23. Missouri
Ohio	24. Maryland
25. Utah	25. Colorado
26. Oregon	26. Washington
27. Maryland	27. Montana
Missouri	Utah
29. Indiana	29. Idaho
30. Idaho	30. New York
31. Michigan	31. Illinois
32. Illinois	32. Kentucky
New York	33. Hawaii
Oklahoma	34. West Virginia
35. North Carolina	35. North Carolina
36. Kentucky	36. Oregon
West Virginia	37. Georgia
38. Arkansas	38. Oklahoma
39. Nevada	39. Tennessee
Georgia	40. Alabama
41. Tennessee	South Carolina
42. South Carolina	42. California
43. Texas	43. Florida
44. Arizona	44. Nevada
45. Alabama	45. Texas
46. Florida	46. Arkansas
47. California	47. Mississippi
48. New Mexico	48. Louisiana
49. Mississippi	49. Arizona
50. Louisiana	50. New Mexico

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# Voter's guide

*Rhode Island's secretary of state takes civics to the schools*

BY ROBERT PREER

One early November morning last year, when the rest of their Woonsocket High schoolmates were sleeping late or otherwise enjoying a cherished day off for teacher conferences, 17 students from Michele Gerber's 10th-grade social studies class reported to school as usual. After gathering in the classroom for last-minute instructions, the youngsters fanned out across the city to other schools or municipal buildings. The Woonsocket local elections were happening that day, and the students, though not old enough to vote, arrived at the polling stations ready to participate. Some students helped poll workers check off names of voters. Others assisted people who were uncertain how to work the voting machines, and a third group waited outside with clipboards to do exit polling.

This hands-on lesson in local elections was the final assignment for Civics 101, introduced last year at Woonsocket and Central Falls high schools by Rhode Island Secretary of State Matthew Brown. The pilot program is slated for other schools in the state this fall.

"It's very good," says Jonathan Pagan, 15, a Woonsocket High sophomore, of the course. "I hope they put it all across America."

Civics 101 is part of a growing roster of initiatives that Matt Brown has launched since he took office in January 2003. The founder of the public service program City Year Rhode Island and of the voter recruitment group Democracy Compact before running for office himself, the 34-year-old Providence native is on a mission to get more people—especially young people—participating in government and in the lives of their communities.

Last year, he started a tradition he hopes to observe each spring: visiting nearly every high school in the state to give an award to a student singled out by teachers and administrators for "outstanding civic involvement."

"One of my responsibilities as secretary of state is overseeing elections," he says. "And I believe an important part of overseeing elections is making sure people come out and vote."

Brown's election initiatives also include the establishment of a statewide voter list. The current system of uncoordinated, separate lists in each city and town is "ripe

for fraud and error," he says.

In another attempt at modernization, last year he successfully proposed legislation requiring advance notice of every state and local government meeting in Rhode Island posted on the secretary of state's Web site. The law, which is to be fully implemented this summer, supersedes a statute dating to Colonial times that merely required a notice posted on the door of the room where a meeting was to be held. Brown also is setting up an e-mail list to alert citizens who sign up in advance about upcoming public meetings in which they are interested.

"He is very forward-looking, and he thinks big," says Darrell West, a political scientist at Brown University and

**'He is very forward-looking,  
and he thinks big.'**

director of the university's Taubman Center for Public Policy. "He wants to effect real change in the political process."

Brown's civic-revitalization work has started to garner national attention. Last September, the national Democratic Leadership Council named him its "New Democrat of the Week."

Efforts to promote civic participation in the United States may be as old as American democracy. The first concerted national campaign arose in the early 1890s, after a period of widespread municipal corruption. The National Municipal League—later renamed the National Civic League—was founded by Theodore Roosevelt and Louis Brandeis, among others. The league coordinated a nationwide network of locally based reform organizations.

A century later, another reform movement was born. The impetus this time was not corruption but a growing sense of malaise. Voter participation in national elections had been declining for several decades. Disenchantment with the pervasiveness and power of big government, big media, and big business was widespread. There was also

the troubling decline of many traditional civic institutions, including political parties, labor unions, fraternal organizations, and women's clubs. Sociologist Robert Putnam struck a chord with his sad metaphor for the country's alienation; *Bowling Alone*, first a 1995 magazine article and later a book, noted that bowling leagues were disbanding even as the number of individual bowlers was increasing.

A host of organizations, public and private, came forward to combat these woes. Foundations commissioned studies on civic disengagement, and universities established institutes on civic revitalization. The rise of civic journalism sent newspaper editors and reporters in search of remedies for their communities' ills. In 1990, Congress passed the National and Community Service Act, which provided grants enabling many grass-roots organizations to flourish. Three years later, AmeriCorps was established, and community service became an institutionalized part of American government.

Matt Brown, who graduated from college in 1992 and is the youngest of three children, was poised to enter public life just as this reform movement gathered momentum. His father, a physician in Providence, and his mother, who was a dean at Wheelock College in Boston, had always

stressed the importance of community life, and at the age of 7, he went door-to-door with them delivering campaign fliers for presidential candidate Jimmy Carter. Later he became editor of the high school newspaper at Moses Brown School, a private Quaker school in Providence.

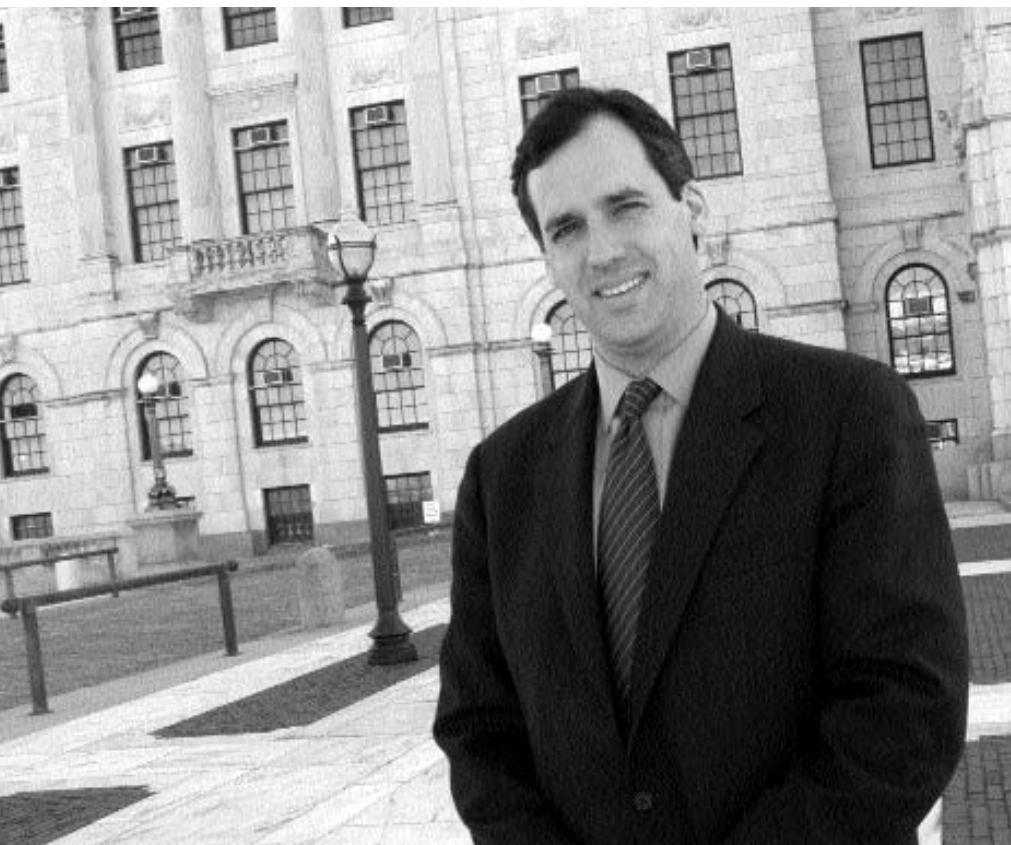
After graduating Columbia University, Brown went to Washington, DC, where he established connections in the emerging national service movement. He returned to Rhode Island to set up City Year Rhode Island, the state's AmeriCorps program, which was modeled after the City Year youth service organization founded in Boston in

## A host of organizations came forward to combat these civic woes.

1988. Begun in Providence and expanded to Pawtucket, Central Falls, Woonsocket, and Newport, the growing corps of youth volunteers cleaned streets, repaired playgrounds, and tutored disadvantaged children. Many also were put to work at dozens of community-based organizations. City Year Rhode Island also gave Brown his first



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*Matt Brown took his passion for civic engagement into the electoral arena by running for office.*

chance to shine.

"He had a knack for drawing star power quality," says Casby Harrison, a Providence attorney Brown recruited Harrison to the organization's board of directors. "He got Hillary Clinton to come talk to us. He arranged for us to host the national convention of City Year."

Brown left for Yale Law School in 1998. While there, he got the idea for what would become the Democracy Compact. For the 2000 national election, Brown and others in the organization recruited 1,500 people who each pledged to approach 20 people—friends, family, co-workers—who had not voted in the past. The volunteers tried to persuade the nonvoters to participate in the election. Brown today proudly claims that Rhode Island had the biggest increase in participation by young voters (ages 18 to 24) of any state in the nation in 2000, though he was unable to provide specific figures. The Democracy Compact model has been adopted in two other states, Georgia and North Carolina.

Two years ago, Brown decided to take his passion for civic engagement right into the electoral arena by running for state office himself. He got the chance to do so after a lengthy round of falling dominoes. In 1999, Republican US Sen. John Chafee died in office; his son, Lincoln, then the mayor of Warwick, was named as his replacement. Believing that an appointed Republican senator could be beaten, Democratic US Rep. Robert Weygand

gave up his House seat in 2000 to run against Chafee, but lost. Democratic Secretary of State James Langevin then ran for the House seat Weygand vacated, and when Langevin won, the Legislature appointed longtime state lawmaker Edward Inman III to take his place.

The 2002 Democratic primary for secretary of state was a classic insider vs. outsider contest, and Rhode Island voters were in a mood for change. Blessed with Ivy League good looks and natural charisma, Brown also proved to be a dynamic speaker, especially effective at motivating his troops (bolstered by a legion of loyal followers from the community-service organizations he built) during campaign gatherings. In a year that saw

political newcomers elected as governor and attorney general, Brown prevailed in the Democratic primary with 58 percent of the vote to Inman's 42 percent. In the November final, Brown crushed Republican Chris Stanley, a town council member from Warren, by a better than 2-1 margin. The victory gave Brown the chance to turn the secretary of state's office, long seen as a sleepy, quasi-clerical posting, into a bully pulpit for civic participation.

While Massachusetts does not have a Matt Brown to nurture a more civic-minded citizenry, the Bay State does have its share of individuals and organizations toiling for the cause. State Sen. Richard Moore, a Democrat from Uxbridge, has been a persistent voice for civic education in Massachusetts schools. President of the state's chapter of the American Society for Public Administration, Moore has called for the establishment of a statewide commission on civic education. He also has filed bills and lobbied the state Department of Education to encourage or require school districts to teach civics.

In 2002, the Department of Education took a step in that direction when it issued curriculum frameworks that call for secondary schools to teach American government in history classes. "They are strengthening civic education—government, whatever you want to call it—through

# HOME SWEET HOME

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these frameworks," says Diane Palmer, Massachusetts coordinator for the Center for Civic Education, a nonprofit organization based in Calabasas, Calif., that promotes informed participation in the democratic process in the United States and abroad.

According to the guidelines, teachers are to explore the US Constitution and its amendments as part of history instruction. Thus, when history courses come to the 1780s, they are to examine the inner workings of the Constitution. When they get to 1919 and 1920, they are to examine the amendments on Prohibition and granting women the right to vote. The frameworks, though, are guidelines, not requirements. The state does not mandate civic education, nor are there any civics questions on any of the current MCAS tests. Only about 18 school districts require a course in government or civics for graduation, according to Palmer.

Various other programs exist to encourage young people to take an interest in Massachusetts government. Once a year, state lawmakers participate in Legislators Back to School Week, visiting schools in their district and talking to students about the ways of Beacon Hill. During another annual event, Student Government Day, youngsters roam

## The Bay State has its own toilers for the civic cause.

the marbled hallways of the State House and "fill in" for state officials.

Brown's counterpart in Massachusetts, Secretary of State William Galvin, has tried to encourage voter participation by forging partnerships with a broad range of private organizations. With the League of Women Voters, Galvin puts out state election guides—a practice he inherited from his successors. His office also provides materials to Rock the Vote and World Wrestling Entertainment's "Smackdown Your Vote!," as well as to many local organizations that encourage ethnic and racial minorities to participate in elections. And Galvin's office operates a toll-free telephone line that voters can call with just about any question regarding government. (Much of this information also is available on the secretary of state's Web site.)

Voter registration in Massachusetts went up significantly eight years ago when the state's motor voter law went into effect. In 1994, voter registration was around 3 million, where it had been for a dozen years. By the end of 1996—the first year voters could register at the Registry of Motor Vehicles—it topped 4 million. The law also allowed registration forms to be distributed by private groups and individuals, as well as candidates and political parties. "We have removed most of the impediments to registration," Galvin says.

Voter registration now is about 3.9 million and likely



to top 4 million again as the November election approaches, according to Galvin. Getting registered voters to cast ballots is another story. Figures from the Federal Election Commission show that since 1992, when 83 percent of the electorate voted, turnout has dropped steadily and significantly—down to 75 percent in 1996 and 68 percent in 2000. (Rhode Island's turnout dropped from 82 percent to 62 percent over the same period.)

To encourage citizens to vote, Galvin's office sends out press releases, makes radio and television public service announcements, runs paid ads, and works with corporate partners. "We do our best," says Galvin. "We try to publicize elections as much as we can."

Michael Kryzanek, chairman of the Bridgewater State College political science department and co-author of a recent study of political participation in Massachusetts, favors more of a marketing approach to encouraging turnout.

is unlikely to adopt Rhode Island's approach to publicizing municipal meetings on the secretary of state's Web site, since the task of gathering information for all 351 cities and towns would be monumental. Rhode Island has only 39 municipalities.

