

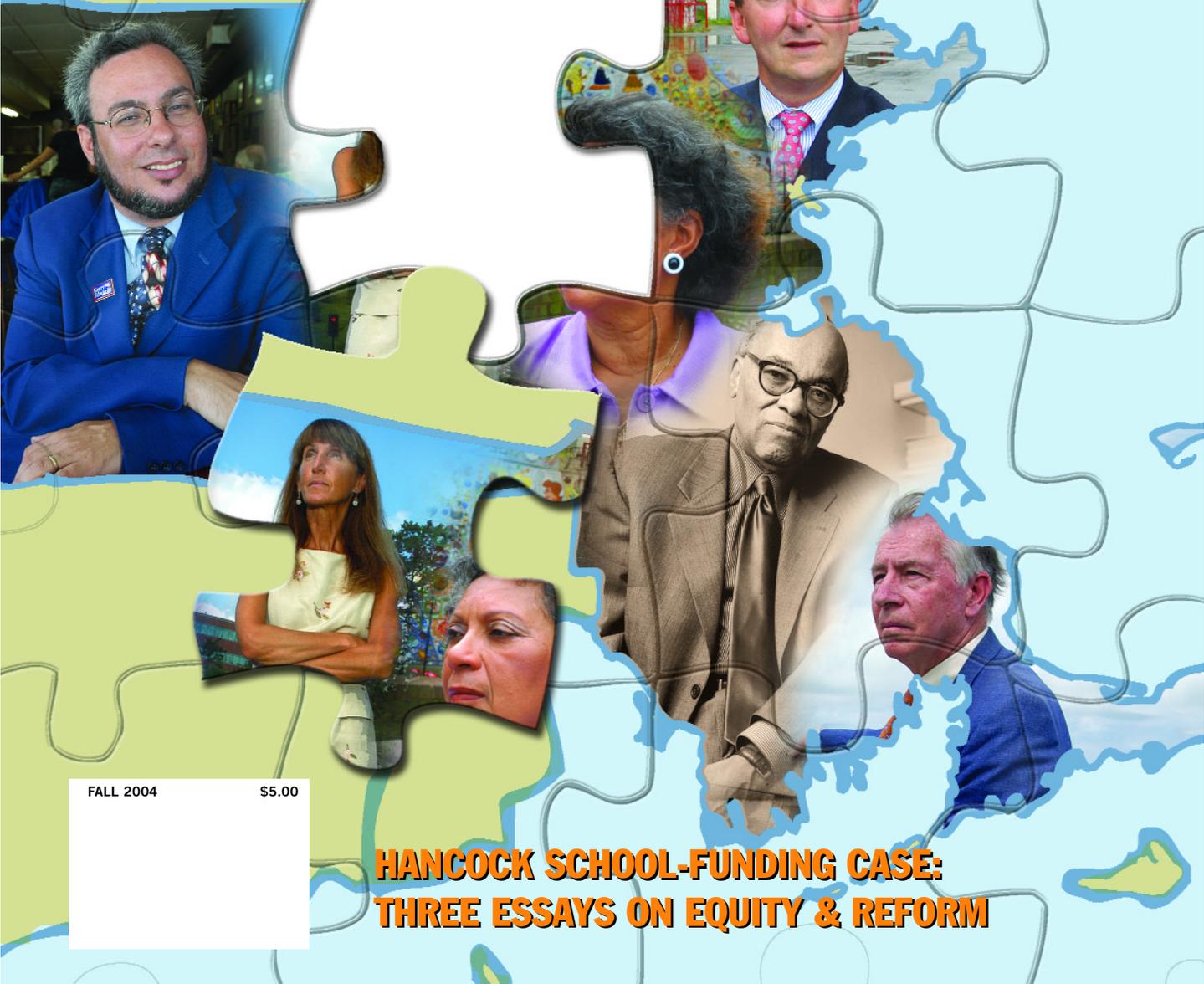
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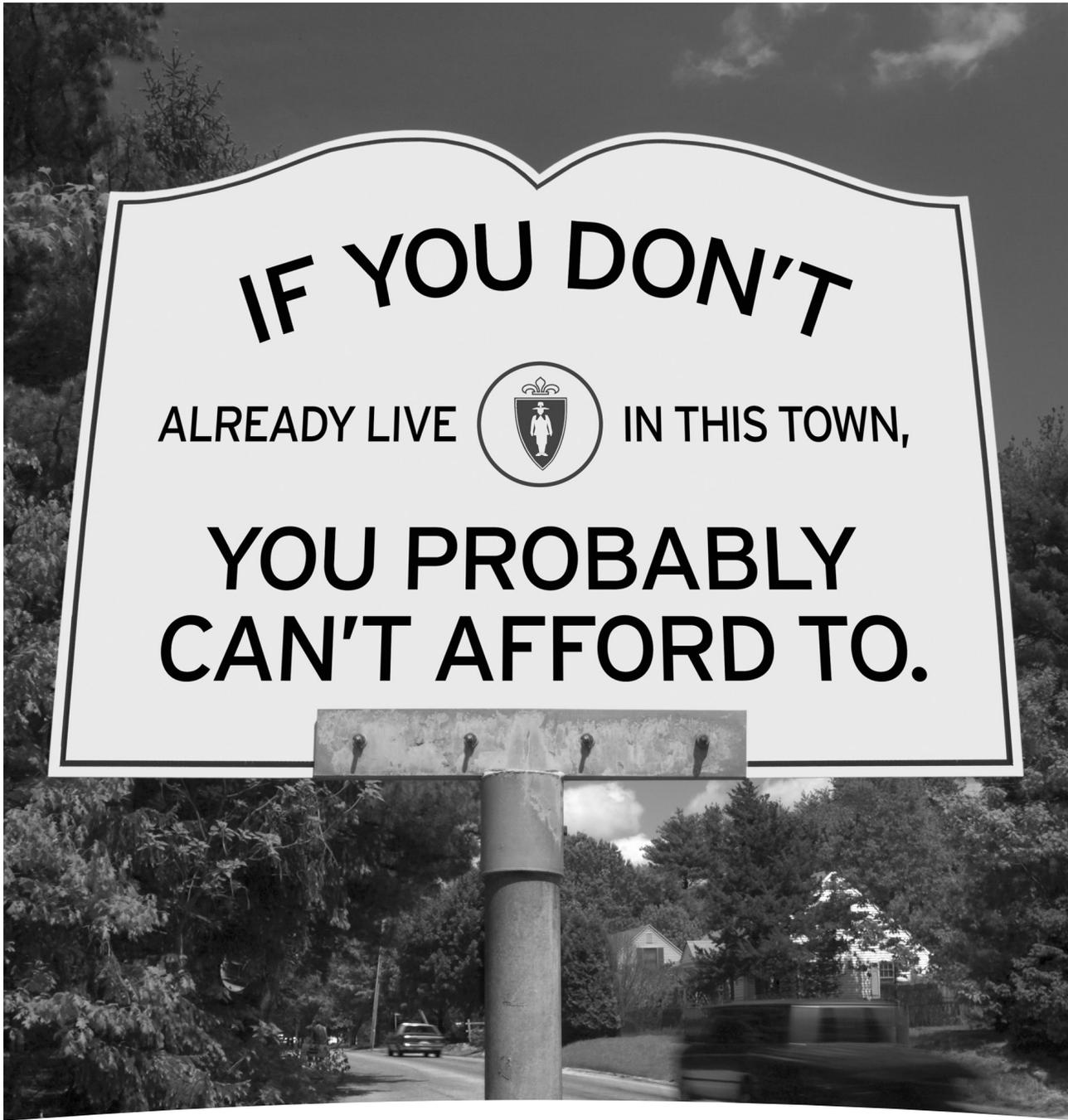
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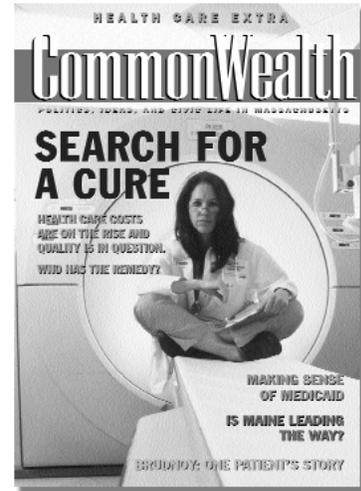
CORRESPONDENCE

SECRETARY PRESTON NEEDS A LESSON IN PUBLIC HEALTH

After reading the article “Being Ron Preston” (Health Care Extra 2004), I was appalled to realize how little the cabinet secretary charged with protecting the health of the Commonwealth understands about public health. He states that public health advocates should work with him to integrate public health into primary care. One might wonder how Ron Preston would use primary care to guarantee a safe food and water supply, require that cars and roadways be engineered to reduce traffic fatalities, or protect the population from nat-

ural or bio-terrorism epidemics.

