Reality sets in

Taking stock of Patrick’s first year

Do the casino numbers add up?

School integration loses steam

A new spin at the Museum of Science

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CommonWealth is published quarterly by the Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth (MassINC), 18 Tremont St., Suite 1120, Boston, MA 02108. Telephone: 617-742-6800 ext. 109, fax: 617-589-0929.

Volume 13, Number 1, Winter 2008. Third Class postage paid at Holliston, MA.

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IT'S NOT FAIR TO PUNISH MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES

In reference to your article “Municipal Meltdown” (CW, Fall ’07), I would like to set the record straight. You stated that the Professional Firefighters of Massachusetts “opposed” the GIC law [allowing municipalities to join the state’s Group Insurance Commission as an alternative to negotiating health insurance coverage with local public-employee unions]. I take exception to your statement, and you certainly did not research your claim. The Professional Firefighters of Massachusetts was an active participant with the Municipal Finance Task Force, and for over 18 months we worked diligently to reach consensus.

Last June 25, I sent a communication to the House Chairman of the Joint Committee on Public Service stating that “firefighters do not oppose the concept of municipalities purchasing health insurance plans through the GIC. Our final concern was to add an amendment to establish a safety net and safeguard to protect the future quality of proposed health insurance plans.” If that amendment had been accepted by the Legislature, the bill would have had our full support.

Municipal employees and retirees are not responsible for a “municipal meltdown,” nor are they responsible for the increases in the cost of health insurance, and they should not be expected to bear the full brunt of increases in premiums, co-payments, and deductibles. It should be noted that employees and participants negotiated with municipal management in good faith over many years and have received [minimal] salary increases in order to retain affordable, quality health insurance. Municipal employees, retirees, and survivors of participants should not be punished for actions not under their control.

It is time for all the stakeholders to address the annual double-digit increases for health insurance and not just offer inferior plans with higher premiums, co-pays, and deductibles. Nobody wins with that solution.

Bob McCarthy
President
Professional Firefighters of Massachusetts
Boston

TECHNOLOGY ISN’T A CURE-ALL FOR OLD NEWS

Dan Kennedy does an excellent job explaining how the relationship between young people and the news media today is damaged (“Plugged In, Tuned Out”). I wholeheartedly agree that increasing participation among young people in the creation, consumption, and distribution of news is a key to the survival of the industry, as well as our democracy. And I share his belief that a dramatic shift in how the news industry operates has the potential to spawn larger changes in our society. As he writes, “the ongoing reinvention of the media that’s being driven by the Internet could lead to a better, more democratic, more decentralized way of staying informed.”

At the same time, I am concerned about how folks in the news media are responding to this trend, and this is reflected in the practices that Kennedy highlights in his article. Organizations—and the news media in particular—too often look at technology as the solution to their problems. But when it comes to communicating with an ever-evolving audience, today’s news organizations have more than enough tools to get the job done: blogs, podcasts, social networks, and much more. Yet they are still struggling to stay focused and execute their ideas, find a connection, and stem the decline in news consumption.

Consumer-generated content is the newest, hottest trend, but the media’s obsession with it is just another symptom of “Shiny Object Syndrome”—a terrible affliction that results in a marketing path based on whatever is generating the most buzz of the moment, instead of what will truly be effective. Consumer-generated content has been seriously compartmentalized and has become simply a novelty addition to existing [news] operations, not an accepted component of the business model. I believe that as long as organizations focus on the distribution mechanism (as the news industry seems to always do), they’re missing a core element: the informa-
tion and experience that audiences value. If, or when, the news media focus on creating more thoughtful, engaging, relevant information and experiences, young people will re-engage. 

Brian Reich  
Director of new media  
Cone Inc.  
Boston

JOURNALISTS SHOULD GO BACK TO SCHOOL
I’ve long thought that the newspaper industry has a responsibility to get involved in schools. If every publisher would sponsor one or two classes in their community, it would open the eyes of so many young people to what newspapers have to offer. Information is addictive, compelling and enriches our lives. We need to pass this passion on to our children.

My mother is in her 70s. She reads the paper daily. Her father, who had very little formal education, also read the paper daily and that left an impression on her.

Putting a passionate journalist in every school would turn this industry around in five years!

Karen Everett Watson  
Galt, California

CRACKING THE CODE CAN CUT HEALTH COSTS
Thank you for highlighting some of the factors contributing to the rising cost of health care in Massachusetts (“Cost Unconscious,” Summer ’07). For health care reform to truly work, it is imperative that we identify areas where we can control escalating costs — and then take action so that premiums do not continue to take bigger and bigger chunks out of employees’ paychecks and employers’ budgets.

To that end, I have introduced legislation that is quite simple: It requires the use of standard, nationally recognized procedural and diagnostic codes. Although this idea was not mentioned in the article, acute care hospitals in Massachusetts have estimated it would save $20 million in the first year of its implementation alone. Add doctors and other health care providers, and even greater savings will be realized.

How many of us have undergone a medical procedure we know is covered by our insurance plan, only to get a bill in the mail telling us that coverage was rejected? You make calls, more bills are sent, and finally the bill gets paid by the insurance company or you pay it yourself to avoid further frustration. This scenario is often the result of each insurance company requiring hospitals, doctors and other health care providers to follow their
own customized version of coding and billing, which routinely results in miscoding. This is precisely the type of situation Senate Bill 697 seeks to ameliorate, without infringing on any rate of payment or contract.

Currently, nearly one-third of all dollars spent on health care go toward administrative costs, as hospitals and providers must hire additional staff to puzzle out which combination of codes to use to describe a given medical procedure, depending on the patient’s insurance plan. Without this layer of bureaucratic expense, hospitals, doctors and health care providers can focus on what they do best: making people well.

Standardized and uniform coding procedures have perhaps an even more important benefit to the Commonwealth—the ability to collect accurate and consistent data on which diseases and chronic health problems are prevalent, where they may be concentrated, and when they occur. The Health Care Quality and Cost Council’s mandated goals of transparency and accurate reporting of health data across the state will continue to be hindered as long as hospitals and providers must track, bill, and report using the current system of inconsistent, customized procedural and diagnostic coding. Accurate and consistent reporting is not only a mandate. It is a necessity if we are to make the best use of scarce resources and have sound public health policies for our residents.

I was proud to be a part of the historic health care reform movement in Massachusetts. Like so many of the people you interviewed for your story, I too worry about its long-term success in the face of spiraling costs. As you noted, there are many reasons health care costs keep going up. However, implementing true standardized coding is one fix that would result in better health care policy and save all of us money. It is an idea that is long overdue.

Karen E. Spilka
State Senator
2nd Middlesex & Norfolk District

To continue the discussion of the challenges facing local government raised in our last cover story, “Municipal Meltdown,” we solicited commentary pieces from seven leaders from citizen groups, local government, labor, and business. Read the essays, and weigh in with your own comments, by visiting our online forum at www.massinc.org. From our home page you can also link to the transcript from the December 6 CommonWealth Forum that featured a panel discussion on these issues.
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Looking forward

FOR MORE THAN 10 years we have worked hard to make CommonWealth the state’s leading journal of politics, ideas, and civic life. I say “we,” but in reality it is the editorial staff and contributing writers of CommonWealth who deserve the credit for the reputation the magazine has gained over the years with community leaders, the press, and the public as a must-read. Now we make the transition to new leadership at the top of the masthead. Bruce Mohl—a veteran reporter, bureau chief, and editor with the Boston Globe for nearly 30 years—will be our third editor since we started CW in 1996, and he will oversee the magazine starting with the Spring 2008 issue.

Bruce has served in a variety of key positions at the Globe, as both a reporter and editor, since beginning his career there in 1978. He covered the Massachusetts State House and served as the Globe’s State House bureau chief in the late 1980s. He also reported for the Globe’s Spotlight Team, winning a Gerald Loeb award in 1992 for his coverage of conflicts of interest in the state’s pension system. He served as the Globe’s political editor in 1994, managing coverage of that year’s elections, including the campaign for US Senate between Ted Kennedy and Mitt Romney. Most recently, Bruce has been the Globe’s consumer reporter, covering a range of issues including the state’s antiquated ticket reselling laws and the recent introduction of competition to the auto insurance market. He also wrote the weekly Consumer Beat column.

Since January 2007, CommonWealth’s acting editor Michael Jonas has not let the journal become stagnant. Recent cover stories about the state’s community colleges, “green” development in the old mill city of Lawrence, and the crisis in municipal finances have been enhanced by on-line forums on our website, public events to discuss different points of view, and in-depth reporting on the issue of bringing casinos to Massachusetts. Last year CW also introduced new Web-based content and our first blog, Beyond Red & Blue. Michael and his team, including managing editor Robert David Sullivan and staff writer Gabrielle Gurley, deserve our thanks for ensuring that CW is still seen as a key player in the highly competitive, and evolving, world of Massachusetts journalism.

CommonWealth is facing some difficult challenges in the years ahead. As a quarterly publication of politics and public affairs dedicated to longer stories and features, we need to find ways of staying timely and relevant in between our publication dates while staying true to MassINC’s non-partisan mission. It will mean taking some risks and looking at doing some things differently. But I am confident that Bruce and the CW staff will expand the reach of the magazine to a larger and more diverse audience, use cutting-edge technology combined with old-fashioned shoe leather journalism, and help us make the right decisions for another 10 years of success.

GREG TORRES, PUBLISHER

MassINC would like to congratulate our outstanding board co-chairs

GLORIA CORDES LARSON

and

PETER MEADE

on their recent achievements. Peter was named the 2007 New Englander of the Year by the New England Council in September of 2007 while Gloria was recently appointed to lead Bentley College as the school’s seventh president.
National Grid meets the energy delivery needs of approximately 3.4 million customers in the northeastern U.S. through our delivery companies in New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire. We also transmit electricity across 9,000 miles of high-voltage circuits in New England and New York and are at the forefront of improving electricity markets for the benefit of customers. At National Grid, we’re focusing on the future.
Mixed-use project raises hope for Salisbury Beach comeback

by phil primack

LIKE THE WOODEN roller coaster that once dominated its Atlantic Ocean skyline, Salisbury Beach’s economic fortunes have climbed and fallen with changing times and demographics. Once a summer magnet drawing crowds from the Merrimack Valley and beyond to its wide sand beach and a center packed with rides, games, and other entertainment, Salisbury Beach is now in a commercial funk. In recent years, condominiums have sprung up along the coast, including where the coaster and hand-carved carousel once stood, but even that growth has cooled with the housing chill. And except for a few food stands and the venerable Joe’s Playland arcade, little is left to attract even the summer crowd, let alone year-round commerce.

But the ambitious “place making” plans of a Boston–based developer with a heady resume of waterfront turnarounds are offering hope for a Salisbury Beach revival and for a level of public/private cooperation often lacking in the Commonwealth. The Thompson Design Group, whose portfolio includes such marquee projects as Faneuil Hall, Union Station in Washington, DC, New York’s South Street Seaport, and Baltimore’s Harborplace, has secured options on most of the 70 or so properties it needs for a massive redevelopment of the town’s oceanfront center.

Jane Thompson, principal of the firm since the death of her husband, architect Ben Thompson, in 2003, says she hopes to have a concept plan ready for Salisbury town meeting this spring that will feature a mix of residential, commercial, and entertainment uses, including a “village center” that will reflect Salisbury Beach’s location and history. “We’ve always appreciated the natural attraction of this truly extraordinary beach and understand that people have always wanted to come here,” she says. “While roller coasters are not part of the future.”

Though a drop in the bucket of the $2.8 trillion federal budget, the write-off could cost $4 million. By mid December, the provision had passed the House and Senate and congressional leaders were tying up loose ends before sending the bill to the White House.

inquiries

Legislators’ per diems may get a DC boost

Per diem payments for mileage, meals, and lodging for Bay State legislators have long been fodder for critics who see no justification for politicians dining out on the taxpayers’ dime. The payments range from $10 for lawmakers living in greater Boston to $90 for a member who lives in the far reaches of Berkshire County or on Martha’s Vineyard. (A Nantucket address would earn $100.)

That legislative perk could be getting even sweeter, however, thanks to a measure making its way through Congress.

Under a tax bill sponsored by the powerful chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Charles Rangel of New York, state lawmakers would be able to write off on their federal returns per diem payments for days their legislature is in formal or informal session. The IRS has claimed lawmakers are only eligible for the deduction on days when their legislature conducted official business.

According to The Washington Post, the measure was taken up by Rangel at the request of the National Conference of State Legislatures and included in a long list of “extenders” approved in November. Those are measures that must be renewed each year, but the Post reports that this one doesn’t extend anything, because it was not part of existing tax law.

Though a drop in the bucket of the $2.8 trillion federal budget, the write-off could cost $4 million. By mid December, the provision had passed the House and Senate and congressional leaders were tying up loose ends before sending the bill to the White House.

by gabrielle gurley

Roller coasters are not part of the future.
She adds, “We don’t get scared off by a project being too big or too complicated. Our approach is to create the vision and concept and make every stakeholder a partner. Public/private partnership is the way the world has to work now.”

While anxious for details—like how big a footprint, how many residential units, and what kind of commercial growth and amenities are envisioned—town officials are encouraged by Thompson’s comprehensive, rather than piecemeal, approach to both land acquisition and development, says Salisbury planning board chairman Robert Straubel. “We hope to come up with a vision that incorporates what people have told us they want for the beach,” says Straubel, who also heads a committee developing a town-wide master plan that he plans to present at town meeting. “Thompson can hopefully use that vision to produce an area that people will be proud of and that can also make money for the developer.”

In 2005, Salisbury created a Beach Overlay District that changed zoning rules in the town center. The intent was partly to close the door on a casino—the talk of which had stalled other development for nearly a decade—and to attract the kind of mixed-use, large-scale development envisioned by Thompson. “We changed our business model to be much more business-friendly and much more transparent about what we expect from the development community,” says Chris Reilly, the town’s director of economic development. “Problems come when that message is not clearly conveyed or things come out of left field. We want to have a streamlined public process to give responsible, reasonable developers a level of comfort so that they can come here and know what they have to do to move their process forward.”

Besides approval from the town, the developer will also need a bevy of state permits for its oceanfront plans. Thompson says the firm will work closely with the state on wetlands issues and “on improving life for the adjacent [state-owned] beach, including possibly sharing some infrastructure and other resources.”

Eugene Dean Jr. is among property owners who have sold land options to Thompson. For decades, the property his father bought in 1935 housed a range of amusement businesses. In recent years, Dean spent more than $1 million converting his building into a year-round bar and function room. “I did not succeed because there are not enough day-traffickers to the beach any more,” he says. “Thompson could be very positive for Salisbury Beach, which remains an undiscovered treasure.”

In unemployment insurance showdown, labor still has muscle

By Jim O’Sullivan

Organized labor may represent just over 14 percent of the Massachusetts workforce, but unions showed last year that they still have plenty of juice on Beacon Hill. Despite talk of a business-backed move to rein in unemployment insurance costs to employers, the state AFL-CIO and its legislative allies beat back House Speaker Sal DiMasi’s late-in-the-year effort to nix a scheduled increase in the unemployment insurance payments companies make to the state.

The assessment per employee increases each year, according to the unemployment insurance statute, unless the
inquiries

Legislature moves to freeze it. Business leaders have long complained about the unemployment insurance payments, which they say contribute to high business costs and stifle job growth.

DiMasi, who this year stepped into the role of employer’s most prominent champion on Beacon Hill, proposed the rate freeze in a late September speech to the Associated Industries of Massachusetts, dangling what business groups said was $153 million in savings. The issue went underground for several weeks, but unions were busy weighing in with their opposition, hoping to run out the clock until Thanksgiving, after which employers would have to wait until the new year and a new window of only a few weeks before invoices went out, bearing additional charges of roughly $40 per employee.

“It was a late entry from the business community to try to sneak through the freeze,” says AFL-CIO president Robert Haynes, who calls the corporate groups behind the movement “short-sighted” in the face of a potential recession. “These people don’t have a clue, they just don’t want to pay any taxes,” he says.

Business leaders pointed to projections from the state Division of Unemployment Assistance that showed canceling the scheduled increase would cost the $1.12 billion unemployment trust fund $56 million over the next year, but that the fund balance would replace that amount over time.

In pressing legislators with letters and meetings, however, unions were able to frame the debate as one of fiscal responsibility, arguing that allowing the rate increase to take effect would ensure that the fund stays ruddy despite any downturn. Any retreat from the statutorily required schedule, they said, would imperil the trust and could force employers to pay more in the long run.

That argument, business officials said, ignored the state’s option of accessing short-term federal loans to make payments, if necessary, while the fund was recapitalized. No employer would sign off on a meager short-term savings if it translated into a big hit later on, they insisted. Business leaders say a series of suspensions of scheduled unemployment insurance increases in the 1990s helped goose the economy into the job creation boom that lasted into the first part of this decade. The Associated Industries of Massachusetts bombarded lawmakers with over 1,000 let-

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ters last fall urging a similar freeze, but to no avail.

The duel came down to the final, confused days of the 2007 legislative calendar, when lobbyists swarmed the State House and lawmakers hustled to make sure their priorities made it to the front burner. In the end, DiMasi backed off, frustrating employers and allowing labor to claim victory and depart the field. Politically, the showdown played out largely as a business-versus-labor proxy contest, with the Speaker pressing the business cause and Senate President Therese Murray and Gov. Deval Patrick registering less quietly against the freeze — if in no other public way than refusing to back DiMasi as the session clock expired.

“He realized there was no sense in having a big, full-scale battle in the last week of the session, I presume,” Haynes says of DiMasi.

For his part, Paul Guzzi, president of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, sounds a note of frustration over the failure thus far to hold off the increase. “When you look at where the state is in terms of job creation, this is the time to try to remove obstacles, not to add obstacles for employers in the state,” he says.

With a small window open until early February, pro-freeze groups hold out hope their “UI” move could emerge as a bargaining chip during the 2008 session’s opening weeks. But unemployment insurance is a top priority for both sides, and Haynes says the only discussion he wants to see would focus more broadly on the trust’s structure and administrative formula.

Guzzi acknowledges that the business community has work to do in order to have any chance of winning out. “You need agreement at a minimum between the Senate and the House, and preferably between all three leaders, and my understanding is that we’re just not there yet,” he says.

Jim O’Sullivan is a reporter for State House News Service.

Voters get another shot at erasing the state income tax

**By Gabrielle Gurley**

**She’s Back.** The coming throw-down over the personal income tax finds libertarian dynamo Carla Howell back in
the ring. Howell’s first attempt to end the income tax by ballot question struck a chord with Bay State voters and shocked some observers by coming within 10 points of carrying the day in 2002. So the head of the Committee For Small Government—who has unsuccessfully run for state auditor, US Senate, and governor—is trying again this year. Howell is spearheading the campaign on behalf of a ballot initiative that would cut the state income tax, currently at 5.3 percent, to 2.65 percent in 2009 and then do away with it entirely the next year.

Howell claims that eliminating the income tax would put an average of $3,600 in the pocket of every taxpayer, every year. What about those cities and towns already on the ropes with cutbacks in school budgets and municipal services? Howell dismisses those concerns, saying simply that municipal budgets have still been “increasing.”

If the income tax is eliminated, the overall state budget, totaling $26.8 billion this fiscal year, would be cut by about 40 percent—reducing it to $17 billion, or what the state government ran on in 1995, according to Howell. “When we shrink big government, it’s not only going to make the tax structure more favorable to businesses, it’s also going to remove some of the big government programs that drive them away with permits and licensing and delays and other obstacles that they face,” she says.

Given the anti-tax sentiment across the state, perhaps no one should have been surprised that 45 percent of voters said “yes” to this idea six years ago. But the state’s political and media establishment, who pretty much treated Howell as a pariah and the ballot question as nonsense, were thrown for a loop by its strong showing.

They might want to listen to Methuen resident Kasia Sokalla, one of the 10 original signers of the 2008 initiative. “This will be the first serious tax cut for working-class and middle-class Massachusetts voters that I can remember,” she says. The proposal got 53 percent of the vote in Methuen the last time it appeared on the ballot, and Sokalla says, “We voted to end the income tax in 2002 because working families deserved and needed the money.”

In Fitchburg, where voters have turned up on the winning side of state elections and referenda to the tune of 83-1 since 1994, the “no” vote won last time, with 53 percent. But Jason Lefferts, editor of Fitchburg Pride, the city’s year-old weekly newspaper, still thinks officials should keep an eye on this year’s campaign. “I think people’s first reaction is, ‘Well, yeah, of course, if I can get rid of the income tax, I’m going to vote for it,’” he says.

The chattering classes can ignore this sentiment at their own peril. DID YOU KNOW THAT:

• Since 1970, the 11 Gateway Cities studied in this report lost more than 11,000 jobs or 3 percent of their job base, while Greater Boston added 467,000 jobs to grow by 51 percent.

• Educational attainment levels remain low with just 16.5 percent of Gateway City residents possessing a four-year college degree.

• Homes in Gateway Cities have out-appreciated Greater Boston in percentage terms since 2000, rising 78 percent versus 32 percent.

To learn more, check out MassINC’s report Reconnecting Massachusetts Gateway Cities: Lessons Learned and an Agenda for Renewal. It’s available free-of-charge at www.massinc.org

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peril, but this time around Michael Widmer isn’t taking any chances. The president of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, who single-handedly led the charge against the first repeal effort and debated Howell several times, plans on building a coalition of groups to oppose the question this year. Howell’s committee already has a running start, aiming to raise $500,000 for advertising, mostly from small, in-state contributions. (Asked about donations from outside Massachusetts, Howell says, “All campaigns get money from outside the state.”)

Since the question did so well the last time, Widmer isn’t surprised to see that it’s bounced back. But Widmer argues that Massachusetts can ill afford to see $12 billion in fiscal 2009 revenues disappear into thin air. If the measure passes, he says, the state would sink into a period of political and fiscal chaos rivaling the late 1980s, the most turbulent period he can remember. Education and health care budgets would see massive cuts, he adds, and Massachusetts would not be able to meet its debt service or pension obligations. It would be “hugely messy,” Widmer says.

Trimming K-12 education funding alone would probably prompt legal challenges in light of Supreme Judicial Court decisions outlining the state’s responsibility to provide education for all children. “Could we meet our constitutional obligations? The rough answer is ‘no,’ unless you are just closing prisons and college campuses and so forth,” Widmer says. As for Howell’s claim that doing away with the income tax would cut red tape, Widmer says that a repeal wouldn’t undo permitting and other regulations, but instead gut the staffing of state agencies. If people are having trouble getting an answer out of MassHighway or the Department of Environmental Protection now, staff layoffs would “guarantee that that you won’t get a response,” he warns.

But when asked how she would handle the fiscal fallout, Howell insists that the question is not relevant: “The right question would be, ‘Is ending the income tax good for the 3 million Massachusetts workers and taxpayers?’” She says that repeal of the tax would create a “vibrant, free-market economy” in which people can use their tax savings for retirement, education, health care, home improvement projects, and vacations — all of which would stimulate the economy and create jobs.

The anti-tax campaign has collected the required 66,593 signatures to advance the question to the next hurdle, the
Legislature. Lawmakers have until the first Wednesday in May to give the petition the go-ahead or reject it. A third, rarely used, option gives lawmakers the opportunity to draft a countermeasure that would also go on the ballot. If lawmakers give the petition a thumbs-down, a likely course of action given the fiscal consequences, repeal supporters will have to persuade 11,099 more registered voters to put their John Hancocks on a second petition to get the question on the November ballot.