Brown acknowledges that some reforms are easier to pull off in Little Rhody: "It's a great place to do public service," says Brown. "Because of the size of the state, you can put solutions in place a little more quickly. Maybe you can have more of an impact than you would in a larger state."

With the 2004 presidential election fast approaching, Brown is preparing to expand Civics 101 to high schools throughout Rhode Island. This year's election, which also includes federal and state legislative races, should excite more interest than

the municipal voting held last year in Woonsocket and Central Falls.

The curriculum, which the secretary of state's office provides to school systems that request it, includes an overview of the government process, in-class discussions of campaign issues, mock elections, and participation in a voter registration drive, as well as trips to polling places on Election Day. The course concludes with a tour of the Rhode Island State House, led by Brown and his staff.

"It's especially important that we do this with young people, for two reasons," says Brown. "They are not getting involved at high rates, and, second, I think young people have something special to offer—energy, idealism, and enthusiasm that can benefit any

community."

Woonsocket High School teacher Michele Gerber says she was skeptical when first presented with the curriculum. Her sophomore social studies class is made up mostly of below-average achievers, she says, and she was doubtful they would take to it. But she was pleasantly surprised.

"They got so much out of it," says Gerber. "It became real to them. It's one thing to talk about civics. It's another thing to do it." ■



*Woonsocket High teacher Michele Gerber with Civics 101 student Jonathan Pagan.*

"I don't see billboards," says Kryzanek. "I don't see much on television. I think you need some kind of catchy campaign using professional marketing techniques."

The statewide voter registration list Brown is implementing in Rhode Island already exists in a similar form in Massachusetts. City and town voter registrars send their data to the secretary of state's office, which maintains a central registry where duplicate registrations are detected. But a spokesperson for Galvin says that the Bay State





*Worcester's Wyman-Gordon Co.  
was still at full power in 1982.*

# BLUE COLLAR BLUES

Castoffs of the Old Economy  
are still trying to make  
the transition to the New.  
Meet a few of them.

Economist Paul Harrington has lots of data about manufacturing employment in Massachusetts, and all of it is ugly. In 1984, about 670,000 people were employed in making things, or about one in every four non-agricultural workers; just a decade later, manufacturing was down to 447,000 employees, or about 16 percent of the state's private sector workforce. That was far from the end of the slide. Last fall, manufacturing accounted for just 331,000 of Massachusetts's 3.2 million private sector jobs. In just two decades, manufacturing's share of total employment in Massachusetts fell from 25 percent to barely 10 percent. But Harrington, co-director of Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies, says there's another way to capture the reality of these vanishing blue-collar jobs—with a colloquialism that's vanishing as well.

"Do you remember when someone used to go work for some big, established company around here?" Harrington asks. "You'd say, he's at General Motors or Polaroid or whatever—he's set for life. You just don't hear that expression any more."

Set for life. It's a phrase the workers profiled below would find familiar, if poignant. Kevin Casella figured he was set for life when he went to work at Wyman-Gordon Co., in Worcester, as a high school graduate and community college dropout in 1985. He never thought that, at 46, he'd be a laid-off father of two. And Karl Farmer thought that the social compact that had long marked Cambridge-based Polaroid's relationship with its employees was something he could count on forever.

Those were expectations of a different era. It was an era that promised not only security but also opportunity for society's have-nots—those who had

BY PHIL PRIMACK | PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK MORELLI

a dream they were willing to work for. For more than a century, manufacturing was the first rung on a ladder to the middle class for wave after wave of immigrants and for countless Bay State residents who did not or could not attend college. “In manufacturing, you had this upward mobility based on skills acquired on the job,” Harrington explains. “Even without formal schooling, you could work your way up the mobility ladder. Now that ladder has broken down and doesn’t work anymore.”

Manufacturing still provides a haven for immigrants, Harrington says, but for fewer of them. High school dropouts, for whom factories long served as an economic and social lifeline, have caught particularly bad colds from manufacturing’s big sneeze. “Access to full-time jobs for high school dropouts is way below what it was in the past,” says Harrington. “Even when they do find full-time work, real earnings today are about two-thirds of what they were 30 years ago.” The consequences, he says, go well beyond a shrinking paycheck: “The loss of manufacturing undermines basic family structure and community.”

The decline of manufacturing jobs has become a big issue nationally. Between 1999 and 2003, during the recent recession and tepid recovery since, 2.8 million manufacturing jobs disappeared, devastating the industrial Midwest. But in Massachusetts, the drain of manufacturing jobs is an old story, one that attracts little attention today. “If one company were closing with the sudden loss of thousands of jobs, then we’d maybe see big headlines,” says Massachusetts AFL-CIO treasurer Kathleen Casavant. “But it’s been a slow bleed over many years to the point that people don’t even know about some of these companies until they start closing.”

Example: Last October, Main Street Textiles, in Fall River, closed, with the loss of 400 jobs, but the event merited just a one-paragraph squib in *The Boston Globe*. The slightest hiccup in biotech gets more ink than that.

And it’s not just the media that have lost interest. “Unfortunately, too many policy-makers see manufacturing as a thing of the past in Massachusetts,” says Richard Lord, president of Associated Industries of Massachusetts. “AIM is trying to change the stereotype that the New Economy isn’t going to contain manufacturing jobs. It has to include manufacturing, and for a lot of reasons. The most basic is that manufacturing creates wealth. Losing our manufacturing base will have a profoundly negative impact on our economy.”

For now, however, the negative impact seems confined to people like those you’ll meet here, people who saw themselves once as the source of a nation’s wealth—as well as their families’ breadwinners—but now as society’s castoffs. The economy will adjust, providing opportunities for the next generation that the factory hands of yesterday—or

those remaining today—would find difficult to imagine. But for individuals who knew a different era, and who bought into a social contract that is no longer being honored, change comes hard.

“Blue-collar guys without a lot of skills were never going to be rich. We knew we’d have to work until 62 or so. And we always understood that,” says Paul Soucy, president of United Steelworkers Local 2285, who put in 25 years at Wyman-Gordon. His father and his uncles racked up more than 40 years apiece at the company; his brother is working there still. “What I don’t understand is why people don’t get what’s happening to us now,” he says. “We’re Middle America. We’re what makes America go. We’re the ones buying the cars, keeping the local stores afloat, trying to put our kids through college and provide for our families. We’re the core of America. And it boggles my mind that we’re under attack.”

#### KEVIN CASELLA: “WYMAN’S WAS IT”

Attack might not be the right word, even if that’s what it feels like to Soucy and other factory workers. But there’s no doubt that the world of factory work has almost disappeared in Massachusetts, and it’s on the way out elsewhere.

Kevin Casella, 46, has watched—and lived—the change. Back when work was steady, Casella could spot his fellow workers in blue-collar bars around Worcester even if he

## ‘We’re the core of America. And we’re under attack.’

had never met them. “You could always tell the guys from Wyman’s,” he says. “They were the ones with cash.”

Casella was one of those guys from Wyman’s, as the 120-year-old Wyman-Gordon Co. was known to generations of workers who produced the firm’s complex metal components and other products for aircraft engines, energy turbines, and other heavy equipment. “If you grew up around here, Wyman’s was it,” says Casella, who was raised in Grafton. “I went to community college for a couple of years but never finished. You didn’t really need to. There were a lot of places to get good work, but Wyman’s was it. Good pay, good benefits. You worked at Wyman’s, you assumed you were set for life.”

Founded in Worcester in 1883, Wyman-Gordon had a customer base of defense, energy, aircraft, and other clients that would seem to immunize it from the rise and fall of the business cycle. Or so Casella thought. After working in construction and other jobs, Casella started at Wyman-Gordon in 1985 as a chip puller in the machine shop at the Worcester



*"Good pay, good benefits. You assumed you were set for life."*

The company was hit hard by defense cutbacks in the early 1990s. It rebounded with commercial air sales, but then they plummeted too. Lately, the company has suffered by its choice of customers: One major energy-related contract, for example, fell victim to the collapse of Enron.

Manufacturers cite high labor costs and union work rules as factors in their inability to compete with overseas operations. Casella, who served on Steelworkers Local 2285's executive board for six years and was a Wyman-Gordon shop steward for eight, knows that. "People say we were overpaid crybabies, but I sometimes think it's because they were jealous that we made more. They don't realize that we set the standard that brings up everybody's wages. But at the same time, I can see the company's point. I'm a union man, but the fact is

plant. Part of that plant has since been closed. Gone, too, is the local ownership. In 1999, the company was acquired by Oregon-based Precision Castparts Corp.

After less than a year on the job, Casella faced the first of a string of layoffs that came and went with contracts, recessions, and market cycles. They didn't discourage him. "With every layoff, I always thought I'd be back," says Casella. And a layoff didn't always mean being out of work, he says. "It used to be that you'd get laid off, you could go across the street and find work. It maybe wouldn't pay as much as Wyman's, but it was a paycheck until you got back. Now it's different. The places across the street aren't there anymore. You have to go to Malaysia or China."

Indeed, Casella did go back, a few months after his first layoff, shifting to the company's Grafton plant. There he was a millwright, helping to maintain the plant's complex machinery. "In Worcester, I'd heard that you don't get laid off in the Big House—that's one of my names for Grafton," says Casella. "But I did." His longest layoff, in 1993, lasted eight months. Casella, who married in 1989 and has a daughter who is now 12 and a son who is 9, has tried other jobs. He sold copy machines for a while, but it was not for him. Wages, habit, and colleagues kept drawing him back to Wyman-Gordon. "It was dirty, loud, hard, and heavy, but you took pride in making products that were going to help your country."

Helping the country took Wyman-Gordon only so far.

that if there's no company, there's no work. No mortgage payments. No toys."

Despite nearly two decades of seniority, last year Casella joined the rank of unemployed manufacturing workers with solid credentials and work histories but few options. "I know people who started when they were 18, and now they're 45 and laid-off," says Casella. "Everything they've ever known is at Wyman-Gordon."

He tries to keep things in perspective. "My wife and I saw this coming, and we prepared for it. We put money aside for the kids." But Casella also feels the ground shifting under him. "I'd like to think this is just another layoff, but this one's deep. A lot of people won't be going back. My son says to me, 'Dad, now you're going to be a mailman, right?' Then, after a while, he says, 'Dad, when are you going to get a job?'"

Casella was beginning to wonder the same thing. "You miss the pay"—about \$19 an hour, down from \$22—"and you miss getting up and going in every day," he says.

He got called back in late December to Wyman-Gordon's Worcester plant. Less than two months later, he was laid off again. Now he doubts he'll ever be called back again. "They keep laying more people off as they keep sending more work out of the country," Casella says. "If you work at a place like Wyman-Gordon, you always took layoffs as a given. It was always peaks and valleys. The difference now is outsourcing and job elimination. This time it isn't a cycle. This time, it's an exit."



### KARL FARMER: "POLAROID CULTURE WAS FAMILY"

A few years ago, Karl Farmer was sitting with a group of other Polaroid workers when he realized something that would be almost unimaginable in today's manufacturing world. "I'd been with the company for about 28 years at that point," says Farmer, "And I was [still] the least senior person at the table." At that time, he didn't feel that there was anything strange about making a life at the company Dr. Edward Land built. "That's just how it was at Polaroid," he says. "Management made you feel wanted, and you trusted management. It meant good production and steady operation for the company, and longevity and security for the people who worked there."

Farmer, 57, was raised in Roxbury, attended Boston public schools, and graduated from Northeastern University in 1970 with a degree in electrical engineering. In 1971, Polaroid was actively recruiting black engineers, and Farmer was one that Polaroid got. "But I wasn't trying to milk the situation," he says. "My brother was working for Polaroid as a financial representative, and he thought it would be a good place for me. The Polaroid culture really was family. Some companies frown on husband and wife working together, but at Polaroid, it was a way of life. And you wouldn't invite your mother or daughter or brother to work for a company that didn't treat you well."

Farmer eventually held various production, management, design, and service positions. If the image of manufacturing work—skilled or unskilled—is of rote jobs and rigid divisions of labor, Polaroid was anything but, he says. "There were so many facets to the company that you could virtually get an advanced degree without ever going to school. If you felt stagnant in your job, you could do something different without ever leaving the company. Management encouraged it. Dr. Land always tried to knock down walls."

But the picture changed at Polaroid as quickly and completely as an image on Dr. Land's famous instant-developing film. Polaroid, which once employed 13,000 people and 9,000 as recently as early 2001, faced mounting business losses. Once an icon of innovation in Massachusetts and around the world, Polaroid filed for bankruptcy protection in October 2002. A new Polaroid—based in Waltham,

not Cambridge—has emerged, but a gaping hole remains not only on Memorial Drive, but also in the psyches and pocketbooks of former employees.

"In late 2001, I was told my job was going to be gone, so I had to either accept another job in the company or take a layoff into retirement," Farmer recalls. "A job was available



*"Corporate officials priced their own company out of the market at the workers' expense."*

in Wayland, but it meant a long commute. I was going to be 55 [in January 2002], so I decided to take the layoff. Remember, we didn't know what was going to happen. And people at Polaroid used to say that we can't wait to go because the retirement package was so great. We owned Polaroid stock that we thought would always be worth a lot. I figured I could easily afford to retire. I'd be able to do other things, like take courses or teach golf. Then the roof fell in."

The sweet retirement offers fell off the table, replaced by vastly reduced packages. The stock fell to near zero. Farmer and other Polaroid retirees and laid-off workers have angrily challenged their treatment, with a rage stoked by the hefty salaries and golden parachutes given to former executives who led the company to bankruptcy—and also to the officers and directors of the new Polaroid formed from assets of the bankrupt entity.



"The way I look at it, corporate officials priced their own company out of the market at the workers' expense," Farmer says. "Workers did what they could to economize, like shipping work offshore. We kept the company going, but it turns out all we did was protect huge salaries for executives who had great contracts but no accountability."