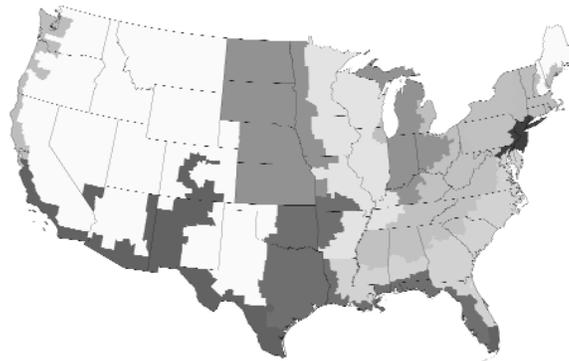
Primary care is health care delivered to individuals. Public health is organized efforts to protect the health of the community. As the examples above indicate, public health uses different tools, different people, and different organizations than does medical care. It is also spectacularly successful at reducing death and disease. Although some public health work (such as vaccination campaigns) can be coordinated with primary care, primary care can no more absorb the fundamental work of public health than could private lawyers replace a state Legislature or private tutors re-



place a public school system. Someone in Ron Preston's position who doesn't seem to know this is either

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woefully ignorant or acting in bad faith.

Mr. Preston goes on to trivialize one of the great successes of public health, the dramatic decrease in smoking and smoking-related illnesses, by saying, "Having billboards on buses to get people to stop smoking is nice, but if there's someone in a wheelchair who needs a personal care assistant, I want to have the assistant." As a result of the comprehensive tobacco control program in Massachusetts, overall adult smoking prevalence fell from 23 percent to 18 percent, resulting in 240,000 Massachusetts residents quitting and preventing the premature deaths of 120,000 citizens. The work of Ron Preston's team to drop the funding of this program from \$48 million to \$2.5 million does a lot more than take down a few billboards—it kills thousand of people.

One might question why the richest society in history has to choose between such a program and an assistant for someone who needs it. This is a political choice, not a necessity, and it is ultimately a false one. Society will pay either for the tobacco control program or for the consequences of not having one, irrespective of whether it pays for personal health care assistants. The choice Mr. Preston would have us make is not for or against the personal assistant, but rather a specific choice for the unnecessary death, disease, and disability that comes from allowing the tobacco industry to promote itself unopposed by organized community effort. To my mind, that's not in the job description of Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services.

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Managing a slate —and expectations

BY MICHAEL JONAS

It has been billed as the biggest challenge to Democratic dominance on Beacon Hill in more than a decade. But after rolling out a field of 131 Republican candidates for the Legislature in late May, Gov. Mitt Romney and Republican Party leaders were, by Labor Day, keying in on 20 to 30 seats in the 200-member Legislature that might realistically be in play—and keeping predictions modest even about them.

“If we pick up a seat, I’ll be happy,” Romney told reporters in a mid-September press conference that used Paul Revere’s house in Boston’s North End as a backdrop for the Republican effort to bring revolutionary change to the State House. “If we pick up more than that, I’ll be very happy.” In an interview later in the month, Romney depressed expectations even further, saying that, with the Democratic favorite-son presidential candidacy, he was bracing for a “Kerry tsunami” that would make 2004 a particularly tough year for Republicans to make headway in the Bay State.



If Romney’s audacious electoral gambit—engaging a battle over legislative seats his three Republican predecessors studiously avoided—has turned into an exercise in diminishing expectations, it’s not for lack of trying. Romney has made the state GOP a fundraising powerhouse, raking in and spending about \$2.7 million to rebuild the party, and showering legislative candidates, whom he dubbed “Team

Reform,” with another \$1 million in donations and in-kind support, according to the *Boston Globe*.

The governor’s not the only one trying to manage expectations for the coming election. “Everybody knows that he’s being disingenuous when he says he’ll be happy with a pickup of one seat,” says Philip Johnston, chairman of the state Democratic Party. With rumors circulating that the state GOP may launch a huge media campaign down the home-stretch, featuring Romney himself in TV ads beseeching voters to elect Republicans who support his reform agenda, Johnston says he’s prepared for the worst. “If he does a million-dollar buy, I think we can lose quite a few seats,” he says.

Johnston’s fears notwithstanding, things haven’t exactly broken Team Reform’s way. The GOP lost its favorite symbol of all that is wrong under Democratic rule when Thomas Finneran resigned as House Speaker September 28. Republi-



Republican Field (left) is targeting incumbent Peisch (above).

can leaders were quick to pronounce his successor more of the same. “Sal DiMasi is no reformer,” says Republican Party chairman Darrell Crate. “We’re swapping one for another.”

But Romney—who has distanced himself from fundraising letters sent out under his name, as reported by the *Globe*, calling Finneran the “poster child for patronage, waste, and blocking my reforms at every turn”—says that the legislative contests ultimately will turn on the pressing issues in each district. “I think Tip O’Neill had it right, that all politics is local,” says Romney, invoking an icon of the Democratic Party.

And that might prove to be Team Reform’s biggest challenge. The Republican Party is hoping its candidates can hitch themselves to Romney’s coattails, echoing the gover-

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nor's message on issues such as merging the Turnpike Authority and state highway department or honoring the voter-approved rollback of the state income tax to 5 percent.

But by concentrating those efforts in parts of the state where Romney drew strong support in 2002, GOP challengers are taking on Democratic incumbents in the suburbs who are not as easily tarred by the Beacon Hill insider brush. Take Rep. Alice Peisch, a Wellesley Democrat being challenged by Republican George Field, an attorney who says the race is "about independence and reform." He claims that Peisch, in her one term in office, has been "following the lead of the Boston-based leadership in the House."

"It's laughable to think I am a pawn of the Speaker," says Peisch, a former Wellesley school committee member and elected town clerk who is the first Democrat ever to represent the upscale suburb in the House. Peisch opposed a leadership effort to grant Finneran power to hand out pay raises to favored lieutenants, and cast one of the few Democratic

'IT'S LAUGHABLE TO THINK I AM A PAWN OF THE SPEAKER.'

votes against stripping Romney of the power to appoint an interim US senator should John Kerry win the White House.

Citing two other Team Reform planks, Field charges that Peisch does not support an immediate rollback in the state income tax and voted to "water down" the state's new English-immersion education law, which was passed overwhelmingly by voters in 2002. But it's not clear how much Wellesley voters will be stirred to outrage over a 0.3 percent margin in tax rates or allowing school districts to continue popular two-way bilingual programs, in which English- and non-English-speaking students receive concurrent instruction in each other's languages.

The Wellesley face-off highlights a pattern in some of the most seriously contested races: Many of the Democrats facing the strongest challenges are suburban moderates who have tended to operate more independently of the legislative leadership. "It's an ironic twist," says Johnston. While Romney "talks about reform, his real targets are reformers."

But with the GOP holding just 22 seats in the 160-member House of Representatives and seven seats in the 40-member Senate, who can blame the Republicans for taking any target they can get? The districts now being concentrated on are those "where the gap is closing, where instead of being 20 or 30 points behind, we're 10 points behind," says Romney, citing the party's polling. "Targeting races in Lawrence and Boston wouldn't make a lot of sense." ■

Economic plans turn into a war of words

BY MICHAEL JONAS

Mitt Romney swept into office with a vow to put his business know-how to work for the Massachusetts economy. Nearly two years after his arrival, however, employment growth remains sluggish, while Romney has faced a job challenge of his own, with the top two members of his economic development team resigning in the past year. Romney's also spent much time sparring with legislative leaders over who's really on the economic ball, with both sides seeming to do their best to undercut the other—or take the credit.

“There's been a revolving door [within the administration], and it seems the only leadership on the economic development front has come from the Legislature,” says state Rep. Michael Rodrigues, a Westport Democrat and House chairman of the Joint Committee on Commerce and Labor.

Last December, less than a year into the new administration, Robert Pozen, the former Fidelity Investments executive recruited by Romney to serve as an elevated secretary of economic development, with oversight of the departments of business and technology and labor and workforce development as well as the office of consumer affairs and business regulation, left state government, returning to the private sector as chairman of MFS Investment Management, a mutual-fund company. Following Pozen out the door 10 months later was business and technology director Barbara Berke, who spearheaded formation of regional economic advisory councils.

Pozen's replacement, Ranch Kimball, a business consultant who served on a state commission that examined the state's fiscal crisis in the late 1980s, says there's been no “wheel spinning” in the Romney administration, despite the turnover in top economic-development jobs. (Romney appointed Kimball in April; no replacement for Berke had been named by the end of September.) He says the administration's approach has remained consistent: maintaining a favorable business climate by holding the line on taxes and looking to break down unnecessary regulatory barriers to

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business and job growth.

To that end, Kimball's priority has been to get the state to do a much better job of connecting businesses with various technical assistance programs, grants, and other services available through state government and quasi-public agencies. Too many companies feel they are "off in the forest, with no map and no flashlight, at night," he says.