Thanks to the presidential contest, voter turnout is expected to be high this fall, which means that the 2002 result may not be a predictor of what happens this time. There is at least one bit of evidence that anti-tax sentiment is strong: Last year, voters in about 70 communities weighed in on Proposition 2 ½ overrides, and according to the Massachusetts Municipal Association, less than half of the overrides succeeded.

The Massachusetts Republican Party has not taken a position on the income tax repeal, but Peter Torkildsen, the state party chairman, weighs in with his take.

“I personally understand why someone would vote for it out of frustration that Beacon Hill has not been doing its job for quite a few years now,” says Torkildsen, a former congressman. “A lot of people on Beacon Hill start the argument with how much money would they like to spend,” he says. “A better starting point is, ‘What’s an appropriate level for people to pay?’ and then ‘What’s the most economical way for the public officials to use that money?’”

Few believe that legislators would simply watch the income tax disappear. If the question passes, the Legislature could dramatically increase the sales tax, impose a statewide property tax, or simply vote to restore some version of the income tax itself, according to Widmer. Asked if House Speaker Sal DiMasi has considered any responses if the question passes, spokesman David Guarino says, “it’s such a far-fetched idea” that the top lawmaker doesn’t anticipate it passing. “He doesn’t think it would be sound fiscal policy,” Guarino says.

But what do you do with people who want to use the ballot question to send a message to Beacon Hill? “I guess the answer would be, ‘Be careful what you wish for,’” Widmer says.

While ballot questions are often not debated until late in the campaign season, Lefferts says it will be interesting to see if repeal opponents are able to make a strong case: “Somebody is going to have to stand up and make the argument—and overwhelm you with logic—that this is a bad idea.”

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**STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT**

**BY ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN**

**VOTING AS IF YOUR LIFE DEPENDED ON IT**
According to a recent article in *Scientific American*, whether or not you vote may be “hardwired” in your genetic makeup. A study by political scientist James Fowler, of the University of California at San Diego, found that identical twins are more alike in their frequency of voting than are fraternal twins, who share less DNA. Fowler speculates that the gene governing voter behavior may have been passed on since ancient times. But since “we obviously did not vote in large-scale elections in the Pleistocene,” he told *Scientific American*, the desire to participate in politics may be connected to more primitive tendencies, such as whether an individual has an innate disposition toward cooperating with other humans.

**NO NEED TO COUGH INTO THE PHONE WHEN YOU CALL IN SICK**
Massachusetts fell from seventh to ninth place in the United Health Foundation’s annual America’s Health Rankings, released at the end of last year—even as next-door Vermont moved up to take the prize as the least sickly state. Factors counting against the Bay State included our high incidence of “binge drinking” (17.7 percent of residents volunteered that they had had several drinks in one sitting during the prior month, compared with 15.3 percent of all Americans), and the percentage of children living in poverty (13.6 percent, lower than the national average of 17.4 percent but up from 11.6 percent the year before). But we retained our No. 1 ranking in occupational fatalities (or lack thereof), immunization of infants, and the number of primary-care physicians per capita.

We also passed a milestone of sorts: The number of self-reported “poor mental health days” per month went up from 3.1 to 3.2—passing the number of “poor physical health days,” which went down from 3.4 to 3.1. Though Bay Staters may be more likely to spend a sick day relieving stress than nursing a sore throat, the reverse is still true nationally, with 3.6 days of physical illness outnumbering 3.4 days of poor mental health.

**ASK NOT FOR TOLLS IN NEW ENGLAND**
Of all demographic groups studied in a poll taken last October, residents of New England most strongly opposed “charging tolls on more roads if the result was better roads and reduced traffic congestion,” even as an alternative to a higher gas tax. The National Association of Realtors and Smart Growth America co-sponsored the survey of 1,000 adults, which found New Englanders opposed to tolls by a 55-45 margin—with residents of the Pacific Coast at the other end of the continuum, approving tolls by a 63-36 margin. Overall, Americans gave tentative approval to new tolls by a 55-44 margin, with more support coming from women and older voters than from younger men.
GET OUT OF CLOTHES AND INTO COMPUTERS
“Network systems and data communications analysts” have the rosiest job outlook over the next decade, according to December estimates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The BLS predicts that jobs in that high-tech category will have increased by 53 percent—or 140,000—in the US from 2006 to 2016. The only other occupation with a growth rate of more than 50 percent is “personal and home care aides.” However, the greatest numerical increase in jobs will be for registered nurses (up 587,000, or 24 percent) and retail salespeople (up 557,000, or 12 percent). Among professions requiring a master’s degree, the fastest growth in demand will be for mental health counselors (up 30 percent), and among jobs that require vocational training beyond high school, the sharpest gains are predicted among make-up artists (up 40 percent) and skin care specialists (up 34 percent).

The industries with the worst jobs outlook are textile and apparel manufacturing (down 35 percent, or 211,000 workers), steel manufacturing (down 25 percent), and printing (down 22 percent).

BLANKS CHECK
In a few months we’ll know whether Massachusetts can improve on 2006’s embarrassingly low number of contested races for the state Legislature. Only 26 percent of the 160 House seats were contested by both parties last time, lower than in any other state but South Carolina. But even in races with only one candidate, voters have a second option. They can leave their ballots blank, and their non-votes are counted (if not given much attention). Last time, the highest percentage of blank votes (28 percent of all voters who took a ballot) was in the Cape Cod district represented by Democrat Matthew Patrick. Close behind were Mark Faalone of Saugus, Cory Atkins of Concord, David Torrisi of North Andover, and Lida Harkins of Needham—all Democrats in suburban districts where Republicans have done relatively well in gubernatorial elections. Will the GOP find candidates to run in these districts where it seems they can get more than a quarter of the vote without trying?

In contrast, voters in western Massachusetts seem relatively happy with their (lack of) choice. In five districts, blanks accounted for less than 15 percent of the vote even with only one candidate on the ballot, and all the winners were Democrats west of Worcester: Stephen Kulik of Worthington, William “Smitty” Pignatelli of Lenox, Christopher Donelan of Orange, Ellen Story of Amherst, and Dan Bosley of North Adams.
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Mass. in the middle  

BY ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

AT THE END of 2007, “free-market economists” Stephen Moore and Arthur Laffer—most famous for the “Laffer Curve” illustrating the idea that higher tax rates can actually bring in less revenue—touted yet another ranking of the states based on economic strength. “States with a high propensity to tax and spend are finding their most wealthy and productive citizens moving across borders into areas that impose less of a financial burden,” they warn, so it’s not surprising that the top half of their Economic Competitive Index is dominated by states with low tax rates and minimum minimum wages, most of them in the South and West.

More striking is that old, cold Massachusetts ends up squarely in the middle, above every Northeastern state except Delaware and New Hampshire. What made us relatively appealing to Laffer and Moore? Their index is based on 16 variables, and the Bay State finished in the top 10 for three of them, thanks to our low sales tax, low reliance on “other” taxes (that is, other than income, sales, and property), and low worker’s compensation costs. We were also the 11th lowest in the number of public employees relative to our total population.

Where did we lose points? Our top marginal corporate tax rate was higher than in all but three states; our debt service as a percentage of total revenue was 12.8 percent, third-highest in the nation; and, of course, Laffer and Moore were not pleased by our relatively generous minimum wage law (higher than all but four states).

Laffer likes our relatively low sales tax.

Laffer and Moore’s American Legislative Exchange Council also released a ranking of states by economic performance over the past decade, and here the Bay State was a less impressive 35th. Only three variables were considered, and we finished fifth on the basis of personal income growth but 43th on the basis of job growth and 44th on the measure of domestic in-migration (we actually lost 330,000 people to other states).
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It’s available free-of-charge at massinc.org.
PROPERTY TAX RELIEF may be the Holy Grail of Massachusetts politics (it’s even touted as one of the benefits of casinos), and the map below shows why. The average property tax bill in Massachusetts went up 48 percent from FY2000 to FY2007, and in a few dozen communities, it jumped by more than two-thirds.

For the most part, the increases highlighted on the map came not because of tax rate hikes or Proposition 2 1/2 overrides but because of soaring property values. (One outlier is the Connecticut River town of Erving, which started out the decade with one of the lowest average tax bills in the state, $327, but has had to come up to a still relatively low $1,203 as it has expanded government services.) Among communities with at least 1,000 residential properties, Everett had the biggest increase in property taxes, almost exactly doubling from $1,431 to $2,836. During the same period, the property tax rate was actually cut from $10.41 to $8.34, but the city still took in more revenue because the average property value almost tripled, from $136,000 to $340,000. Everett did not get a boost from new residential growth, however, as it was one of the few communities in the state to lose taxable residences (six of them) over the time period. The biggest tax jump among municipalities of more than 5,000 residences was in Woburn, where home values more than doubled and the average tax bill rose from $1,874 to $3,356—but the addition of 209 properties to the tax rolls may have prevented an even bigger shock for homeowners.

Among towns with at least 5,000 residential properties, Chatham saw the smallest percentage increase in the average property tax bill, going from $2,520 to $3,118. But the Cape Cod town also posted the state’s biggest jump in average home value during the same period: $250,000 to $893,000, or 257 percent. Because of this explosion in property values, plus the addition of 362 new households to the tax rolls, the town cut its tax rate from $10.08 to $3.49 per $1,000 of assessed value.

**HEAD COUNT**

**House hikes** BY ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

**CHANGE IN AVERAGE SINGLE-FAMILY PROPERTY TAX, 2000-07**

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services (www.dls.state.ma.us).
Note: The DLS does not calculate averages for communities granting residential exemptions, including Boston.

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**The bottom line**

The Bay State sets an example for Maine lobstermen who may be inadvertently killing rare whales  

*BY SHAWN ZELLER*

**YOU COULD SAY** Maine’s lobster industry has been on a roll. By throwing back breeding lobsters, Maine’s lobstermen have preserved their fishery and actually increased its size, even as other seafood species have been badly depleted by overfishing. But research by marine biologists, many of them from Massachusetts, shows that lobstering gear is killing endangered North Atlantic right whales, and that could put a crimp in the good times for lobstermen Down East.

The National Marine Fisheries Service wants the lobstermen to start using a heavy sinking rope that sits on the ocean floor — out of the swimming range of the whales — to connect their pots, which are typically strung together in groups of five to 15. The lobstermen, who now use floating lines that rest a few feet above the ocean floor, say that just won’t work along Maine’s rocky coast. They believe the heavy rope will get snagged on rocks and break, costing them millions of dollars in lost gear.

Depending on the way you look at it, Massachusetts deserves either a lot of credit — or a lot of blame — for the situation in Maine. State Division of Marine Fisheries Deputy Director Dan McKiernan was the first to hypothesize, back in the 1990s, that right whales were becoming entangled in the lines connecting lobster pots. His thesis gained credence when research by Charles “Stormy” Mayo, the director of right whale habitat studies at the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies, found that the plankton favored by the whales often packs near the ocean floor. Both men sit on the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team, a body established by Congress in 1994 to work to reduce whale entanglement in fishing gear. As a result, they’ve played a leading role in the development of the new regulations.

Many also credit Boston environmental activist Richard Max Strahan with pushing Massachusetts and the federal government to speed up their timetables for regulating fishing gear. In the mid 1990s, he sued the state, the Coast Guard, and the US Department of Commerce (which the National Marine Fisheries Service is part of) on the grounds that they weren’t doing enough to protect the endangered whales from fishing gear, and he got the courts to agree.

The researchers’ findings and Strahan’s litigation didn’t go over well at first. But with the courts examining the issue and the threat of regulation pending, Bay State lobstermen — in contrast to the posture taken so far by their counterparts to the north — decided to compromise. That decision has made them darlings of the environmental movement. “If you look up and down the whole coast, Massachusetts has been the most proactive and been in the forefront in the effort to protect whales,” says Bill Adler, the longtime executive director of the Massachusetts Lobstermen’s Association.

Environmentalists point to the Massachusetts case as an example of how the environmental movement and fishermen can work together in a mutually beneficial way. In September 2005, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, which has led the charge for whale-safe lobstering gear, bestowed its Song of the Whale award on Adler’s colleague, Sandwich lobsterman Gary Ostrom, and on US Sen. Edward Kennedy for their efforts to protect the right whale.

A year before the Washington award dinner honoring the duo, the International Fund had teamed with Ostrom, Adler, Kennedy, US Rep. William Delahunt, and state regulators, including McKiernan, to launch a gear exchange. Some 300 Bay State lobstermen turned in more than 3,000...
miles of their floating rope for heavier, whale-safe line. Delahunt and Kennedy had secured more than $650,000 in federal funds for the program. The animal welfare fund contributed $350,000, and lobstermen put up the rest.

“Our thinking was, rather than the typical stick approach, let’s find some carrots here,” says Mark Forest, who was Delahunt’s district director during the negotiations and now heads his Washington staff. “You can’t always just regulate people. If the goal is to conserve whales, you have to work with fishermen. It’s inappropriate to think these guys aren’t interested in saving whales. You need to treat them as partners.”

Thanks to Delahunt and Kennedy’s efforts, when Massachusetts fisheries regulators banned the floating line off Massachusetts’s coast early last year, the state’s lobstermen didn’t miss a beat. Most of them had made the switch to whale-safe gear more than two years before. And that wasn’t their only contribution to right whale protection. Ostrom more than a decade ago developed a buoy line that is designed to break away if it becomes entangled with a whale. The devices are now in wide use up and down the Atlantic coast.

“Typically conservation and fishing groups are not allies,” says Forest. “But this is one case where you had groups come together.”

The question now is whether the happy ending in Massachusetts can be repeated in Maine. The new Fisheries Service rules will set up a restricted fishing zone encompassing 30 percent of Maine state waters. Within that zone, the agency will require the lobstermen to use the sinking rope. So far, the rules have sparked the kind of standoff between environmentalists and fishermen that is, unfortunately, far more common than the compromise seen in Massachusetts. The Maine lobstermen say the zone includes areas where whales are rarely seen; environmentalists say the proposed zone is too small.

Nevertheless, Maine’s lobstermen are scrambling to come up with alternative fishing techniques that comply with the new requirements before they go into effect.

And they are getting help from an unlikely source: Scott Kraus, vice president for research and senior scientist at the New England Aquarium, in Boston, whose research on whale entanglements helped give rise to the new rules. Kraus began meeting with the lobstermen and concerned environmentalists last fall. The idea is to find a rope that’s just buoyant enough not to get caught in rocks, but not so buoyant that it catches whales. “Fishermen are always reluctant to be regulated, but they’re also always innovating,” Kraus says. “The trick is to take advantage of their innovative capacity.”

The researchers and the lobstermen have until October
to find some solutions. The Fisheries Service finalized the new rules last fall, but after protests from Maine’s Democratic governor, John Baldacci, and Republican U.S. Sen. Olympia Snowe, it agreed to hold off on implementation for a year.

Adler and other Bay State lobstermen aren’t directly critical of their colleagues to the north who take a hard line, but they say they have found the transition to the new rope to be relatively painless. Adler says that while gear has been lost, particularly off some rocky fishing grounds near Cape Ann, the worst-case scenario predicted by some has not happened. However, it could be trickier to determine the right kind of equipment for Maine, he says, since its lobstering grounds are notoriously rocky, in contrast to the Bay State’s mostly sandy grounds.

Patrice McCarron, executive director of the Maine Lobstermen’s Association, says she figures the cost to her group’s members of buying new line could be more than $100 million. Without a more practical, alternative type of line, she warns that lobstermen would be stuck between “needing to feed their families and pay their bills and complying with a rule that will not allow them to do that.”

And if they do comply with the rule using the heavier rope now available, she argues, the effect may well prove self-defeating: To avoid having lines caught on rocks, lobstermen would probably attach a single trap to each buoy—dramatically multiplying the number of ropes in the water, and presumably the number of threats to the whales.

Kraus doesn’t see any silver bullet on the horizon. He expects the Maine lobstermen will have to make do under the new regime for at least a while. The lobstermen “have been their own worst enemy by not really engaging in the process and believing they could be protected by politics, and unfortunately the day of reckoning has come and they are in a situation where they really need some alternatives,” he says.

Even so, McCarron is hopeful. At her group’s first meeting with Kraus and the environmental community, she says, “There was some openness to think if there is a better solution that isn’t as harmful to us. Everyone agreed the goal is not to put the Maine lobster industry out of business but to conserve right whales.”

McCarron is lobbying hard to get the Fisheries Service to delay implementation for another 18 months beyond this October to give the lobstermen and Kraus more time to find gear alternatives. And she’s getting some help from Maine’s congressional delegation. Snowe and Democratic Rep. Tom Allen have written to Fisheries Service officials to protest the new rules.

But there is still no guarantee that the two sides will be able to work things out like their Bay State counterparts. The surest sign of that: McCarron is also raising money for a potential legal showdown with the Fisheries Service.
HISTORIC HANGAR AS THE NEW WALDEN POND?

Ah, the civilized village of Concord. Home of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Louisa May Alcott, and historic landmarks like the Old North Bridge, Walden Pond, and... Hangar 24? Yes, Concord town meeting voters recently won a skirmish with Massport without firing a shot. They added the decrepit (but, they say, historically significant) hangar at Hanscom Field to the list of nearly 60 properties protected by the town’s demolition delay bylaw.

Under the bylaw, Massport, which owns the property, must wait at least six months before tearing down the building, which was condemned last year but is now on the State Registry of Historic Places. The clock started in November, which gives some time to local aviation buffs seeking the funds to convert the place into an aviation museum.

The hangar, which has been vacant for several years, was built in 1948 and served as a lab for Charles “Doc” Stark Draper, whose research led to several big advancements in aviation navigation technology. It won’t be cheap to rehab the structure; in fact, no one really knows how much it will cost. But for locals, another historical site is preferable to what Massport had planned for the parcel of land: a distinctly unpicturesque refueling station with above- and below-ground jet fuel tanks.

“You might say, ‘This is just a 20th-century hangar, so what?’ But this place is important,” says Concord Historical Commission chairman Nancy Butman. “This is a positive approach. It’s a way to tell Massport that we’re not just saying no to everything.”

CAPE COD OUT OF BALANCE

Cape Cod certainly has its charms, but its appeal seems to be lost on young families, fewer of whom live there these days. Peter Francese, director of demographic forecasting for the New England Economic Partnership, told an economic summit on the Cape in October that the region currently faces zero growth in its year-round population and now has a median age of 45.7, making the Cape’s Barnstable County the oldest in New England—and one of the oldest in the country. (Approaching geezer status among Cape towns: Orleans and Chatham, with median ages over 55.)

The trends contribute to the declining school enrollments in 13 of the Cape’s 15 districts, says Francese. For example, the number of students in the Barnstable district dropped from 6,924 in 2000-01 to 5,446 in 2006-07.

Still, school costs keep going up. Francese calls this conundrum an imbalance of the region’s “human ecology” and says that policies such as banning high-density housing, buying up land for conservation, and promoting “child-free” communities can actually make the situation worse by keeping out new taxpayers.

“The problem is very tiny school districts,” he says, “The costs are very high, and the burden of those costs fall very heavily on the property taxpayer.”

Francese’s suggestion: Consolidate...
BLACK LOCUST AS THE NEW BELGIAN ENDIVE?

They all laughed 20 years ago when then-presidential candidate Michael Dukakis told Iowa farmers that the key to survival lay in diversifying their crops into products such as Belgian endive. (OK, he might have been wrong about endive, but who’d have thunk we’d get so wild about pea tendrils?) But specialty farm products and the “buy local” movement have helped preserve Massachusetts farmland and beef up the state’s farm economy. Could the same happen for forestland?

Williamsburg lumber mill owner Dave Lashway thinks so. Lashway belongs to the Massachusetts Woodlands Cooperative, which markets Home Grown Wood, a brand of native lumber products raised under Forest Stewardship Council regulations. The FSC rules call for sustainable management and attention to wildlife habitat and forest diversity.

“I get calls all the time from people who say, ‘We’re trying to avoid buying lumber from clear-cutting’ [lumber companies] and looking for guaranteed resources from a sustainable forest,” Lashway said. “Here, you’re not just buying a mass-produced product from China. You know how it’s produced.”

It might not be apparent in the 617 area code, but 60 percent of Massachusetts is forestland, and most of it (2.4 million out of 3.2 million acres) is privately owned. Forest products generate $600 million per year, and woodlands also provide recreational opportunities, help clean the air, and preserve wildlife habitat and watersheds. And it’s estimated that transporting wood products from China uses about eight times as much energy as buying the same products from within the state.

But landowners face strong economic incentives to sell, and Massachusetts Audubon estimates that the state loses nearly 40 acres of forestland per day to development. By sharing equipment, expertise, and marketing tools, the co-op encourages the “buy local” movement—and represents a tiny beachhead in the fight against development. It currently has 55 members and 11,500 acres, and hopes to eventually have 25,000 acres under management.

The group also promotes lesser-known—but abundant forest species such black birch, ash, red maple, and beech. Lashway is especially bullish on the black locust, which is technically an invasive species in Massachusetts but is also a good alternative to pressure-treated wood because of its toughness and natural decay resistance.

At Cowls Building Supply, a ninth-generation lumber business in Amherst, sales of Home Grown Wood are brisk. “We’re getting more and more requests. People buy everything from flooring to siding to heavy timbers for post and beam construction,” says manager Evan Jones. “People are thrilled that they can get something that’s locally grown.”

school districts, take a regional approach to services, and get real about the costs of the hallowed tradition of home rule.

All of which is heresy in Massachusetts. And it may be one reason why, Francese quips, he’s generally not invited back after giving his analysis to groups throughout the state. But it was a slightly different story last year on the Cape. Francese was invited back, and spent three days in December speaking with legislators and nearly 100 municipal administrators and school officials about the issue. “It was very definitely a call to arms,” says Clare O’Connor, director of workforce development for the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce. “With a demographic snapshot, you have the time to change things.”

And, Francese says, the Cape is not alone. Berkshire County and parts of Franklin County have similar problems of population loss and graying demographics.

“Environmentalists have done a good job of showing the interconnectedness of life. I’m trying to show the interconnectedness of people,” he says. “You need young people, middle-aged people, and children in schools, and when you unbalance that by massively favoring one age group, you’re committing economic suicide. Unless there are some serious efforts to rebalance the human ecology, we’re in deep trouble.”
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No-shout zone
Dan Rea moves into WBZ’s legendary nighttime talk-radio slot and sticks to the high road

**JERRY FROM MATTAPAN** never knew what hit him.

It’s a Monday evening in late October, and the journalist Sally Bedell Smith is a guest on *NightSide with Dan Rea*, on WBZ-AM (1030). For the past half-hour Rea has been interviewing Smith about her new book on Bill and Hillary Clinton, *For Love of Politics*. Now Rea opens up the lines.

“Sally, Sally, Sally,” says Jerry, the first caller, his voice dripping with contempt. “Why do you like being a rump swab?”

Anyone who follows the talk-radio wars in Boston could guess what would happen next. Bedell would deny being a “rump swab”—that is, a kiss-ass. And that, in turn, would set off a loud, unenlightening exchange of insults and enmity.

Only that’s not what happened. Instead, Jerry’s crude characterization, a phrase heard on some talk shows more frequently than the traffic report, never made it past the seven-second delay. Rea gave Jerry another chance. “Jerry, do you want to play by my rules, or do you want to take cheap shots?” he asked. But Jerry was already gone.

This is talk radio as we’ve come not to know it.

Last fall, Rea, among Boston’s better-known television reporters, switched to radio, succeeding the late Paul Sullivan—and, before him, the legendary David Brudnoy—as host of WBZ’s evening talk show, heard weekdays from 8 p.m. to midnight. Rea has quickly made his mark as the host of a show defined by civil conversation on a wide range of local and national issues.