"The people who have really paid are the workers at the bottom," he continues. "A lot of corporate America thinks you can have companies of just offices and no workers. Corporate offices may bring about some projects, but they don't add any value to a company. It's the line worker who actually adds the widget that produces the real value."

Farmer now works as a mechanic at a golf course in Bedford. Even as an engineer, he found that his skills were a better fit for Polaroid than for today's job market.

"At Polaroid, I never became an expert in one field," he says. "I was more a jack-of-all-trades, which was an asset to Polaroid. But today, it's a liability. Employers can pick from all the résumés in the world right now and find the exact square peg they need for a square hole. I was kind of a gel that would fit into any hole. A company could train me for a particular task, but why should it? With so many unemployed workers out there, companies can pick a specialist out of a pool of specialists. They just don't see the benefits of a person like me."

### MARIA FURTADO: "ALL I KNEW WAS CLITEX"

Even as a teenager, Maria Furtado had her future all figured out. "By the time I was 16, it was already programmed into my mind that I was going to quit school to go work in a factory," she says.

Furtado moved from the Azores to New Bedford with her family when she was 8, following two sisters who had come over earlier. "My parents worked in the local mills," she says. "I remember sitting in junior high school counting the years until I could go to work. Two days after my 16th birthday, I quit school and went to work. It was my first job, and I assumed it was my last job."

That's because the job she got, 20 years ago, was at Cliftex. At the time, Cliftex employed 2,000 people making men's suits and other clothing. Though she felt "like a little girl in a grown-up world," Furtado says, the work fit her like a tailored suit.

"The work was heavy, but it wasn't as boring as straight sewing because I did detail work, closing the sleeves on men's suit jackets," says Furtado. "On good days, I'd close up to 400 coats, which is 800 sleeves. I was fast, and because my pay was based on how many pieces I did, I always made at least \$100 a day. With no education, there was no other way I could have made that kind of money in New Bedford. I was able to save enough to get married and to help out my parents."

But this immigrant dream of hard work for reliable reward didn't last. Like other textile makers, Cliftex was hit hard by market changes, imports, and stiff competitive

winds. Once New Bedford's second largest employer, Cliftex filed for bankruptcy in August 2000, and has since shut down.

To the AFL-CIO's Kathleen Casavant, who spent 17 years as a union organizer and representative for clothing and tex-

### 'A DREAM COME TRUE' DISAPPEARS

Gail Walkowiak stares from a photo accompanying a 1985 *Boston Herald* story about workers coping with layoffs at the sprawling General Motors assembly plant in Framingham, which at the time was in its death throes. Walkowiak, who had worked at the GM plant since 1978, had welcomed its wages and modern facilities after her previous employment in a dusty textile mill in western Massachusetts. "I almost doubled my pay," she told the *Herald* at the time of the layoffs. "This is where I was going to retire at 60."

More than 15 years later, Walkowiak, 66, still mourns the loss of that job and the life that went with it.

"I'm still down in the dumps about it," says Walkowiak, who lives in Webster. "Getting laid off from Framingham was the worst thing that ever happened to me. I'd still be there if I could. I've always liked hard work and I had a good job with benefits and with a lot of people I knew. Me with no education, working at Framingham was like a dream come true."

The dream ended when Walkowiak was laid off with 3,500 other workers in 1985. She lacked sufficient seniority to retain a spot on the single shift GM maintained for a while before totally shutting down in 1991. After getting laid off at Framingham, Walkowiak found work at a company in Cranston, RI, but even with lots of overtime and weekend work, she couldn't match her former pay. So she chased after GM. After about 18 months, she learned that a plant in Baltimore had openings.

"I quit my job in Cranston on a Friday and was in Baltimore on Monday," she says, leaving her truck driver husband and two sons behind. "The only reason I did it was to get in my time [to receive a full GM pension]. I started in the body shop doing axles. Then they put me on the motor line. Then I ended up sweeping floors. I had to take whatever they gave me until they offered me the out package [at age 55]. It was a real nightmare."

No, she corrects herself, the real nightmare began when she took the package. "The worst thing I ever did was retire," says Walkowiak. "I even called GM back a week after I took it and asked to come back. I was going out of my mind. I'd always been a laborer."

She's had a variety of jobs since then, Walkowiak says. Have any of them offered anything close to the wages and benefits of GM Framingham? Her answer comes with hardly a pause. "Are you kidding?"

—PHIL PRIMACK

tile workers, the story is all too familiar. "There is nothing like being a union rep and walking into a plant and telling folks they're going to close, and I've done it too many times," says Casavant. "The workers are angry at the union, angry at the company. But I don't blame Cliftex and other employers for closing their doors. It's our trade and other public policies that are responsible. How can these companies compete with low-wage places like China?"

At Cliftex, rumors of serious problems had long been in the factory air. "You could just tell something was going to happen to the company," says Furtado, who heeded the warning signal by getting her GED in 1999. "If Cliftex closed, I wanted to at least be able to get into a training program for something else," she says.

The next year, she was laid off from the job she had assumed would last forever. She had two young children, a marriage (to a fisherman) that was ending, and little education. The skill she did have—stitching men's suit coats—was no longer worth \$100 a day to anyone. The day after getting her layoff notice, Furtado dropped her two daughters off at school and headed for the stone wall that separates New Bedford from the sea.

"I just sat there and cried," she recalls. "I was totally depressed. What was I going to do? All I knew was Cliftex.

I didn't even have a side job. All I knew was sitting at a machine and sewing. It was so scary."

Then came a call from her union, UNITE Local 377, about a meeting with the state's Rapid Response Team, which offers information about training programs and other services for workers who have been or are about to lose their jobs. "That's where my GED began to pay off," says Furtado. "I learned about openings in health care and went back to school." Even with some help and some direction, making the transition to a new job in a new industry was not easy, she says. "I had to take care of my kids while enrolled in a training program fulltime for nine months and making just \$250 week in unemployment insurance."

Making the transition from factory to health care was difficult in other ways, says Furtado. "A job counselor said I could become a medical assistant in phlebotomy. I said, what's that? Drawing blood, she said. I didn't think I could do that." But she finished the training program, then went to work in a medical office in Wareham. A few months later, Furtado became a medical assistant at the New Bedford Health Center, then a laboratory assistant. Her goal now is to become a registered nurse.

Furtado is still earning less than she did at Cliftex, but at least it's not piecework. And a part of her still doesn't believe

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## ‘My daughter is proud that I got out of the factory.’

the change she’s made in her working life. “At times, I just stop at the job I have now and ask myself if I’m really doing this,” says Furtado, who is also taking courses toward a bachelor’s degree at Bristol Community College. “I was so used to stitching work, and now I’m doing something I’d only seen other people do in a doctor’s office. If you told me four years ago I’d be doing this, I’d say you were crazy.”

**M**anufacturing will never regain its dominant position on the Massachusetts industrial landscape. No one appreciates that reality more than those who have seen the notion of “set for life” lost to harsher phrases such as permanent layoff, outsourcing, and foreign competition. People who once prospered with manufacturing are trying to make sure the hard lessons they learned are not lost on their own children.

“If one of my kids wanted to go to school to become a machinist, I’d say that that may not be the right choice today,” says Kevin Casella. “You want to help your kids get a job in a vocation that’s going to last. And you have to make

*“You could just tell something was going to happen to the company.”*

sure they are adaptable to the changes they’re going to face.” If they do follow in his blue-collar footsteps, they should plan on a volatile working life, he says. “It would be OK with me if my kids went to work for Wyman-Gordon or a company like that if that’s what they wanted to do. You can make a decent wage and can take pride in the fact that you’re helping supply industry with the parts that help make this country run. But I’d also tell my kids that they’d better be prepared to move on to a different company and to different kinds of work.”

Maria Furtado offers similar advice to her two daughters. “I’m telling them how important it is to go to college, to get an education. It’s true that people even my age were once able to do OK financially without going to college. People were able to make it to the middle class without a lot of education, and they were able to afford their kids a better future that was not in the factory. But today, I tell my children that you can’t do that. There are no factories around here any more.”

Though she still earns less in the medical field than she did at Cliftex, Furtado thinks her children are learning something from her own experience. “My daughter is proud that I got out of the factory, that I’m doing something that is not factory-related. In a way, it was good for me that Cliftex closed down because another door opened to a field in which I’m very happy.”

Karl Farmer’s three children have all found work that is far from Farmer’s life of making things. One works in criminal justice, another advocates for mentally challenged adults, and the third is a phone company service representative. They’re all doing well. But Farmer worries about people trading on their specialties in the open market, rather than signing on with a company and doing what’s needed to make it a success.

“The kind of engineering work I did at Polaroid—being a jack-of-all-trades—is a thing of the past,” says Farmer. “I got a lot of satisfaction out of being able to do different things, to think about how to solve different problems. That’s all gone now. Today, it’s specialize in this and specialize in that. In the long run, I think that’s bad for industry. But I don’t think industry cares.” ■

*Phil Primack, a Medford-based freelancer, writes about economic development and other public policy issues.*

# Worcester's Wonder

An inner-city high school  
sets a new standard  
for public education

BY MICHELLE BATES DEAKIN

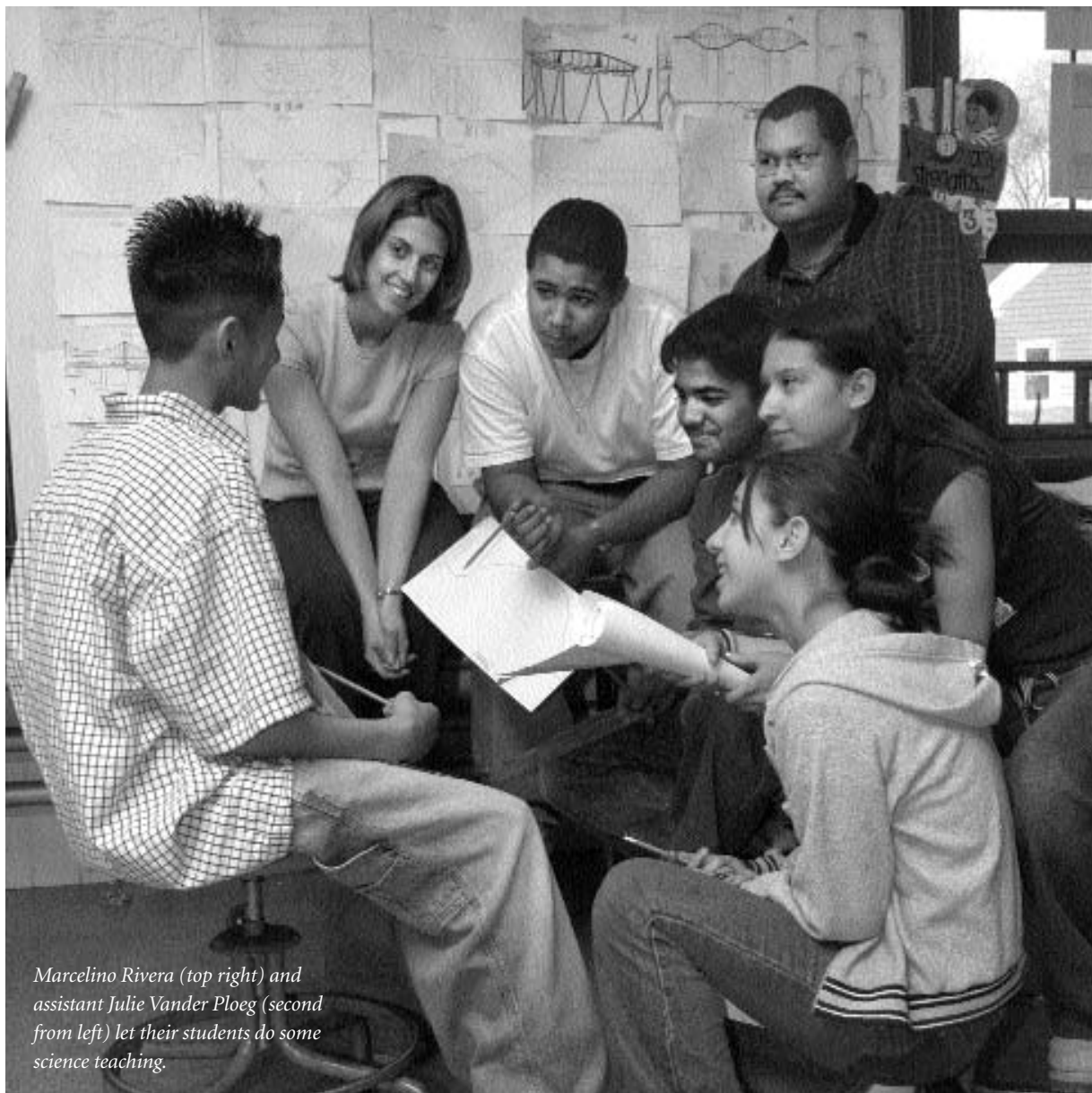
PHOTOGRAPHS BY FRANK CURRAN

When it comes to guessing the communities with the highest MCAS scores in the state, a lot of towns beginning with the letter “W” might come to mind—Wellesley, Weston, Winchester. But never Worcester. Nonetheless, sophomores at a public secondary school in the state’s second-largest city ranked fifth in the state in 2003 on the MCAS tests, with an astounding 97 percent scoring at the Advanced or Proficient level in math.

Who are these wonder kids? They’re not children of two-parent, college-educated families, and they don’t attend a magnet school, let alone a competitive-admission honors school. They are the products of University Park Campus School, a non-selective secondary school in Worcester’s poorest neighborhood, where most of the students are minorities and two-thirds come from homes where English is not spoken. This grade-seven-to-12 school, now in its eighth year, is shattering the myth that inner-city kids are not college material.

On a typical day at University Park, seventh-graders teach their own classmates, giving lessons on cell biology as the teacher looks on and lends assistance. This focus on presentation skills kicks in as soon as students begin their six years of study here. It doesn’t





*Marcelino Rivera (top right) and assistant Julie Vander Ploeg (second from left) let their students do some science teaching.*

matter that, at home, these same kids speak Spanish, Portuguese, Albanian, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Swahili. In school, the focus is on listening, learning, and pursuing a goal that was once unthinkable in the crime-ridden neighborhood of Main South: to attend college. Last year, the first graduating class sent students to Brown, Georgetown, Tufts, and Holy Cross. Five other students are attending Worcester's Clark University on full scholarships.