Kimball has assembled a cross-agency "business resource team" to coordinate the activities of the office of business development; MassDevelopment, the state's quasi-public development agency; and the Economic Stabilization Trust and Workforce Training Fund, state programs that offer loans and grants to businesses. Through a toll-free phone number and Web portal announced in September, businesses will be able to access state economic development programs through "a single point of contact," says Kimball.

"One-stop shopping" for businesses is a concept observers say they've heard before. And even those who are eager to see it in action say that streamlining access to state services for businesses can't make up for deep cuts in the offices that provide them. "You can't undertake these am-

'ONE-STOP SHOPPING' IS AN IDEA THAT'S COME UP BEFORE.

bitious programs if you don't have anybody to implement them," says Richard Lord, president of Associated Industries of Massachusetts.

Indeed, regional offices of the Massachusetts Office of Business Development once offered a form of "one-stop shopping" for business services, before budget cuts slashed the agency from 42 full-time positions in the mid-1990s to just 15 today. Romney has twice proposed funding increases for the regional offices, only to be rebuffed by the Legislature.

For its part, the Legislature's big splash on economic development came in the form of a \$100 million economic stimulus package passed last year ("Mass. Production," *CW*, Summer 2003). The one-time appropriation, which draws money from the state's tobacco settlement fund, directed \$35 million to the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative for, among other things, state matching money for competitive federal research grants and \$25 million for the state's



Ranch Kimball says Romney's strategy has been consistent.

Emerging Technology Fund, a program begun by Gov. William Weld to aid growing technology-oriented firms.

Romney initially panned the idea of a stimulus package, saying his business background told him the market is a better judge of investments than state bureaucrats. He tried to cut the package in half, but the Democratic-led Legislature restored nearly all of the original funding. Romney still doubts it had much effect.

What the Legislature should have done to boost employment, Romney says, was adopt his proposed reforms to the state's unemployment insurance fund.

"That decision not to reform UI is costing us jobs," says Romney. "Look at the money the Legislature sent out. How many jobs has that created?"

His skepticism of state-supported projects is not stopping the governor from trumpeting them, however, even those whose funding he tried to nix. In the 2004 budget, Romney vetoed \$550,000 in funding for a Fall River technology manufacturing center developed by MassDevelopment, and in the 2005 budget he cut in half a \$1.1 million appropriation for the center. Both times the Legislature restored the funding. In early November, Romney is slated to appear at a ceremony marking the decision of Avant Immunotherapeutics, a Needham-based biotech firm, to begin pilot-phase manufacturing at the facility.

"He vetoed the money for this center twice but he's coming down to cut the ribbon," says Rodrigues. Scheduled to join Romney at the event is the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council's new president, Tom Finneran, the former House Speaker who proposed the economic-stimulus package, and with whom Romney sparred over the wisdom of such state investments in the first place. ■

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Interns plug a public service brain drain

BY VICTORIA GROVES

In 2002, Michael Young was still a Midwesterner, earning his master's degree in public administration at the University of Kansas. But in order to graduate, he needed to complete a year-long internship, so he accepted a post as management intern with the town of Lexington, which made him the only person in his class to head to New England.

"I came to Massachusetts as a risk, but it was a wonderful risk," says Young. The internship, he says, "gave me exposure to all areas of the organization and allowed me to create bonds and [pursue] mentoring opportunities" with town employees.

The risk paid off for Young, who now has a permanent position as budget officer for the town. But Lexington was just as much a winner, since many municipalities, as well as

state agencies, are having trouble finding people—and keeping them—for government jobs, which generally pay far less than similar positions in the private sector. And communities are beginning to catch on to internship programs as a great way to snag young people before they enter the job market. And while someone like Michael Young is a great out-of-state catch, cities and towns are also working with graduate schools in their own back yards to prevent public-servants-in-training from leaving the Bay State.

Public management internship programs provide students with career experience, stipends to help defray expenses, and, in many cases, a working tour of municipal offices from finance to sanitation. At the same time, cities and towns use the extra hands to work on budget reports and other tasks.

"It keeps us fresh," says Linda Crew Vine, assistant town manager in Lexington, which began its internship program 20 years ago. "Our interns don't just come in and watch, they take over major initiatives."

For example, Kerry Evans, a Quincy native who received her MPA from Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg, is working on a customer service project aimed at making Lexington Town Hall easier for citizens to navigate.

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"I've realized that this is a profession I want to stay in," says Evans, who is beginning her second year as an intern in town government. "But I wasn't sure where I fit in, and [the internship] helped me figure that out."

It also helped Lexington figure some things out. "Many special projects in some communities wouldn't be implemented without these programs," says Victor DeSantis, director of the Institute for Regional Development and an instructor in Bridgewater State College's MPA program. "Having access to newly trained and enthusiastic professionals at a lower cost is a real benefit."

Bridgewater State is doing its part to encourage partnerships between cash-strapped municipalities and experience-hungry students. Last year, the college won a \$90,000 grant from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development to support three MPA students who wanted to combine their coursework with internships. One of the students chose an internship in the Taunton mayor's office.

It's not only smaller communities that take advantage of these on-the-job training programs. For 10 years now, Boston City Council has had an internship program that includes not only graduate students but also high schoolers

and undergraduates. Kelly Koput became an intern for the city council while a student at the New England School of Law, helping to draft legislation and research legal questions. That experience led her to her current job, as an attorney for the corporations division of the Secretary of State's office.

"I was trying to figure out what to do after law school," says Koput. "After they offered me the internship, I was interested in staying on as long as possible."

Sometimes, even an internship that takes a native public-management student out of state pays off for government agencies here in Massachusetts. Originally from Alford, on the New York State border, Christopher Ketchen received his MPA from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. After serving an internship with Prince George's County, Maryland, Ketchen stayed on for three years, working in the county executive's office and the budget office. But this spring, Ketchen returned to his home state, becoming a budget manager for the town of Wellesley.

"I've realized how special and unique local government is in Massachusetts communities," he says. ■

Victoria Groves is a freelance writer living in Chelmsford.

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Impossible dream

GOP hopefuls wage quixotic quests for Congress

BY SHAWN ZELLER

Ken Chase is running for Congress, he says, to give voters a choice. “Fundamentally, there is a corruption of the process at the congressional level,” says the Medford native, who graduated from Malden Catholic High School and Boston College. “The crushing majority of races are not races at all, or there is just token opposition.”

But if Chase wants to offer more than token opposition, he has his work cut out for him. A former aide to onetime GOP US Senate candidate (and John Kerry opponent) Ray Shamie, Chase ran unsuccessfully for

three election cycles, only 16 House incumbents nationally have lost their seats. Challengers have a victory rate of less than 2 percent.

When it comes to the state Legislature, Massachusetts Republicans have reason for enthusiasm this year, with a popular governor in place and the biggest field of candidates for state House and Senate in years (see *State of the States*, page 26). Chase and the rest of the GOP congressional slate hope that enthusiasm will spread to them—and help to unseat at least one of the state’s 10 Democratic members of the US House of Representatives in November. But skeptics abound.

Challengers for House seats have a victory rate of less than 2 percent.

state representative and for a seat on Medford’s city council in the 1980s. Now he’s taking on Ed Markey, the dean of the Massachusetts congressional delegation, who in 14 campaigns has never garnered less than 62 percent of the vote. As of August 25, which is the end of the last Federal Election Commission reporting period, Markey had more than \$2.1 million in the bank, Chase just \$13,000.

Chase, who runs a business teaching Spanish and French to schoolchildren and until September lived in Cambridge, just outside the 7th Congressional District, is facing one of the toughest roads in politics—and not just because of Democratic dominance in the Bay State. In the last

“The Washington congressional slate is hopeless,” says Jeffrey Berry, a political scientist at Tufts University.

Hopeless or not, there are challengers to six of the state’s 10 Democratic congressional incumbents this year. Five have Republican opponents, while Barney Frank is facing independent candidate Chuck Morse, a conservative radio talk show host. Four congressmen—John Olver, Richard Neal, Michael Capuano, and Stephen Lynch—are unopposed.

Several of this year’s Republican challengers have made the traditional pilgrimage to Washington, DC. Novice candidates



go to the nation’s capital hoping to win the favor of, and assistance from, their party’s campaign wing—in this case, the National Republican Congressional Committee—and they go to raise funds from the myriad political action committees run by corporations and interest groups. They also go to convince top political prognosticators, such as Charlie Cook, of the *National Journal*, and Stuart Rothenberg, of *Roll Call*, to take their candidacies seriously.

Ron Crews, who is challenging James McGovern for the 3rd Congressional District seat, met with Ron Kaufman, a Washington lobbyist and Republican National Committeeman for Massachusetts, as well as with GOP powerbroker Grover Norquist. Chase went to Washington for two days of candidate training with the NRCC, while lobbyist Mike Jones, a Plymouth native who is running against William Delahunt, has used his Washington connections to garner fundraising help from former White House chief of staff John Sununu, US Rep. Kay Granger of Texas, and US Sen. Susan Collins of Maine.