Though *NightSide* may be well within the staid tradition of WBZ, a news-and-talk station owned by CBS, it’s very different from the nasty, vitriolic rhetoric and inexpensive, nationally syndicated programs that have come to define talk radio in Boston and elsewhere. Since the early 1990s, WBZ had been in something of a holding pattern, as first Brudnoy, then Sullivan, struggled with serious illness. Now the station has a healthy evening host who can make a full-time commitment to the program. But can a show like Rea’s survive and thrive in the age of Howie Carr and Jay Severin, of Rush Limbaugh and Michael Savage?

Michael Harrison, the editor and publisher of the Springfield–based trade magazine *Talkers*, says the very fact that WBZ management would continue with local programming in its evening slot is a heartening departure from what most stations are doing nationally, as bottom-line pressures force steep budget cuts. With fewer people listening than is the case during the morning and afternoon commutes, many stations—including WBZ’s two talk competitors, WRKO-AM (680) and WTKK-FM (96.9)—run syndicated shows at night. (Although change is in the air: At press time, WTKK was getting ready to debut a new, locally based 7-to-10 p.m. program to be hosted by former *Boston Herald* reporter Michele McPhee.)

“I think that program on that radio station has tremendous historical and cultural significance, and is very important part of the commercial Boston talk-radio scene,” says Harrison. “A live and local program in today’s radio is a rarity.”

Rick Radzik, who’s been producing the program since 1997, sees Rea as very different from both Brudnoy, a dauntingly intelligent host who could talk about a wide range of social and cultural issues, and Sullivan, a political columnist for the Lowell *Sun* with a sharp sense of humor who liked to mix it up with callers. But he sees some similarities as well.

“I think one of the things that’s important to me and important to the station is, the one thing you always heard about Paul and David was that you may not have always agreed with them, but you always liked them,” Radzik says. “Dan’s on board with that.”

Adds former *Boston Herald* television critic Monica Collins: “I think he follows in that tradition of Brudnoy and Paul. I wouldn’t say he’s as smart as Brudnoy, but he certainly follows in that tradition of civilized talk, and that’s always a refreshing thing to listen to on the radio.”

**AT 59, REA** is starting a new career during a time of life when many people think of winding down. He’s walked away from being one of the most rec-
ognized faces in New England to become an unseen voice in the night. Yet, as he describes it, the decision wasn’t difficult.

Rea worked as a reporter for WBZ-TV (Channel 4) for 31 years, and he spent the last 11 on the morning shift. “It was very clear to me that there was a direction of television news that was not going to be reversed, and I wasn’t quite sure that I wanted to continue doing television news as I was doing it,” Rea says in an interview at his home in Chestnut Hill, where he lives with his wife, teenage daughter, and a friendly brown-and-white Cavalier King Charles spaniel named Charlie. (Their other child, a son, is now a sophomore at Harvard.)

He offers an example: On October 23 one recent year (he thinks it was 2004), he was sent to Winchendon because the season’s first snowfall had been spotted. He did as he was told, informing Channel 4 viewers that yes, indeed, white flakes had been spotted.

“My executive producer, who can remain anonymous, called me in the truck and said, ‘I don’t think you’re into this live shot,’” Rea recalls. “And I said, ‘Really?’ I said, ‘Watch my next live shot.’ And I delivered it with vim and verve, perhaps the likes of which has not been seen on local television. And, of course, I was taken to the woodshed for that because I was not being respectful.”

So Rea was clearly looking for a way out. The opportunity presented itself last spring, when Paul Sullivan underwent the latest in a series of surgeries for recurrent brain cancer. Rea began filling in, and he recalls wondering whether he might be able to take the final two hours of the four-hour program when Sullivan returned to work. Instead, Sullivan deteriorated rapidly. Sullivan hosted a farewell show in June (both moving and hilarious, it’s still available on the WBZ website), and he died in September. Rea was named the permanent host a few weeks later.

Like Sullivan, Rea is a local boy, having grown up in the Readville neighborhood of Boston and graduating from Boston Latin School, the old Boston State College, and Boston University Law School. This is, in fact, his second stint in talk radio. In the early to mid 1970s, he hosted a program on WBUR-FM (90.9) and, later, a weekend show on WBZ. At that time, Rea was deeply conservative, serving as national vice chairman of Young Americans for Freedom and opposing Richard Nixon’s re-election as president in 1972 on the grounds that he was too liberal. But Rea left opinion-mongering behind in 1976, when he became a full-time reporter for Channel 4. (“Today, he describes himself as more of a “libertarian conservative,” and says that ideology in general does not hold the allure it did when he was younger.)

By far Rea’s best-known work at Channel 4 was his years-long crusade to clear Joseph Salvati, who, along with three other men, spent 30 years in prison for a 1965 murder they did not commit after being fingered by a government-pro-
tected witness named Joseph “The Animal” Barboza, an admitted hit man. Rea worked tirelessly, on his own time, after he became convinced that Salvati was innocent, but his efforts drew criticism in some circles that he had lost his journalistic objectivity. A headline on the jump page of a 1994 Boston Globe story about his involvement in the Salvati case—HAS DAN REA GONE TOO FAR?—still bugs him after all these years.

“That always kind of stuck in my craw,” he says. “How can you go too far if you really think the person’s innocent?”

Rea’s persistence paid off. This past July, US District Court Judge Nancy Gertner awarded $101 million in damages to the families of the four men, saying in her ruling, “The FBI’s misconduct was clearly the sole cause of this conviction.” His report on the ruling was the last piece Rea did for Channel 4. “How many reporters would have stuck with that story all those years?” marvels Jon Keller, Channel 4’s political analyst, adding that Rea’s involvement in the Salvati case “speaks to his humanity and his caring about people.”

If his role in freeing Joe Salvati was the most satisfying of his Channel 4 career, among the more embarrassing moments took place in the early 1990s. He was reporting on a story about a homeless advocate’s advice that people shouldn’t give money to panhandlers, and he illustrated it with video depicting two panhandlers, both of whom were black. He says he and his cameraman, who was also black, had been unable to find a white panhandler before deadline.

The story ran, and co-anchor Liz Walker—the most prominent African-American journalist in Boston—was furious. “She was really upset,” recalls Rea. “She was really yelling.” It was unsettling enough, he adds, that he feared for his job, but says the incident quickly blew over. He says he was recently a guest on Walker’s current show, Sunday with Liz, and that he wants to have her on NightSide as well. (Walker, through a Channel 4 spokeswoman, declined to be interviewed for this article.)

In spite—or perhaps because—of that run-in, Rea speaks with notable sensitivity about the way African-Americans are portrayed on TV. “Local television news is one of the great purveyors of racism of our time,” he says. “They don’t understand that. But if you are somebody who lives out in one of the 128 or 495 suburbs, and never have a reason to really interact with people of color, the only time you’re going to see young black males is when they’re being arraigned, they’re being arrested, or they’re dying in the street. We ignore the 99 percent of the kids in that community who are trying to do the right thing, trying to go to school, trying to participate in community programs and athletics.”

He recalls the difficulty he had persuading Channel 4 to let him report on a summer math camp for inner-city kids, mostly African-American, back in 2006. “It took me much more time than should have been necessary to get this story on television,” he says. “And I think that was an important story to tell. I can tell those types of stories on radio.”

Although Rea doesn’t use the term, his vision for talk radio is a form of civic engagement, both locally and in the 38 states and the parts of Canada where WBZ is heard each night. He’s had Gov. Deval Patrick in for an hour of conversation, taking calls from listeners, and he hopes to do the same with Senators Ted Kennedy and John Kerry. He’s
willing to host some out-there discussions, too, from the endless conspiracy theories surrounding the assassination of John Kennedy to a new generation of conspiracy theories over the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. All without shouting or name-calling.

*It’s not as* though the idea of civil talk radio is utterly unique. Tom Finneran, Jim Braude, and Margery Eagan, to name a few, are all trying to be heard without calling people names. At WBUR, the public radio powerhouse, Tom Ashbrook, Robin Young, and, since last year, WCVB-TV (Channel 5) refugee David Boeri host outstanding shows, though they emphasize interviews over listener call-ins, and only Boeri’s program—the weekly *Radio Boston*—is truly local.

There’s no question, though, that *Nightside with Dan Rea* is something of a throwback to the local radio scene of the 1970s and ’80s, when the likes of Brudnoy, David Finnegan, Jerry Williams, Gene Burns, and Janet Jegheliian saw the mission of a talk-show host as leading a conversation rather than spewing insults.

Among the more prominent talk-show hosts of that era was Peter Meade, a former politico whose late-afternoon/early-evening program on WBZ led into Brudnoy’s. Meade, a co-chairman of MassINC and executive vice president of corporate affairs for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, remembers that he, a liberal, and Brudnoy, a conservative, would usually appear together for about 15 minutes. “What was clear to people is how much David and I both loved and respected each other, and how often we did legitimately disagree,” Meade says. “It was fun. And I thought that set a really terrific tone.” Meade, who stepped down from his position as an occasional WBZ commentator in 2006, calls Rea “a terrific choice for the station.”

Also giving a thumbs-up is veteran anti-tax activist Barbara Anderson, the director of Citizens for Limited Taxation. During the 1980s, Anderson was a ubiquitous presence on Brudnoy’s and Williams’s shows, and her organization’s signature victory—the tax-cutting initiative Proposition 2½—would probably not have been approved

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by voters if it hadn’t been for talk radio.

“I’m a big Dan Rea fan,” says Anderson. “There’s never going to be another David Brudnoy, and nobody would expect anyone to be. But I think he’ll be his own great talk-show host.”

Not that Rea doesn’t have a learning curve he needs to master. If it’s a good thing that he’s not as snide as Howie Carr or as caustic as Jay Severin, it’s also true that, in his early months on the air, he was also not as cutting as David Brudnoy or Paul Sullivan had been. For all his smarts and charm, Brudnoy, in his soft-spoken way, could be devastating if he thought a caller or guest was being ridiculous. And Sullivan could get pretty hot under the collar; it’s just that he managed to do it without getting personal and without holding a grudge. Rea, by contrast, has been almost too polite, especially with callers.

WBZ program director Peter Casey says he expects that will change as Rea becomes more comfortable in the job. “I would say that for anybody who comes from a reporting background, whose whole career has been spent not putting their opinions into the content they’ve been providing, it’s a bit of a transition,” he says. “It will evolve.”

Rea agrees, up to a point. “I don’t want to criticize other people’s programs. Maybe this show, NightSide, won’t succeed, but I’m not going to let it deteriorate into the gutter. We’ll hopefully have strenuous conversations, strenuous disagreements. Raised voices? Not a problem,” he says.

“My producers and Peter Casey are trying to say to me, ‘You’ve got to get out there further, you’ve got to state your positions.’ Sometimes my positions are a little more nuanced than they should be. And they want you to say, well, ‘I’m in favor of this,’ or ‘I’m in favor of that.’ I think I’m getting better at it. But, ironically, maybe I was better at it 30 years ago, because now I see that there is always more than one side to a story, multiple sides. So I don’t know if that’s going to be an impediment to me becoming a good talk-show host.

“I feel like I have great freedom to do this. The thing is, I’m at the end of my career. I did 31 years in television. I could retire tomorrow, I really could. I’m doing this not because it’s a job, I’m doing it because I like it. If it turns out that the public doesn’t like what I’m doing, I’m sure WBZ will adjust. And I’ll be able to deal with it.”

Dan Kennedy is an assistant professor at Northeastern University’s School of Journalism. His blog, Media Nation, is at medianation.blogspot.com, and he can be reached at da.kennedy@neu.edu.
REALITY SETS IN

BY DAVE DENISON

Patrick’s first year brings hard lessons

On a Friday afternoon in early November 2006, I went to the office of Michael Dukakis, deep in the political science warren at Northeastern University, to talk about the job he held for 12 years, longer than anyone before or since, as governor of the Commonwealth. It was his birthday, I soon discovered, and he was in good spirits. His wife, Kitty, had congratulated him at breakfast, saying, “Well, you made the Herald.” The Boston tabloid had put his photo on the front page to illustrate a Howie Carr column suggesting the election of Deval Patrick would mean a return of the Dukakis era—“Duke Redux,” in Herald-speak.

The election of Patrick was still four days away, but by this time it was clear that Massachusetts was ready, for the first time in the 16 years since Dukakis left, to try a Democrat again. What would it be like? Republicans had been warning voters off this path for years, winning four gubernatorial elections largely on the claim that the state needed a night watchman to keep the Democratic Legislature from raiding the treasury. Now we were on the verge of returning to one-party control. Thus, it seemed to me, the governorship was about to become powerful again. The new governor would have a chance to really lead—not just to play defense against the Legislature, but to propose and dispose. We were about to see a new study in power and positive leadership.

Dukakis was one of several people I interviewed just before and after the election with these ideas in mind. The result was an article for CommonWealth, timed for Patrick’s inauguration in January, that raised the question, “What are the most important habits of highly effective governors?” (See “Recipe for Success,” CW, Winter, 2007.) Based on the interviews, I listed eight elements of success for a governor in Massachusetts. And, in the spirit of Patrick’s uplifting campaign, in which he urged voters to “hope for the best,” I asked political veterans another question: What would it take for a governor to go from good to great? Is it even possible to imag-
As a candidate, Deval Patrick was highly successful without “listening to the experts.”

ine a chief executive in government running a great administration?

Chalk it up to a thought experiment. Now, a year into the Patrick administration, the question about greatness seems to have sprung from a moment of irrational exuberance. It’s a credit to Patrick’s campaign that so many were caught up in it. The three principals who run Blue Mass Group, a leading liberal website, endorsed Patrick as the “most inspiring leader and speaker in Massachusetts in a generation.” After the election, The Boston Globe Magazine named Patrick its “Bostonian of the Year” and, in a cover story, portrayed him as an optimist who has consistently exceeded expectations.

Yet Patrick’s governorship now looks like a triple-A bond that was suddenly downgraded. Good to great? The question on the minds of some close State House observers is: Can he go from shaky to steady? Patrick started the year with some high-profile stumbles—headlines about lavish spending on office furnishings and his desire to ride around in a Cadillac—then spent several months grappling with the budget process while shuffling people in and out of key administrative positions, and by October was confessing he was frustrated because so few of his agenda items were getting attention in the Legislature. In the meantime, he surprised many of his supporters by proposing a controversial plan to bring three resort casinos to the Commonwealth. The announcement generated much publicity, but little applause among his backers. The plan faces uncertain prospects on Beacon Hill, and the governor later complained that casino gambling was overshadowing other agenda items he cared about. As 2007 drew to a close, Patrick looked like nothing more than Rookie of the Year, which is not celebrated in politics the way it is in sports.

CAMPAIGNING VERSUS GOVERNING

“It’s stating the obvious to say he had a difficult transition,” said Marty Linsky, who teaches in leadership studies at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, when I checked in with him recently. “I think it’s a function, in part, of the
Michael Dukakis says that Patrick’s ‘slow start’ reminds him of his own rocky first term.

While the statewide media devoted considerable coverage in Patrick’s first month to the money he wanted to spend on the interior of the governor’s office and on his preference for a Cadillac instead of a Ford, there was a more telling drama unfolding even in the days before Patrick’s inauguration on January 4.

One of the first and most important steps a new governor makes is naming his chief of staff. Traditionally a governor looks for someone with a mind for political strategy, an eye for hiring talented people, and a knack for winning friends and influencing people in the Legislature. The chief of staff should know the governor’s thinking better than anyone else. Several weeks before his swearing-in, Patrick announced his choice: Joan Wallace-Benjamin, a well-regarded administrator of a Boston nonprofit organization — and

ternal agreement that Patrick has faltered in two critical areas: working closely with the Legislature and setting clear, achievable priorities. These are two commonly accepted “rules” for executive branch success, yet most of the people I spoke with were unsure whether the governor would see it that way. In fact, I wasn’t so sure myself. Maybe it qualifies as the kind of “expert” wisdom he likes to disprove.

THE BOSLEY AFFAIR

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The Bosley affair

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someone without any of the usual credentials. She didn’t have a background in state politics, and she hadn’t worked closely with Patrick before.

Suddenly Wallace-Benjamin was helping Patrick set up an administration. And before long, a significant slip-up occurred. Patrick had decided he wanted to hire one of the Legislature’s most respected members: Rep. Dan Bosley, a Democrat from western Massachusetts. Bosley had immersed himself in complex economic development issues for years. In fact, when Patrick was just beginning his campaign for governor, he paid a visit to Bosley. It was supposed to be a 15-minute getting-acquainted session, Bosley recalls, but it turned into a two-hour discussion. Both parties were apparently impressed. Bosley supported Patrick for governor, and shortly after Patrick won, the governor-elect was on the phone talking to Bosley about a job in the administration. Bosley accepted the post—which, in his understanding, was to involve coordinating economic development policies at a cabinet secretary level. He told friends and supporters he would give up his House seat.

As Patrick took a holiday vacation, Bosley met with Wallace-Benjamin and was disturbed by how the job responsibilities were described. By the time Bosley spoke again with the governor, they were unable to come to terms. The governor decided he would assemble a “development cabinet” and chair it himself. Bosley quickly decided he would stay in the Legislature.

A minor personnel snafu? Perhaps. But it immediately called into question the governor’s management skills. And it’s exactly the kind of misstep the governor’s chief of staff who had been his campaign manager. He also hired David Morales, an aide to then-Senate President Robert Travaglini, to be a senior advisor. And he brought in Joe Landolfi, a veteran of previous administrations, to supervise his communications.

But the Bosley affair was not without potential political consequences: Bosley, a leading opponent of bringing casino gambling to Massachusetts, is the chairman of the economic development committee in the House, which has jurisdiction over Patrick’s casino bill. Bosley insisted he is “not upset” about what he calls a simple miscommunication about a job offer, that he holds no grudge, that he will give the governor’s casino plan (eventually) a fair hearing.

The governor himself, however, may believe otherwise. When asked in an October television interview with Jim Braude on New England Cable News about Bosley’s views on casinos, Patrick said, “I see absolutely nothing objective about what comes out of Chairman Bosley’s mouth on this subject, so I’m going to set that aside.” I asked Bosley if there had been any attempt by the governor’s staff to smooth things over after that remark. Bosley said no and clambered for high ground: “I think what he said he said out of frustration. I don’t take it personally.”

Still, a question lingers: Is this how the governor intends to treat his legislative friends? Was it necessary to knock Bosley’s integrity, publicly questioning his “objectivity,” as if the governor had the one unbiased position on the state’s gambling policy? In fact, the matter of Patrick’s treatment of his friends and potential allies was a simmering issue all year, and it lasted well into the new tenure of Patrick’s more experienced political team.
DANCING WITH THE LEGISLATURE

Eventually, the governor’s staff pulled together two meetings with a group of about two dozen House Democrats who had been early supporters of the governor’s campaign but were becoming increasingly disaffected. The lawmakers met on November 6 with chief of staff Rubin and other members of the governor’s senior staff. On November 15 they met again, this time with the governor present.

One complaint lodged with the governor was what some saw as a nearly complete breakdown in communication between House allies and the governor’s office, according to one attendee, who found it stunning that the 26 representatives had to go around the room and introduce themselves before the meeting with Rubin got underway.

It was more than benign neglect that worried some members. Did the governor intend to score political points by bashing the Legislature? Both Rubin and Patrick were questioned about an event that left some lawmakers steaming. In October, the governor had sent Kevin Burke, his secretary of public safety, to the joint committee on the judiciary, which was holding a hearing on a capital punishment bill. Burke’s instructions were to read a letter from the governor in which the committee was castigated for the “annual spectacle” of holding a hearing on a death penalty bill while other crime-related proposals were waiting for their turn.

The legislators’ point was that sometimes bills get a hearing even when everyone knows the bill will not advance. The governor’s public scolding of committee members provoked Sen. Robert Creedon, a conservative Democrat from Brockton, to comment that the framers of constitutional government “took sovereignty away from the king.” Even among Democrats sympathetic to Patrick, according to one lawmaker who attended both meetings, the Burke letter “inflicted more harm than anything he’s done.”

Rep. Jay Kaufman, a Democrat from Lexington who had helped set up the November meetings with Rubin and Patrick, said that he, too, had thought the Burke letter was a “bizarre” way for the governor to attempt to move his agenda. Did the governor have an explanation for it at their meeting? “I did not hear a response from him,” said Kaufman.

Rubin, for his part, disputed that. He said the governor’s answer was that he was trying to make a legitimate point about the need to deal with “real solutions” on crime. “I understand why the Legislature reacted to the Kevin Burke testimony,” Rubin said. “I respect it, but I also think there was legitimate reason why the governor and the team felt that made sense to do.”

But what puzzled me most was that it took almost a year...
Patrick says that he and the Legislature need to ‘trust a little bit more in each other’s good faith.’

...
and how implementable it will be.” Rep. Ruth Balser, a Demo-
crat from Newton who campaigned for Patrick and praises
his “progressive values” (although she strongly dislikes his
casino proposal) discerns no dominant agenda items. “They
probably wouldn’t say they have a signature issue,” said Balser.

“His vision seems to be more of a process vision than a
content vision,” said Linsky, recalling the governor’s speeches
about changing the culture on Beacon Hill and revitalizing
civic life. Still, Linsky said, “If you’re having to intuit what
the basic theme is, that’s the problem.”

Not everyone agrees. Montigny, a Democrat from New
Bedford, said he doesn’t fault the governor for proposing lots
of “bold ideas,” such as reforming the state’s transportation
agencies, even though that means “taking on many, many,
vested and entrenched special interests.” Where some see a
lack of focus Montigny sees ambition. “I think this guy wants
to be seen for what he is, which is a hyperactive guy who wants
to be everywhere and get things done,” he said. “I respect that
as a strategy.”

“You gotta understand,” said former governor Dukakis.
“You campaign your tail off, right? You’ve worked as hard
as on anything you’ve ever done. You get elected by 21 per-
cent points, in his case… And you’ve got this very broad
agenda. You want to be working on 30 different fronts si-
multaneously. If you pick good people, you can make real
progress on 30 different fronts. But you’ve got to focus on
the two or three big ones.”

AN EYE ON CREATING JOBS?
By this time, I had developed my own hypothesis: Patrick
wants to be seen as a job-creating governor. He understands
that unless the economy grows, there won’t be enough gov-
ernment revenue to fund the programs he cares about and
the new initiatives he has plans for. He spoke plenty during
the campaign about the need to stimulate clean energy in-
dustries and the life sciences sector. He’s kept a steady drum-
beat as governor to advance a 10-year, $1 billion plan to pro-
more biotech and life sciences. Even the casino proposal fit
in. He wasn’t talking about allowing any old dog track to add
slot machines. He was talking about big resort casinos that,
presumably, would have economic spillover effects.

So when I trekked up Beacon Hill on the last day of
November and sat down with chief of staff Rubin and top
communications man Landolfi and asked them to list the
accomplishments of the year, I thought I had hit the jack-
pot: “First and foremost,” Rubin began, “the governor’s
talked a lot about economic development and job growth.”

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Rubin said Massachusetts had added 26,000 new jobs in 2007 (as of October), “which is well on the way to 100,000 new jobs in four years, which is what he had talked about as a goal for the administration.”

The life sciences bond bill has the support of top legislative leaders, Rubin noted, and will be at the top of the agenda when the legislature reconvenes after the new year. The governor’s staff has worked closely with House Speaker Sal DiMasi on a major bill to promote clean energy initiatives. Again, I thought: economic development and jobs.

But Rubin moved on to the implementation of the universal health care law. Big priority to make that a success. And civic engagement. The governor is proud of a bill he promoted and signed creating a Commonwealth Corps to harness the power of volunteerism. Marriage equality. The governor clearly felt strongly about that, and worked hard to keep an initiative off the ballot that could have reversed the historic Supreme Judicial Court decision on same-sex marriage.