The MCAS scores and college acceptance rates are reason enough for University Park to stand apart from most urban high schools, including the rest of Worcester's. But the school is also distinguished by its extraordinarily high attendance rates for pupils (96.2 percent) and teachers (99.6 percent) alike. It also has stunningly low suspension and expulsion rates: Both are zero. Last year, the Center for

Education Research & Policy (now the Rennie Center) at MassINC named University Park the only "high-performing" non-selective urban high school in Massachusetts. The report found that University Park excelled in the five areas that are the hallmarks of top urban schools: high standards and expectations; a culture of personalization; small learning communities; data-driven curricula; and strong community relationships.

"Having high expectations for the kids is really important," says principal June Eressy. "Contrary to what many people think, these kids will rise to the occasion."

### **URBAN KIDS, SUBURBAN SCORES**

To understand how far the University Park students have risen, one has to look at where they started. When the first



seventh-graders started in 1996, half of the 35 children read at below the third-grade level. Four could not read at all. Today's students enter with similar disadvantages. Seventy-eight percent of University Park students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and 67 percent do not speak English at home. Sixty percent of the school's 210 students are minorities.

These numbers make the MCAS results all the more startling. For example, when this year's senior class entered University Park five years ago, only 1 percent of the students were reading at grade level, while 30 percent were three grades behind in reading. But not one of this year's seniors failed the 10th-grade MCAS two years ago. Indeed, since 2003, every University Park student has passed MCAS in both math and English, meeting what is now the state's graduation requirement, on the first try.

In most cases, with flying colors. In 2003, 87 percent of University Park sophomores scored advanced or proficient on the English section of the MCAS, and 97 percent scored advanced or proficient in math. That's close to the performance of the very selective Boston Latin School, where 98 percent of students scored advanced or proficient in math and English. In comparison, at Worcester's South High School, the comprehensive public high school in the same district as University Park, just 33 percent of students scored advanced or proficient in English (31 percent failed outright), and 25 percent scored advanced or proficient in math (42 percent failed).

Only three high schools in the state outscored University Park on the math portion of the test, and each of those is an exam school: The Massachusetts Academy of Mathematics and Science in Worcester, Boston Latin, and Boston Latin Academy. In English, University Park ranked 28th in the state, outscoring the Lincoln-Sudbury, Belmont, Duxbury, and Winchester public high schools.

Partly based on 2002 MCAS scores, the MassINC report singled out University Park as the only urban high school worthy of the label "high performing," noting that at University Park alone "students consistently performed at high levels," passing MCAS with scores "substantially higher

than state averages, despite high rates of poverty (70 percent) and minority enrollment (56 percent)." What accounts for this standout performance? The study found that, like eight other urban high schools it considered "higher performing," University Park has small size, data-driven curriculum, internships, and community service opportunities. What set the school apart, according to the report, were the relationship between the school and the community, an intense focus on reading in grades seven and eight, capable school leaders, an extended day, and a unique relationship with Clark University, its Main South neighbor—and partner from the start.

relationship with Clark University, its Main South neighbor—and partner from the start.

### THE CLARK CONNECTION

In the early 1990s, Richard Traina, then president of Clark, and James Garvey, then superintendent of the Worcester public schools, envisioned a high school that would provide children in Worcester's toughest neighborhood with the best possible education. Many partnerships between universities and high schools have sprouted up across the country. Unlike most such arrangements, however, Traina and Garvey decided not to overhaul an existing school with the university's help, but to build a brand new school from scratch.

A commitment to the neighborhood around it was

nothing new for Clark. Since the mid-1980s, the university has donated between \$7 million and \$8 million to revive the blocks adjacent to campus in the Main South neighborhood (See "Urban Studies," *CW*, Summer 2000). It has been rehabilitating abandoned and burned-out buildings, spurring business development, and increasing public safety in its urban backyard. The university also promises free tuition to Clark for local kids who can meet its admissions criteria.

"It's enlightened self-interest for Clark," says Jack Foley, who has worked at the university since the mid-'70s. He now serves as assistant to the president, a job that includes overseeing the school's government and community relations, and he's been a member of the Worcester School Committee for four years.

An involvement in the Worcester public school system has long been part of Clark's revitalization plan, and the



*Principal June Eressy: "Contrary to what many people think, these kids will rise to the occasion."*



## There's no tolerance for street talk or fighting at University Park.

university embraced Traina and Garvey's goal of a small, personalized learning environment with a strong core curriculum and high expectations and standards. The difficulty was in creating this environment with children who could not read or speak English well, and to do it at a per-pupil cost comparable to the rest of the high schools in Worcester—about \$8,600.

Traina and Garvey found a dynamic leader to put their ideas in motion. Donna Rodrigues, the school's founding principal, had taught Latin, Spanish, and French in Worcester schools for more than 20 years. She grew up in Main South and still lives there today, and she knows the neighborhood inside and out.

"This was a job of a lifetime," says Rodrigues, now a program director at the nonprofit group Jobs for the Future, in Boston, where she is creating a guide for educators interested in replicating the school she created. In it, she writes, "This had to be my job. It was my neighborhood."

At the time she was hired as planner and then principal, Rodrigues was fresh off a year at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education. Her new post gave Rodrigues the opportunity to combine her experience teaching inner-city

children with her new academic credentials, all with the support of the school department and the expertise of Clark's Hiatt Center for Urban Education.

In fact, there is so much sharing of resources between the two institutions that it can be hard to tell where Clark ends and University Park begins. For its first two years, University Park was located on the Clark campus as it awaited its own school building. Even now, graduate and undergraduate students from Clark are continually crossing Main Street to student-teach and help kids with homework. University Park uses Clark's gym and library, and juniors and seniors at University Park can take Clark courses for credit.

"We have a synergistic community," says Tom Del Prete, director of the Hiatt Center. "The attitude of partnership makes a tremendous number of resources available, and we learn a lot from each other."

### HEAD START FOR HIGH SCHOOL

As a facility, there's nothing impressive about the University Park Campus School. It's a well-scrubbed three-story schoolhouse built in the 1830s, and its stone stairs have been eroded by generations of students. The cramped cafeteria is in a windowless basement. Some rooms are heated to sauna-like temperatures, but one classroom goes unused because it has no heat at all. Even so, seventh-grader Yari Reyes, who is African American, says it was like winning a lottery when

she found out she was going to University Park.

"Here we start preparing for our SATs in the seventh grade," Reyes says proudly. "On the first day of school, the teachers explain to us that this is a serious place. They expect us to get high scores."

The seventh and eighth grades are important at University Park. These two years of intensive preparation get students ready to hit high school running, and educators at the school and at Clark see them as essential to the students' later success. "We can take kids at a vulnerable age and nurture them over time," says Del Prete. "And we can have uniform expectations for kids even though some of them are more under-prepared than others."

Indeed, the expectations—for academics and behavior—are established even before students enroll, with acceptance by lottery, except for sibling preference. "The only criterion is that they live in the neighborhood," says June Eressy, who succeeded Rodrigues as principal at the end of last school year. The promise of the school is spreading, with 55 students now on a waiting list.

Eressy, like Rodrigues before her, requires prospective students to attend information sessions before they can apply. "That's when I establish the school's social curriculum," says Eressy, who explains to applicants that they'll get two

hours of homework every night, and that there's no tolerance for street talk or fighting at University Park. She warns that if kids don't show up, she'll call home; if no one answers the telephone, she may even drop in. To parents who attend the session, she stresses how important it is for children to be in school—that is, not home helping parents with babysitting or translating.

Entering seventh-graders start in the summer at the school's mandatory August Academy. In the morning, there's swimming and other kinds of recreation; in the afternoon, there are programs designed to initiate students into the school's culture of high expectations. The Academy is part of a larger Clark-sponsored summer program for 7- to 12-year-olds throughout the Main South neighborhood that's staffed by Clark faculty and students, along with some older students from University Park.

What follows the August Academy is a two-year process of moving from remedial reading to college-prep. Knowing there was no sense giving students textbooks they couldn't read, Eressy, who was University Park's first English teacher, started teaching from picture books.

"We had to take a longitudinal look at the kids and get them reading," says Rodrigues. "We knew that by ninth grade we wanted them all following an honors curriculum."



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*Former principal Donna Rodrigues found a way to hire the best.*

seniority, Rodrigues, as principal, wouldn't even have the right to interview them. Fearing that she would end up with teachers who weren't committed to University Park's high standards, Rodrigues convinced the teachers' union to allow her to hold informational meetings for interested teachers. She used the meetings to her fullest advantage.

"I told the group to listen carefully, because this might not be the right choice for them," recalls Rodrigues. She talked about the school's 90-minute classes. She talked about the before-school homework time and the after-school homework time that was expected of them. She briefed prospective teachers on the planning meetings that were part of the job, and she stressed that teachers had to give constant feedback to students. Most importantly, she stressed that teachers who came to University Park had to believe that their students could succeed. After this briefing from Rodrigues, not a single veteran teacher applied.

That was just fine with her. She hired two graduates from Clark's Hiatt Center, and the following year she hired two more. "They had no bad habits," says Rodrigues. She also valued their connections to Clark professors, who regularly visit University Park and guest-lecture.

But as University Park's reputation spread, veteran teachers eventually did begin to apply, for the best reasons. Jim McDermott left his position as liaison for language arts for the entire Worcester public schools system to return to the

## Teachers who came to University Park had to believe that their students could succeed.

Even though many of the students in the seventh and eighth grades are not native English speakers, University Park never offered bilingual classes. Instead, the faculty, fellow students, and Clark volunteers run before- and after-school sessions to help improve fluency in English. Seventh- and eighth-graders are also given 90-minute math classes to help overcome deficits in that area.

### HIGH STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS

In opening University Park for the first class of seventh-graders, Rodrigues was deliberate in choosing her initial staff, both veteran teachers. One was Eressy, a former colleague of hers at South High School who in 2001 received the double honor of being named a Milken National Educator and Teacher of the Year in the Worcester public schools. The other was Dermott Shea, a longtime math and science teacher with a knack for relating to inner-city kids.

But as the school began to expand, Rodrigues knew that union bidding rules would keep her from being so selective. Not only would teachers from throughout the Worcester district be able to claim new teaching slots entirely based on

trenches at University Park. He has a simple motto when it comes to selecting what the kids study: "If it's good enough for Phillips Exeter, it's good enough for us."

Marcelino Rivera, who started in September after teaching science at Sullivan Middle School, welcomes the focus on learning at University Park. "I don't spend time on discipline," he says. "I can always get to my lesson. These kids want to be here, and they know what the expectations are."

Eighth-grade math teacher Kate Shepard is another believer in the University Park model, saying, "There's a culture here that kids are expected to do the work, and they rise to the occasion." Shepard says she gets warnings from other Worcester teachers about problem students who are on their way to University Park. But once the kids get immersed in the school's culture, she can't even see the behavior she was warned about. "It's a different place with different expectations," she says.

Peer pressure is one of the strongest influences on the students' behavior, says Shepard. If a seventh-grader says, "shut up," a 12th-grader will remind him that "kids don't say that here." And it's not just in behavior that upperclassmen



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help out. Shepard says she has had 11th-graders volunteer to tutor in her class simply because they want a chance to get to know the younger kids.

Tutoring is common during the before- and after-school homework sessions. Peers help each other, and Clark students drop in to provide one-on-one support. Some teachers are paid to stay for the homework center, too. At University Park, high expectations are not just for kids.

## HIGH HOPES, CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES

When the first class of University Park students graduated last June, Damian Ramsey was valedictorian. He's now a freshman at Brown University in Providence, RI, worlds away from the Main South neighborhood where he grew up with a drug-addicted mother. He frequently returns home on weekends to visit his neighborhood friends, many of whom are teenage parents or gang members (See "I gaze at the stars," page 67).

"It's definitely different coming from Brown and going home," says Ramsey. "I really get to see it and think, 'Wow. I made it past all this.'" He's careful to add that he's not passing judgment on his neighborhood friends who haven't gone to college.

Ramsey finds the work at Brown challenging, but he says University Park prepared him well. He says that getting accustomed to his new social environment, and in particular to the wealth and privilege all around him at an Ivy League school, was more difficult. "I speak Ebonics back home with my friends, and a lot of people here don't have that experience," he says.

Tony Mastrorio, who graduated second in University Park's class of 2003, is now enrolled at Georgetown University. Mastrorio says he was ready for this highly competitive school, having taken classes taught by Clark faculty in government, economics, and international relations while at University Park.

"UPCS definitely opened up my options," says Mastrorio, noting especially the writing skills he gained with close teacher attention. He'd never heard of Georgetown until ninth grade, when Donna Rodrigues brought both Ramsey and Mastrorio to Washington to speak to officials in the US Department of Education, the Department of Justice, and the Office of Housing and Urban Development about their high school and the revitalization of the Main South neighborhood.

Rodrigues always stressed student presentations, ensuring that in every class students stand up and speak so they become comfortable doing it. "I made a deliberate decision to help all the kids focus on presentation skills," says Rodrigues, who was initially struck by the trouble many of the students had making eye contact. "They needed practice speaking in front of people and developing that kind of poise. They needed to learn how to package themselves."



Ramsey and Mastrorio think that emphasis worked for them. Both see themselves returning to Worcester after college, Mastrorio to pursue a career in law and politics, Ramsey with his eyes on public policy. “I want to try to help out kids in a similar position,” he says.