But this crop of Massachusetts Republicans has made little headway inside the Beltway. When Chase asked the NRCC for funding, he was told to come back after he’d built a seri-

ous campaign organization. And the \$193,000 Jones raised by September was far short of the \$1 million he said last year he would need to challenge Delahunt. This fall, most of the PAC money is flowing to incumbents who face little chance of losing. Beyond that, the interest groups and the parties are concentrating on a handful of races that are truly competitive, most of them open seats left by a member retiring or running for higher office.

According to political analyst Cook, only 11 of the 435 congressional seats nationwide are truly toss-ups this year. Another 10 Republican seats and 11 Democratic seats are considered at risk. Not one is in Massachusetts, and only one is in New England: Republican Rob Simmons's 2nd District Connecticut seat.

Dismissed up and down the line as non-contenders, the Republican congressional candidates have had little

success convincing Gov. Mitt Romney to include them in his Team Reform push, or to throw any of his fundraising largesse their way. After weeks of pleading, the GOP slate convinced Romney in September to do a photo shoot at the Union Club near the State House. Crews handed Romney

a pledge envelope. If the governor provides some fundraising help, "that would be wonderful," Crews says. "But I'm not anticipating it."

By late summer, Jones led the GOP field in fundraising with less than \$200,000, followed by Crews with \$84,000. In contrast, the Democratic members had raised sums ranging from Richard Neal's \$431,579 to Markey's \$1,979,963 and Martin

Meehan's \$2,513,389. Markey and Meehan plan to use their war chests to run for Senate if John Kerry is elected president; Barney Frank, who raised \$800,000 but had only \$331,000 in cash on hand as of late August, has picked up the fundraising pace to compete for the Senate seat as well.

GOP candidates say it's a mistake to pigeonhole Bay Staters as liberals.

Republican Party officials say that, in Massachusetts, they have to pick their battles, and this year the focus is on the State House, not the Capitol. Much of the party's hope lies in recruiting candidates for state Legislature in communities where Romney did well against Democrat Shannon O'Brien in 2002. National committeeman Kaufman says the state party is "going to try to challenge Demo-



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crats at the congressional level, but our first and foremost goal is to pick up seats in the [state] House and Senate.” If the state party has \$1 million to spend, he says, it’s better spent on 20 state races than on one congressional seat.

That leaves Republican congressional candidates with shoe leather, rather than advertising, to carry them to victory. They are knocking on doors, making the rounds at community meetings, holding signs, and marching in parades. “It’s tough running against an incumbent, especially a really entrenched one,” says Jones, referring to Delahunt. “The hardest thing is the money.” So Jones is out every morning, shaking hands at Dunkin’ Donuts. In the afternoons, he and volunteers hang banners from overpasses along the Route 3 corridor from Quincy to Cape Cod.

Still, some congressional aspirants hold out hope that Romney’s Team Reform legislative candidates will boost their own efforts, and vice versa. “We have some very good candidates for state Legislature,” says McGovern challenger Ron Crews. “The voters they bring to the polls will vote for me, and those I bring to the polls will vote for them.”

Whether enough voters will mark their ballots for any of the GOP hopefuls, for Legislature or Congress, remains to be seen. But all of the Republican challengers say it’s a mistake to pigeonhole Massachusetts voters as diehard liberals.

“People are people,” says Crews, a former Georgia state legislator who made a name for himself running the conservative Massachusetts Family Institute’s campaign against gay marriage earlier this year. “Once you get out of certain pockets of Boston, Cambridge, and Provincetown, there are many folks who share my values. Towns like Attleboro and Plainville are just like towns in Georgia.”

Jones says it’s incumbent Delahunt, not he, who’s out of step with voters of the 10th Congressional District, which stretches from blue-collar Quincy to the South Shore and Cape Cod—areas where Republican governors, at least, have run strong. “He has an ultra-liberal record,” says Jones.

Finally, Republicans take heart in the decline of Massachusetts voters registered as Democrats, from 46 percent in 1980 to 36 percent in 2004, even if the Republican ranks are not growing. Today, nearly half (49.8 percent) of Bay State voters are not registered with any party. The unenrolled “are people Republicans see as potential targets,” says political science professor Dennis Hale of Boston College. The emergence of serious two-party competition for congressional seats will take time, says Hale. But, he adds, if the Republicans “can just win a couple, the loser label disappears.” ■

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Incubating democracy

Civic rebirth requires a comprehensive agenda

BY KEVIN C. PETERSON

Massachusetts has been long recognized as possessing unique capacities at producing innovations that have changed the nation and the world. Whether its residents are especially gifted or they take advantage of the region's rich institutional and financial resources, the Bay State distinguishes itself as an incubator for new ideas that work. Such new ideas and ingenuity have reshaped our national industries, re-conceptualized social and community practices, and definitively reformed public policies.

Certainly, this was the case in the 1970s and '80s, when our propensity for innovation could be seen in the emergence of the region's technology industries. Route 128 companies such as Digital Equipment Corp., Data General, Apollo Computer, and Wang Laboratories whetted the nation's appetite for computer technology, at the same time fueling the Massachusetts Miracle. Talents at places like Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology would develop the Internet, an invention unparalleled in the sphere of knowledge transfer and global communications.

In the area of crime, Massachusetts also showed itself to be a pathfinder. The Ten Point Coalition's triangulated approach to summoning African-American faith institutions, law enforcement agencies, and the justice system into concerted efforts against youth violence is a model replicated across the country.

And more recently, the emergence of the bio-sciences industries in the Commonwealth beginning in the 1990s will mark this region as a leader on a new frontier of biological discovery and knowledge.

Yet, while Massachusetts has been in the forefront of new developments in technology, public policy, and science, our state's efforts in the area of civic innovation have been feeble and anemic. When it comes to producing democracy-friendly solutions that ensure greater civic participation, enhance democratic commitment among new generations of citizens, and protect against electoral inequalities, our Commonwealth has done little. Why has Massachusetts, the so-called cradle of democracy at this nation's founding, shown so little of its genius in the realm

of democratic participation and civic engagement?

In terms of the rituals of democracy—voting and running for office—the numbers tell a sad story of public life in the Commonwealth. Voter participation in non-presidential statewide general elections has fallen dramatically, from more than 80 percent in 1962 to 52 percent in 1998 (bouncing back, only slightly, to 56 percent in 2002). While voter participation rates have fluctuated up and down over the course of the past half-century, the general trend has been downward, with each peak lower than the last.

To be sure, election contests involving candidates with strong (or polarizing) personalities increase voter participation. Hence, in the governor's race between John Silber and William Weld in 1990, voting among Bay Staters spiked upward to 75 percent of registered voters, a modern high. Similarly, high voter turnout will also characterize the national election in November, when the fiercely contested presidential race will turn out voters in significant num-

Both voters and candidates are dropping out.

bers. But these moments of political drama are more and more the exceptions, not the norm, providing testament to the waning and increasingly episodic civic interest among Massachusetts voters.

Proof of our civic dissolution is all the more true for young people. In Boston's 2003 city council election, less than 15 percent of youth between 18 and 24 years old voted, one third less than the overall turnout, according to a *Boston Globe* report. Nationally, voter participation for youth is consistently 5 to 15 percentage points lower than average, and 50 percent below their 45-to-65-year-old counterparts. Voter participation in the 18-to-34 cohort reached its nadir at 29 percent in 2000, the lowest in a presidential race since 1972, when the voting age was lowered to 18.

It's not only voters who are dropping out of the civic sphere. It's candidates, too. According to Massachusetts Common Cause and the Boston-based Money in Politics Project, fewer people are electing to run for office on the

state level. The Bay State ranked 49th in the nation in contested state representative races in 2002. Thanks to Gov. Mitt Romney's efforts to break up Democratic hegemony in the House and Senate, the number of contested races this year is higher than in recent years (see *State of the States*, page 26), but still represents barely more than half the seats in the Legislature; even with this year's bumper crop of candidates, the Republicans are ceding 40 percent of legislative seats to the Democrats without a fight. The trend is as sobering as it is conclusive: Citizens in Massachusetts no longer deem elected office an attractive career or public service option.

Recent reforms have proved incapable of improving our civic condition. Even gadgets like the Clean Elections Law and the modestly successful redistricting case in Boston this year have provided no cure for our civic malaise. The Clean Elections Law, which sought to limit exorbitant campaign spending and create a level playing field between incumbents and challengers, took its mandate from a vote of the people in a 1998 statewide ballot question. But when this law was subsequently dismantled by the Legislature, the public seemed not to care. Clean Elections failed not only because of legislative hostility,

The place to start is voter registration laws.

but because the campaign's proponents did not grasp that money is not the overriding barrier to electoral participation. Voters are also motivated to participate in elections by other factors, including their comprehension of the political process, their ability to discern the fine points of public policy, competition in electoral races, and unhindered access to the voting process. Leaders of the Clean Elections initiative, while well meaning, could have benefited from a deeper understanding of the many variables depressing the civic soul.