“I think one of the signature issues that the governor’s been talking about is education reform—the next phase of education reform,” Rubin continued. The governor has asked more than 150 experts in education to suggest ways to develop this next phase, which in Patrick’s view should involve longer school days and a longer school year, full-day kindergarten, and free community colleges.

Given all this, I asked Rubin if he and the governor reject the conventional wisdom about the need to focus on a few agenda items at a time. The answer was yes. “This governor feels very strongly that we’ve inherited a state government that has been led in a very different direction than he wants to take state government,” Rubin said. “There is an enormous amount of things he wants to get done, and reform, and fix, and make better quickly. And so he’s not going to apologize for putting a lot of issues on the table and for trying to bring change in a lot of different areas.”

As for those who doubt that approach is realistic, Rubin invoked the lessons of Patrick’s campaign. “From the first day I started working with him back in the campaign, he has had a very clear strategy and game plan to accomplish things,” he said. “Early on, the media didn’t understand some of the things he was doing on the campaign, or why he was doing certain things, but he always had a long-term game plan about what he wanted to get accomplished. And he consistently worked to implement that game plan. I think it’s the exact same thing in the administration.”

In other words, stay tuned. Watch and learn. It’s an attitude that is perhaps justifiable after only one year in office. And if Patrick makes headway in his second year by advancing economic stimulus bills and transportation reforms and improvements in public education, he will begin to acquire believers outside of his office in his “long-term game plan.”

But one only needs to look at the governor’s casino gambling proposal to see the risks involved in pushing on too
many fronts. As a matter of political strategy, there is no apparent reason the governor—who as a candidate did not take a firm position on casinos—couldn’t have said, “This is not a first- or second-year priority for me.” The drive to promote gambling does nothing to improve his public image.

Boston Globe business columnist Steve Bailey has taken to referring to Patrick as “Governor Slots,” unleashing recurrent zingers such as this one in October: “Deval Patrick ran as the candidate of hope. Gambling, by contrast, is all about false hope.”

“I think it’s very unfortunate for him politically that he’s been forced to take such a high-profile position on that,” said Osborne. “It’s kind of a no-win issue for a governor. Casino gambling is not something people are proud to have in their state, most of them. So it makes you look a bit like a salesman who will peddle anything.”

I asked the governor in December why, just as a matter of political strategy, he didn’t hold off on what he had to know was going to be one of the most controversial parts of his legislative package.

“First of all,” he said, “I’m completely confident the Legislature can handle more than one issue at a time. The press can, too, for that matter.” Patrick gave no sign that political strategy entered into it. “I promised I would come to rest on the question by the end of the summer after I’d done my homework,” he said. “I did my homework and I came to rest. I think we made a very thoughtful proposal, which is neither a panacea nor the end of civilization as we know it.”

And on the question of focus? While Rubin and Landolfi had laid out the extended version of the agenda, Patrick had a coherent distillation. “I can tell you what our agenda is about,” he said. “It’s about schools, jobs, and citizenship. I could give you a soundbite, policy by policy, but every one of the policy initiatives, every one of the legislative initiatives fits under that [agenda], and that’s because it’s those three things that transform lives.”

UNDERSTANDING PATRICK
Nothing that’s happened in Gov. Patrick’s first year has caused the people I spoke with to doubt the governor’s work ethic or good intentions. “My sense is that he’s very smart and he really wants to do the right thing,” said Linsky. “And, much more than his predecessor, he’s deeply engaged in the job.”

“He’s had a much better first year than I had,” said Dukakis. “You know, rookie governors make mistakes, and we learn on the job, and if you’re smart and perceptive, as he is, you get better and better as time goes on.”

A certain amount of wheel-spinning is to be expected in any governor’s first year. If you combine inexperience, though, with righteousness and insularity—which is what worries some of Patrick’s own allies—you end up undermining your ability to persuade, which is the key to political leadership, and which was expected to be one of Patrick’s strengths.
Why hasn’t that persuasive power shown itself?

The fact is, we learned only a little about Patrick’s relevant skills during the campaign. We learned that his persuasion is effective when employed in front of sympathetic crowds, and when pitted in debate against middling candidates. We could discern that much of his campaign skill comes from his own superb speechwriting abilities and his understanding of the power of inspired oratory.

If you mine the public record, you find other things that made him successful in his years before seeking elective office. Patrick was a lawyer who cared passionately about civil rights, and especially about rooting out discrimination in the workplace and in mortgage lending. He was a lawyer who excelled at a certain kind of negotiation; many of his successes came not in trials but in boardroom settlements. He specialized in working with companies that had been deeply compromised. In the 1990s that meant working with Texaco, which had allowed racism to become part of its corporate culture, and with ACC Capital Holdings, the parent company of the notorious Ameriquest Mortgage Co., to address predatory lending practices.

Patrick also developed a politics that could sound vaguely populist—with exhortations about America’s need to become “an inclusive democracy”—while at the same time working with corporate executives at the highest levels and getting rewarded to the tune of millions of dollars. Consequently, the impression of Patrick as a reflexive liberal has long competed with his image as a corporate-friendly Democrat. When he testified in front of a Senate committee in 1994, shortly before he was confirmed for his post as assistant attorney general for civil rights in the Clinton administration, he explained himself this way: “I come to this challenge, despite some of the things you may have read, as neither a so-called liberal nor a so-called conservative. I come to this as a pragmatist with very high ideals.”

In his career as a litigator and negotiator for civil rights, Patrick occupied the moral high ground as soon as he walked into the room. But most legislative negotiations are of a different nature; the governor has political preferences, which aren’t usually accorded special moral or ethical status. The bright shining exception during the past year was when a civil rights issue took center stage. When the Legislature was forced to decide, once again, whether the right of same-sex couples to marry should be put to a statewide vote, we saw Patrick in his most natural element, and many would say we saw him at his best.

The citizen-initiated constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage cleared its first hurdle when the Legisla-
ture, meeting in constitutional convention on the last day of its session in 2006 (just days before Patrick was sworn in as governor), put the matter to a vote. The amendment needed at least 50 votes to advance; it received 62. Then, Senate President Robert Travaglini, who was not strongly opposed to a statewide vote, was replaced by Therese Murray. In the spring, the state's three top leaders and their staffs did what skilled politicians do: They counted votes, swayed opinions, counted again, and then moved when the time was right. When the amendment came up for the second vote after a climactic week in June, it was voted down 45 to 151.

Montigny, the New Bedford state senator, said Patrick's work in the marriage battle was "masterful." And it's the most prominent example of one way state politics — and people's lives — will be different in coming years by virtue of Patrick's leadership. "I think if Romney were still governor it may very well have gone a different way," said Montigny. Patrick helped prevent a long and expensive, and probably ugly, ballot campaign on same-sex marriage.

POETIC PROSE
Lurking in the record of how the governor handled the same-sex marriage issue, though, is something else worth noting. Patrick was initially willing to sanction a "whatever it takes" approach to achieving his desired end. Even after the Supreme Judicial Court re-stated the Legislature's constitutional obligation to vote on a validly submitted initiative for a constitutional amendment, governor-elect Patrick let it be known he wouldn't mind if the Legislature avoided a direct vote. Travaglini (and later Murray in June) decided against using a parliamentary dodge.

Will the governor's impatience to "move on" and "get things done" sometimes collide with the high expectations he's created by his talk of democratic inclusiveness and "grass-roots governing"? The problem with legislative collaboration, not to mention citizen participation, is that it slows things down. The other problem is that grass-roots agitation has no value to the governor in the abstract. One of the most active networks to get going since he took office consists of churches and good-government groups that are mobilizing to oppose an expansion of gambling. On the other side are well-paid lobbyists, as well as labor unions, who hope to exert influence the old-fashioned way: as insiders working the right connections on Beacon Hill. In this case, the governor is on the side of the big interests.

Cynics at the State House, of course, have always discounted Patrick's ideas about broad-based citizen participation. But even sympathetic legislators who see it as part of Patrick's penchant for "high ideals" wonder about the pragmatism of it. Kaufman, who said he admires the desire to move from grass-roots campaigning to grass-roots governing, added, "That's never been done before."
Old hands in politics advise Patrick to focus on smaller, practical steps as he starts out. In late 2006, when I spoke with Alan Ehrenhalt, executive editor of *Governing* magazine, I asked him about governors who achieved notable success. He put New York governor Al Smith, who had three terms in the 1920s, at the top of his list. “His greatness was that he had the practical political skill of a Tammany Hall politician and the vision of a Progressive,” Ehrenhalt said. Later, I spoke with Ehrenhalt about Patrick’s goal of inspiring wider citizen engagement with politics. The practical problem with that for a governor, Ehrenhalt said, is that “the main reason most citizens participate most of the time is to oppose things.” If Patrick were able to forge a strong relationship with the House Speaker and Senate President, cut some deals, and enact good legislation, why not, Ehrenhalt wondered, be happy with that?

The answer has to do with Patrick’s vision of himself as a pragmatist and an idealist. Patrick the pragmatist wants to get things done in a hurry. Patrick the idealist wants to align himself with a citizen army that marches on Beacon Hill and transforms the political culture. On the one side are the “experts,” the insiders, the cynics in the press. On the other side is a grand “you,” who, in agreeing with Patrick, will change politics in Massachusetts.

At the rally in Roxbury four days before his resounding election, Patrick followed his declaration about ignoring the experts with a lofty vow. “See, I don’t pretend to be smarter than everybody else,” he said. “I know how to listen well. And I know that a big part of leadership is articulating a vision, developing a plan with you, and then motivating you to deliver on that plan. That is how we built this campaign, but that’s also how we’ll govern.”

Those are very high ideals. Sitting with the governor in the corner office, I asked him about the tension between political pragmatism and idealism. I asked if he agrees that the ideals are evident during the campaign and the pragmatism becomes evident upon taking office.

He looked into the middle distance. “Well I wish it were as simple as that,” he said. “An important objective is not to let your ideals be the casualties of your confrontation with reality. Because, I think that would be a betrayal both of the people who supported me and of my own core.”

But don’t the ideals need to be given shape by practical political skill?

“I take your point,” he said. But did he? He seemed to assume I was saying the loftiness of the campaign needed to be abandoned, as opposed to made real. He may be ready to consign the first year of his term to the past — noting that “your legacy is not based on the first year, for heaven’s sake” — but, meanwhile, the high hopes of the campaign are still very much with him. “Some people say the campaign is the poetry and governing is prose,” he said. “Well the prose should be poetic, too.”

Playing the numbers

Do Patrick’s casino projections add up?

AS A CANDIDATE for governor, Deval Patrick sounded a cautionary note about the perennial calls to bring casino gambling to Massachusetts. While not morally opposed to slot machines or blackjack tables, Patrick said, he was concerned about the social costs of expanded gambling, as well as its possible threat to the Massachusetts Lottery. In April 2006, he told The Boston Globe that he wondered “if the person at the slot machine can afford to be there,” adding that what he’d learned so far made him “uncomfortable with slots in racetracks and casinos in Massachusetts.”

But as governor, Patrick signaled a clear willingness to put the casino question on the table. He said he would initiate a formal process to weigh the pros and cons of the issue, and he established a five-person “Gambling/Gaming Internal Study Group,” chaired by his economic development secretary, Daniel O’Connell, and asked it to gather information to help inform his decision making.

Through the spring, and on through a late summer vacation in the Berkshires, Patrick pondered the casino question. Finally, on September 17, flanked by his lieutenant governor and four cabinet secretaries at a packed State House press conference, Patrick announced his support for three “resort casinos,” laying out a broad set of benefits that he said would flow to the state. Though Patrick later called his proposal “a very modest expansion of gaming” in a television interview, this was no tentative half step. The governor who had expressed reservations about opening the door to casino gambling was charging through it full speed.

Patrick said his plan would create 20,000 permanent jobs and 30,000 construction jobs, and generate more than $2 billion in annual economic activity. And those were all “conservative estimates,” he emphasized in later interviews. What’s more, through taxes on casino gambling revenues, the plan was projected to net at least $400 million a year for state coffers, money that Patrick proposed dividing equally between transportation infrastructure spending and property tax credits for homeowners.

A month later, with his casino bill filed on Beacon Hill, the governor appeared on Jim Braude’s talk show on New England Cable News to promote the plan and its economic benefits. “I’ve done a lot of the homework,” he said. “It’s time for the Legislature to do its homework.”

But in the months since the casino plan was rolled out, the proposal has been dogged by a persistent question: How much homework did the governor really do?

The study group Patrick established was in place for more than eight months, but it conducted no independent analysis of the casino question. Instead, when he finally announced his support for casinos, Patrick unveiled a proposal that closely tracks a plan drawn up by a local researcher known for his strong pro-casino views.

In October, a prominent business-funded watchdog group issued a report claiming that the governor’s plan overstates by at least $100 million the likely net casino revenue to the state. Meanwhile, a closer look at Patrick’s proposal and the assumptions behind it—from the scale of gambling operations the administration says the regional market can support to the claims of job creation and broader economic activity—finds plenty of grounds for healthy skepticism. Because hype comes with casinos as surely as lights, bells, and convenient cocktail service, it is especially important for policymakers to separate fool’s gold from the real stuff.
BLUEPRINT MATERIAL

It’s hard to talk about casinos in Massachusetts without talking about the work of Clyde Barrow, the University of Massachusetts–Dartmouth political scientist whose reports have, for years, argued that the state stands to accrue considerable economic gains from casinos. It’s even more difficult to talk about the particulars of Patrick’s casino proposal without talking about Barrow. That’s because the plan rolled out by the administration mirrors in great detail one prepared by Barrow last March as the casino debate was heating up and Patrick’s study group was busy collecting reports.

Barrow, who directs the Center for Policy Analysis at the Dartmouth campus, submitted a paper to the working group titled, “Maximum Bet: A Preliminary Blueprint for Casino Gaming & Economic Development in Massachusetts.” In it, he calls for “three commercial resort casinos”; so does Patrick. Barrow suggests a 27 percent tax on gross gambling revenues; so does Patrick. Barrow proposes that casinos pay a total of $600 million in fees for licenses that would have to be renewed every 10 years. Patrick’s legislation has similar requirements. And Barrow says that when they are fully operational, the new casinos would “generate over $400 million” in gaming revenues for the state. Patrick? Ditto.

Perhaps most importantly, Patrick generally accepted Barrow’s analysis of the New England gambling market. That analysis assumes that the regional market can support three large gambling palaces in Massachusetts, even as those in Connecticut and elsewhere expand; that the casinos won’t mainly suck up money that would otherwise be spent at local restaurants, hotels, and other businesses; and that Massachusetts can recapture most of the Bay State dollars being wagered in Connecticut and, to a lesser degree, Rhode Island.

If anything, his casino proposal to Patrick’s study group was “highly conservative,” says Barrow. “My purpose was to get people thinking about the issue. It was a baseline for a conversation. This is a debate that tends to get polarized very quickly. I’m on record that there are fiscal and economic benefits that accrue to the state if [casinos are] done right. And the governor’s proposal does it right.”

Given how much Patrick’s legislation borrows from Barrow’s “Blueprint,” such praise isn’t surprising. “Barrow’s numbers withstand a fair degree of scrutiny,” says Stanley McGee, O’Connell’s assistant secretary for policy and planning, who coordinated the casino study group. “To the extent [our proposal] is perceived as mirroring Barrow, it is because the mainstream of what Barrow is proposing is pretty close to what [top casino executives] have come up with.”

Perhaps the most often cited single figure used in the argument to bring casinos to Massachusetts is the claim that Bay State residents leave behind some $900 million each year at Connecticut casinos. That figure derives from research by Barrow that concludes that more than one-third of the patrons at Foxwoods, the Connecticut casino closest to the state’s northern border, hail from Massachusetts. Barrow’s “patron origin analysis” involves surveying at least 1,000 cars each day for a five-day period at the Foxwoods parking lot and recording which states they’re licensed in. Since beginning such surveys in 2004, Barrow has consistently pegged Massachusetts patronage at Foxwoods at around 35 percent.

The Connecticut casinos, not eager to see competition sprout in Massachusetts, certainly have an interest in playing down how much of their business comes from across the border. That said, Foxwoods’s former chief executive, Mickey Brown, claims that when he ran the giant casino in the mid 1990s, their own parking lot surveys, combined with zip code information collected from customers obtaining food vouchers and other analyses, suggested a far lower figure. “We consistently found that about 22 percent of our patron count was from Massachusetts,” says Brown. (Connecticut’s other casino, Mohegan Sun, publicly states that 22 percent of its patronage is from Massachusetts.)

With his support for casinos in Massachusetts well known, Barrow has faced criticism that his research is biased in favor of expanded gambling. Barrow maintains that none
of his research is funded by the casino industry, a claim that may, strictly speaking, be accurate. But his research center has received funding from pro-casino interests, including, in 1999, funding from the Visions Group, a business group then pushing for a casino in Salisbury. In 2006, Barrow’s center received $20,000 from the Rhode Island Building Trades Council, which backed an unsuccessful casino referendum in the Ocean State. The Trades Council had, in turn, received funding from one of the casino industry’s giants, Harrah’s Entertainment.

Despite his vote of confidence in Barrow’s work, even McGee was mindful of the questions that have been raised about Barrow’s reports. In a note attached to the Barrow casino plan in the study group’s documents, McGee wrote that Barrow’s work “is not without some controversy, and many opponents of expanded gaming question the rigor of the economic analysis and the independence of the [Center for Policy Analysis], given its pro-gaming recommendations.”

LIVING LARGE

The Patrick administration’s baseline premise is that as soon as they open, the new casinos will match the gambling capacity and revenues of Connecticut’s Foxwoods Resort and Mohegan Sun. But O’Connell also warns that doing things on a small scale won’t work. “What I heard from industry representatives and various people who study the industry is that to compete effectively [with Connecticut], the full amenities are necessary and you cannot add them incrementally,” he says. “You need comparable facilities that are better located than the competition.”

For this reason, Patrick envisions casinos of an even grander scale than suggested by Barrow. While Barrow calls for the three casinos to have a total of 10,500 slot machines, which are a casino’s major draw and dollar source, Patrick assumes a total of 15,000 slots.

Harrah’s chairman and CEO Gary Loveman was among the major casino executives who testified—along with Patrick and Boston Mayor Tom Menino—at an all-day State House hearing on December 18 that focused on casino revenues. In his testimony, Loveman said that “the Massachusetts casino market is robust” and can support three resort casinos. But even he seems to wonder about the scale of the administration proposal for 5,000 slot machines at each of three casinos. “Very few casinos in the world have that many slot machines,” the former Harvard Business School professor and Massachusetts resident says in an interview. “Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun are the only ones I know. It’s pretty rarified...
Casinos with that many slot machines can be “economically viable,” says Loveman, but not without risk. “The engine starts to falter as all this supply comes on line.”

Richard McGowan, a professor of economics at Boston College and expert on gambling and state lotteries, who met with Patrick’s casino study group, also thinks the governor is thinking too big. “You can’t do three casinos,” he says flatly. “If you build one in Boston, who would want to invest in anything in southeastern Massachusetts? You won’t get the revenue or economic development [envisioned by Patrick] there or in western Massachusetts. I don’t think the market is saturated, but the state can overplay its hand.”

Echoing that view at the State House hearing in December, Las Vegas Sands CEO Sheldon Adelson told reporters that “three [casinos] is too many,” a remark dismissed by O’Connell as positioning for a competitive edge in any licensing scramble.

Not everyone is pessimistic. In contrast to the view of a regional market that could quickly become exhausted by new gambling capacity, Gary Border, Foxwoods’s senior vice president, sees one that could grow because of it. Border says there is the risk of “an arms race,” in which developers sell bigger and bigger facilities with greater and greater promises. “But as these new resort casinos come on line, they tend to create more critical mass,” says Border, who thinks New England could support six casinos.

But even if the Patrick administration’s projections regarding economic activity are solid, changes in any number of variables, such as the appearance of new Connecticut or New Hampshire casinos near the state border, could throw off the assumptions undergirding such numbers. Under federal law, once casino-style gambling is approved here, federally recognized American Indian tribes in Massachusetts could also pursue casino plans independent of the state.

The assumptions built into Patrick’s casino projections could also be thrown off by changes in proposed casino licensing fees, or the proposed tax rate for gambling revenue. Casino lobbyists, for whom Patrick has created a major payday, may well try to make a case for a more industry-friendly bill. Such moves by casino interests will certainly be seen as posturing to sweeten the deal. However, Loveman insists that for any company to make a return on the estimated $1 billion in capital investment required for a resort casino it needs the assurance of more than the 10-year license period proposed by Patrick’s bill. That limited time period, on top of the required initial payment of at least $200 million and annual operating licensing payments of at least $100 million, Loveman says, gives him “great pause” about competing for...
a Massachusetts casino license under the current proposal.

Jeffrey Hartmann, executive vice president and chief operating officer of Mohegan Sun, is also wary of some of Patrick’s terms. “There is always a balance between the economics the state needs and the needs of the investors we must satisfy,” he says. “A lower license fee and a longer [license]

Patrick said the plan is ‘first and foremost a jobs proposal,’ opening slots for 20,000 employees.

period would drive operators to create greater investments, which would create greater economic opportunity for Massachusetts.”

CASINO WORK

There is nothing subtle about the strong union support for the governor’s casino plan. When Patrick and others testified at the December hearing, virtually every seat in the State House’s Gardner Auditorium was filled by members of Boston’s hotel workers Local 26. CASINO + UNION = GOOD JOBS declared their red T-shirts. And in his testimony, Patrick made the reason for such union backing clear: “Our casino proposal is first and foremost a jobs proposal,” he said.

The administration says the three-casino plan will create 20,000 permanent jobs, paying on average $34,000 a year in wages and benefits. Patrick’s team based its jobs number on current employment at the two Connecticut casinos, which have about 22,000 full-time equivalent employees. “We used the real-life experience of Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun to validate some of the specific numbers we were given by industry groups,” says McGee, the economic development assistant secretary.

If Massachusetts could support three casinos whose total operations equal those of Connecticut’s two, Patrick’s 20,000 permanent jobs number may be plausible, says Dartmouth College economist Bruce Sacerdote, co-author of a 2005 Rappaport Institute of Greater Boston report that compared economic data for counties with casinos with those without them. But Patrick’s bill itself suggests a lower jobs target. It requires each licensee to “create at least 5,000 new permanent jobs at the casino, or through casino service providers, over a 5-year period.” Even 15,000 net new jobs would certainly be a positive, especially for those otherwise unable to find work. Indeed, one main reason Patrick is considering a casino in Boston (though his support for casino there has been on and off) is the prospect of jobs for people with relatively limited skills and a dependence on public transportation, says O’Connell. Life sciences is a higher overall economic development priority, he says, but “we would be remiss if we did not have proposals that focus on all strata of educational experience in the Commonwealth.”

If the permanent job projection is at least plausible, the claim of 30,000 construction jobs being created by a sudden casino-building boom is harder to square. Patrick has cited the figure several times. The administration press release announcing the casino proposal claims “tens of thousands” of hardhat jobs. O’Connell suggests there will be 8,000 construction jobs per casino, based on his office’s look at construction job figures for recent casino developments elsewhere.

But even this estimate, which would translate to 24,000 total construction jobs to build three resort casinos, seems optimistic. Consider, for example, construction employment at the biggest structure ever built in New England, the $800 million Boston Convention & Exhibition Center, which opened in 2004. Even at the peak of construction, no more than 3,000 construction workers were on site, according to Massachusetts Convention Center Authority Executive Director James Rooney. Mohegan Sun’s planned $740 million, 1.4 million square-foot expansion, which includes a 1,000-room hotel, additional casino space, and new restaurant and retail facilities, will employ 1,400 construction workers, according to a November 2006 Mohegan Sun press release.