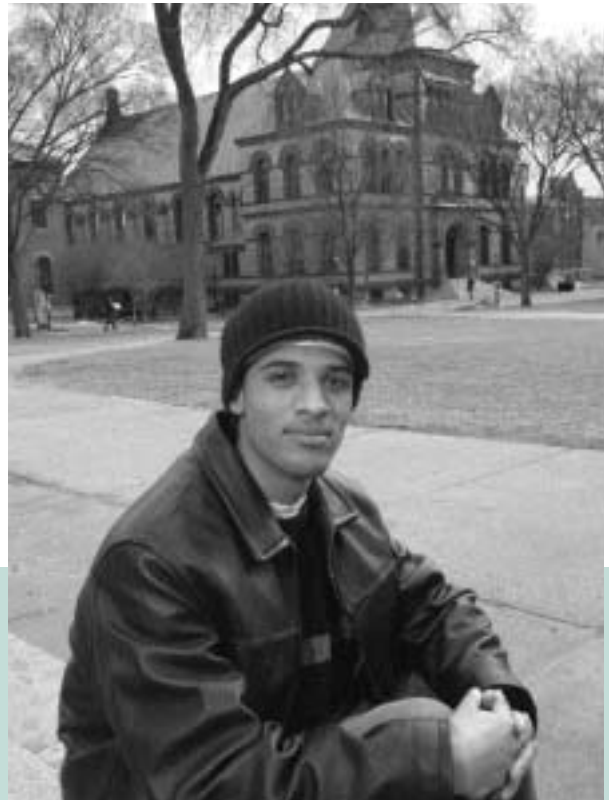
Whether even University Park will be able to do so in the future remains uncertain. Given the culture of high expectations at University Park, setbacks fall hard on students and staff.

When it opened, University Park had 90-minute blocks of classroom time spread out over an eight-hour day. Money from the Worcester public schools allowed the school to pay teachers for the extra time. But two years ago, budget cuts ended all extended-day programs in the city. As a result, University Park lost an entire class period from the school day. The school sacrificed seventh- and eighth-grade

*The poetry of Damian Ramsey, valedictorian of University Park's first graduating class, combines the language of the street with a writing discipline learned at the school:*

## **“I GAZE AT THE STARS”**

We are God's children  
That's what we are  
I gaze at the stars  
and see all the flaws  
of this world we live in  
kids chillin' on street corners  
spraying 9s at their brothers  
we ought to be lovers  
hugging, kissing, showing affection to each other  
under the lord above  
where's the love  
young teens get caught in a whirlpool of sex and drugs  
it's WWII on the streets  
mothers get beat  
blood starts to leak  
little kids get robbed when they trick or treat  
stealing candy from a baby  
no it ain't sweet  
but it's bitter  
trying to sleep at night and hear gang members pulling triggers  
look at the figures  
one million die  
then ten thousand more lose their lives  
burning in the heat of hatred and I ask myself why  
as I read the scriptures  
my little sister i miss her  
caught in a drive by and shot down by a pistol  
poetically incline  
wish i could be sublime  
but i live in a world where saying i love u is a crime



giving me goose bumps like RL Stine  
and chills up my spine  
when i think of the statistics  
all those who die and those uneducated  
and ignorant folks whose hatred elevated  
to cause 911  
this is not a pun or a joke  
all that smoke that developed after the fires and boulders enveloped  
so many innocent brothers and sisters  
once again i read the scriptures  
hoping for hope  
but the world can't be fixed by reading a book  
hear being black makes u a crook, or should i say minority—look  
at the absurdities of our societies  
they bother me like gnats  
plutonium bullets fired from gats  
we're trapped  
and “we want free” like Amistad, we feel enchained by the hatred  
no love amongst our cousins, brothers, sisters, fathers, or mothers  
the fire burns my hands when i step outside my door  
we live in a hellish universe where thousands are poor  
discrimination floods this nation  
and never ends  
hostility exists even amongst friends  
rage breeds more rage  
I'm drunk with disgust  
it makes my heart bust  
I'M CRUSHED

Spanish to avoid cutting the time spent on core subjects.

"It was devastating," says Rodrigues. She offered to give up a teacher position in exchange for the longer day, but the school committee wouldn't accept the trade. Rumor had it that the school committee was leery of showing any kind of favoritism toward the high-performing school. But in all likelihood, the deal wouldn't have lasted more than a year anyway, since the school committee made another \$14 million worth of cuts in fiscal year 2003.

Worcester schools superintendent James Caradonio says he regretted the need for cutting the extended day at University Park, just as he was sorry to eliminate 190 teaching positions across the city over the past two years. But he says there's a silver lining in proving the school's success under stress.

"When people come from around the country to look at University Park, they always want to know whether they've hit on any hard times," he says. "They can say, 'Yes, but look at our student achievement.' It's continued to stay at high levels."

But the hard times got personal for Rodrigues, and not just the budget. She began to feel a sense of isolation from her longtime colleagues at other public schools. The better students at University Park performed, the farther away

people sat from her at principals' meetings. She heard whispering and laughter from people who had been longtime friends. As discussions ensued about creating small learning communities within the large high schools, one colleague jokingly asked, "Do we all have to become little University Park Campus Schools now?"

Even worse were some of the compliments. People began to refer to Rodrigues as a "charismatic" leader who oversaw an "island of success." She bristled at the idea that what she and her team had pulled off couldn't be done elsewhere. To her, it was just one more excuse for giving up on needy kids.

### THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE

Rodrigues brought her tenure at University Park to a close last June. She says it was the right time for her to move on—with the first graduating class. At Jobs for the Future, a Boston-based educational research, consulting, and advocacy group, her mission is to travel around the country talking about University Park and how other school districts can form similar partnerships in pursuit of equally stunning results.

Indeed, educators from around the country are flocking to University Park—from New York City; Washington, DC; Las Vegas; and Los Angeles—to see what makes the school work. But it may not be easy to re-create the special envi-

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*Clark University's Jack Foley and Tom Del Prete.*

ronment of University Park at high schools with more than five times as many students.

"The challenge is, how do you convince all the students and all the teachers that the students are capable of performing at high levels and that you will do everything possible to support them to achieve at high levels?" asks Paul Reville, executive director of MassINC's Rennie Center and a lecturer at Harvard's Graduate School of Education. "The challenge for the school district leaders is how to learn from the success, to honor the extraordinary results, and to encourage others to adopt some of the principles that are at work here, without at the same time canonizing this school and its faculty in a way that is sure to marginalize the rest of the systems."

That challenge is not lost on superintendent Caradonio, who, as deputy superintendent, served on the steering committee that created University Park. But it's a tall order to extend that success throughout a city when a fiscal crisis has lopped \$30 million off the school budget in the past two years.

Caradonio is hopeful, however, that as the city's large high schools begin to divide themselves up into smaller learning communities within their sprawling buildings—a process that's underway with the help of an \$8 million grant from

the Carnegie Corp.—the lessons of University Park will have greater local relevance.

"The issue is creating the same personalization and motivation at the larger schools," says Caradonio. He believes the larger schools can look to University Park for guidance on family involvement, project-based instruction, and curricula that prepare kids for higher-level thinking skills.

"People tend to canonize small schools," says Caradonio, but adds that making a learning community small means nothing if there is no culture change. "It's not just the new wineskin that's important," Caradonio says. "It's the new wine that goes in it."

At the large high schools, however, the "new wine" is being made as it's poured. "University Park had the advantage of starting from scratch, building the team, and building the student body that set the model and the tone for succeeding classes," says Clark's Jack Foley. "It's more difficult going into a large building and changing the culture. But I know

**The issue is to create the same personalization and motivation at the larger high schools.**

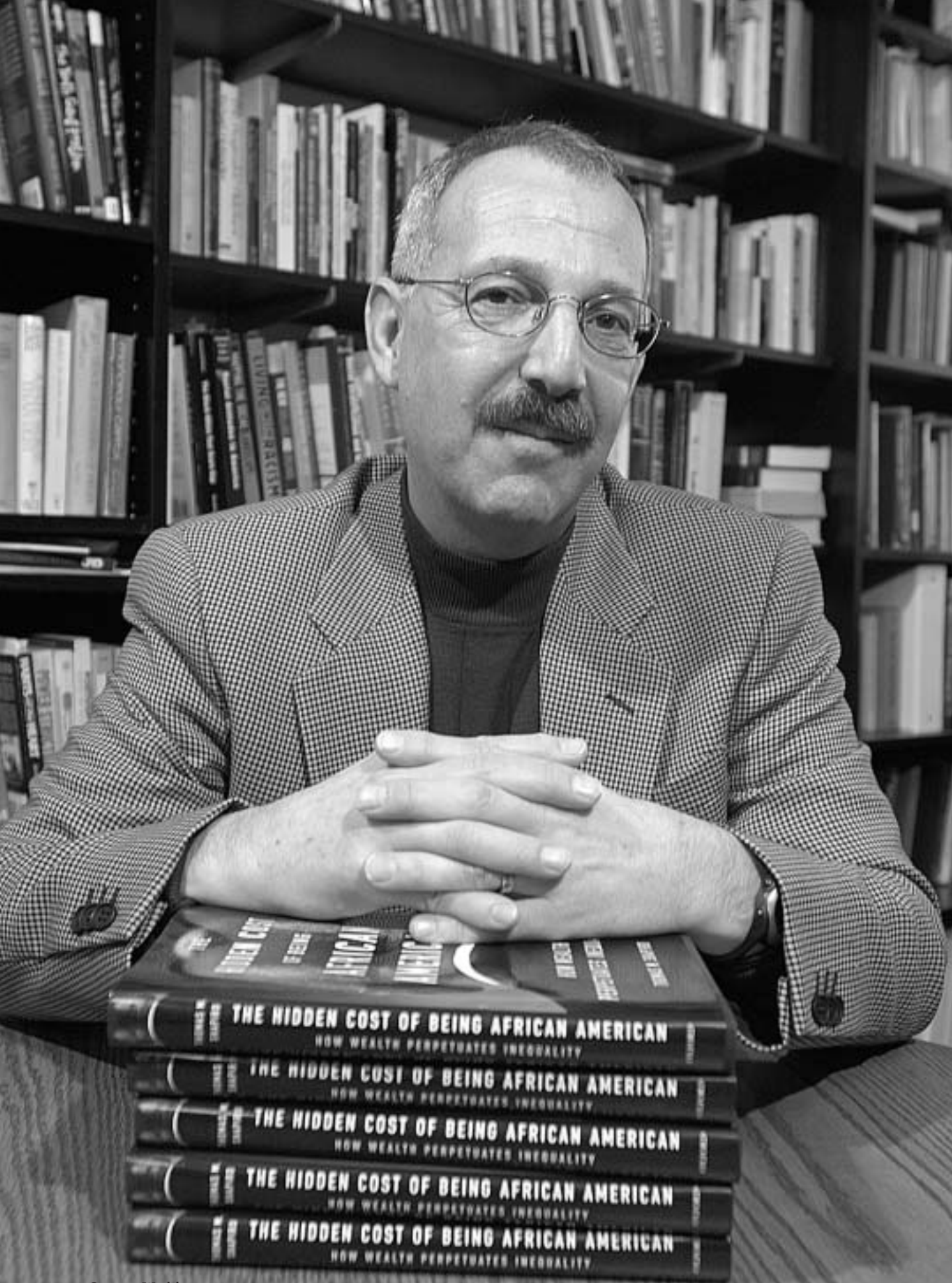
it can be done."

One Worcester principal trying to do it is Maureen Ciccone, who worked with Donna Rodrigues and June Eressy when they were teachers at South High School. Under Ciccone, South High has formed a partnership with Clark's Hiatt Center, which is administering the Carnegie grant, and they're working together to create three academies within the 1,500-student school. One of the greatest benefits she's gotten from University Park, she says, are the Clark-trained teachers who have done their student-teaching there and since come to South as teachers. But she's also been inspired by the example of personalization and high expectations set by University Park.

"Everyone in Worcester has benefited from the results that University Park has achieved," says Ciccone. "I think what they've done is what everyone should be able to do if we just dig a little deeper. They've shown us what's possible." ■

*Michelle Bates Deakin is a freelance writer based in Arlington.*





# to HAVE AND HAVE NOT

Thomas Shapiro says assets, not income, make the real difference in getting ahead —and the lack of them is what holds African-Americans back

On the issue of economic inequality, Americans are of two minds. On the one hand, we value opportunity over security, balancing a meager safety net (compared with other developed countries) with the promise of upward mobility for those with ability, gumption, and tolerance for hard work. The idea of opportunity itself suggests variability of outcomes, so inequality in income and wealth does not so much disprove the idea of equal chance for everyone as validate it. As a result, Americans are probably more immune to class resentment than any other people on earth. On the other hand, when economic inequality appears as a symptom of social inequality, as when women and minorities systematically earn less as a function of second-class status, it strikes at the very heart of the opportunity-for-all ethos. Just as offensive, in some ways, to the American sense of right and wrong is the idea of an inequality so immutable as to trump opportunity altogether—a permanent stratification that defies effort, making class a preordained status.

If those twin dangers—discrimination and permanence—could make economic inequality un-American, Thomas Shapiro's research on racial discrepancies in assets, rather than income, should be disturbing. The sociologist, now at Brandeis University's Heller School of Social Policy and Management after long tenure at Northeastern University, says issues of inequality—race, class, and gender—were his

“passion” even when he was in graduate school, in the 1970s, but at that time the study of social stratification “had come to what looked like a dead end.” That, he says, was because all that social scientists could analyze were what he calls “labor market factors”—that is, jobs and income. “What was left out was a notion of family wealth, of property,” he says. That gap was filled in the mid-1980s, when the first national data on family assets and liabilities were collected. Shapiro, working with an African-American former grad-school classmate, Melvin Oliver, mined that data in *Black Wealth/White Wealth*, a 1995 book that established assets as what Shapiro calls “a fundamental axis of inequality, specifically of racial inequality, in the United States.” *Black Wealth/White Wealth* showed that even when education, occupation, and income are equal, blacks remain far behind whites in wealth accumulation, a continuing legacy of racial discrimination.