In the redistricting case, the plaintiffs, who hinged their arguments on the so-called dilution of minority voting power through race-based gerrymandering, successfully—and deservedly—got some district lines redrawn. But little was done to take advantage of the court victory. Not a single minority candidate entered the race for any of the 17 state-representative districts in and around Boston that were affected by the court case. In this instance, the plaintiffs failed to see that the issue of district boundaries was less important than the development of an expanded civic imagination; investment of time and money in creating effective policy agendas; a clear electoral strategy; coordinated candidate recruitment; and a commitment among black and Latino leaders toward true power-sharing and collaboration. Perhaps a clearer civic vision generated by

those truly suffering the brunt of electoral unfairness and disenfranchisement would have produced a more focused, concerted, and comprehensive reform effort.

TOWARD A NEW CIVIC AGENDA

So, against this backdrop of civic crisis, piecemeal solutions, and dubious strategies, what is to be done? Surely, no single approach will be a panacea. But a comprehensive strategic plan could arrest downward civic trends and lay a foundation for civic revival. Such a strategy, equipped with innovative approaches favoring specific civic policies, civic literacy, and electoral justice, would be a fitting starting place. New Democracy Coalition proposes a comprehensive plan consisting of three parts: civic policy, civic literacy, and electoral justice.

CIVIC POLICY. Coherent policies supporting voter access represent one immediate response to the state's civic woes. The place to start is modifying voter registration laws that are antiquated and no longer relevant.

Specifically, Election Day registration could ameliorate lagging voter participation trends in this state. Why impose an onerous 20-day deadline before elections as the cutoff for registration? By showing proof of residency and taking a sworn federal oath, eligible citizens could be allowed the right to vote immediately, on Election Day, even if they had not registered in advance.

Election Day registration is now in place in six other states: Maine, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Idaho, Wyoming, and New Hampshire. It is hardly abused, and voter participation in those states ranges from 10 to 14 percentage points higher than states that do not have this policy.

With Election Day registration, Massachusetts could immediately realize higher youth voter turnout in local, statewide, and presidential elections. In other states where this law is in place, political participation among young people (between the ages of 18 and 24) is 10 percent higher than in states without it, according to Demos, a New York-based think tank focused on election policy.

This law would also be a boon to renters, who tend to move within a city or region more frequently than homeowners. No longer would they have to visit City Hall to change their registration every time they change apartments. These voters could simply appear at the polling place on Election Day in their new neighborhood and claim their right to vote.

As for the traditional concerns opponents have raised about Election Day registration: There's no reason to think that same-day registration gives an advantage to one party over the other, as studies show that Republicans are as likely to make use of this law as Democrats or independents. Nor does this law work to the advantage of political challengers over incumbents. And election fraud, in the form of repeated voting, is almost nonexistent. The

obvious benefit of this law is that it allows people who are inspired to vote on Election Day to do so, whether or not they were motivated to register weeks or months earlier.

CIVIC LITERACY. Another way to systematically foster public engagement is by increasing citizen knowledge of democracy and civic issues. Those who are civically literate are more likely to be civically active. Yet, currently, there is no formal civics requirement for young people in Massachusetts's public schools, a singular strategy to expose young people to core democratic ideas. Without civics instruction, how do we expect to engage a new generation of active citizens in their communities after they graduate from the public schools?

There is a growing movement to include civics in graduation requirements for high school students across the nation, but Massachusetts has not been in the vanguard. This has left more than 60,000 students graduating here every year without a formalized orientation in civic obligations, rites, responsibilities, and procedures. In Boston, our capital city, civics instruction in public high schools ceased in 1972.

In contrast to our state's lack of effort to prepare youth for public life, 38 other states require civics in high school. They do this because they recognize the nexus between

civic literacy and the perseverance of democracy. The rationale for civics instruction in high school is as simple as it is convincing: Young people who are taught about the ways democratic government works better understand their role as citizens and as stewards of democracy.

Certainly the reverse is true. According to national studies, youth that go unexposed to civic ideas are less likely to vote regularly or engage in community affairs. Fundamental knowledge about the history of the franchise and social movements is critical to the development of mature civic identities. Students need exposure to the Magna Carta, the Articles of Confederation, the US Constitution, as well as the suffrage and abolitionist movements, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the 26th Amendment, which conferred the right to vote to 18-year-olds.

Reintroducing a formal civics curriculum into the state educational framework is a matter of importance. Lawmakers concerned about the state of the citizenry can amend the Education Reform Act of 1993 to make civics a core requirement for high school graduation.

ELECTORAL JUSTICE. If we want to encourage voter participation, we must increase our focus on ensuring equality and fairness at the polls on Election Day. When voters experience confusion, misdirection, or intimidation,



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tion at the polls, that's electoral injustice. Unfortunately, such has been the case in elections across the Commonwealth in recent years. A newly instated voter identification rule in Lawrence two years ago prompted concerns that Hispanic voters would be targeted to produce documentation in a situation where the language barrier may also be formidable. This could result in an intimidating experience for an otherwise eligible and qualified voter. Polling stations abruptly changed in Worcester two years ago, resulting in confusion among voters. And as recently as the 2004 primary election, voters in Boston's wards 12 and 18 stood discouraged as the city's new voting machines malfunctioned.

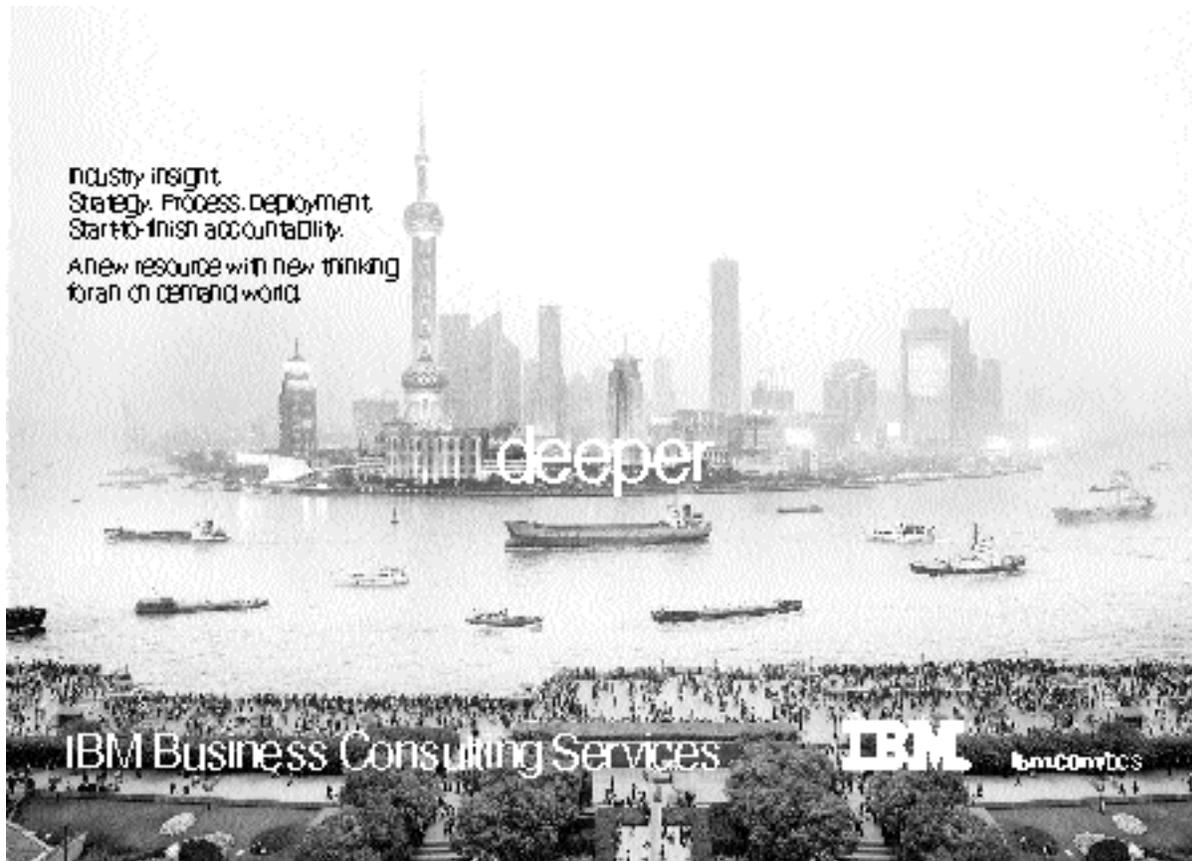
Voting is a sacred civic ritual, which must be preserved and protected. There are a number of measures that can protect against electoral injustice, starting with the poll workers who are employed by town and city election departments across the state. Whether a voter returns in the next election—or even succeeds in casting a vote in this one—can depend on how he or she is treated by the people working the polls. Many poll workers are courteous and helpful, but some can be obstructive, uncooperative, and—at worst—prejudiced.