PRIMING THE PUMP

Patrick emphasizes that he views his casino plan as part of an overall strategy for economic development, which includes such efforts as his $1 billion life sciences initiative. He has insisted that the overall economic impact, not simply the revenues the state will realize from casinos, was the main factor behind his decision. This is how he has explained his opposition to licensing racetracks to operate slot machines, which would generate quick revenue for the state but not drive broader economic activity.

Racinos “don’t lead to the level of capital investment he thought would be most positive for the Commonwealth,” O’Connell says of the governor’s thinking. “Our resort casino plan involves a $3 billion capital investment. That’s a lot of jobs and materials you’re buying,” triggering direct and indirect economic activity.

McGowan, the Boston College researcher, isn’t sold on the economic development argument. “I find it amazing that the governor is using the line of the casino industry, which always wants to talk about economic development because it sounds better,” he says. “The industry doesn’t like to talk about revenue, because it doesn’t want the state to view it
as a cash cow. It wants to see itself as a legitimate form of entertain-ment that is also a contributor to economic development.” But any conversation about casinos in Massachusetts, says McGowan, is ultimately about revenue.

Besides the minimum $1 billion capital investment per casino required by Patrick’s bill and the gross gaming revenues, which the administration pegs at a minimum of $2 billion from the three casinos, the administration says casinos will generate millions in additional revenue and economic activity from hotels, restaurants, and other amenities. To economists, however, the key measure of economic activity is net gain, not gross numbers. If a casino draws new people to Massachusetts outside its borders, or if it causes people here to spend money they would not otherwise spend, the casinos are in the economic plus column. But if the money going to casinos would otherwise be spent at other businesses in the area, it does not represent new net economic activity. Fears of such a “substitution effect” are why, for example, the Massachusetts Restaurant Association has come out strongly against the casino plan.

Like much else in the debate over casinos, the extent of any substitution effect is hotly contested. Virtually every major study, however, agrees that such an effect is most pronounced in an area, such as Boston, with a healthy economy. Casinos can stimulate depressed economies, said the National Gambling Impact Study Commission in its 1999 report, but “a significant danger [is] posed by the continuing expansion of legalized gambling into places where the economy is already prospering…Not only are the net benefits in these new areas low, but the benefits to other, more deserving places are diminished, due to the new competition.”

While Patrick has wavered in his comments about locating a casino in Boston, one person whose position has been unambiguous is Menino, who has come out strongly in support of a casino at the Suffolk Downs racetrack in East Boston. Such a facility, however, could compete not just with restaurant and entertainment businesses in the area, but with one of the mayor’s own legacy projects — the South Boston convention center. “I don’t necessarily see a casino venue as a need-to-have for purposes of attracting more events or people to Boston,” says Rooney, the convention center executive director. “And if a new casino is built to compete head-to-head for meetings and conventions, it would fly in the face of a strategy of many years to grow our convention business through the new center, in which we have invested $850 million.”

If Patrick truly wants “this semi-dream of economic development, you don’t put a casino in Boston,” says McGowan, the BC researcher. “A tourist visiting Boston isn’t going to say, ‘I can’t wait to go to a casino.’”

Harrah’s Loveman thinks that talk of the substitution effect is overstated. A new casino would compete with local business, he says, as does “any new entertainment or retail-oriented facility when it arrives in an area. But just look at
major cities that have casinos,” he says. “Sydney, London, Berlin, Paris, Hong Kong—I know of no case where anyone feels there has been a damaging substitution effect.”

**CASH CALF?**

Though the administration carried out no independent analysis of the economics of its casino proposal, McGee says it did some “internal modeling” and has other material that it has not released because “we are still in policy formation.” The thick pile of reports and other information made public, he says, “is just a small part of what we looked at. When there is a hearing, there will be a very robust backup to these numbers. It’s not as if the governor made an ill-informed decision. We knew what we were doing.”

“But the idea that we are going to make available everything that supports this [proposal] is not good policy and good politics,” he says. “If you were talking to people who know this business and they said these numbers are whacked, I’d be concerned.”

He doesn’t exactly use that term, but Michael Widmer, president of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, a business-funded watchdog group, says the governor’s projections that three casinos will net $400 million a year in revenue to the state “are significantly off.” In October, the foundation released its own analysis of Patrick’s casino revenue projections. “It quickly became apparent that the administration had not vetted Barrow’s numbers and simply put forward his conclusions as its own,” says Widmer. “There is much too much at stake to inflate numbers and promised benefits, but our analysis concludes unequivocally that that is what they have done in terms of revenues.”

Among other things, the foundation’s report said Patrick failed to properly consider the potential of market saturation due to new casino capacity coming on line across New England. As for market demand, the administration accepted Barrow’s analysis that New England has $1.5 billion in unmet gaming demand and that Massachusetts gamblers spend $1.1 billion a year gambling in Rhode Island and Connecticut. “Combining these two elements creates a $2.6 billion revenue opportunity for Massachusetts casinos,” said the MTF report. “If the administration is to reach its goal of $2.05 billion [in gross gaming revenues], Massachusetts casinos must capture nearly 80 percent of the estimated $2.6 billion, an enormous task made all the more difficult as it would take five years before Massachusetts casinos become fully operational.”

MTF concluded that nearly one-third of casino revenues would be needed just to compensate the state Lottery for any fall-off in sales that casinos would cause, as required by Patrick’s bill. Additional revenue would be earmarked to pay for programs for problem gamblers, “mitigation” of local public safety needs, and other costs. The report’s bottom
line: Rather than generating $400 million in net revenue to be divided between transportation infrastructure needs and property tax relief, the casino plan would generate roughly $200 to $300 million per year, depending on which assumptions are used. That would mean $100 to $150 million for transportation spending—far short of the $400 million a year for transportation needs that would come from the 11.5 cent gas tax increase proposed last year by a state Transportation Finance Commission on which Widmer served.

The administration dismisses the MTF report as off-base and says it seems to be driven largely by Widmer’s support for an increase in the state’s gas tax, something Patrick has opposed. “That MTF document was, in my opinion, a case for increasing the gas tax,” says O’Connell. But with no detailed revenue analysis of its own, the administration has offered no direct, point-by-point rebuttal of the group’s report.

In the wake of such criticism of its projections, the administration began voicing support for an independent analysis of the casino proposal. In early December, the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce announced that it had hired a consulting firm to conduct “an independent, data-based study of the impact that three resort-style casinos may have on the Commonwealth,” including social and economic implications. The report is due early this year.

A few weeks later, at the December 18 hearing on casino revenues, O’Connell announced that his office would issue a request for proposals in January to conduct “an independent review” of the fiscal and economic projections put forward in the governor’s casino proposal.

BUYER BEWARE

The purpose of the governor’s earlier study group, says O’Connell, was to inform, not shape or direct, Patrick’s casino decision. For that, the governor could also have looked to his secretary of public safety, Kevin Burke, who in 2002 chaired then-Gov. Jane Swift’s Commission to Study the Potential Expansion of Legalized Gaming. While that commission’s 118-page report generally supported the view that there are net economic benefits to the state from casino gambling, it also offered this caution: “Quantifying the economic development potential of expanded gambling is a complex project…and predictions done before development are notoriously inaccurate.”

Though Patrick challenged the Legislature back in October to do its homework on the casino plan, one of the leading players in the consideration of the casino bill will be someone who claims to have already done a lot of home-
work, due diligence that has convinced him of the folly of chasing casino dollars. With the Senate appearing supportive of casinos, all eyes are on the House, where Speaker Sal DiMasi is skeptical—and where Dan Bosley, chairman of the committee that will review the bill, looms as the chamber’s most vociferous opponent of casino gambling.

As much as he has studied the issue over the years, Bosley, a North Adams Democrat who is the House chairman of the economic development committee, says the answer he keeps coming up with is that casinos don’t deliver the economic benefits promised by the industry. “The other side has an easy story to tell,” says Bosley. “People like to gamble. We’re losing money to Connecticut. So let’s have our own casinos.” I’m not anti-gambling, and any state with as much lottery revenue as Massachusetts loses any claim to moral authority. But we’re supposed to be the independent arbiters of public policy, and I’ve been trying for 11 years to figure out where I’m wrong on this thing.”

When his committee takes up the bill, Bosley will no doubt test Patrick’s numbers. Some casino effects, however, are harder to quantify. “Not only is what we’re going to make from casinos always exaggerated, but the costs are never put into the equation,” says Sen. Susan Tucker, an Andover Democrat who says the damage that will be done to families from increases in compulsive gambling makes casinos bad state policy. “How can you consider something as economic development when even the governor agrees that 2 percent [of gambling revenues] must be set aside for the social havoc that will be wrought on the Commonwealth?”

Patrick and Bosley both agree that casinos are far less important to the state’s long-term fortunes than expanding jobs in the knowledge economy. “In terms of importance to the economy, casinos lag behind such things as trying to revamp the life sciences industry,” says Bosley. “But it ranks number one in terms of time consumption, both for us and the governor. It just sucks the oxygen out of matters involving true economic policy.”

Economic claims about casinos should be viewed cautiously, says Thomas Garrett, assistant vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis and author of several papers about the economics of casino gambling. “I’m a little dubious of these grand projections about the effects of casinos on economic growth and revenues to government, especially when the industry hasn’t really been established in the state,” he says. “The effects of these casinos won’t be seen for years, but politicians tend to have short political lives. It’s easier to amplify the benefits now and worry about the costs later.”
As educators focus on the achievement gap, the importance of school integration is up for debate

AS NEW ENGLAND prepared to cheer on the Boston Red Sox starting nine at Fenway Park in late October, another starting nine basked in their own standing “O” a few miles away at Faneuil Hall. The Little Rock Nine hailed from Arkansas. They integrated the all-white Central High School in 1957, three years after a unanimous US Supreme Court declared the “separate but equal” doctrine in public education unconstitutional in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case.

In their quest for educational equity, the six young women and three men braved the worst abuses that whites in the small Southern city could conjure up. At the 50th-anniversary celebration of the civil rights milestone, attended by seven of the nine students, Harvard Law Professor Charles Ogletree Jr. called them “national treasures.” Ernest Green, one of the Little Rock Nine, was more modest. He said simply, “We had a vision about connecting education and opportunity.”

Now a gray-haired managing director with the investment bank Lehman Brothers, Green explained that Central High was all about “more options.” For Green and his peers, pursuing a quality education meant going to a school with qualified teachers, challenging curricula, and up-to-date facilities—all of which were lacking in the segregated schools that blacks attended. That education, in turn, was a gateway to good jobs, homeownership, and other opportunities that previous generations of African-Americans could scarcely fathom.

But a half-century later, the school integration movement has fallen on hard times. Over the past 30 years the Supreme Court has gradually pulled back from its endorsement of desegregation efforts. In its most recent decision, the high court ruled last June that school districts in Seattle and Louisville cannot use race as the sole criterion in voluntary desegregation plans. Many civil rights advocates and educators viewed the decision as a major setback, and it provided a somber backdrop to the Faneuil Hall tribute to the Little Rock Nine. “The Court did everything to overrule *Brown* but say so,”

BY GABRIELLE GURLEY | PHOTOS BY MICHAEL MANNING
said Gov. Deval Patrick, his voice rising with indignation during his remarks at the event. “You can’t tell me that it doesn’t make a difference right here in Massachusetts.”

In the Bay State, the latest attempt to dismantle the state’s remaining voluntary desegregation plans came days after the Supreme Court decision. A multiracial group of plaintiffs in Lynn filed a new challenge in federal court to the city’s 20-year-old voluntary desegregation program, five years after federal courts declared the city’s plan constitutional. There has also been concern that the Supreme Court ruling could imperil Metco, the voluntary busing program that sends black and Latino students from Boston and Springfield to suburban districts, though no formal action has been filed and state officials continue to express confidence that the program could withstand a constitutional challenge. And in December, Milton narrowly escaped a lawsuit over its redistricting plan, which moved some white children to a school that was mostly minority.

The changing attitudes alarm those who continue to view school integration as a way to improve both educational opportunity and race relations. “Though it was often imperfectly implemented and sometimes poorly designed, school integration was, on average, a successful policy, linked to a period of social mobility and declining gaps in achievement and school completion and improved attitudes and understanding among the races,” wrote Gary Orfield, co-director of UCLA’s Civil Rights Project, in a report last year on school desegregation in America.

While some educators lament the turn away from school integration, others say the goal today is high achievement for minority children regardless of the racial makeup in classrooms. Such an approach may be driven by a recognition that desegregation plans are losing their legal footing—as well as the fact that desegregation efforts no longer appear feasible within many large urban districts, where minority students make up an overwhelming share of the public school
population. But the shift is also a product of the new education focus on standards and accountability, and the idea that predominantly minority schools can achieve at high levels.

This line of thinking lies behind efforts in Boston and other cities that have so far created a small cadre of urban schools “of excellence.” With minority-majority enrollments and a high percentage of students from lower-income families, such schools have defied stereotypes about the achievement levels that are possible in such settings.

As the battles to preserve Metco and other remaining voluntary desegregation programs continue, providing opportunity for black and Latino students may depend more on replicating urban education models that have demonstrated success in closing the achievement gap.

In sharp contrast to the days of the Little Rock Nine, the integration model today—in the face of declining judicial support, a focus on state and federal standards, and demographic shifts—seems to operate only at the margins as a vehicle for improving achievement among children of color.

RAISING THE STAKES

The Brown decision didn’t mean that doors to educational opportunity for African-Americans opened instantly. A second Supreme Court ruling, a year after the initial 1954 decision, counseled “all deliberate speed” in desegregating schools but instead ushered in a decade’s worth of foot-dragging. Not until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 put federal power behind desegregation with the threat of lawsuits and funding cuts did school officials and community leaders across the country begin to face up to the issue.

Massachusetts plunged into the fray the following year by passing the nation’s first state law designed to confront public school segregation. The Racial Imbalance Act came about after state Education Commissioner Owen Kiernan released a report documenting the harmful effects of segregation both on the educational process and on society overall.

The Racial Imbalance Act, in its own words, “encourag[es] all school committees to adopt as educational objectives the promotion of racial balance and the correction of existing racial imbalance in the public schools.” It points to the re-drawing or altering of school assignment boundaries and the selection of new school sites as opportunities to prevent or eliminate racial imbalance.
“A lot of what it accomplished was to raise the stakes and to get people to deal seriously with the fact that education had to be made adequate for minority students,” says Charles Glenn, the interim dean at Boston University’s School of Education and the self-described “Mr. Busing” who crafted the desegregation plans in Boston, Lynn, and other districts.

Boston’s resistance to addressing school segregation led to Judge W. Arthur Garrity’s historic 1974 order that sent buses rolling between white and black schools—and unleashed a period of violence and racial strife. In the 40 years since the state law was enacted, however, other districts like Lynn have quietly adopted desegregation plans, mostly voluntarily and without incident.

The racial imbalance law survived a state high court challenge shortly after its passage, and a 1973 attempt by legislators to repeal the law led to a veto by Gov. Frank Sargent. But the renewed legal challenge to the Lynn plan casts some doubt over the law’s future. The Seattle and Louisville cases have also put pressure on other school officials in Massachusetts, forcing more than 20 districts with plans approved under the racial imbalance law to review and tweak them to withstand challenges based on the ruling.

In December 2006, Richard Cole walked out of the US Supreme Court after hearing the arguments in the Seattle and Louisville cases, convinced that the justices would completely scrap voluntary desegregation plans for schools. The former Massachusetts assistant attorney general, who defended the Lynn desegregation plan during its first court challenge, had filed a friend-of-the-court brief on behalf of the Commonwealth, arguing that regardless of what happened to Seattle and Louisville, other districts like Lynn had desegregation plans with different histories that were essential to the needs of their students.

For Cole, Justice Anthony Kennedy’s concurring opinion was therefore some consolation in an otherwise disheartening ruling. Kennedy maintained that school districts had “compelling interests” in achieving diversity and avoiding racial isolation. Programs “narrowly tailored” to achieve those goals were permissible as long as they did not resort to “sweeping race-based classifications,” he wrote. Kennedy also rejected the idea that “the Constitution requires school districts to ignore the de facto resegregation of schools.”

Cole reads Kennedy’s qualifier this way: First, if school districts want to specifically use race in making assignments to promote integration, they must show that other options won’t work. Second, officials have to demonstrate why a plan matters to their district.

Confidence that the Lynn plan will stand up in court is running high. Unlike Boston, the Lynn schools have retained a sizeable population of white students, with 42 percent of all students Latino, 30 percent white, 13 percent African-American, and 10 percent Asian. The city’s voluntary desegregation plan allows a child to attend his or her neighborhood school regardless of race. When a parent requests a transfer to a different school, however, such moves are approved only as long as they do not upset the racial balance in the current or destination school. Lynn school officials declined to comment for this article, citing the pending litigation.

When US District Court Judge Nancy Gertner ruled in favor of Lynn’s program in 2003, she found that it required neither race-based assignments nor forced busing, and that it permitted neighborhood schools and transfers. “It was clear that the Lynn Plan played an important role in creating a thriving, diverse, and integrated urban school system,” she wrote, “where race relations are positive and ethnic tensions are absent.” She also took note of recent gains in test scores and the “uniformly” high attendance rates in Lynn schools under the plan.

The US Supreme Court has twice declined to hear challenges to the Lynn plan. Cole believes that the high court turned down the Lynn case in 2005, when the Seattle and Louisville cases were in the pipeline, because there was consensus that the plan had the strongest record on education, race relations, and other areas. Chester Darling, the attorney who is pursuing the new lawsuit against Lynn in the wake of the Seattle and Louisville ruling, maintains that the plan is unconstitutional. “What we are talking about here is a constitutional transgression,” says Darling. “It’s benign in a sense of what they are trying to do with diversity, but it’s injuring individual people on the basis of their color.”

In contrast to Boston, Lynn and other districts have quietly adopted desegregation plans.

SIDESTEPPING INTEGRATION

Integration has lost momentum outside of the courts as well. More than two decades ago, the quality of US public education overall began to come in for harsh criticism. The 1983 federal report A Nation at Risk exposed an “unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament” that was leading to a “rising tide of mediocrity” in US schools. In 1993, Massachusetts responded to the calls to improve schools by passing the
Education Reform Act, which demanded quantum leaps in student achievement, including the MCAS graduation requirement. In return, the state committed hundreds of millions of dollars in new spending, much of it directed to poorer districts.

“Education reform was about how to deliver a higher quality education to the greatest number of children in the Commonwealth,” says Paul Reville, chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Education and an architect of the reform law. He says school integration wasn’t a primary strategy. “Ed reform, at some certain level, was race-blind,” says Reville. While that has put the standards movement at odds with the decades-long push for school integration, the push for accountability in public schools has, in large part, been driven by a recognition of the achievement gap that has black and Latino students lagging substantially behind their white and Asian peers.

“I think most people have come to believe that you have got to do something around what happens in the classroom in order to affect quality, not just focus on who is walking in the door,” says Jim Peyser, who served as chairman of state Board of Education from 1999 to 2006.

That’s a view that rankles educators like Robert Peterkin, who heads the Urban Superintendents Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. “Those folks who are solely relying on the standards movement are delusional if they think that students are going to catch up without some attention to who those students are,” he says. Because of the inferior resources often found in largely minority schools and districts, Peterkin says, there is still a synergy between integration and standards. “It seems to me you can’t separate them because as we find pockets of poor students and students of color, it becomes an education issue, it becomes a resource issue.”

Whether integrating students actually affects educational outcomes remains a contentious subject. “While there has been rigorous academic debate around that question, I
think the evidence suggests, on the whole, no, there aren’t academic benefits,” says Abigail Thernstrom, a former member of the state Board of Education and current vice chair of the US Commission on Civil Rights. However, a report last year from the National Academy of Education found that “African-American student achievement is enhanced by less segregated settings,” though more so in earlier grades than in later grades. It also found that white students were not harmed academically by desegregation or by other changes in the racial makeup of schools. (Curiously, given the intense spotlight on the issue, there have been no comprehensive studies of Metco students’ academic achievement.)

The inequity that predominantly minority districts start with is “very, very large, so closing achievement gaps is very difficult,” says Josh Bogin, director of Springfield’s magnet school program. “I don’t think, candidly, we know enough about the extent to which racial or ethnic integration is a substantial factor by itself in closing the achievement gap.”

When it comes to the push for school integration, the reality on the ground has also changed the calculus. White middle-class families fled the Boston schools, some of them years before the busing crisis, and black middle-class parents have followed. That means there are increasing numbers of families of color seeking out smaller communities like Framingham, Holbrook, and Marlborough. But it has also become harder to imagine how schools could be broadly integrated in many of the state’s larger urban districts and the suburbs that ring them, which remain largely segregated by race.

In Boston, more than 85 percent of public school students belong to minority groups. In Lawrence, the school population is nearly 90 percent Latino. Meanwhile, Metco only makes a tiny dent in its racially isolated suburban partner schools. With an enrollment of 3,300 students in 37 towns and a waiting list of 15,000 more, the $20 million program doesn’t come close to meeting demand. When suburban communities call to find out how they can participate, Metco head Jean McGuire tells them funds for expansion simply aren’t available.

So for many black and Latino students in the state, integrated schools are not an option. But some education leaders argue that integration is not the appropriate remedy in any case. Jeff Howard, founder and president of the Efficacy Institute, a Waltham–based nonprofit dedicated to education reform, says schools have to demonstrate that they can get a high standard of attainment with black and brown kids wherever they are. “I wholeheartedly disagree with people who think that we should be doing [integration] so that we can get better achievement with kids,” says Howard.

Indeed, there are high-performing, predominantly minority schools in Massachusetts and across the country that are demonstrating that they can close the achievement gap. The Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, a middle school whose students are all African-American or Latino, posted the highest percentage of students in the state (94 percent) scoring advanced or proficient on the 2007 eighth-grade MCAS math test. With a dedicated teaching staff, a school culture that stresses success and achievement, and the latitude to operate free of the strictures of the city’s district schools, Roxbury Prep outpaced students in tony suburbs.
like Weston and Wellesley. Yet even officials at that school admit that things could be different.

“I fully believe that even in a place like Boston, that’s very segregated still in terms of its neighborhoods, that we wouldn’t see the amount of white flight that we are seeing today if the schools in the city were performing at an incredibly high level,” says Roxbury Prep co-director Joshua Phillips.

**BEETTER TOGETHER**

In November, students in Melanie Konstandakis’s Arlington High School class on “Race, Society, and Identity” invited peers of different racial and ethnic backgrounds to a pre-Thanksgiving breakfast discussion about race in the high school and in the wider town, a participant in the Metco program. After the breakfast, the 20 or so seniors, about a quarter of them minority students, critiqued the event.

Some groups dove into questions like, “Have you ever been a minority? How does it make you feel?” Others shut down conversation completely, leaving their peer leaders stymied. Disturbed by the pattern of all-white-and-Asian honors classes at the school, with African-American and Latino students bunched in standard-level courses, Konstandakis decided to offer the multi-level class. Her goal? Getting kids who live the daily reality of race to communicate with others who rarely give it a thought. “I want these kids in the same room,” she says. “I want them to talk about this topic.”

Some educators argue that this “democratic element”—
Some educators argue that bringing together different races has intrinsic educational value.

brining together students of different racial and ethnic background and fostering positive interactions—has intrinsic educational value. In *Brown*, the justices saw education as “a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values.” That idea is a key to Metco, according to Kahris McLaughlin, president of the Metco board of directors. “You can’t teach people about how to live together unless you actually give them that real opportunity,” she says.