But Shapiro felt that the numbers, while persuasive, didn't go far enough in demonstrating how this disparity in economic means perpetuates itself, even when disparities in the means of wealth accumulation—education, jobs, homeownership, all of which blacks were shut out of in the past by forms of discrimination that are now illegal—have narrowed. In order to get beyond the facts of wealth distribution and into the mechanics, Shapiro knew he would need more-detailed knowledge of household financial manage-

PHOTOGRAPHS BY FRANK CURRAN



ment than he could get from national surveys. So he set out to interview nearly 300 families (in the Boston, Los Angeles, and St. Louis areas), half of them black and half white, of various income levels, all with school-age children, to see how they use their assets to preserve and advance their economic status—or not.

The result is Shapiro's *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality*, which was published in January. Title notwithstanding, *Hidden Cost* is as much about class and its reproduction, from generation to generation, as it is about race and its continuing cost, social and economic. That's because Shapiro finds that most families living with the material comfort and range of opportunities normally associated with middle-class status have obtained them the old-fashioned way: inheritance. But Shapiro is not talking about trust-fund babies here. Rather, he finds that it is with modest gifts at opportune moments—going to college, buying a first home, enrolling a child in private school—as well as in bequests, that previous generations use the fruits of their own life's work to safeguard a middle-class existence for offspring who have not yet earned it on their own. The lingering legacy of racial injustice, says Shapiro, can be seen in the absence of assets (or in the diminished value of those assets) available for passing down to boost young black families up the economic ladder or prevent them from dropping down a rung.

Shapiro's schematic diagram of class transmission also raises questions about the distribution of opportunity beyond race. If assets, even in small amounts, have become a necessity for economic advancement, is equality of opportunity meaningless without equal access to the assets that can transform lives? Shapiro thinks so. In a visit to his office on the Brandeis campus in Waltham, I asked Shapiro about assets, asset policy, and opportunity. The following is an edited transcript of our conversation.

—ROBERT KEOUGH

**CommonWealth:** A friend of mine who was at the time a graduate student in the field defined sociology as “documenting

the obvious.” That's not the most flattering characterization, but I think true enough, in the sense that what sociology does is take everyday experience and judge how typical it is, what it tells us about society as a whole. You make the simple point that most of us don't get to middle-class status, particularly at a young age, without help from family, usually from parents. It may be paying our college tuition so that we avoid the burden of college loans, or lending us, usually with no expectation of actual repayment, money for the down payment on a first house, or simply helping out during a rough patch and being able to maintain a lifestyle that

at that particular moment you can't really afford on your own. But what's wrong with getting a little help from your friends—and especially your family?

**Shapiro:** First, as a sociologist, I don't want to defend my profession by answering the claim that we're documenting the obvious. But let's look at the racial wealth gap. I think it is obvious, certainly a commonsense notion, that white families have more wealth than black families. That's the commonsense part. For me, the sociological part is, first, to say, is that empirically true? And what is the extent, what's the magnitude of it? What I was able to show in this book was that the average African-American family has 10 cents of wealth for every dollar of wealth that the

average white family has. Now that, to me, is a humongous gap and it cries out, among other things, for explanation. Traditionally, what we have done [to understand inequality] has been to look at income. When we look at income, we have great data that's released every year by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau that tell us that the average African-American family earns 58, 59, 60, or 61 cents for every dollar that the average white family earns. Ten cents on the dollar [in assets] versus 60 cents on the dollar [in income] is a very different yardstick in thinking about inequality. I don't want to say that we've become complacent as a society, but we've all become so accustomed to that yardstick. It's a very different fact when we say [the economic disparity between blacks and whites is] 10 cents on the dollar.



**CommonWealth:** And it's not just that inequality is far greater than it might appear when you just look at income. You also argue that wealth is different than income, that we use assets in ways that are different than the ways we use income. Indeed, you suggest that having fewer assets may be more disadvantageous than having less income in terms of the options available to you.

**Shapiro:** Wealth is a special form of money; it's different than income. Families think of it differently and they use it differently. In a nutshell, most of us use the income we get from our paychecks or social assistance or whatever to survive. We use it to pay our rent, pay our mortgage, buy food, keep clothes on our back, buy heat in places like Boston, which is very expensive. But we usually don't think of income as getting-ahead money. Income doesn't feed dreams. Income doesn't launch social mobility. That's what most families use wealth for, wealth being a stored-up reserve of financial assets that families consciously use for either safety-net purposes or getting-ahead purposes. That is, when the time comes to think about a business opportunity or a job move or somebody needs higher education or somebody's medical insurance has run out—those are the kinds of special purposes that wealth is used for in most families, as opposed to income.

**CommonWealth:** In essence, income is the fruit that comes from getting ahead—you get ahead, your income rises. But it's the assets that allow you to do that getting ahead. They give you leverage to take advantage of opportunities you hope will increase your income on a permanent basis.

**Shapiro:** It does, in many cases.

**CommonWealth:** You've coined the term "transformative assets" for those bits of wealth that are used for the particular purpose of generating a next step up the economic and social ladder—buying your first home, moving to a community you want to live in, opening a business, which you know is a risky proposition and you need to guard against the possibility of failure. I was struck, in reading story after story in your book of how transformative assets from relatives helped families get ahead, that it's often not a lot of money, but it's really important money. It's a kind of money that allows families to obtain something for themselves and for their children that they couldn't do on their own.

**Shapiro:** Intellectually, I thought I had an understanding of that going into this project. But it really was a cumulative discovery, a pattern that developed in the way I think about it. I knew going in, for example, that half the businesses in the United States are capitalized with \$5,000 or less. I knew you can go to community college for about \$2,500 a year. We know there are low-income housing programs around that allow one to put down as little as \$5,000 and buy a home. For those of us in the middle class who have fairly decent incomes, that doesn't sound like a lot of money. And it's not a lot of money. But it is critically important for the average American family to have that kind of nest egg because it really can leverage for them the kinds of opportunities that are going to make their lives better. So it's very significant to them.

'Income doesn't  
feed dreams.  
Income doesn't  
launch social  
mobility.'

Now, I came up with the term transformative assets because, as a sociologist, there's a context for that. The American experiment, the American Dream, the American ethos, is really built around the notion that people can succeed on their own skills, on their own merits, on their own achievements, regardless of background. That's how we were founded as a nation. We won't talk about the historical contradictions around that, but that's the real promise of America.

Embedded in that foundation is the notion of merit and achievement, which comes, for the most part, from people's earnings in the labor market, their skills or creativity, in starting a business, how smart they are, and certainly a little amount of luck thrown in. The notion of transformative assets is something beyond that, something outside the process of merit and achievement. I was seeing it in the families I talked to—families anchored in middle-class status, but, you know, it was obvious that they couldn't pay for the house they were living in out of their earnings; their earnings aren't bad, but that's not the community they should be slotted into. How are they there? How is their kid in this school? How are they pursuing this kind of business opportunity?

As part of the interview process, we conducted a nice inventory of the financial assets the families had, how they acquired each asset, and how they thought about it, what they were attempting to do with it. It became very apparent that most of the families, especially the middle-class families—some black middle-class families as well—at some point in the past had the benefit of some very important transformative assets from parents or grandparents, whether it was paying for college (we usually don't think of that as an

inheritance) or down-payment money for the first home. Other than a parent's death, in American society there's no larger trigger for the transfer of wealth between generations than the buying of a first home.

**CommonWealth:** And it is common. I could never have bought a home, certainly not at the age that I did, without help from family. But, as you point out, we don't acknowledge the role of these helping hands in our mythology of self-made men and women. I was struck, in your interviews, by how often you really had to go back and probe to get families to recognize how much they had gotten thanks to others rather than by their own efforts. As you say, you don't doubt that these families work hard and save as much as they can—it isn't as if they're all trust-fund babies who had life handed to them—but still it's very hard for them to face the fact that what they have, they haven't really achieved on their own.

**Shapiro:** Right, right. In the families I talked to, it was pretty common for significant financial assets, significant in terms of what they could help those families purchase, [to come from parents]. That was especially true for white families. For African-American families, it was a little out of the ordinary. When it did happen, it tended not to be financial assets that were passed along, but it was more in-kind services that allowed families to save money. Take, for example, a young family deciding they wanted to buy a home, to move to a safer community. What two families I talked to did was they moved back in with their parents for a couple of years, saved enough money for a down payment, put it in a special account. That was the deal: The parents said, you can live here rent-free as long as you use your savings to make a down payment on a nice house in a nice community.

**CommonWealth:** You also note that another sharp difference between white families and black is that, for white families in that kind of middle-income range, it's common to be getting help from parents, but for black families in that middle-income range, they're more likely to help out their parents or other family members than to get the benefit of their parents' success.

**Shapiro:** That was a relatively new finding for me. I was a little surprised at the extent of it. In the book, I talk about one wife who calls her husband "the bank of Kevin," because any relative who is in need of anything is always knocking

on their door. Apparently they can afford it, and he's got parents who need that help, whereas most of the white middle-class families I was talking to, they weren't being asked, at least at this point, for that kind of financial help.

But I want to get back to the question you asked about what seems to be lack of recognition of where these transformative assets come from. This is something that I came to relatively late in my mining of the interviews. I came to it, frankly, with the help of one of my research assistants, who is more interested in the ideological aspects of this research. Among families who had inherited or were given significant transformative assets, there was and is a real reluctance to fess up to it, in a way. In their use of language—I was trying to listen to language very carefully—they were justifying it in the language of having earned it, going back to achievement and back to merit. We worked hard, we

worked two jobs, we worked overtime, we had garage sales, we did this and that. Now, I have no doubt that they're working very hard. My point is, I also have no doubt that there are other families just like them working just as hard, if not harder, but they don't have access to those transformative assets that could anchor them in middle-class status or put their kids in a school they have more confidence in.

‘Homeownership  
creates wealth, but  
less wealth for the  
African-American  
homeowner.’

**CommonWealth:** The other racial difference that is striking—and heartbreaking—has to do with the most common way most middle-class families build wealth, and that is, buying a home. A home is the biggest investment most of us make in our lives, and it's appreciation in the value of that home that is the most common vehicle for wealth accumulation. But you note that this is another place where African-Americans do not fare as well as white families. In fact, this is the source of the title of your book, because there is an actual price—you can put a dollar figure on it—that black families pay in appreciation in their homes they *don't* get because of the neighborhoods they live in.

**Shapiro:** It really gets into the dynamics of housing markets and mortgage markets and lending markets and brokers. There are two processes that are important to look at. One has to do with why it is that African-American homeownership is about 20 to 25 percent lower than white homeownership. Economists will tell us—and they're partly right on this—that's a function of different income levels: the higher the income, the higher the homeownership rate. So, one would think it would be the case that white and black

families of roughly the same income would have the same homeownership rates. That's not true, because of some of the things we've talked about already. How do you come up with the down-payment money? Where does that come from? It's not just the earnings on the job and the paycheck. The median house price in the United States—don't gasp, this isn't Boston I'm talking about—it's like \$165,000. But for that average home, the family has to come up with somewhere around \$16,000 to \$19,000—5 to 10 percent down payment, plus closing costs. Most families don't have that. About 30 percent to 35 percent of American families have zero or negative financial assets to start with. So, to get into that homeownership market, even if your income qualifies you, African-Americans are at a disadvantage [because they're less likely to have assets from parents]. That, for me, is part of the hidden cost of being African-American. That's a difference that comes from the past. Their parents were shut out of the Levittowns; their parents were shut out of FHA; their parents were shut out of GI loans; their parents were shut out of Veterans Administration [loans]. Their parents were zoned out and excluded and redlined out of the opportunity to build up that wealth in homes.

The second process is that, even in America today, residential segregation remains very high, no matter what part

of the country you're in. It's high by economic [group] and it's also intransigently high by race. Whites live together, blacks live together, and different groups in other parts of the country also tend to live together. Geographic space doesn't get shared too often. We have made some progress towards residential integration; I don't want to discount that. But the degree of residential segregation remains very high. Now, that creates a dual housing market. Say I own a home in a community in Boston that's 80 to 90 percent white. When I go to sell that house, what determines what I can sell it for? Well, you have to look at who are the eligible buyers. The eligible buyers are going to be other whites and blacks and Latinos and Asians who have the earning power that can qualify them for the loan. So the only excluding lens for buying a home in the white community is the economic lens. But now assume that I'm African-American and I own a home in a community that's 60 percent African-American or in transition to becoming more African-American homeowners than white homeowners. We now ask the question, who are the potential buyers for that home? We need to, unfortunately, exclude a large majority of whites. They're not looking for homes in African-American communities, no matter how nice the homes are. One result is the price of that home will be lower. The difference in equity, the increase in



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value [between homes owned by whites and those owned by blacks] is, in my data set, on average \$28,000. Homeownership creates wealth, for sure, but it creates \$28,000 less wealth for the African-American homeowner than it does for the white homeowner. That's a very important hidden cost of being African-American. Who do we blame? There's no perpetrator here. It's much larger societal dynamics that are at play. But there's a clear victim, if I can get away with that term here. Somebody suffers.

**CommonWealth:** You argue that, in focusing the spotlight on assets as opposed to income in trying to understand inequality, public policy should take this asset approach as well, not only looking at income but also the acquisition of assets, particularly those assets that can help families advance economically and socially. You also argue that asset policy, as you call it, would be nothing new in this country, that historically there have been programs going back to the Homestead Act, as well as much more recent ones, that explicitly had as their purpose giving Americans an opportunity to build wealth.

**Shapiro:** That's right. One could write a book about the amazing success story of asset policy for some groups in the

United States. Those groups happen to be, for the most part, middle-class, upper-middle-class families and largely white. Yes, we can go back to the homesteading acts of the middle part of the 1800s in various states, the federal Homestead Act as well. One study projected that up to one in every four homeowners in the United States can trace their acquisition of property to the Homestead Acts. That really boggled my mind. Now, it may not be one in four, but the point is, it's not something that we think about. Just before World War II, the Federal Housing Administration changed the rules on homeownership, probably forever. Prior to the FHA, if you wanted to buy a house you had to come up with about 90 percent of the purchase price in cash, then you got a short-term loan for the other 5 or 10 percent. The FHA reversed that, by guaranteeing banks that if a family went bust the FHA would pay up, in essence. But it also reversed the terms, so that we now buy homes with typically 5 to 10 percent down, and we finance the remaining 90–95 percent over a period of 30 years. On a monthly basis, it comes closer to what some people would think of as rent money. That's very important. Americans—I think I'm correct in this—I think America has the highest homeownership rate in the world. Certainly among the industrialized countries it does; Canada, I think, is a close second. We're the biggest homeowners not

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because we love homes more than anybody else, maybe not even because we have more money than other societies—although we do have more money than most societies—but because of federal policies that reward families, that give incentives to families to buy homes. The home they buy, if it's in a decent neighborhood—and most homes are—appreciates in value. The nest egg they accumulate is something they can leverage or pass on to their kids or whatever they want to do with it. It's federal policies that provide incentives, tax incentives and others, that allow Americans to buy homes to the extent they do.