Statewide training, as well as strict scrutiny in recruit-

ment and selection, will improve the caliber of poll workers—and the Election Day experience for voters. A diverse force of well-trained and well-paid poll workers will eliminate anxiety for minority voters. At best, these changes could improve the quality of services received by all voters. At very least, they will ensure that voters across the state will receive similar treatment, protecting against errors and unevenly applied standards.

Another element of electoral justice is mechanical. Voting machines that break down frustrate voters and, in the worst-case scenario, rob citizens of their votes. Faulty equipment undermines the public's faith in elections, fomenting cynicism and spoiling the democratic process. A standing commission is needed to identify and promote the use of the most modern, reliable, and user-friendly voting machines. A commission dedicated to safeguarding the integrity of voting machines will protect against all sorts of election irregularities, especially those likely to occur in poor and minority communities.

Finally, electoral justice can be interpreted in a broader fashion, in that low civic involvement can be an injustice in and of itself. In communities long alienated from participation, it may not be enough to remove barriers and correct unjust practices. It may be necessary to take active



steps to re-energize a discouraged citizenry.

Creation of a funding entity that can respond to community needs where civic participation is low would support the state's overall civic health and combat electoral injustice. Called the Democracy Fund, this state-created agency would bring technical assistance and funding for participatory initiatives to communities suffering low voter engagement or other civic crises. The revival of the "town hall forum" in civically depressed areas is just one strategy worth fostering. Special democracy-informing projects for youth, such as that produced at the CIVICS summer project at Harvard University's Institute of Politics, deserve attention and replication around the state. And certainly voter registration, voter education, and Election Day turnout efforts by the organization Dunk the Vote would benefit cities and towns across the state, were its nonpartisan efforts funded and expanded.

The impact of such a Democracy Fund would be enhanced by creation of Civic Empowerment Zones. These zones, based on the Economic Empowerment Zones implemented during the Clinton administration, would focus efforts to build civic capital where it is most needed. Just as Economic Empowerment Zones facilitated economic growth among poor and underserved communities, Civic Empowerment Zones would pump-prime civic growth and development.

The Democracy Fund could support initiatives within Civic Empowerment Zones with funding of \$3 million per year for 10 consecutive years. Such an allocation represents approximately 0.5 percent of the current year's budget surplus. Over a 10-year period, \$30 million would represent a respectable investment in rebuilding the state's civic infrastructure.

Nothing short of a three-tiered approach to re-engaging citizens through civic policies, civic literacy, and electoral justice will reverse the negative trends that plague public life in Massachusetts. Such an approach is envisioned by the Massachusetts Democracy Compact, an effort forged by Boston-based New Democracy Coalition, which consists of policy and advocacy groups, the faith community, housing and youth organizations, elected officials, and lay citizens.

As a state often in the forefront of innovation, Massachusetts can inspire the nation toward civic renewal through collective and collaborative efforts. With determination and imagination, we can create a new democracy in Massachusetts, and show the nation—and the world—how it is done. ■

Kevin C. Peterson is a senior fellow at the Center for Collaborative Leadership at the University of Massachusetts–Boston. He is founder and director of the Boston-based New Democracy Coalition.



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Sources: Partisan make-up is from the National Conference of State Legislatures (www.ncsl.org) as of September 8, 2004. Percentages of unopposed seats are from the Secretary of State's office, or the equivalent agency, in each state.

Half the battle

Some 50 percent of all Massachusetts voters will get to choose between Democratic and Republican candidates for state representative this fall, thanks to the “Team Reform” slate of GOP contenders being championed by Gov. Mitt Romney. (For where these contests are underway, see Head Count, page 28.) To the Republican Party, this is a classic case of a glass being half-full. Just two years ago, only 50 of the state’s 160 state representative districts (31 percent) featured candidates from both major parties, making Massachusetts the second least competitive state in the nation (ahead of South Carolina, which is even less competitive this year). With 81 House seats drawing both Republican and Democratic contenders, the Bay State has moved up from an abysmal 49th to a more middling 31st in our ranking of states as measured by two-party competition. Massachusetts still ranks lower than any Northeastern state outside of Pennsylvania, but with 10 seats currently in Republican hands going unchallenged by the Democrats, it’s at least mathematically possible (if exceedingly unlikely) for the Republicans to gain clear control of the House of Representatives here, something that couldn’t be said two years ago.

Romney can take some credit for the GOP fielding the biggest crop of legislative candidates since 1990, but one of his neighbors did even better this year. Rhode Island Gov. Donald Carcieri, stymied by a lower legislative body that’s almost as dominated by Democrats as the one on Beacon Hill, has potential allies running in almost three-quarters of the House seats in that state. That’s up from 48 percent in 2002, giving the Ocean State the biggest jump in partisan competitiveness outside of Alaska and West Virginia. Every page on the Web site of the Rhode Island Republican Party carries the banner headline “Let’s Give Governor Carcieri Veto Power in 2004!” Romney would undoubtedly love to pull off the same feat—installing enough GOP members to sustain at least some of his vetoes—but he would need a much higher percentage of his candidates to win.

—ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

TWO-PARTY COMPETITION FOR LEGISLATIVE SEATS (LOWER HOUSE)

RANK / STATE	SIZE OF LOWER BODY	% OF SEATS HELD BY MAJORITY PARTY	% OF SEATS CONTESTED BY BOTH MAJOR PARTIES, 2002	% OF SEATS CONTESTED BY BOTH MAJOR PARTIES, 2004
1. MINNESOTA	134	61 R	95	99
2. MICHIGAN	110	57 R	99	98
3. NEW JERSEY ('03)*	80	59 D	94	96
4. MAINE	151	53 D	85	95
5. HAWAII	51	71 D	88	94
6. CALIFORNIA	80	60 D	89	93
7. WEST VIRGINIA	100	68 D	65	90
8. NORTH DAKOTA**	94	70 R	90	84
OHIO	99	63 R	89	84
10. NEVADA	42	55 D	76	80
11. MONTANA	100	53 R	73	78
12. OREGON	60	58 R	75	77
13. COLORADO	65	57 R	74	75
14. NEW HAMPSHIRE	400	70 R	65	74
15. ALASKA	40	68 R	45	73
RHODE ISLAND	75	84 D	48	73
17. WASHINGTON	98	53 D	70	72
18. MARYLAND ('02)*	141	70 D	70	70
19. NEW YORK	150	69 D	71	67
20. IOWA	100	54 R	62	63
OKLAHOMA	101	52 D	51	63
UTAH	75	75 R	65	63
23. MISSOURI	163	55 R	72	62
24. CONNECTICUT	151	62 D	73	61
LOUISIANA ('03)***	105	65 D	52	61
26. VERMONT	150	49 R	61	59
27. INDIANA	100	51 D	52	57
WISCONSIN	99	59 R	48	57
29. DELAWARE	41	71 R	56	54
30. SOUTH DAKOTA	70	70 R	67	53
31. IDAHO	70	77 R	71	51
MASSACHUSETTS	160	85 D	31	51
33. ALABAMA ('02)*	105	60 D	50	50
KENTUCKY	100	65 D	32	50
35. ARIZONA	60	65 R	55	48
ILLINOIS	118	56 D	48	48
NEBRASKA****	49	n/a	58	48
TENNESSEE	99	55 D	54	48
39. KANSAS	125	64 R	44	44
MISSISSIPPI ('03)*	122	61 D	64	44
41. PENNSYLVANIA	203	54 R	57	43
42. NORTH CAROLINA	120	51 R	52	42
43. GEORGIA	180	59 D	41	40
TEXAS	150	59 R	45	40
WYOMING	60	77 R	38	40
46. NEW MEXICO	70	61 D	41	39
47. FLORIDA	120	68 R	34	30
VIRGINIA ('03)*	100	61 R	51	30
49. ARKANSAS	100	70 D	34	28
50. SOUTH CAROLINA	124	59 R	28	23

*No lower-body seats are up for election this year. “Contested” figures are for the last statewide legislative elections.

**North Dakota Assembly members serve four-year terms; the 2004 “contested” figure applies only to the 46 seats up for election this year.

***Louisiana holds “jungle primaries” that allow the top two candidates, regardless of party affiliation, to advance to the general election. The “contested” figures include any race with more than one candidate. Last year, only 19 percent of the seats had announced candidates from both major parties.

****Candidates for Nebraska’s unicameral legislature are listed without party affiliation, and winners serve four-year terms. The 2004 “contested” figure applies only to 25 seats up for election this year.