Karen Horner, mother of a Lynn middle-schooler and two high school graduates, agrees. When school officials said her youngest son couldn’t attend the school she preferred because the move would alter the racial balance of school he would leave, Horner, who grew up in Boston and was a Metco student herself, had “no problem” with that decision. She believes that integrated schools offer a host of social benefits that segregated schools do not. “To me, the plan works,” says Horner.

One of the reasons Lynn pursued its voluntary desegregation plan was to address concerns about racial tension and violence. Students of different backgrounds who navigate diverse environments learn to interact more productively, which helps undermine stereotyped messages and racial group cliques, according to Cole, the former assistant attorney general. As a result, he says, violence in the Lynn schools has plummeted as the atmosphere for learning, especially in the middle and high schools, has improved. “You cannot learn if schools are not safe and if you have race relations that are polarized,” says Cole.

But US Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, part of the majority in last year’s decision against the Seattle and Louisville programs, concluded that “no democratic element can support the integration interest.” And Darling, the lawyer handling the new challenge to Lynn’s voluntary desegregation plan, scoffs at the idea that putting diverse groups of kids together has educational benefits in a multiracial democracy. “If somebody said that to me, I’d
suggest that they hug a couple of more trees and eat a couple of more granola bars and graze on some more bean sprouts,” he says.

**INTEGRATION: THE NEXT GENERATION**
Some school districts have already steered away from race-based assignments. Boston abandoned the use of race in 2000. To avoid a court test of its desegregation plan, Cambridge switched to using socioeconomic status as the primary factor in assigning students.

In many conversations about educational equity, class has replaced race. But plans like those in Cambridge, which rely on income, can also unintentionally resegregate students and stir up as much resistance from middle-class parents as plans based on race do. The Boston Globe reported last July that about 60 percent of Cambridge’s 12 elementary schools are now racially imbalanced, compared with less than 40 percent in 2001-2002, before the adoption of the socioeconomic criteria.

That leaves expanded school choice programs as a potential vehicle for school integration. The best pilot and charter schools can attract a heterogeneous student body, but many are as segregated as their traditional counterparts. Magnet schools, which are open to all children throughout a district, can also attract a multiracial group of children. Springfield, the only school district in the state still under a Supreme Judicial Court desegregation order, received a fifth consecutive, three-year magnet school grant in September 2007, totaling $3.1 million, for five new schools under a US Department of Education magnet program designed to eliminate, reduce, or prevent minority-group isolation in districts with high numbers of minority students. “Magnet schools have quite a strong record as an integration vehicle,” says Harvard’s Peterkin.

Relying on a hodgepodge of traditional district schools, pilots, charters, and magnets isn’t going to solve the inte-
integration riddle, however. And there is little appetite for an inter-district choice system that could integrate schools on a regional basis, the one move that could dramatically reshape the racial composition of schools. “I never heard a serious conversation about that in Massachusetts,” says Reville, the state Board of Education chairman. Most of the districts encircling large majority-minority cities like Boston and Lawrence do not accept nondistrict transfer students.

Reville suggests that some communities are at capacity and would be hard-pressed to accept more students. And the others? “I guess you have to ask if it is coincidence that most of the communities around most of the major cities with high concentrations of minorities choose not to [accept nondistrict students],” Reville says. “Or does that pattern reflect some bias?”

REDEFINING EQUITY

“In nearly every state, the question of mixed and separate schools was a matter of much debate and strong feeling,” wrote W.E.B. Du Bois, the African-American social scientist and Great Barrington native, more than 70 years ago. Conditions have improved on the road from Little Rock to Lynn, but DuBois’s observation remains true.

De jure school segregation has been swept into the dust-bin of history. Nevertheless, parent Karen Horner uses the same words to describe what the Lynn plan means to her today that Ernest Green used to describe what integration of Little Rock’s Central High School meant 50 years ago: Education and opportunity. For them, school integration continues to be the way to link those two strands in a multiracial democracy. Others voice hope that remaining integration programs will survive. “I’m confident that Lynn and Metco are programs that are not only viable, but exemplary, and will withstand what I expect to be persistent and long-term challenges to things that are doing a good job,” says Harvard’s Ogletree.

However, with the energy sapped out of the integration crusade for all but a few select programs, most students in Massachusetts won’t have the opportunity to attend racially mixed schools. For some, like the Efficacy Institute’s Jeff Howard, that development is of little consequence, as they strive to create schools that will stimulate academic excellence closer to home. “My dream is the situation where in 10 years in this country, we have so many virtually all-black and or all-Latino schools that are achieving at the very highest levels of proficiency that white folks are demanding integration,” he says.
TURNING DOWN THE HEAT

North Shore Task Force member Bob Hogan (left) and fellow Lynn police detective Oren Wright make the rounds in Lynn in December.
THUNDERSTORMS HAVE RAGED over the Tobin Bridge, pelting the narrow streets and closely packed tenements of Chelsea, driving everyone indoors. It’s a warm night in July 2007, and Chelsea police detective Scott Conley and FBI Special Agent Darwin Suelen are cruising the 1.6 square miles of the city. A head taller than his colleague, Conley refers to the cheerful, energetic Suelen as a “secret kung fu master” and teases him relentlessly about his enthusiastic approach to the job. Conley and Suelen are members of the North Shore Gang Task Force, a multi-jurisdictional group made up of federal, state, and local law enforcement officers charged with “identifying, infiltrating, disrupting, and destroying” violent gangs across the region—from East Boston, Lynn, and Chelsea up to Lawrence and Haverhill.

Suelen was a police officer in Des Plaines, Illinois, for six years before joining the FBI and coming east in 2005, so he’s light on the criminal history of the Boston area. Conley, who was raised in Chelsea and has been a street cop for 13 years, provides him with a running commentary of past mayhem as he rolls up and down the deserted streets: Heller’s Café, on Second Street, is where bookies and gangsters “paid up” every week to Whitey Bulger; the alley adjoining Division Street is where small-time mobster Teddy Deegan was murdered in 1965, leading to the wrongful convictions of Joseph Salvati, Peter Limone, Henry Tameleo and Louis Grieco; and the eerily lit King Arthur’s Lounge and Motel on Beacham Street is where 52-year-old reputed mobster Vincent J. Bordonaro was beaten to death in 1982.

In Greater Boston, the gangs of yore wore scally caps and car coats and roosted at the bottom of Winter Hill. Or they slicked back their hair, accoutered themselves with gold pinkie rings and Cadillacs, and spent the daylight hours sipping espresso on Hanover Street in the North End. Today, not only in Boston, but in Chelsea, Lynn, Revere, Lawrence, and elsewhere, street thugs from the Latin Kings, MS-13, La Familia, NETA, Tiny Rascals, the Crips, the Bloods, and other gangs are committing acts of violence, selling drugs, and recruiting kids as young as age 12 and 13 on the street and via MySpace.com and other websites—beating, blessing, and tattooing these youth into some highly organized criminal groups.

Law enforcement officials and social service providers say that besides the lure of ill-gotten

BY JAY ATKINSON
PHOTOS BY MARK OSTOW
gain from their criminal activities, young people from dysfunctional families join gangs because they seek identity, recognition, and a peculiarly tribal form of brotherhood. There is also the street-level protection from the violent whims of rival gangs.

Because of its sheer volume of gang and gun activity, Boston may rightly get the most law enforcement (and media) attention these days. But there is also a stubborn gang problem facing smaller cities. Right now, the North Shore Gang Task Force is concentrating on two urban centers. The “north group,” based in Methuen, focuses primarily on Lawrence, which has seen a decrease in violent crime. (Its highest recent crime rate was in 1997, before the Task Force was formed.) Haverhill and Lowell, on the other hand, have seen an increase in gang-related criminal activity over the last few years, says FBI Special Agent John Woudenberg, supervisor of the task force.

The “south group” is based in Lynn, which has attracted rival gangs such as the Crips, the Bloods, and the Deuce Boys. The task force also operates in the connected cities of Revere, Everett, and Chelsea, where gang members ply their trade in drugs and guns. Overall, violent crime has been down, or holding steady, in these communities. But gang activity accounts for an overwhelming share of the violence that still occurs, making its suppression a top law enforcement priority. In Lynn, for example, 63 of 73 firearm offenses in 2006 (the last year for which complete data were available) were gang-related.

“Addressing gang-related violence is the number one priority of our branch of the FBI,” says Thomas Larned, 45, assistant special agent in charge of the Boston FBI office’s criminal division. “In some communities, and portions of others, gangs have taken over.” The goal of the FBI-sponsored gang task forces, says Larned, is “giving the streets back to those communities.”

Out on the streets, Hogan plays the dual role of inquisitor and mentor.
“C’mon. I saw you, bro. What ‘set’ are you in?”

“I’m a Blood.” The kid quickly shakes his head. “I was a Blood. I ain’t any more.”

“You just had some red beads and an old red bandanna lying around and nothing else to wear, is that it?” Conley asks. “Now, you are a Blood, or you used to be a Blood, which is it? How old are you?”

“Fourteen.”

From the passenger side, Agent Suelen lets out a low whistle. “Fourteen? I thought he was 20, 21.”

“Where you been?” asks Conley. “I haven’t seen you around. I see your brother but I haven’t seen you.”

The boy, whose name is Michael, says he was convicted on a firearms charge when he was 11, after holding a gun for another Blood. Both his brothers, who are Latin Kings, have been in prison for gun charges, Conley explains later. After serving time in “juvey,” Michael has been attending the Eagleton School in Great Barrington, a residential treatment center for boys and young men with severe behavioral issues. He lives with a foster family and is in Chelsea only for a weekend visit.

“Just remember, I gave you a break today. I knew you had weed on you and I drove right by, ” says Conley. “How was that school? Did you like it?”

After some more prompting, Michael smiles in embarrassment and says he liked the school all right and wants to be an engineer. Although he’s old enough for high school, Michael will enter the seventh grade this fall, if he even makes it to school.

Conley keeps his eyes steady on the boy and says, “You see very few Bloods smoking dope at the big architectural firms in Boston.” But then the former US Army Ranger’s manner softens and he motions the boy closer. “You seem like a smart kid. If you ever need anything, call the police station and ask for Scott. I am the only Scott working there. You can call whenever you want, it doesn’t matter. I can help you out of something and maybe you can help me. All right?”
After another long moment the boy says, “All right,” and Conley drives off. Even on such a “slow” night, the two investigators have been busy with radio calls and a traffic stop that involved a reckless and rude driver with out-of-state plates. On the way down the hill, Conley says, “We’ve been out here for, like, 18 minutes and we’ve had a gang member assaulted with a bat in Bellingham Square, been flipped off by a Texan, which is just unacceptable, and ‘FIO’ed’ a 14-year-old Blood. That’s Chelsea for ya.”

**POINT AND CLICK**

The conversation with Michael is a prime example of the FIO, or field interview and observation, which is one of the primary tools of gang interdiction. In this sort of encounter, the local cops, who are usually known to the young gang members, play the dual role of inquisitor and mentor, doling out equal parts advice and admonition as they grill their subjects on who they are running with, what they’ve been doing, and what new, dangerous undercurrents are flowing along the streets. Since many of these kids have no adult guidance, the cops and agents are perceived by some of the gang members as surrogate fathers as much as authority figures.

Still, Conley and Suelen have learned to be wary, even when FIO’ing someone as apparently harmless as Michael. In the world of gangs and guns, today’s pot smoking 14-year-old Blood is tomorrow’s Pasquale Luna.

A few weeks earlier, during an immigration rally in Chelsea, Luna, a Latin King with the gang name tattooed on his hand and two previous gun charges on his rap sheet, was spotted in front of Roca, an agency that works with troubled young people. Luna, 22, had an active warrant for his arrest and when police hailed him, he ran away, leading Scott Conley and other police officers on a foot chase.

As he zooms along Division Street, Conley says, “As soon as he crosses the street right here—I’m chasing him, I’m the first one—I see he has a gun in his hand. He takes this turn, and I figure he’s going to dump it. I’ve known Pasquale for five, six, seven years. And so I’m yelling, ‘Pasquale, drop the gun.’ It’s daylight, three o’clock. I’m thinking as he’s going around the corner, ‘He’s going to drop it and be standing there with his hands up.’ We turn the corner, and he’s not dumping it. It’s a rally, people everywhere. An immigration rally in Chelsea is quite popular. It’s not like an immigration rally in Lexington.”

Conley stops the pickup truck and points to the corner. “I run up to here, right up to that NO PARKING sign. [My partner] Dan Delaney is back maybe about 20 feet. There’s people everywhere, there’s kids, there’s music playing. Luna takes this turn right here, the gun is in his left hand; he stops and turns around and points it right at my head—and fires.”

Conley stops the truck and peers through the windshield, nodding. “That’s what saved my life: the laws of
physics and geometry. He points at my head but as he's coming up, he points it and then fires at me, and his momentum takes the shot [across the alley] into the opposite wall over here and a little piece of fragment goes into Danny's stomach. A little piece of the round. Either that, or Danny fell on a bumblebee and got stung.” Within seconds, Conley and his lieutenant, Dave Bachelor, and Officer Raoul Goncalves, an Everett cop who was also working the rally, caught up to Luna. They tackled and arrested him without firing a shot.

According to Conley, a short while later, in his jail cell, Luna said, “Scott, I’m crazy. I don’t know what I’m doing. I love you guys. I’d never wanna hurt you guys.”

“But you shot at us.”

“I’m crazy. I don’t know what I’m fucking doing out there. I black out,” Luna said. “Are your guys coming?”

“Who are my guys?”

“The FBI guys.”

“Yeah, they’re coming.”

“Then I’m fucking, huh?”

“Yeah, you’re in trouble.”

“Am I in trouble for shooting at you, or for having the gun?”

“A little bit of both.”

“Are you going to tell them that I shot at you?”

“Yeah, I think they know, brother. I think they got the word.”

OFFERING A THIRD CHOICE
As part of its nationwide Safe Streets Initiative, the FBI currently spearheads four gang task forces in the region; besides the North Shore, they are in the New Bedford, Providence, and Springfield areas. The Safe Streets budget includes overtime pay for the local police officers who work on the task force; leased vehicles; sophisticated surveillance equipment; and compatible radios.

Currently, the North Shore group is comprised of FBI agents, plainclothes state troopers, deputy sheriffs from Middlesex and Essex counties, and police detectives from Chelsea, Lynn, Lawrence, Haverhill, and Everett, as well as an Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) agent who is assigned part-time. Intelligence collected by the unit is shared with other gang task forces across the region, including those operated by the state police, Boston police, ATF, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and other law enforcement agencies.

“There are no gangs that aren’t involved in drugs and...
guns,” says FBI Special Agent Mark Karangekis, who now co-
ordinates the task force in Springfield, but got his start on
the North Shore. The FBI is involved in gang interdiction be-
cause gangs “are decaying our cities. It’s eating them up from
within. You see kids taking their colors at age 9, 10 and 11
these days,” Karangekis says.

Karangekis, who grew up in Wethersfield,
Connecticut, and was the son of the local po-
lice chief, became the de facto coordinator of
the North Shore Gang Task Force and helped
make several cases against gangs in Lawrence.
Before that, gang members had two options:
“Be part of the gang, or be dead,” says
Karangekis. The task force provided “a third
option for these kids, who were going to be put
away for life, or be killed on the street, sometimes by their
own gangs,” he says.

This third option meant developing informants from
among members of the gang. Karangekis reasoned with these
kids, many of whom were known to local law enforcement,
by saying “you trust officer so-and-so and he trusts me, and
if you help us, we can help you start a new life.” Under the
right circumstances, informants are provided with a cash
stipend and assistance in relocating to another community.

After the Latin Kings
moved into Lawrence, the
task force moved to ‘cut
the head off the snake.’

A short, stocky fellow, Karangekis was clear about the
nature of the relationship. “You’re not my friend,” he would
say. “You are a tool.”

Lawrence became the proving ground. With help from
gang informants and their own undercover officers,
Operation Gang Bust culminated on January 23, 2000,
when 11 Latin Gangsta Disciples (who were locked in a feud
with the Immortal Outlaws) were arrested. All 11 were con-
victed on narcotics charges in federal court, and several
were also found guilty on firearms charges. Due to prior
criminal records, the average sentence handed down to the
defendants was 18 years, according to Karangekis. “Geez, that
worked, guys,” said Karangekis. “Do we have another in-
formant in the Immortal Outlaws?”

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In 2002, the Latin Kings moved into the gang “power vacuum” in Lawrence, so the task force took down “the significant leadership and cut the head off the snake,” says Karangekis. In that operation, 22 Latin King members were arrested and tried in federal court. They were all convicted, with their sentences ranging between 12 and 24 years, according to Karangekis. Federal prosecutions are superior by virtue of “taking the convicted members of the gang and spreading them across the country in federal prisons,” says Karangekis.

Moving these inmates away from their power base is the key to disrupting the way they do business. “If you arrest 20 gang members in Lynn and move them into the Middleton jail, guess what? You just moved the gang to Middleton,” says Woudenberg, the task force supervisor.

LOOKING TO MAKE ‘FRIENDS’

With his ruddy complexion, dark hair, and cleft chin, Lynn police detective and North Shore Task Force member Bob Hogan looks more like a vintage Irish sportsman than a computer geek. But before a recent shift, the 42-year-old Hogan, who’s been a cop for 13 years, spends an hour in his office on the second floor of the Lynn PD, clicking through MySpace pages featuring local gang members.

Three years ago, an informant sent Hogan a link to a local gang member’s MySpace page that led to the gang member’s “friends” pages, and their friends’ pages, and on and on. Now Hogan logs on at least once a week to search for photos of gang members wearing their colors, making gang signs, displaying weapons, as well as other incriminating evidence. “I don’t think the [gang] kids know I can do this, that I can save a page,” says Hogan, pointing to a gang member’s MySpace site and his motto. (“Get Money and Fucc the Police.”)

Hogan brings the website to the attention of another detective in an adjoining cubicle. “If he’s out on parole and he’s communicating with another gang member on there, that’s a [parole] violation,” says the other detective, who has also called up the site.

Hogan logs off his computer and, at dusk, meets Woudenberg and a plainclothes state trooper, who works undercover and whom CommonWealth agreed not to identify, for one of their frequent patrols through Lynn’s grittiest neighborhoods. In a white Crown Victoria, the classic unmarked cop car model, the task force members are fairly conspicuous, but tonight’s mission is deterrence and information gathering, not surveillance or “takedowns,” the mass
arrest of gang members that are the culmination of long, painstaking investigations.

At the apex of Bellair Street in what was once a fashionable neighborhood, Hogan stops the car to talk to a beefy white kid named Matt, who’s wearing a white T-shirt that hangs to his knees and baggy jeans.

“You healing?” asks Hogan through the open window. “Doing all right?”

Matt is associated with the Crips, as well as a homegrown gang known as the Baby Mafia. A few months ago, he was involved in a fight with several members of a rival gang at the corner of Washington and Laighton Streets, where he was shot twice with a .357 magnum. He lifts up his shirt and pant leg revealing two ugly, braided scars where the doctors removed the slugs. Eyewitnesses said that Matt had the .357 in his hand, was swarmed by his enemies and shot with his own gun.

“He stuck to his guns, so to speak, and said he doesn’t know who did it,” says Hogan, rolling up his window and driving away. “He got memory loss.”

“Some of these kids are near death with bullet wounds, but we can’t get them to cooperate,” says the state trooper.

Late in the evening, with the state trooper and Woudenberg busy elsewhere, Hogan stops on Olive Street to talk with several members of Avenue King Crips, who are draped on a parked car in front of a bullet-ridden, dilapidated house. Hogan is dressed in dark green fatigue shorts, a polo shirt, and sneakers, and the teenagers, one Asian girl about 14 years old and five boys between 15 and 20, greet the Lynn detective as if he were a playground instructor.

“What’s up with MySpace?” asks Hogan, who has just seen new online photographs of some of these kids. “What are you guys doing with that? Recruiting?”


Shawn is 19, a bright, amiable teen who is looking to

Some of these kids are near death with their bullet wounds, but we can’t get them to cooperate.”
Hogan for a little bit of jailhouse information on Blinky, the boss of the Avenue King Crips who’s been indicted by a Suffolk County grand jury for stabbing three men in a single night. Looking away with a smile, Shawn insists that MySpace is a harmless pursuit.

“We go on to check for girls,” he says, but adds, “My nig-gas got locked up just because they’re saying they’re strapped on MySpace,” he says, invoking street lingo for carrying a gun. “The FBI is all over MySpace, nigga.”

A small, triangular island divides the entrance to Olive Street, and while Hogan is talking with the group a car with tinted windows screeches around the corner, gunning past on the wrong side of the island. “Didn’t you see that car doin’ an illegal turn?” asks an Asian kid who’s been standing on the sidewalk flashing gang signs and laughing at Hogan.

“Call the police,” Hogan says.

The Asian kid laughs again. “You are the police.”


“Damn, you’re a stalker,” the Asian kid says.

Hogan gazes up at the house. A group of small children are eyeing him from a second floor balcony and holes from a drive-by shooting that took place during the previous month dot the façade. “How many people live here?” the detective asks.

“Twenty-six,” says the Asian girl.

“Really 35, but a lot are in jail,” says Shawn. He denies being an Avenue King Crip, despite having “AKC” tattooed across the knuckles on his left hand, and another gang tattoo, happy and sad faces side by side, on his forearm.

Shawn is talking tough, but with other, senior members of AKC on ice or on the run, he and his pint-sized posse are vulnerable to the violent inclinations of rival gangs. Beneath all the banter, Hogan is angling for the name of the gang member who’s calling all the shots now that Blinky’s in jail. What Shawn doesn’t seem to realize is that Hogan is offering him a way out of “the life”: If he’ll provide the task force with the right sort of information, they’ll try to help save him from a fate like Blinky’s, or worse. Such epiphanies, sadly, come far too rarely among the young people Hogan deals with.

Shawn and Hogan go on to joke about a recent basketball game between the gang kids and the cops, staged as part of a truce among warring factions. The gang bangers prevailed that night, Shawn reminds Hogan, and the detective laughs and says that might be true, but in the end, the cops are going to win out.

“That’s how y’all’ll win,” says Shawn, ruefully. “You got straps.”

Jay Atkinson is the author, most recently, of City in Amber and Legends of Winter Hill. He teaches writing at Salem State College and lives in Methuen.
Ioannis Miaoulis swears he has nothing against dinosaurs or grasshoppers. That’s a good thing, since he presides over Boston’s Museum of Science, which attracts more than 1.6 million visitors each year, many of them interested in all manner of creatures, both living and extinct. There is still plenty at the museum to satisfy such tastes, but Miaoulis is looking to put the natural world in its place.

He says science museums have been out of balance, with so much attention given to the natural world that we lose sight of the man-made phenomena that dominate our everyday lives. He’s out to inject more of that side into the museum’s offerings: A Star Wars–themed exhibit two years ago explained robotics, and the recent “CSI” exhibit explored the technology behind crime-scene sleuthing.

That shift in the exhibit halls is hardly surprising, considering that Miaoulis arrived at the museum in 2003 after 10 years as dean of the engineering school at Tufts University. The bigger challenge he is taking on is to get engineering and technology studies into US schools, which he says have also focused too much of their science curriculum on subjects that are disconnected from the world immediately around us. “Folks spend a month teaching how volcanoes work and they don’t teach at all in most schools how a car works,” he says. “How often do the kids find themselves in a volcano?”