Now, there's one huge federal program—you might not think of it as a federal program—that lets you deduct the interest you pay on your mortgage right off your taxes. Now, that's not a line item in the federal budget; that's not something we have congressional hearings about like we do over food stamps or WIC or even arms budgets. That's embedded, almost etched in stone, in the tax code of the United States. What that is essentially is a subsidy. The federal government, the taxpayer, is subsidizing my home. The wealthier you are, the higher up you are in the tax brackets, the higher the subsidy. On one level, it's tremendously effective social policy. Here's a program of the federal government that encourages families to buy homes, and we can make a really strong case that homeowners are more stable, their families are more stable, they accumulate assets and wealth, their kids do better in school, they're tied to communities better, they participate in civic affairs more. So encouraging homeownership is a good thing. However, the way the FHA, the Federal Housing Administration, was applied, the way some of the other programs were applied, allowed for excluding whole groups of people—African-Americans for sure; in some communities they were Catholics; in some communities it was Jews and whoever else. But those programs provided the impetus—the reward system, the incentives—for many American families to acquire that second pillar of middle class status. The income pillar is one; the wealth pillar is the other. And the wealth pillar is usually provided by homeownership. For African-Americans, in particular, the wealth pillar is what's missing.



**CommonWealth:** There are newer asset policies, things like 401Ks with deferred, tax-advantaged savings, and other proposals like medical savings accounts...

**Shapiro:** My pension, and your pension, and most people's pensions, they're all federally subsidized.

**CommonWealth:** Absolutely. So we're continuing to expand asset policies, but these are not asset policies to help people who don't have assets to get them. What would asset policy for the poor, to get them those middle-class assets, look like?

**Shapiro:** Let me just backtrack a bit here. In fact, current asset policies, which are for those who already have assets, act in such a way as to make inequality worse. So, while homeownership policies give Americans the highest rate of homeownership and make them an integral part of the American Dream, homeownership policies—and others, like retirement and pension policies and medical policies, in particular—function in a way that increases inequality, because they give subsidies to those who already have enough financial assets to participate in those kinds of programs. The intellectual puzzle here for me and others is this: If

asset policies have been effective in helping to build a broad American middle class, and clearly are important to their stability and clearly important to their feeling a part of society, what is it we can do to bring asset policies to families who are asset-poor?


First off, what is an asset-poor family? We're talking about 40 percent of the population. We're not talking about the 12 percent of Americans under the poverty line [in income]. We're talking about at least two out of every five families—and I view that as a very conservative definition, I really do. If we're thinking about how you structure a way for asset-poor families to accumulate assets and use them for their own social mobility to become more self-reliant and independent and stable, then we're thinking about a project that, minimally, is talking about two out of every five families in the population. At some point we're going to have to think large here.

I can describe a number of demonstration, pilot projects,

privately funded, foundation funded, philanthropically funded, that for the most part do not get any federal assistance. Because I sit on the research advisory board for this, I'm very aware of a demonstration program in 13 cities across the United States, where the point is to answer the question: Will poor families save money, given a high incentive? The incentive they have is that their savings, the money they put aside into a special account, is matched; I think the highest match is \$8 for every \$1 you put aside, up to certain limits. Well, the findings from this demonstration program are very clear—in fact, President Clinton's second-to-last State of the Union speech cited some of the preliminary evidence, where he said something like, we now know the poor can save. He then went on to propose something he called Universal Savings Accounts, USAs, but that didn't see the light of day. But that demonstration program proved very effectively that, given high levels of incentives, yes, poor people will save. For the most part, these were families that probably shouldn't be saving. But given the promise—assets fed their dreams—they figured ways of scrimping, saving amounts that might be enough of a nest egg to put down a first month's and last month's [rent] in a safer neighborhood. Or to get themselves into a community college or to provide some techni-

cal training that would get them that better job. It was that kind of asset they were building for themselves that would help them make a leap in social mobility. So that was very important.

There are a lot of other programs on the drawing board. At the federal level, there is something called the Assets for Independence Act, which is a program where the federal government matches the savings of eligible families. Another piece of legislation that would be much broader, but has not passed, is the Savings for Working Families Act, where there would be a match of savings, but the match comes, not from the federal government directly, but from the bank. In return, the banks get a tax break. It's a policy tool that doesn't come out of the budget side, but rather the tax-code side. The program closest to my heart, that's about to start, is called Children's Savings Accounts. It's almost exactly like the program in Great Britain, part of Tony Blair's last election manifesto, that journalists there dubbed Baby Bonds. At birth, children would receive, in a special account, a certain amount of money, to be determined. At signal events—like maybe entering kindergarten, graduating middle school, first summer job—the federal government would contribute more to the account. Parents could contribute and not have that money taxed. Employers,



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including summer employers, could contribute; foundations could contribute. A philanthropist could adopt a community, match accounts. So that by age 18, when that child starts to become an adult, they could use that money and the matching money for higher education. At age 21, it could be used for starting a business, continued higher education, homeownership, home repair, and then at some later age, it could be rolled over into retirement accounts or whatever.

**CommonWealth:** Unfortunately, most of these are still on the drawing board, rather than actually in place.

**Shapiro:** Most of them are on the drawing board, but not all. I think that more than half of the states have a program where there are state monies that are matching saving accounts. Now, they're not doing it on an \$8-to-\$1 basis, and not everyone's eligible.

**CommonWealth:** Reading your book also got me thinking about the estate tax...

**Shapiro:** I'm glad you called it the estate tax...

**CommonWealth:** ...and not the death tax, right. But that brings up this whole issue of the attitude in America toward inherited wealth. Your book makes such a powerful case that intergenerational transfer of wealth—and we're not talking, for the most part, about enormous fortunes, but the more incidental passage of smaller amounts of wealth—is really important for people as they try to get ahead. But we've never quite squared the idea that it's a good thing to be able to pass something along to your children—we all hope to do that, as we all hope our parents will be able to do that—with the American mistrust of a permanent plutocratic class. I have to say, I'm not sure but what the concern about plutocracy is almost vestigial in American society. I'm not sure that there's much passion left behind the idea that there should not be inherited fortunes passed along from generation to generation. But from your discussion, I found it intriguing to think about taxing inherited fortunes as a way to finance other sorts of asset policies. Perhaps, in fact, it's most justifiable on the grounds that those who succeed in accumulating assets should, upon passing those assets to the next generation, help to fund opportunities for others who are less fortunate to develop that kind of asset base.

**Shapiro:** I think there's some beautiful symmetry to that argument. You know, we had, last year, the book by Bill Gates Sr. and Chuck Collins, *Wealth in Our Commonweath*, which tried to make that argument [for taxation of large fortunes]. Through my prism of looking at family financial assets and how they're used, there's a way of looking at American history as being a tussle between the deeply held values and beliefs around equality and opportunity as the core of the American Dream and the American ethic, on the one hand, and on the other hand, a belief that I would say is inconsistent with that, the notion of unfettered inheritance. For me, inheritance is the enemy of meritocracy. Now we're in a position where that pendulum has swung virtually entirely to the unfettered-inheritance side, at the expense of meritocracy, at the expense of achievement—

and, tragically, perhaps at the expense of democracy, as well. I try to frame the issue around seeing inheritance as an attack on equal opportunity, as an attack on meritocracy, and to think of the estate tax as a way to redress that imbalance.

The attack on the estate tax started before [George W.] Bush became president. It started gaining some steam in the Clinton administration. It's something that goes across, not necessarily liberal and conservative

lines, but Democrat and Republican. It's almost a fait accompli. As of the year 2011, if there's no positive action, there will be a permanent repeal of the estate tax, a piece of legislation that has been with us through Democratic and Republican administrations, liberals and conservatives, since 1912, I think that's the year. It makes sense that the estate tax would come under attack at exactly a period when, for the first time in American history, the middle class actually has some wealth that it's attempting to pass along. They think—they've been fooled into thinking—their wealth is going to be taxed. Under the current laws, their wealth would not be taxed.

What do we do about it? We could think about reforming the estate tax in a way that you exclude the first \$3 million, the primary home—we could think about it in a way where there are really no farmers in Iowa who are going to lose their farms. Even the kinds of transformative assets that I have a problem with, intellectually, would be allowed. But whatever we decide to stick with as an estate tax, we could earmark those funds to help structure ways for asset-poor families to accumulate assets on their own. That's the symmetry, the linkage, that one could build a stronger political base around. ■

The American  
Dream clashes  
with the notion  
of 'unfettered  
inheritance.'

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# Test pattern

## No Child Left Behind? The Politics and Practice of School Accountability

Paul E. Peterson and Martin R. West, editors

Washington, DC, Brookings Institution Press, 340 pages

REVIEWED BY PAUL REVILLE

In January 2002, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act, which elevated to federal law an approach to systemic educational reform—high standards, regular assessment, and real accountability—that had been sweeping the states for a dozen years. Many state leaders readily identified their own reform principles in the new law and welcomed the moral and (promised) financial support from the nation's capital. However, some worried about the new mandates and implementation plans for what amounted to an enormous and unprecedented federal incursion into public schools, which had historically and constitutionally been the province of state and local governments. Some saw the feds as offering parents more educational choices, high standards, increased performance pressure on schools, higher quality teachers, and other benefits, while others saw Congress seeking 100 percent of the power to define accountability yet providing only 8 percent (an increase of only 1 percentage point over the preceding year) of the total funding for education.

NCLB clearly signaled a federal intent to hold states and schools accountable for educational performance. But will this new federal scrutiny fulfill the promise of the standards-and-accountability systems put in place in states like Massachusetts, under the Education Reform Act of 1993, or distort them? And what does the experience of school accountability in the states and other juris-

dictions suggest about the new educational accountability to the federal government?

In a collection of essays titled *No Child Left Behind? The Politics and Practice of School Accountability*, editors Paul Peterson and Martin West of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government try to answer those questions. Originally presented at a spring 2001 conference called "Taking Account of Accountability: Assessing Policy and Politics," these essays have been updated to reflect the new reality of No Child Left Behind and to comment on the prospects for effective implementation of the law.

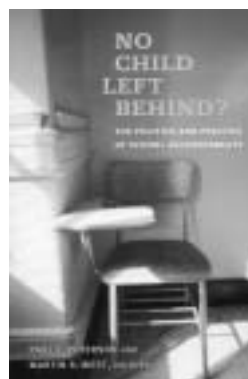
Several chapters written after the passage of NCLB address the origins and politics of the new law. In

mentation schedule, which they predict will allow for the dilution of the toughest requirements. They believe that placing local districts in charge of providing choices to the parents

of children in failing schools sets up an untenable conflict of interest for district officials. And they take great exception to the absence of student sanctions, such as promotion and graduation requirements, which they see as essential for providing performance

pressure. However, they conclude that NCLB's "soft accountability," with all its flaws, is better than no accountability at all and may well trigger educational improvement.

In a fascinating chapter on the policy and political history of the



**'Soft accountability' may be better than no accountability at all.**

their introduction to the book, Peterson and West express a wide range of doubts and cautions about the dramatic new federal role in education accountability. "There is every reason to believe that tough, coercive accountability will gradually evolve into something softer, nicer, more acceptable to those directly affected," Peterson and West suggest. They lament the bill's protracted imple-

ment, Andrew Rudalevige of Dickinson College chronicles the compromises that led to the creation of a bill fraught with ambiguity and reliant on an awkward combination of "coercive accountability," whereby student performance is measured across schools on a standardized basis, and "a dash of free market accountability," whereby parents and schools freely choose schools and force competition. Rud-



alevige warns that the “devil will be in the details” of implementation because policy-makers, unable to resolve their own disagreements, settled for ambiguous language, deferring the tough decisions to the US Department of Education.

Jennifer Hochschild of Harvard University takes a look at the political currents that led to the compromises described by Rudalevige. She discusses how politically unlikely it was that accountability would become as central to school reform as it is now, but she wonders if the consensus will hold when the public moves on to other issues.

What can go wrong in imposing accountability on schools? In two extraordinarily insightful chapters, Frederick Hess, of the American Enterprise Institute, and Terry Moe, of Stanford University, outline a number of factors that can under-

mine the good intentions of lawmakers. In “Refining or Retreating? High-Stakes Accountability in the States,” Hess describes the politics of opposition to high-stakes consequences in the new accountability systems. He focuses on four groups of opponents who seem to crop up in every state that tries to hold schools accountable: teachers who resist monitoring and intrusions on their classroom autonomy; ethnic and “socioeconomic communities whose students might be disproportionately sanctioned”; affluent communities who resent state intrusion and fear the dilution of local standards; and those who worry that their favorite subjects will be marginalized by the tests. Hess notes that these opponents never openly reject the principle of accountability, only the specific form of accountability in question, whatever it happens to be.

“Opponents of transforming accountability hardly ever suggest that they are opposed to the broader notion of accountability, instead tracing their opposition to the specifics of existing arrangements,” writes Hess. In order to defuse such opposition, policy-makers attempt to “soften the blow” by lowering stakes, making tests easier, reducing passing scores, providing “opt out” provisions, or delaying the implementation of sanctions. Hess observes that such expedient strategies are often advanced in the name of “refinement” when in reality they represent “retreats” from the original intent of the accountability system. With this analysis, he provides policy-makers with an excellent litmus test for proposed modifications in accountability systems. He seems, however, to overemphasize the politics of “standing firm” at the expense of discussing the



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genuine need to constantly improve and upgrade systems of accountability that are young and complex.