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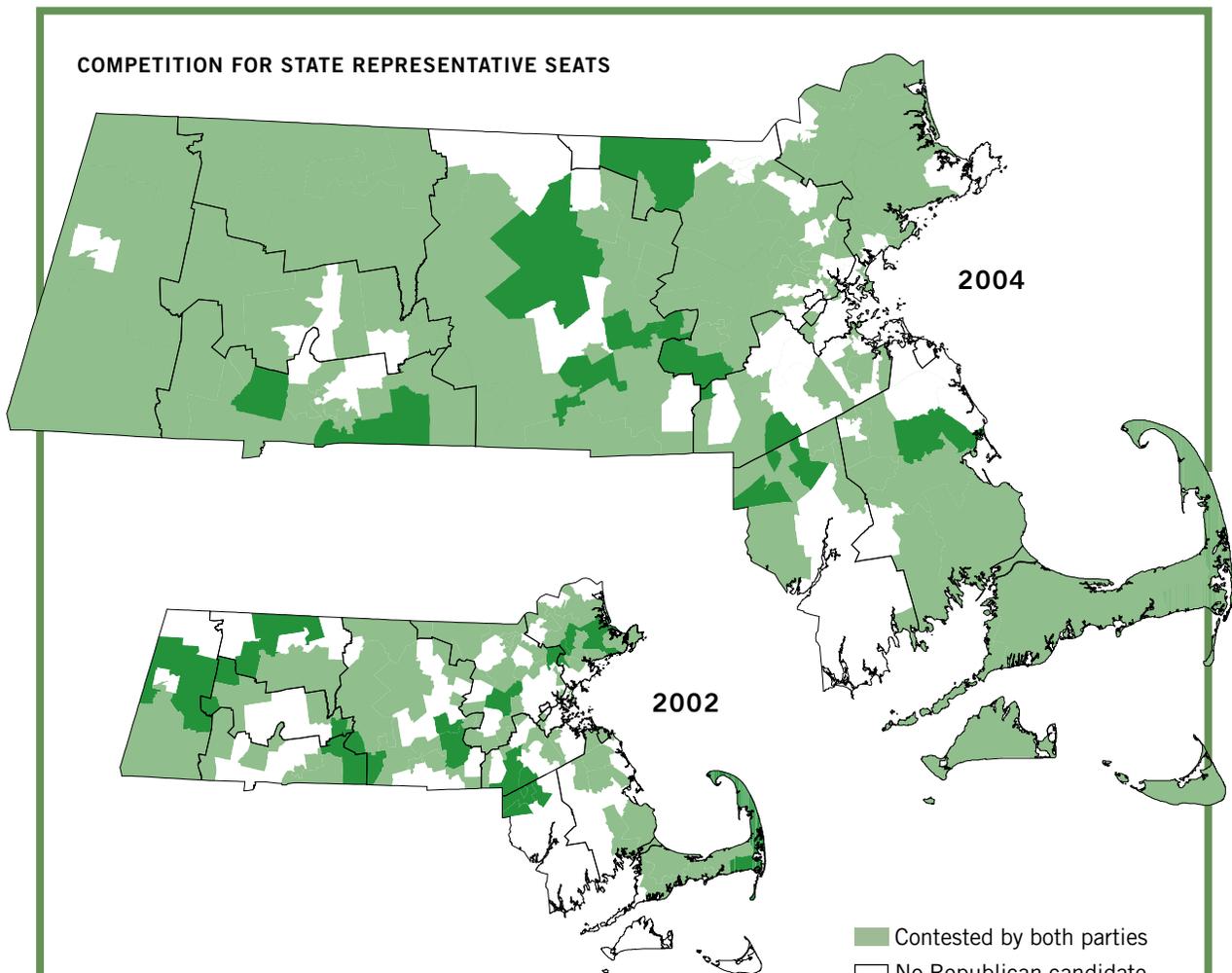
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HEAD COUNT

COMPETITION FOR STATE REPRESENTATIVE SEATS



- Contested by both parties
- No Republican candidate
- No Democratic candidate

Field of battle

For the first time in more than a decade, voters in most Massachusetts communities will see a Republican candidate for state representative on their ballots this fall. (Also see State of the States, page 26). Republican candidates are filling in gaps where there had been no GOP candidates two years ago just about everywhere except the state's major urban centers. (Our maps show county lines, but if we had included the boundaries of towns and legislative districts, we'd have to provide magnifying glasses with each issue of the magazine.) The GOP has candidates in all six Cape and Islands House districts, and in six of the seven districts that cover Berkshire and Franklin counties—the exception being the one entirely in Pittsfield. Gov. Mitt Romney's "Team Reform" is particularly well represented in the I-495 suburbs where the governor ran so strongly when he was elected in 2002. For the first time in years, everyone in the multi-district municipalities of Framingham and

Haverhill have the option of voting Republican, and GOP candidates are on the ballot in many smaller communities where Romney topped 60 percent in 2002 (including Bolton, Kingston, and Westford) but where Democratic legislative candidates were unopposed that same year. (In the races for the state Senate, the Republicans have an even stronger presence this year, with candidates in 29 of 40 districts, including three who have no Democratic opponents.)

Democratic representation in the House remains unchallenged in some territory in and around the state's cities, however. There are Republican candidates on the ballot in only three of the 19 seats in Boston's Suffolk County, and there are no GOP contenders at all in several large cities and towns with multiple districts, including Fall River, New Bedford, Taunton, Malden, and Medford.

—ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

Source: Elections Division, Massachusetts Secretary of State's Office (www.sec.state.ma.us)

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1846 First public demonstration of ether use during surgery
— *Massachusetts General Hospital*

1883 First use in North America of antiseptic during childbirth to protect mothers and newborns from deadly infections
— *Brigham and Women's Hospital*

1896 First use of X-ray image for diagnosis in U.S.
— *Massachusetts General Hospital*

1929 First use of iron lung to save polio victim
— *Brigham and Women's Hospital*



1947 First artificial kidney machine in U.S. perfected
— *Brigham and Women's Hospital*

1954 First successful human organ transplant
— *Brigham and Women's Hospital*

1962 First successful surgical reattachment of severed limb
— *Massachusetts General Hospital*

2000 AIDS researchers at Mass General make groundbreaking discovery in treatment of early detected HIV.
— *Massachusetts General Hospital*

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STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT

BY ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

GETTING OUR IRISH UP

Here's another way in which Massachusetts is different from the rest of the nation. The US Census Bureau reported this summer that German remains the most common ancestral group in the US, with 15.2 percent of respondents claiming that label on the 2000 Census "long form." But in Massachusetts, Germans represented only 5.9 percent of the population, lower than all but a handful of states.

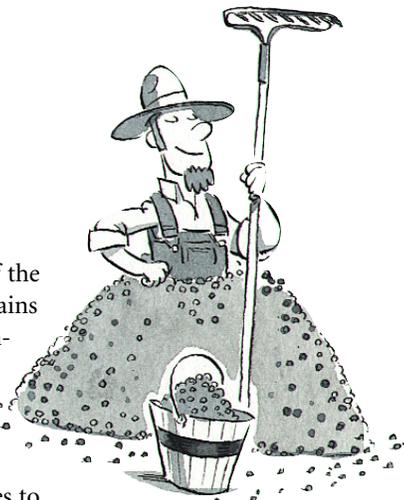
Not surprisingly, Massachusetts was the most Irish state in the nation in 2000, with 22.5 percent of Bay State respondents claiming ties to the Emerald Isle. Nationally, the Irish label ranks second, with 10.8 percent of the population, but it takes the top spot in only three states (the others being Delaware and New Hampshire). Looking at other New England states, Connecticut and Rhode Island have more Italians than any other ethnic group, while the English still enjoy pluralities in Maine and Vermont.

The Irish are the most populous ancestral group in 11 of the 14 Bay State counties. The exceptions are Franklin and Dukes, where the English have bragging rights, and Bristol, which is one of only two counties in the US where the Portuguese are No. 1. (Curiously, the other one is also the only other county in the US named Bristol—in Rhode Island.)

LIONS AND TIGERS AND M-CATS! OH MY!

With high-school football season upon us, we wondered about the most popular mascots in Massachusetts and toted up the nicknames among the 344 public, private, and charter schools that list teams with the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association. It turns out there's a tie for first place: 19 high schools have teams called the Panthers, and another 19 call themselves the Warriors. They're followed by the Tigers and the Raiders (including variants such as the Red Raiders), at 15 schools each. Twelve schools have adopted the Eagles as a nickname (including, of course, Boston College High School), and 11 are known as the Wildcats. Overall, 140 teams have animal names, 58 from the feline family. Despite charges of racial insensitivity over such names, there are still nine teams called the Indians and two teams called the Redmen (not to mention those Red Raiders).