Miaoulis, who came to Massachusetts from Greece in 1980 to attend Tufts, is credited with pushing the state in 2001 to become the first in the country to incorporate engineering and technology education into its K-12 curriculum frameworks. Starting with the class of 2010, Massachusetts students must pass one of four science MCAS exams, with technology and engineering one of the test options. The museum is playing a leading role nationally in science education through its National Center for Technological Literacy, launched in 2004 with $32 million in grants to develop technology-related exhibits for science museums and to develop engineering curriculum materials for schools.

Miaoulis calls engineering “the connector” that ties math and science to real-world challenges around us, as he works to increase technological literacy, and, through it, to ensure a steady pipeline of future engineers. At stake, he says, is nothing less than the country’s standing as a leader in technological innovation.

I spoke with Miaoulis in his museum office overlooking the Charles River. What follows is an edited transcript of our discussion.

—MICHAEL JONAS
that the connector of math, science, and innovation is engineering. You use math and science, fundamental concepts, and also use your imagination and your creativity skills through engineering to create innovation. And that piece is missing from the curriculum.

CW: At Tufts you became alarmed that it wasn’t enough to be working with people who’d come into the engineering pipeline, but that the problem was upstream from there, you might say, and that’s how you turned to this focus to the K-12 system.

MIAOULIS: Our goal, in introducing engineering to [K-12] schools, was to focus on getting states to change their learning standards. And after quite a bit of effort, we managed to have Massachusetts change its learning standards. Massachusetts was the first state in the country to not only include engineering in its learning standards but also testing. I was still at Tufts, and I thought, now we’re going to conquer the world. If one state does it, then everybody’s going to do it. But we needed partners. So as I was frustrated trying to figure out how to get there, the museum called and asked if I was interested in becoming a candidate for the presidency. I quickly realized that this could be an amazing platform to take this initiative to the national level. We went from having one state considering engineering before I started at the museum to now working with 39 states throughout the country. Now we have hundreds of partners, universities, other science centers, and engineering collaboratives throughout the country.

CW: Right. Yet at least as of very recently, Massachusetts was still alone in having science testing as part of its K-12 statewide frameworks.

MIAOULIS: Well, No Childhood Left Behind may change that, because as science becomes one of the requirements, other states will start pouring resources into it. It’s unfortunate, but it’s a fact: Resources go to specific subjects where testing occurs.

CW: You also started the National Center for Technological Literacy, which has been further boosted by a $20 million gift from the Gordon Foundation. So it’s not enough just to spread the idea of engineering education. We really kind of are starting from square one in terms of curriculum, textbooks, and so forth.

MIAOULIS: The National Center focuses on three areas. We advocate for including engineering as a new discipline into the curricula. I travel and speak to key influential groups—to see the National Governors Association or to see the educational leadership of a particular state or at
the national level in meetings in DC. The second area is curriculum. We searched internationally, identified and purchased all the engineering curriculum we could find from K-12, and we have it here in our library. We hired a group of experts that analyzed the curriculum and correlated it with the engineering standards of Massachusetts and national technology standards. Our findings are on the Web, and it’s free access for anyone to go and see. At the elementary school level, we've created a series of books featuring children from different parts of the world, describing a challenge or an opportunity and how an engineer solved the problem. The little girl from India talks about the problem in her town, which was quality of drinking water and how an environmental engineer built a filtration system. And children can then engage in activity to build an actual filtration system. We use engineering activities to support the math curriculum at the middle school level, and at the high school level we developed stories about real engineers along with content that satisfies 100 percent of the engineering standards. The third thing we do is professional development—anything from straight teacher workshops to train-the-trainer workshops, since we have partners throughout the country.

CW: For all the traction you’ve had in Massachusetts, the results of the recent MCAS science exam were regarded as pretty disappointing. More than a quarter of the students failed, and in urban districts it was often more than half. We have our work cut out for us, I guess.

MIAOULIS: I don’t see it as a problem now. Most of the emphasis has been put into math and reading, and now that science is tested, we also realize that there is a problem with science. So I’m sure that because of that, there will be resources and excitement now toward science and technology. I’m hoping that these results will generate a mini-Sputnik for Massachusetts, something that will alert people to pay attention. But my message is to pay attention to math and science, but also to what [kind of] science and maybe change it a bit to be more relevant and connect what kids learn with innovation.

CW: In that vein, you seem to talk almost dismissively at times about the traditional focus of museums and schools on dinosaurs and volcanoes and so forth.

MIAOULIS: Well, I love grasshoppers and brontosaurus-es. I think it’s wonderful for a museum to present the nat-
ural world, but I also don’t think it’s right to ignore the majority of the world around us, which is the human-made world. So when I speak, I usually focus on the new stuff, not the stuff that it’s expected that the Museum of Science is going to have. We should have a strong natural-science presence. But if you want to move even to the center, you have to push a lot harder in one direction.

CW: Have you encountered resistance to that change in focus, either here at the museum from its supporters or in the science museum community nationally?

MIAOULIS: Of course, of course. Change is very hard. And believe it or not, the biggest opponents when I started this effort in the mid ‘90s were the science teachers. The biggest argument was, “We don’t have time to teach what we teach now.” I said, well, look at what you’re teaching and how relevant is it to kids’ lives. Folks spend a month teaching how volcanoes work, and they don’t teach at all in most schools how a car works. How often do the kids find themselves in a volcano compared to a car?

CW: In terms of the museum’s focus, you recently had the “Body Worlds” exhibit that was hugely popular, featuring preserved cadavers people could see in close-up detail. Last year, you had the Star Wars–themed exhibit.

MIAOULIS: I loved the Star Wars exhibit, because it really showcased our new direction at the museum, taking a popular venue like Star Wars that would attract the audience, and then creating interactive engineering activities like robotics. So people would come and would engage in learning, sort of, without really figuring out they were learning.

CW: It’s like you slipped spinach into cookies.

MIAOULIS: I think things here taste better than spinach, but it’s a much more engaging way to educate than the dry way that people are used to.

CW: Is there a danger of going so far toward appealing to popular culture icons that you really lose the conveying of important information or learning?

MIAOULIS: There is danger if you don’t pay attention. Our first priority is education. But educating in a fun way. We just have to make sure the fun doesn’t overtake the learning, because then we’re not a museum of science, we’re an...
amusement park, and that we’re not going to be.

CW: You have a missionary passion about your work. You’re traveling extensively. What is at stake for the US if we don’t get this right or if we don’t see the urgency of this issue around engineering and technology education?

MIAOULIS: What has worried me over the last two years is that I have seen even more interest from foreign countries in this new engineering initiative than what I have seen from within the United States. In many cases it has been easier to work with countries like Malaysia than to work with Massachusetts school districts. If we don’t create excitement in the area of technology, things are going to fall apart. Some things we can outsource, which we’re already doing, but there are some things that you cannot outsource, like national defense. Other things you cannot outsource: basic services, your water supply, your electricity, you cannot outsource that. And other more subtle things, like innovation. The reason I came to this country is because it’s a very innovative place, and a lot of new things come out of here. In many ways, the United States defines the innovation of tomorrow. Most things are [still] designed here. Some of them are built in India and then brought back here, but the design and the innovation has happened in the United States. But that’s sliding, because there are a lot of brilliant people in India that can design. The other problem we have is that about 70 percent of engineers in the United States have a relative who’s an engineer. So it’s almost a prerequisite that you have a relative [who is an engineer] to become an engineer. That’s something we’re trying to change by exposing all kids to these topics.

CW: You often talk about the fact that not only in the developing world, but even in Europe, engineers are regarded differently.

MIAOULIS: Oh, yes. I came from Greece. In most countries in Europe, engineers are on the top of the respect list. Our educational system here came primarily from England, and if you look at the values in the traditional English educational system, typically the less practical the stuff you do, the more respected you are. You have the theoretical physicists on top and then experimental physics, so for some reason thinking and doing abstract things is valued more than doing things that run our lives, and that is a unique sort of Anglo-American value system that does not exist in other countries.

CW: So we sort of need a cultural revolution of a certain kind?

MIAOULIS: Yes. That’s why I’m on the road all the time.
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Going global

Massachusetts needs a new strategy for improving its position in international trade  BY MARC R. PACHECO

YOU WOULD THINK that Massachusetts, a leader in many cutting-edge economic sectors, would have a comprehensive overall strategy to ensure that it has a competitive edge in the global economy. Unfortunately, the Commonwealth does not have such a plan. As a result, we are beginning to fall behind other states in the race to secure our piece of the global economy.

The Senate Post Audit and Oversight Committee recently examined this issue and developed recommendations to bolster the Commonwealth’s position in an increasingly globalized world. The committee’s report, Getting in the Game: Increasing Massachusetts’s Presence in a Globalized World, calls for the creation of a Global Competitiveness Advisory Board composed of business and academic leaders, as well as policymakers, who would develop a comprehensive plan for increasing the Commonwealth’s global competitiveness in various sectors.

We must develop innovative strategies, use our resources (which include tremendous political capital and our leaders in Congress), and brand Massachusetts as a leader in foreign markets. In order to accomplish this goal, we must develop a plan to enhance our international trade agenda.

Under the Weld-Cellucci and Cellucci-Swift administrations, there was a plan for Massachusetts that prioritized international trade and Massachusetts’s rank in the global economy. Former Gov. Mitt Romney’s administration neglected this important piece of the economic policy agenda.

Massachusetts is maintaining or surpassing its performance on certain economic indicators. If running alone in this global race, we would appear to be in good shape. For instance, the total dollar value of the Commonwealth’s exports have increased substantially over the past few years. But Massachusetts is not alone in this race. We are competing with not only every other state, but with every other country in the world, for our piece of the global economy.

Massachusetts cannot be satisfied with simply seeing the total dollar value of its exports increase every year while it lags behind the competition. States that had exported less than the Commonwealth are now exporting more. While Massachussets exported more, in terms of total dollar value, than Pennsylvania from 1999 through 2004, Pennsylvania now exports $2 billion more than Massachusetts. From 1999 to 2006, Massachusetts’s rank among states in the total dollar value of exports fell from ninth to 11th place. From 2004 to 2006, our rank among states in terms of exports as a percentage of gross state product fell from 14th to 20th.

Pennsylvania has surpassed Massachusetts because it has created more opportunities in the international market, capitalized on those opportunities, and made a greater investment in international trade. In 2006 Pennsylvania’s budget allotted $20.7 million for international trade promotion, including export assistance and establishing trade offices across the world. In 2006, Massachusetts’s budget allocated less than $1 million for similar purposes.

Massachusetts’s lack of investment in international trade policy is reflected in the state’s number of overseas trade offices and the frequency of trade missions taken by state leaders. Over the course of the 1990s, the Commonwealth had trade offices in 13 overseas locations. That number has been reduced to four locations: China, Brazil, Germany, and Mexico. Meanwhile, Gov. Patrick’s recent trade mission to China was the first such governor-led trip since 2000.
In order to get Massachusetts back in the game, the Senate report, which was hailed by Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Daniel O’Connell as being “in complete alignment with the priorities of the Patrick/Murray administration,” recommends an increase in the number of governor-led trade missions.

The trade mission to China, in which the governor was accompanied by business executives, academic leaders, and top policymakers, is an example of the aggressive approach necessary for Massachusetts to develop much-needed partnerships overseas and promote the state’s higher education programs, life sciences resources, and clean energy sector.

Trade missions have in the past been the target of criticism from those who view such trips as wasteful, but they help improve the Commonwealth’s brand on the global stage and connect Massachusetts companies with foreign buyers. For example, during his recent trip, Gov. Patrick secured an agreement between the Massachusetts Medical Device Industry Council (MassMEDIC) and the Chinese Association for Medical Device Industry to promote economic partnerships. Trade missions are essential for increasing Massachusetts’s global image and brand.

The importance of “branding” Massachusetts should not be underestimated. People view states in the same way consumers view a product based on its brand. Trade missions give officials the opportunity to brand Massachusetts and promote our businesses, products, and services, which translates into increased trade and partnership agreements. The current process of globalization forces a state to strengthen its brand and, in doing so, increase tourism, exports and foreign direct investment.

Gov. Patrick’s plan to pump $1 billion into the life sciences sector will help to further the growth of an already expanding industry here in Massachusetts. A comprehensive trade strategy will help to connect foreign buyers to our products and show the world our commitment to innovative economic sectors, including life sciences, clean energy, and renewable energy sources. The trade mission to China is a good first step as part of a larger strategy that should embrace markets across the world.

The Senate report also recommends an increase in the
number of reverse trade missions, in which foreign leaders travel to Massachusetts in order to strengthen ties, exchange innovative ideas, and forge new partnerships with policymakers and business leaders in the Commonwealth.

The markets in India and China represent enormous opportunities. However, former Harvard president Lawrence Summers, now a professor of economics there, rightly points out that Boston is one of the farthest US cities from the Pacific and is one of the closest major US cities to Europe. Summers recommends that Massachusetts work to make itself an economic gateway to Europe.

We must also focus on attracting more foreign students to study at the renowned higher education institutions in Massachusetts. Research shows that even as a world-class leader in higher education, Massachusetts has been unable to maintain its competitiveness in attracting foreign students. In recent years, the number of foreign students who chose to study in Massachusetts declined by 2,000 students, or approximately 7 percent. This decrease represents an estimated $63 million loss of tuition, fees, and living expenses from foreign students and their families.

However, the true economic impact of a robust foreign student population is much greater than just their direct spending. Attracting foreign students to Massachusetts’s colleges and universities helps to advance the pace of innovation and to build positive and meaningful relationships between Massachusetts and countries around the world. According to top educational leaders, attracting foreign students to the United States has become much more difficult due to the war in Iraq. As a result, it is important that Massachusetts aggressively markets itself to foreign countries as a leading, and welcoming, center for higher education.

Globalization has presented Massachusetts with increased competition from around the world, but a global economy also presents us with the opportunity to create new partnerships. It’s time we start opening those doors, instead of closing them. Gov. Patrick’s trade mission to China was a valuable first step.

Enhancing the Commonwealth’s competitiveness cannot be done without the combined efforts of both the public and private sectors. The Commonwealth can no longer afford to sit on the sidelines. It is time to get back in the game.

Marc R. Pacheco is chairman of the Senate Committee on Post Audit and Oversight.
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What are the 10 new regions of American politics? Find out at Beyond Red & Blue, a new blog from MassINC and CommonWealth magazine that updates our popular analysis of presidential politics from a kaleidoscopic perspective. But keep visiting for a lot more, including original maps and analyses of demographic, economic, political, and cultural trends in Massachusetts and across the United States.

Park benchmarks

Boston’s Esplanade can serve as a template for evaluating public spaces throughout the Commonwealth

By Albert Lafarge

The State Department of Conservation and Recreation recently announced that it will defer filing environmental reports on the rebuilding of Storrow Drive, with the likely result that repairs to the section near the Charles River Esplanade will not begin before 2011. Perhaps there is an opportunity in this delay. What if we were to take a close look at this beloved strip of open space, examine how it is being used, and consider how it might be improved? If we can come up with the right questions, we can generate some useful data to inform our choices in the coming years, not just on the Charles River but also at similar sites across the state.

Many people living near the Esplanade have voiced opposition to the various plans to fix Storrow, saying that the park must not sacrifice trees and green space to accommodate an upgraded roadway. (See “On District Matters, a Patrick Ally Turns Adversary,” CW, Fall 2007.) But the Esplanade belongs to all of us, and its fate should not be determined solely by its neighbors. And who is to say that change is necessarily for the worse? After all, the Esplanade came about in the first place as compensation for the building of Storrow Drive. Maybe this new wave of construction is not a mere nuisance, but instead a chance to tweak the park in ways that will make it an even more attractive amenity.

For example, let’s pay close attention to the beloved trees that might be sacrificed in the Storrow Drive repair. Do the park’s users walk near them? Or do they serve more as a visual benefit to passing motorists? Are there simply too many of them? (There was a “yes” to that question in 2005, when some cherry trees were relocated because they blocked views of the lagoon.) Before we jump to conclusions, we should have a close look at the park. We might be surprised at what we find.

Ask the Right Questions

Several key elements of successful urban spaces were described by William H. Whyte in his book *City: Rediscovering the Center* (1988), which is being republished by the University of Pennsylvania Press in a 20th-anniversary edition later this year. Among the most crucial of these elements are seating, sunlight, water, and shelter from the wind. These may sound obvious, but they’re often missed by urban planners. Whyte figured out ways to measure them—and, more importantly, to gather data on how much the public actually takes advantage of these amenities. In some cases, all that he and his researchers needed was a camera and some graph paper.

Seating. The Esplanade has many places to sit, including benches and sections of grass. But should there be more seating—perhaps to encourage people to stay longer, or to make the park more inviting for the elderly or disabled? A map that shows where people currently stop to rest, and for how long, would help answer these questions.

One place that has terrific seating is Jamaica Pond, in Boston’s Jamaica Plain neighborhood. The path around the pond is lined with old-fashioned park benches, and people use them, even if they came for a brisk walk or a jog. Recently I was walking there with my mother and we were surprised by a sudden rainstorm; luckily we were near the bandstand, a simple shelter with seats and a pleasant view in any weather.

“People sit where there are places to sit,” observed Whyte in his jocular spirit of advocacy for pedestrians. He favored movable chairs, which allow people a feeling of control over exactly where they sit. But movable chairs are not widely used in Boston, although they once enlivened the parklet in front of the Boston Five Cents Savings Bank (now the Borders bookstore) at the corner of Washington and School streets. “The impulse to move chairs, whether only six or eight inches, is very strong,” said Whyte. “Even where there is no functional reason for it, the exercise of choice is satisfying.”

Of course, movable seats may not be practical in green spaces, and in heavily traveled spots, people may be too busy moving to and fro to stop and sit. But the movable chairs on Summer Street...
in front of Filene’s Basement were good for a meeting spot, or a place to have a quick snack, and they should be part of the renovation plans for that block.

FOOD. “If you want to seed a place with activity, put out food,” observed Whyte, stating another truism that is too often overlooked by planners. There’s nary a roasted chestnut to be found on the Esplanade; in fact, food is in paltry supply throughout Olmsted’s vaunted Emerald Necklace. A survey of park users would help us to discover whether there is a need that is going unmet.

If a café or restaurant seems too complicated for the Esplanade, there are probably food vendors who would gladly set up their carts—if only they had a little encouragement from the powers that be. Whyte’s observations in his pioneering Street Life Project in the 1970s led him to offer the following advice, which could be profitably applied to many of Boston’s open spaces, including the Esplanade, a quarter of a century later: “People are told that food vending is bad for downtown business, bad for traffic, bad for them and their health. But people do not believe this. They like eating out-of-doors. They like the choices. They like the prices. They prefer a hot dog and a soda they can afford to a fuller lunch they cannot. So they buy. The vendors are providing what the established order is not.”

Boston’s Post Office Square offered a shining example of food vending that works. A branch of the Milk Street Café was a terrific little business that helped make the pocket park one of Boston’s—even the world’s—best urban spaces. (The branch closed at the end of last year, but a new eatery is planned for the spot.) You could get a cup of coffee, or a bowl of soup and sandwich, or just run in to beg a napkin if you brought along a bag lunch. It was easy and informal, inviting you to stay a while.

The same goes for water fountains. Are there water fountains anywhere around? If not, why not? If so, do they work? One of the most popular features of Jamaica Pond is the big water fountain right between the boathouse and the bandstand. It’s a hit. Why aren’t there more of those around Boston?

EVENTS. The Boston Pops is, of course, a huge draw to the Esplanade, and the Fourth of July fireworks over the Charles River Basin rank among the biggest and most festive public gatherings in the city (not counting the Red Sox’s triumphal parades). But the Hatch Shell is put to only sporadic use. On most summer days it sits empty and even a little forlorn. Do people congregate there nevertheless, as if waiting for something to happen?

If more Hatch Shell events are not feasible, there might be room for smaller-scale entertainment in various spots where people can linger for a moment, as with the street performances you see now and then at Quincy Market. The heart and soul of a lively urban space is the ebb and
flow of people, hour by hour, day by day, season by season. And while the big events have the virtue of drawing people who might not otherwise visit the Esplanade, the serendipitous pleasure of ambling past a mime or a magician or a small outdoor children’s theater can enhance the experience of a summer stroll.

“Density. “What attracts people most, it would seem,” wrote Whyte, “is other people.” Density is one area where merely asking park users for their preferences might not yield adequate data—because they might not be fully aware of their own surroundings. Whyte’s study of New York City’s urban plazas confirmed this “self-congestion” paradox: “The two places people cite as the most pleasing, least crowded in New York—Paley Park and Greenacre Park—are by far and away the most heavily used per square foot. This is immensely encouraging, for it demonstrates how great is the carrying capacity of urban space, given a sensitive design.” (Italics added.) You can say the same about Post Office Square, or Jamaica Pond, or the Esplanade on a busy day. They feel like places you can escape to, even while thousands of other people are doing the same thing.

But you can’t discover the ideal density of a public space by asking people to guess what it would be. We need hard data on how many people the Esplanade can accommodate while still being a pleasant spot to rest.

A CALL FOR DATA
If we take a close look at the Esplanade and examine current patterns of movement and use (taking note of how we actually behave, as opposed to how we assume we behave), we’ll learn a few things that will help us focus on smart ways to accommodate its users. If part of the Esplanade is going to get torn up in the process of the Storrow Drive repair work, and we’ll have to put it back together anyway, we might as well improve it in the process, if possible. And if the work needs to be done, we should put our energy into figuring out what users can get in return for the disturbance that will result from construction. What we don’t ask for, we won’t get.

Of course, all this speculation rests on the assumption that Boston wants more use of its public spaces. The overarching question is whether we want Boston and other Massachusetts cities to be big, messy, and vibrant (in short, urban) or civilized, orderly, and underused (that is, provincial).

Boston has a well-deserved reputation as one of America’s most walkable cities, and it boasts some of the best urban parks and plazas in the world. Certainly few elected officials would publicly call for less use of these urban open spaces, but underuse of space may still be a result of their policies. To the extent that voters tolerate or encourage these policies, we’re getting the city we deserve.

We may have the city we deserve, but we can still create the city we want. It’s up to us to muster the data, even if it means upsetting long-held assumptions of what a public park should look like.

Albert LaFarge is the editor of The Essential William H. Whyte (Fordham University Press, 2000).
PROOF THAT AN EMPLOYER’S ACTIONS CAN SPEAK VOLUMES

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The money pit

Stuck with 19th-century management techniques, the construction industry is outlandishly unproductive BY CHARLES EUCHNER

Residents of Massachusetts do not need to be reminded just how expensive construction can be. Now practically as famous as the Freedom Trail or the Red Sox, the Big Dig has come to represent everything good and bad about the Bay State. Once estimated to cost $2.2 billion, the tunnel and highway project cost more than $15 billion by the time it opened—and it almost immediately revealed terrible construction flaws, like the roof panels that fell and killed a Jamaica Plain woman in July 2006.

The Big Dig is just the biggest and baddest example of cost overruns and inadequate workmanship. Everything seems to cost too much to build. Sports stadiums, museums, government offices, affordable housing, market housing, commuter trains, bus shelters—you name it, and the chances are it cost lots more to build than originally budgeted.

The problem is systemic. Productivity in the non-agricultural sector has more than doubled from 1964 to 2003, but it has actually declined in the construction industry. A 10 percent increase in construction productivity would instantly boost the GDP by $123 billion; that single-year sum, compounded annually at 3 percent for 30 years, would produce $273 billion—perhaps enough to save the Social Security system. Boomers, pay attention.

The usual explanation for the industry’s sluggishness is that housing and other structures get built on land, a finite and immovable resource. It’s true that we can only build on one Manhattan Island, and building costs more in coastal cities like New York, Boston, and San Francisco. But projects are completed late and over budget everywhere. Why?