Terry Moe, a longtime free market advocate, goes further than Hess in his critique of current accountability systems, arguing that the entrenched nature of the opposition renders these systems ineffective. "The authorities face a population of agents who are not of their own choosing, whose jobs are securely protected, who have strong incentives to resist accountability, and whose actions cannot easily be observed," Moe laments.

The chief culprits, according to Moe, are the teachers' unions: "The unions' prime goal in the politics of accountability is to weaken or eliminate any consequences that might be associated with standards and tests." He claims that the unions control the democratic process that elects policymakers, meaning that those who should hold teachers accountable are instead beholden to the unions. Thus Moe is pessimistic about the success of "top down" accountability if it is not accompanied by "bottom up" accountability in the form of free market, choice-based plans that provide options to parents and incentives for good school systems.

**T**he bulk of *No Child Left Behind?* is devoted to sorting through, if in a sometimes overly technical manner, the evidence of successes and shortcomings in educational accountability to date. In reviewing various state systems, Eric Hanushek and Margaret Raymond, both of Stanford University, show that states with accountability mechanisms, no matter their limitations, can boast of better student performances on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. "Evidence of flaws should not be taken as general condemnation of accountability systems but instead should lead us to focus on how the structure of

accountability and reward systems might be improved," they conclude.

Also identifying positive evidence, Julian Betts, of the University of California at San Diego, and Anne Danenberg, of the Public Policy Institute of California, examine accountability in the Golden State. The results are still inconclusive, they say, but Betts and Danenberg see evidence of rising student achievement, some closing of the achievement gap between schools, and some promising results in the state intervention program that seeks to turn around underperforming schools.

In one of the book's most powerful chapters, the University of Chicago's Tony Bryck, one of the nation's pre-eminent education researchers, analyzes efforts to reform Chicago's public schools. These efforts have fallen short, he says, because the systemic reform movement has relied too heavily on accountability and underestimated the need to build the capacity of teachers and schools to educate all children. Bryck writes, "These results suggest clear limits as to what can be achieved through reforms that do not directly confront the limitations in teachers' capacity to engage in more ambitious instruction." He makes a compelling case that reformers who ignore the professional development of teachers will achieve little or no educational improvement with tough accountability systems. Overall, Bryck finds the impact of high-stakes accountability in Chicago to be "modest at best."

In contrast, Brian Jacob, of Harvard's Kennedy School, sees the Chicago glass as half full, believing that accountability measures have "led to a substantial increase in student achievement." Much of his essay is devoted to explaining his statistical analysis and why it differs from Bryck's. In particular, he cautions scholars and policy-makers to be extremely careful in making interpretations and generalizations from

student performance data.

Other chapters address various wrinkles of educational accountability, both at the state level and under NCLB. Thomas Kane, of the University of California at Los Angeles, and Douglas Staiger, of Dartmouth College, provide a technical critique of the "average yearly progress" subgroup rules promulgated under NCLB. These regulations require schools to achieve annual learning gains overall but also for each major demographic group. Kane and Staiger statistically show how these rules unfairly disadvantage schools with large minority populations or undersized demographic subgroups. Their work clearly points to the need for modifications in these regulations. But this dilemma is a significant one. The principle at stake—all students deserve to make progress—cannot be sacrificed, yet NCLB's approach to implementing this principle may not be workable in its current form.

Tom Loveless of the Brookings Institution explores the particular accountability challenges facing states as they attempt to assess the performance of charter schools. He is eager to see charter schools treated fairly by the new accountability systems and cites a number of circumstances that might generate misleading data about these schools. He worries about charter schools that are statistically too small for valid comparisons and also wonders whether different standards need to be devised for charters that deliberately seek "at-risk" students. More broadly, Loveless wonders whether state standards and the accountability that goes with them don't stifle the innovation and diversity that charter schools are intended to create.

Two other chapters deal with accountability systems different from those associated with the standards movement of today, such as MCAS. First, Thomas Dee of Swarthmore College analyzes an earlier experience

with accountability. Beginning in the mid-1970s, most states instituted low-standard, minimum competency tests, but most of these tests were abandoned as states adopted higher standards in the 1990s. Reviewing the mixed results of these competency tests, Dee concludes on a note of pessimism about the power of testing to improve students' prospects.

In the final chapter, Ludger Wößmann, of the Institute for Economic Research in Germany, provides an international perspective on "central exit exams," or tests administered by states or other jurisdictions. These exams, comparable to those mandated by NCLB, are administered by external authorities and designed to measure student and school performance. Where central exams exist, Wößmann finds relatively higher levels of student performance. He argues that central exams may elimi-

nate the need for external authorities to regulate educational processes, which will, in turn, give local educators greater flexibility while the exams simultaneously provide local officials with new data and incentives for improvement. By aligning incentives with standards and performance, he asserts, central exams give coherency and a common agenda to educational systems at all levels.

*No Child Left Behind?* provides a wealth of evidence drawn from a broad array of sources and jurisdictions which suggests the formidable challenges facing the implementers of the nation's education reform law. While most of the authors are devoted to the bill's principles, they have identified a host of problems and complications suggesting that substantial modifications are likely to be needed if NCLB is to realize its promise. Despite some chapters that

are painfully technical in nature, this volume provides useful evidence, valuable perspective, and several extraordinary essays on the major educational development of our time, accountability.

It also delivers some wise cautions. Bryck, for one, not only focuses our attention on the need to invest in building teacher knowledge and skill, but he reminds us that the evidence on the impact of various reforms is far from conclusive: "The overarching lesson is the need to maintain some humility about what is known and some caution in the forcefulness with which arguments are made, based on evidence, about what should happen with regard to the education of other people's children." ■

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*Paul Reville is executive director of the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy at MassINC.*

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# Pep talk

*Across the country, State of the State speeches offer variations on familiar themes*

BY ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

A State of the State address is no time for bad news, unless it's your first year as governor and you have predecessors to blame. "This is a government with problems at its very core, and these problems have festered for decades," said Kentucky Gov. Ernie Fletcher in January, and it goes without saying that the opposition party (in this case, the Democrats) held the governor's office for decades before Fletcher won it last autumn. Similarly, California's gubernatorial midterm replacement, Arnold Schwarzenegger, made his plans to alter the state of his state sound like the plot of one of his action movies: "I don't want to move the boxes around; I want to blow them up."

Forty-two governors delivered State of the State speeches this year, Texas being the largest state where citizens had to figure out for themselves how they were doing. (Not that Texans are known for self-doubt.) Most of them had records to defend, so they were far sunnier in outlook than Fletcher or Schwarzenegger. "The state of our state is strong—and getting stronger each and every day," declared Connecticut Gov. John Rowland, even as he faced impeachment over a financial scandal. "Colorado is back," Gov. Bill Owens announced, and Idaho Gov. Dirk Kempthorne assured citizens that "We're on the road to recovery." Not satisfied with rebound, Maine's Gov. John Baldacci bragged, "We're becoming the envy of every other state in the nation," while Gov. Ruth Ann Minner topped that boast with an analogy from reality TV: "If state government were the TV show *Survivor*, Delaware definitely would've won the million bucks."

If most governors gave their states the thumb's up, they did so in speeches of varying lengths. Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich gave the longest address, at 9,653 words, while New Hampshire Gov. Craig Benson was the pithiest speaker, requiring only 2,093 words to report on the Granite State's condition. The Bay State's Mitt Romney gave the third shortest speech, at 2,313 words. If a larger population means more ground to cover, California Gov. Schwarzenegger gets the prize for verbal efficiency, delivering one word for every 11,827 residents. South Dakota Gov. Mike Rounds spoke nearly three times longer and uttered one word for every 97 constituents.

The speeches were delivered in the dead of winter, and harsh weather seemed to affect governors in different ways. "We've been blessed with a tremendous snowpack in the mountains," Idaho's Kempthorne said happily, looking ahead to an ample water supply. But Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty displayed signs of cabin fever. "Why do we live here in Minnesota?" he asked. "It's been 25 below, it seems like we only see the sun for a few hours during winter days, and we spend a lot of time shoveling snow. There are other places to live." Pawlenty then went on to list reasons that Minnesota's a great place to live, of course, but none was as memorable as his setup.

Many governors started off by flattering their audiences. "Alaska's greatest resource is our people," declared Gov. Frank Murkowski. "We live in a state where people aren't afraid to start carving on a mountain," boasted South Dakota's Rounds, referring to Mount Rushmore, presumably. "We're one of the healthiest states in the nation, and the least obese," gushed Colorado's Owens. "We're also proud that our capital city is the third most literate city in the nation." But in South Carolina, Gov. Mark Sanford decided that a scolding was in order: "We eat the wrong things and don't get enough exercise."

After praising the people, many governors slid smoothly into self-congratulation. "We have spent a year twisting the wet towel of government tight, to wring out ounce after ounce of inefficiency," said Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm. "For the first time in nearly 15 years," New Jersey Gov. Jim McGreevey declared, "motor vehicle offices will be open on Saturdays." Other accomplishments included lowering the legal blood alcohol level in Delaware; raising the minimum wage in Illinois; increasing the penalty for impersonating a police officer in Colorado (a response to a murder allegedly committed by a phony cop); and "installing systems that automatically turn out the lights in state offices at night" in Kansas.

Sanford, South Carolina's nutrition-minded governor, bragged that the state corrections department started up its "own grist mill for grits." (Apparently, grits doesn't fall into the category of "wrong things" to consume. Either that or a bad diet is Sanford's idea of punishment.) But New Hampshire's Benson threw cold water on his state

board of education's attempt to improve teenage eating habits by banning soda machines in high schools. "This type of bureaucratic micromanagement is a dinosaur of the past," he raged, leaving citizens to wonder how he felt about dinosaurs of the future.

**P**ast achievements led naturally to new proposals, though the governors differed on how much they dared to ask from legislators. New York Gov. George Pataki had the most chutzpah: "I ask you to join me in taking action on the 45 specific measures I outline today." (At least he gave his audience fair warning. As people settled into their seats, he asked, "Is everyone comfortable? Because I may be here longer than you think.") West Virginia Gov. Bob Wise was polite, if not obsequious, in requesting a hike in the tobacco tax to help fund Medicaid: "I ask you to add another one cent per cigarette—just a penny." Mississippi's Haley Barbour wrapped the flag around his proposal to make jury duty more convenient, calling it the "Jury Patriotism Act."

The ideas governors put forward ranged from big picture to small bore, but many were held in common. While Indiana Gov. Joe Kernan declared, "My top priority is to

create jobs," so did several others; a couple of governors echoed Idaho's Kempthorne when he said, "Education remains the top priority for this state." But Alaska Gov. Murkowski was alone in saying, "The top priority of this administration is the construction of a gas pipeline."

Attracting the industries of the future was perhaps the most widely shared gubernatorial goal. Governors in Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin all set their sights on biotechnology. West Virginia Gov. Wise was more specific about his state's biomedical niche: "We soon will be the world leader in developing new strategies and treatments for memory disorders." Georgia's Sonny Perdue suggested that his state could become "a world leader" in the emerging nanotechnology sector. By contrast, Maryland's Bob Ehrlich's exhortation to become the plain old "technology capital of the nation" sounded about as cutting-edge as a Mr. Coffee machine.

Being fierce competitors, the governors who mentioned other states were rarely complimentary. Wisconsin's Jim Doyle dissed seven of them in the first few minutes. ("In Kentucky, they let prisoners out early.... In Alabama, they put mannequins in state patrol cars.") New Jersey's McGreevey bragged that "we have gained more jobs than all

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of our neighboring states combined,” then vowed “to compete with Massachusetts and California” in the high-tech arena. Touting “the nation’s newest chip-fab plant” in Albany, New York’s Pataki quoted gleefully from a Texas newspaper: “Upstate New York is a direct threat to Austin’s standing as a top-tier semiconductor research and manufacturing center.” Showing little sympathy for Gov. Rick Perry, a fellow Republican, Pataki chortled, “We’ve set off the alarms, now it’s time to feed the fire.”

But Pataki should watch his back. “We want new jobs and new companies on the West Slope, not the West Side of Manhattan,” proclaimed Colorado’s Owens. “We want innovation in the Tech Center, not Rockefeller Center.”

In Michigan, Gov. Granholm made it clear she’s taking Richard Florida’s book *The Rise of the Creative Class* seriously by declaring that her state needs “strong regional economies anchored by cool cities.” She noted approvingly that “nearly 80 of our communities have local commissions on cool,” charged with finding ways to attract young, creative single people. “Employers will not come here,” she warned, “if the technology workforce has left us for New York or Boston or Chicago.”

South Carolina’s Sanford, however, ignored his rivals on this continent. In the race for jobs, he stressed, “We’re now competing with the likes of China and India.”

**T**he governors sprinkled their speeches with the wisdom of the ages, but judging by their source material, they didn’t want to seem too highfalutin. Indiana’s Kernan turned to “the great baseball philosopher Sparky Anderson” for this bit of advice: “I don’t dwell on the past. There’s no future in it.” Oklahoma Gov. Brad Henry recalled the words of native son Will Rogers: “The best way out of difficulty is through it.” The governors of both Alabama and Georgia made use of the same folksy saying, though neither said where they got it: “You don’t drive full speed toward a cliff and hope that someone will build a bridge before you get there.”

Colorado’s Owens quoted Charles Darwin near the end of his speech (“It is not the strongest of the species that survive...but the one most responsive to change”), but lest he appear too secular, he closed by saying, “God bless Colorado.” In fact, only 14 of the 42 governors failed to end their speeches with “God bless [insert name of state here],” or some variant. Michigan Gov. Granholm opted for “Peace be with you,” and New Jersey Gov. McGreevey wound things up by referencing a homegrown deity: “To paraphrase Bruce Springsteen, the sun is rising in a land of hope and dreams.” Though personally devout, Gov. Romney signed off with a nod to those who control his fate here on earth: “The people of Massachusetts must come first.” ■

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