A prominent housing developer in Boston used to tell me that construction is so costly because “every piece of dirt is different.” Every project requires lengthy negotiations involving hordes of lawyers and bankers, bondsman and activists, and government officials of all stripes. Once everyone agrees on plans, new rounds of jostling begin. Any player can hobble the whole process with a trivial dispute. In effect, each project must start from scratch, with no business templates or standard procedures to work from.

Builders and policymakers respond to this state of affairs in two ways. Most accept it as the cost of doing business and try to be as clever as possible to get projects through the pipeline. Others, and I count myself among this crowd, complain that building codes and local zoning statutes create an absurd obstacle course that imposes unnecessary costs. The only way to ease the construction process is to strip away the contradictory, redundant, and absurd regulations and let builders be builders.

But a third perspective comes from an attorney who has spent much time in the absurd labyrinth. Barry LePatner is a New York lawyer specializing in construction, and he’s seen every aspect of the industry. In Broken Buildings, Busted Budgets, published in October by the University of Chicago Press, he shows how the whole outdated business works—how project bidders lowball their costs knowing they will make profits with change orders, how architects and builders pad budgets to cover cost overruns, how project adjustments hold up a whole line of building partners, and how as little of one-third of a construction worker’s time is spent actually working.

Doing better is a matter of some urgency. In the next generation, the US will spend $25 trillion to build homes, schools, hospitals, arenas, colleges, factories, warehouses, and public works facilities. In 2030, almost 60 percent of the nation’s building stock—427 billion square feet—will have been built since 2000.

The construction industry, LePatner points out,
has stagnated because of a basic paradox of capitalism. According to Econ 101 texts, markets work best when many producers compete for customers. The lower the entry barriers, the more firms, competition, innovation, and cost-cutting. A dozen groceries or clothiers in a community are more responsive to consumers than is one.

But the construction industry defies this basic Smithian truth. With so many players in the construction industry, huge amounts of time and money get wasted coordinating the efforts of architects, draftsmen, lawyers, bankers, investors, builders, and public officials. Rather than working together under one roof, like the manufacturers of cars or appliances, the producers of buildings and public works operate apart from each other.

Interestingly, that’s how things once worked in other industries. In 1876, for example, the Winchester Repeating Arms Company brought together a dozen contractors—each of which hired their own subcontractors—to manufacture guns. “The inside contracting system produced many fine weapons, but productivity lagged over time because of high internal coordination and control costs,” LePatner writes. “For example, contractors deliberately hid productivity improvements, or limited productivity to begin with, so that Winchester could not cut its piece rate.” Not until World War I did Winchester buy out its subcontractors and bring the whole production process under strict corporate control.

The answer for construction, LePatner writes, is the same as it was for gun manufacturing and countless other industries: vertical integration. Only when the construction industry brings together disparate processes under one roof will it be able to produce efficiently. In other words, everyone has to become part of the same process. Construction needs a handful of megafirms to squash the little guys and impose some order. That’s when we will get the wonders of real competition—a battle of companies with real capacity.

Right now, construction is anything but consolidated. In February 2007, 7.65 million workers were employed in the industry. A dozen firms employed 1,000 or more people. Fewer than 1,000 firms employed more than 250 people. Over 90 percent of all contractors employed fewer
than 20 people. Close to 2 million people in the business were self-employed.

None of the biggest American firms (like Skyline, Centex, Toll Brothers, and Fleetwood) operate all over the country. Toll Brothers is the leader, with projects in 18 states. Only Centex is traded on the New York Stock Exchange. Habitat for Humanity, an operation of volunteers, builds more units of housing than all but 16 construction companies—an inspiring fact for do-gooders, but a damning one for the industry as a whole.

It’s not uncommon for 50 or more firms to participate in big projects such as sports stadiums and college campuses. The whole process resembles a perverse, and costly, version of the children’s game of telephone. With so many actors to coordinate, construction projects waste vast amounts of time waiting for signals and communicating basic instructions. Like the military, construction can be a “hurry-up-and-wait” business; a 2005 article in the Journal of Construction Engineering and Management (“Quantifying Levels of Wasted Time in Construction with Meta-Analysis”) surveyed the available data and concluded that workers spent only about half of their time on construction sites involved in actual work.

Without vertical integration, construction companies cannot coordinate the many diverse activities of building. Contractors follow their own idiosyncratic approaches to building. They use different computer systems, hiring procedures, budgeting methods, purchasing practices. Because they all speak different languages and answer to different bosses, they never work closely together. LePatner calls for a major restructuring of the industry, with more large-scale, vertically integrated companies that can coordinate everything from marketing to design, from permitting to construction. Construction will not become efficient, he says, until every phase of projects get coordinated under one roof.

The problem is not just a disjointed production process, but also a lack of management expertise. The construction industry has simply not developed the class of middle managers that other industries take for granted. Why would management superstars work in construction when they’re lucky to have a few hundred people working under them, with little real means of controlling the process? Why not work for megafirms like Coca-Cola or Johnson & Johnson?

Lack of scale aggravates other problems, too. Without scale, the private sector doesn’t have the resources or incentive to invest in research and development—which means that builders follow the same routines, generation after generation. The industry also has a negligible impact on training architects, engineers, and builders. As a result, these professions act like separate guilds, without any ability to speak to each other out in the real world.
ONE MORE THING. Ultimately, productivity depends on good and timely information. When everyone on a project plays by different sets of rules, it’s hard to gather and crunch numbers. By contrast, LePlatner points to the gonzo architect Frank Gehry as the management model for the construction industry.

When Gehry completed the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, in 1997, the titanium-skinned structure immediately attracted global attention for its unorthodox design. The bulging panels of metal embodied a post-modern ideal of chaos and dynamism. Vaguely resembling a ship, the building captured the sunlight and fit into the rugged context of the port city. The museum might be the most original artistic statement of an architect in a generation. And it prompted MIT to hire Gehry to design and build the $280 million Stata Center, which houses computer science and engineering projects. Like the Bilbao museum, the Stata Center looks like a pile of shiny, misshapen blocks that ooze and melt into each other. Gehry has likened the structure to “a party of drunken robots.”

The mad appearance of Gehry’s projects disguises the hyperrational process that he uses to build them. In fact, his most enduring influence might be found in the management of his larger-than-life projects. Beginning with the Guggenheim Museum, Gehry has used three-dimensional computer software (known as CAITA) to develop plans that specify the size and curves of building pieces down to millimeters. This software not only documents each piece of the structure (in Bilbao, there were 7 billion of them), but also shows instantly how every piece affects all the others. Changes to the 3-D imaging also automatically produce changes to the databases for materials and budgets.

That software has helped Gehry build his masterpieces on time and on budget, a rarity for construction of all kinds. Jobs as simple as bathroom renovations and as complex as major campuses and public works almost always run over budget. (Reached by telephone, LePlatner says precise numbers are hard to come by because clients are often embarrassed by the final cost of a project and “want to hide it.”) Overruns are so common in the $1.23 trillion

Job estimates seem about as rational as voodoo.
construction industry that estimates seem about as rational and scientific as voodoo spells.

Unlike most architects and builders, Gehry enjoys significant autonomy on his projects. He’s a master of his art who creates unique structures, and he gets complete control. But rather than justifying inefficiency as the price of genius, Gehry has shown that even the most complicated projects can be managed efficiently. CATIA connects everyone into a vast system, coordinating every decision with unheard-of precision and quickness, and Gehry estimates that the software reduces the number of change orders by at least half.

Of course, sophisticated management cannot solve every problem. In November, MIT sued Gehry for defects in the Stata Center’s drainage system. The project’s construction company alleges that Gehry refused to make changes that would have prevented the problems. As good as Gehry’s management system might be, his independence and complex design demand virtually perfect management and oversight. Even with CATIA, Gehry was probably too clever and independent for his own good. Even with great data systems, the builder needs to pay attention to danger signs.

For many people, databases and number-crunching evoke dread because they remove the “human element” from ancient professions. The dread extends far beyond the construction industry. For years, Boston and other city governments have resisted adopting CitiStat and other database management systems. The fear of losing control is understandable, especially in the political world of folklore and cronyism. But the public deserves strong, consistent, informed management. Anything less constitutes malpractice.

In the next generation, such data systems should become standard operating procedure for the construction industry. At the same time, the construction industry is sure to see a major shakeout. Firms will get bigger and projects more streamlined. The question is whether that shakeout will be big enough to transform the construction industry—and how policymakers respond to the bigger, bolder firms. Long dominated by small builders, state and local boards have been suspicious of anything they consider “foreign.” States and localities must find ways to welcome big builders rather than obstruct their paths.

LaPatner does policymakers a great service by directing our attention inside the black box of the construction industry. As he shows, the housing crisis and other problems in the construction industry stem not just from a lack of public investment or too many rules, but the very structure of the industry. 

Charles Euchner, a New Haven writer, was the executive director of the Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston at Harvard University from 2000 to 2004.
MUSHY-MIDDLE POLITICAL columnists often despair over the “blame game” that has supposedly poisoned American politics. And when a questionable use of taxpayer money appears on the front page of the Boston Herald, the parties caught red-handed often complain about nickel-and-dime stories getting so much attention when there are so many larger political issues to worry about. Both of these attitudes betray disrespect for the democratic process, which requires citizens to assign blame on occasion, and also gives them the right to decide which issues to be concerned about. Civil discourse has its place, but a raw sense of anger or disgust with the people in power is a perfectly legitimate attitude to take into the voting booth.

There is nothing wrong with writing a book full of anger and disgust either, and Jon Keller’s The Bluest State (published last fall by St. Martin’s Press) could have been a bracing look at what he calls the “insular and exclusionary” political culture of Massachusetts. Instead, Keller goes overboard, essentially accusing elitist “boomer liberals” of turning Massachusetts into the Worst Place on Earth. (Not that overeducated, exclusionary elitists don’t have a lot to answer for. I refer you to John Silber’s recently published Architecture of the Absurd, a witty and concise takedown of modern building design.)

“The Democrats from Ted Kennedy on down who’ve had nearly total control of the state for three decades talk a big game about their vision of a better deal for the masses,” Keller writes. “But their abysmal track record tells a different tale.” The Massachusetts that tourists don’t see, he writes later, “is a place where the poor lack hope and live in Appalachia-like squalor, where even middle-class workers with salaries well above the national median struggle to afford inferior housing, hold jobs that barely subsidize survival, and wait in vain for meaningful help from the state government.”

Even Mitt Romney isn’t that harsh on the Bay State. But I’m not sure what the point of Keller’s vivid description is. If you replace his knock of “state government” with “federal government” in that sentence, Keller would sound like any liberal Democrat during the Bush administration. Elsewhere in the book, Keller ridicules the “generous Massachusetts welfare system,” so I don’t think his plea for “meaningful help” from government refers to more spending on social programs. Perhaps the state could help middle-class workers by paying for them to move elsewhere? But Keller doesn’t mention any states, or countries, that have handled things better over the past few decades. You won’t find a sentence like “Why can’t we be more like Mississippi?” in this book.

MASSACHUSETTS DOES HAVE plenty of things to get angry about, even if Keller is being simplistic by blaming all of them on “boomers” (will everything be fine once the Baby Boom generation dies off?) and Democrats (haven’t Republican governors and presidents had anything to do with the current state of affairs?). Some of his finger-pointing at individuals is more fun to read. There’s the school superintendent of Lawrence getting a customized SUV courtesy of the taxpayers, and there’s US Sen. John Kerry’s embarrassingly low level of charitable contributions, at least as claimed on his tax forms. Keller’s most damning chapter may be on “not in my backyard” attitudes, and in particular the efforts of some Cambridge residents to keep a private kindergarten catering to black students from opening in their neighborhood. But he again limits his criticism to liberal elites, failing to acknowledge that NIMBYism is rampant all over Massachusetts, including more conservative and working-class towns. It’s fun to mock the residents of Brattle Street, but we can’t put all of the state’s new schools, houses, and prisons there.
In other places, Keller doesn’t let contradiction get in the way of a good rant. Like many pundits, he criticizes politicians for being insincere and calculating but also for being stupidly candid. Thus, Kerry as presidential candidate is mocked both for being a phony (an “awkwardly staged hunting trip”) and for not being enough of a phony (for continuing to indulge in the “alien” sport of windsurfing “even if it needlessly invited predictable, election-jeopardizing consequences”).

More problematic is Keller’s treatment of statistics. He makes good points in charging that Michael Dukakis papered over state budget problems while he was running for president, and that the cost overruns of the Big Dig are worthy of outrage. (The subhead on his Big Dig chapter is “The Fatal Consequences of the Boomer Appetite for Pork.”) I guess that makes Tip O’Neill a Baby Boomer. Maybe even James Michael Curley. But Keller’s credibility, and this can be said of many journalists, is hampered by his own carelessness with numbers.

For instance, it’s hard to take any data at face value in a book that includes this numerically illiterate sentence: “We are only the nation’s thirteenth largest state, but rank fifth in median housing costs, ninth in per-capita state and local tax burden, ninth-worst in economic burden on small business.” For one thing, leaving out our high per-capita income exaggerates the heaviness of our tax burden at least somewhat. Worse, implying that our rank in any kind of per-capita measurement should be no higher than our population rank suggests that Keller is just larding his book with numbers, much like a laugh track on a TV sitcom.

Also troubling is Keller’s habit of repeating statistics without telling us where they came from. Sometimes he divulges authorship (disclosure: he cites one study from the publisher of this magazine, misidentified as “MINC” rather than “MassINC”), but he’s just as likely to cite “a 2006 study by a Boston think tank” and leave it at that. In one case, where he charges that business costs in Massachusetts are much higher than in other states, it takes a bit of Googling to confirm that he got his figures from the conservative-leaning Pioneer Institute. I have no reason to believe the data is wrong, but why make it difficult for readers to find the methodology behind the numbers if...
they desire?

Then there is this: “In a 2006 survey of Massachusetts expatriates, half fingered exorbitant housing costs as their main reason for moving out, 30 percent singled out high taxes, and 26 percent cited liberal politics as a significant negative.” That was a bit harder to track down, but Keller was apparently referring to a survey commissioned by the Boston Globe in which only 20 percent said that the cost of housing was the “most important reason” for moving out of state and only 4 percent singled out high taxes. (Keller’s higher numbers come from the section of the survey when respondents could name as many reasons as they wanted.) There was no question about “liberal politics,” and Keller seems to have got his 26 percent figure by combining the 12 percent who said liberalism was a “major factor” (not necessarily the deciding factor) in causing them to leave with the 13 percent who said that unspecified “political leadership” was a major factor. Keller does not mention that “a better job” was most often chosen as the main reason for moving out.

Another credibility problem is that Keller’s estimation of local political figures seems proportionate to his ability to get good quotes from them. The heroes of The Bluest State include Rev. Eugene Rivers (who slams the state’s “paleoliberal intelligentsia”) and Boston Mayor Tom Menino (who warns of politicians “caught up in their own importance”). Oddly, Keller chooses Melrose Mayor Rob Dolan, whose salary comes from his neighbors’ taxes, as his case study of a middle-class homeowner pushed to the brink by the high costs of living in Massachusetts. At one point, Dolan sounds like Ron Paul, complaining that “people in this state” ask for too much from government. But a few pages later, he laments that he’s had to close two elementary schools in Melrose, and each time it was like “ripping the soul out of a neighborhood.” That takes-a-village rhetoric sounds more like Robert Reich (“Richard” in the book’s index), whom Keller describes as “the flavor-of-the-summer for liberals” in 2002.

It would have been helpful if Keller had talked to a political leader with some ideas on how to square the popular demands for lower taxes and better services, but either he couldn’t find one or he felt that such a person would distract from the thesis of his book. That is, liberal boomers have ruined everything and “the very same ego-driven neglect of true economic fairness and social justice [John Edwards] decries on the right is thriving like a flesh-eating virus right here in the bluest state of all.”

Well, it does seem like a waste of time to look for ways to make our current form of government more efficient and responsive when the Commonwealth’s very flesh is at risk. Viva la revolucion!
Welcome to Gomorrah

There are places in the Bay State beyond your wildest imagination

BY JAMES V. HORRIGAN

EVER MEET A guy from Blubber Hollow? What about a chick from Podunk? If someone told you they were from Honey Pot or Fiddler’s Green, would you know what they were talking about?

These places really exist, as part of Salem, Brookfield, Norfolk, and Bolton, according to the Secretary of State’s office. There are 1,828 places on the list of “Village, Section or Neighborhood Names of Massachusetts Communities” (an average of 5.2 for each city and town), and it’s not complete yet.

Municipal government is famously strong in Massachusetts, but some residents of places like Woods Hole in Falmouth, or Islington in Westwood, identify more closely with their village or neighborhood than with the collector of their property taxes. The same goes for those who summer on the North Shore at Magnolia or Prides Crossing, or on the Cape at Hyannisport or Buzzards Bay. Don’t try telling them their fancy vacation homes are in Gloucester, Beverly, Barnstable, or Bourne.

Residents of Haverhill south of the Merrimack River call their home Bradford; people in the priciest neighborhood in Agawam are from Feeding Hills. Denizens of parts of Northampton say they are from Leeds and Florence.

Jeff Williams, director of the Secretary of State’s Citizens Information Service, explains in an e-mail that the list was prompted by a telephone call from a Hollywood production company that was “looking to use a fictitious Massachusetts community in their plot” and wanted to make sure that “no such community name was known to exist.” Williams referred to the 1920 edition of the secretary of state’s Historical Data Relating to Counties, Cities, and Towns in Massachusetts, but he suspected that the list was incomplete, so he decided to check in with municipal clerks across the Commonwealth. He says that those 351 telephone calls and e-mails added about 10 names to his original list.

THE LIST NOW begins with Aldenville, a section of Chicopee, and ends with Zylonite, in the town of Adams (the latter named after American Zylonite, a company founded in Adams that was one of the biggest makers of celluloid in the US in the late 19th century). In between, there’s plenty of food for thought, including Artichoke in Newburyport, Apple Valley in Ashland, Rice Village in Barre, Plum Trees in Sunderland, and Bean Porridge Hill in Westminster.

Some of the names hearken back to the Industrial Age and include words like furnace, forge, and mill. There’s also the Box Factory neighborhood in Middleton, Shoe String Village in Carver, Charcoal City in Becket, Soapstone in New Salem, and Brick-bottom (named for its abundance of clay suitable for brickmaking) in Somerville.

Bible scholars might take special interest in the neighborhood of Jericho, in Dalton, named for the ancient West Bank city mentioned more than 70 times in the Bible. And just a few miles away is the Zoar section of Charlemont, named for the Dead Sea town where Lot and his daughter fled from the city of Sodom. Perhaps less enticing is the New Marlborough village called Gomorrah. According to the Bible, its ancient namesake, along with Sodom, was destroyed by fire and brimstone in punishment for its debauchery.

Some community names have become less apt with the passage of years. Do you think there’s still a community of Friends in Uxbridge’s Quaker City section? Maybe, but they’re probably about equal to the number of elms left in that town’s Elmdale neighborhood.

If you dream of world travel and don’t want to live in the tiny Berkshire hill town called Peru, there’s always the section of Otis known as Algeria, or the Guinea neighborhood in Plainville. The reason why those towns have sections named for African countries has been lost over time. But according to the Scituate historical society, there’s a generally accepted reason why part of that town is called Egypt. In Colonial times, whenever residents of less-fertile areas of Scituate would go there to buy its plentiful Indian corn, they were said to be “going down into Egypt,” much as ancient desert-dwellers would head to the Nile River valley to get their foodstuffs.
Sometimes the explanations are more straightforward. The Scotland section of Bridgewater, for example, is named for the Caledonian roots of its original settlers, the Keith and Forbes families. Poland (in Conway) and Canada (in Sunderland) were coined for similar reasons.

If you'd rather live in an area with a name rooted in Native American culture, there are hundreds to choose from. Some are relatively familiar, like Squan-tum in Quincy, Chappaquiddick in Edgartown, and Nantasket in Hull. But others are likely known to few outside their nebulous borders, like Nissitisset in Pepperell, Squibnocket in Chilmark, Antassawamock in Mattapoisett, and Padanarum in Dartmouth.

Animals are another frequent source of Massachusetts place names. Some are pretty straightforward, like Bass Point in Nahant, Bass River in Yarmouth, and Bass Rocks in Gloucester. There’s a surprising ursine influence stretching across the state, from Bearskin Neck in Rockport to Bearfoot in Charlton to Bear Town in Lee. You can also visit Beaver Brook in Danvers, Crow Village in Peabody, Donkeyville in Foxborough, Dogtown in Wellfleet, Duckville in Palmer, Foxtown in Shelburne, Horse Neck Beach in Westport, Lamb City in Philipston, Otter River and Partridgeville in Templeton, Oyster Harbors in Barnstable, Pigeon Cove in Rockport, and Rattlesnake Gutter in Leverett.

Some of those names are pretty easy to figure out, such as the harbor with the oysters, the river with the otters, the island with the deer and the cove with the pigeons. But you need a map to see that Horse Neck Beach (the beach itself is called “Horseneck”) is named for its equine shape.

There are community names straight from a Hardy Boys novel, such as Maplewood in Fall River or Fairview in Chicopee. Others are so banal they recur across the state. If you call Glendale home you could be a resident of Everett, Middlefield, Wilbraham, or Easthampton; if you hailed from Brookside, you might live in Charlton, Dudley, Great Barrington, or Southbridge.

Others are one-of-a-kind, at least in Massachusetts. Gloucester may be the only place in the nation with a neighborhood called Two Penny Loaf. That could be true for the Caper Corner in Townsend, too. Wellfleet has its Money Hill, but Holyoke goes one better with Money Hole Hill.

THE LIST HAS plenty of surprises and curiosities, but how complete is it?

I grew up in Dedham, in the Greenlodge neighborhood. My family, friends, and neighbors all went to the Greenlodge School. Many of us considered ourselves residents of Greenlodge first and Dedham second. But Greenlodge is not on the list. Nor is the contiguous Manor section of Dedham, a neighborhood with parochial pride on a par with Greenlodge.

Curiously, though, the list claims there are parts of Dedham called Jerusalem and Findlen. Where those names came from is a mystery to me. I canvassed every street in every neighborhood many times while working on political campaigns; I also own reproductions of old maps of Dedham. And I have read every town history ever written, from the first, by Erastus Worthington, published in 1827, to the last, by Robert B. Hanson, which came out in 1976.

Although I feel certain there is no Jerusalem section of Dedham, some claim there was once a tradition to name a delivery area after the local postmaster and that there actually is a Findlen, in honor of Joseph Findlen, who served as Dedham postmaster from 1921 to 1935. But I won’t buy that until you show me sections of town named for other postmasters. There aren’t any—unless their names were Oakdale, Riverdale and East Dedham.

Williams calls the document an ongoing project and says that his office is always willing to add a new place name “if we can confirm its existence,” usually by checking with the town clerk and local historical commission.

As a former resident of Dedham, I hereby propose that Greenlodge be added to the official list of names. I have no doubt that both the town clerk and historical commission will confirm its existence.

But there is another way. Take an Election Day drive down Greenlodge Street; stop at the Greenlodge School. Ask any of the guys holding “Re-elect Bill Galvin” signs. They’ll tell you they live in Greenlodge.

Although it would be nice to see the neighborhood I grew up in added to the list, I’m not hopeful that Jerusalem or Findlen will be taken off. Williams writes that his office is “always open” to suggestions, but draws a line in the sand: “No name has ever been removed, nor should it be, as that is the whole point of this exercise.”

Well, then I guess the whole point of this essay is to convince Secretary of State Galvin that Greenlodge in Dedham deserves a place on the Citizens Information Service community names document, right between Green Harbor in Marshfield and Green Lodge in Westwood.
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