Among the most unusual nicknames: the Saint Clement (Medford) Anchor-men, presumably a nautical rather than a newscaster reference; the Bourne Canalmen; the Springfield Science and Technology School's Cybercats; the Hopkinton Hillers; the Maimonides (Brookline) M-Cats; the Lenox Millionaires; the Holy Name Central (Worcester) Naps, which is short for Napoleon, not nap-time; and the Woburn Tanners and Tannerettes, in honor of the city's once-thriving tanning industry. Woburn is one of only two schools that have different names for male and female teams (Sutton High has the Sammies and the Suzies), but the Keefe Technical High School in Framingham has an arguably less-than-masculine name with the Unicorns. Inevitably, Salem High School has the Witches. The most perplexing name may come from my own alma mater: the Malden Golden Tornadoes.



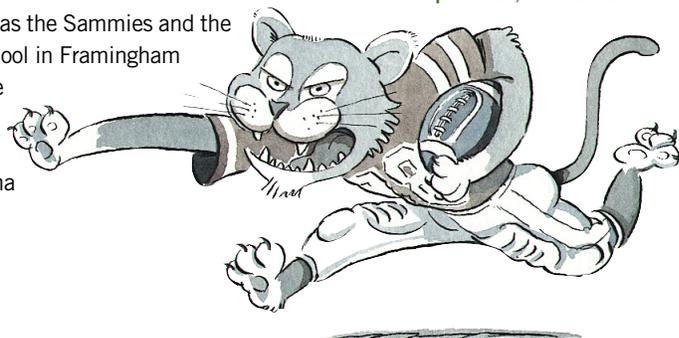
CRANBERRY HIGHS

The US Department of Agriculture forecasts a substantial jump in the Bay State's cranberry crop this year. At 1.8 million barrels, the yield would be up 28 percent from 2003 and up 24 percent from 2002. That's far better than the national forecast of 6.6 million barrels, which is up 6 percent from 2003, 16 percent from 2002. Massachusetts accounts for 27 percent of the national crop, second only to Wisconsin, which produces 54 percent of the nation's cranberries.

FEWER BOSSES IN THE BAY STATE

According to a new report from the US Small Business Association, Massachusetts ranked 47th in the percentage change of employer "births" in 2003. Only 18,984 new employers were founded, down from 21,262 the year before. Only California, Colorado, and Georgia suffered worse slowdowns. Arkansas, Montana, and Idaho showed the biggest gains.

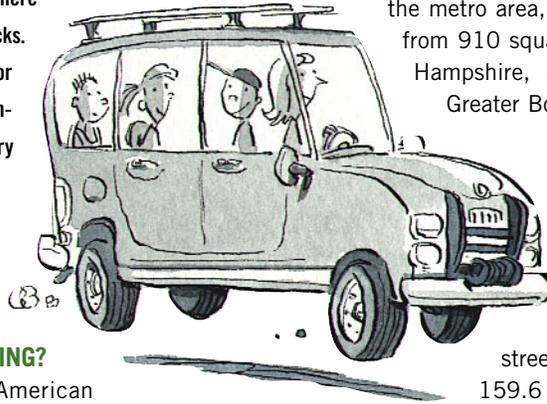
During the same year, more employers in Massachusetts closed up shop (21,870) than opened their doors. The number of "deaths" was up from 20,927 in 2002.



SUVS ON THE RISE

According to the US Census Bureau, the number of SUVs registered in Massachusetts has risen 44 percent since 1997, to just under 600,000. But that's on the low end of the 14 states for which the Census Bureau has released information so far. The number of SUVs in Georgia and Indiana more than doubled during that period.

Massachusetts now has about one SUV for every 11 people, which is about average, but so far it is the only state where SUVs outnumber pickup trucks. There is only one pickup for every 14 people here, compared with one for every four people in Georgia.



MBTA: MORE BUSES THAN ANYTHING?

According to the American Public Transportation Association, ridership on the MBTA rose by 1.2 percent in 2003, going against a national trend in which mass transit ridership fell by 2.0 percent. But the gain was entirely due to the T's bus fleet. Passengers made 112 million trips by bus in 2003, up from 105 million the year before; the 7.4 increase was the largest of any major metropolitan area. However, trips by subway, light rail (the Green Line), and commuter rail all decreased slightly, in line with national trends. It was the third consecutive year of losses on the T's three "heavy rail" subway lines, which is now down to 124 million annual trips.

APTA also reports that the busiest months for mass transit nationwide are in March and October, with the lightest months in August and November.

A FEW MORE PEOPLE, A LOT MORE TRAFFIC

As of 2002, Boston ranked 11th among 85 US metropolitan areas in the costs associated with traffic congestion, according to a recent report by the Texas Transportation Institute. Slow or stalled traffic conditions resulted in the loss of 81.1 million person-hours that year, up from 25.5 million lost person-hours in 1982.

Because so many people are moving farther and farther from their jobs, the amount of time stuck in traffic jams went up even though Boston has had comparatively slight population growth over the past couple of decades. From 1982 through 2002, the population of metropolitan Boston grew by only 6.3 percent, compared with a growth rate of 30.4 percent for all 85 urban areas included in the study. (During that time, the metro area, defined by commuting patterns, expanded from 910 square miles to 1,165 miles, or well into New Hampshire, meaning that the population density of Greater Boston actually decreased.)

But during that same time period, the number of "peak hour" travelers went up by 19.0 percent (compared with a jump of 68.7 percent nationally). And daily vehicle-miles on freeways went up by 47.3 percent (compared with 115.8 percent nationally), while daily vehicle-miles on arterial streets went up 25.4 percent (compared with 159.6 percent nationally).

A GOVERNMENT OF BILLS, NOT LAWS

More bills are introduced in the Massachusetts Legislature than in almost any other state, according to a report by the New York-based Brennan Center for Justice. In 2002, 7,924 bills were introduced on Beacon Hill; among the 42 states researched by the Brennan Center, only New York (with 16,892) and Illinois (with 8,717) posted higher numbers.

As for the success of these bills in making it all the way to law, Massachusetts is near the bottom. The "legislative enactment rate" here was only 6.7 percent, lower than all but three states (New York at 4.1 percent, and New Jersey and North Carolina, both at 2.7 percent). The state legislature that seems to have spent the least time on doomed bills was in Maine, where 85 percent of all introduced bills eventually became law.

The Brennan Center report called New York's legislative process "the most dysfunctional in the nation," and noted several ways in which the Albany State House was more secretive than the one in Boston. For example, proxy voting is allowed in New York Senate committees; the rules committees in both houses of the New York Legislature are exempt from meeting notice requirements; and the leader of the New York Senate can indefinitely remove bills from the legislative calendar without any way for the full membership to override his or her decision.



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Final ballot?

Leverett considers dropping its resistance to modern campaigns

BY MARY CAREY

LEVERETT—It's the only municipality in the US named Leverett, and residents of this small Massachusetts town like to think it's unique. Leverett was one of the first places in the country to officially call for the repeal of certain provisions of the 2001 USA Patriot Act. As one of the state's most liberal communities, it gave Democrat Shannon O'Brien her third-highest percentage of the vote in the 2002 gubernatorial election and produced the third-highest share of the tally in favor of preserving the state's income tax. There is a petition on this year's town meeting warrant asking the United States and other governments to support nuclear non-proliferation.

Leverett is also unique for being last. Specifically, it is the only community in Massachusetts that hasn't passed the Town Ballot Act, an 1890 law that regulates campaigns and elections for town offices. Under the Town Ballot Act, for example, candidates for any municipal office must file nomination papers "at least six days previous to the day of the election," and the town clerk must "conspicuously post" a list of candidates at least four days before the election. But in Leverett, campaigns for local offices—including nominations, speeches, and the vote itself—take place entirely on the floor of town meeting, held at the elementary school. Since 1968, Leverett has been the only town in the state that still conducts elections the old-fashioned way.

"It seems like Leverett is a com-

munity that doesn't follow the pack in one way or another," says Leverett Board of Selectmen Chairman Fenna Lee Bonsignore, a retired pharmacist who has served on the board for 18 years and was on the school committee before that.

Still, the selectmen are mulling whether to hold public meetings this fall to discuss adopting what has

become the usual way of electing town officers in Massachusetts. "Our procedure of nominating people from town meeting floor is antiquated," says Selectman James Perkins. "I think we need to change it."

Residents elect people to about a dozen offices at every year's open town meeting. The board of select-

men has three members, each with a three-year term, so one is up for election or re-election every year. The town's assessors, moderator and assistant moderator, members of the board of health and the finance committee, library trustees, town clerk, and tree warden also serve various terms, with some posts needing to be filled each year.

For most positions, elections are uncontested. But if more than one person for the same office receives nominations from the floor, the town clerk writes out a ballot by hand, drawing a box next to each nominee's name, then runs off as many photocopies as needed in the school's administrative office. At the same time, residents line up in the school gymnasium, where election workers check off their names on a voter registration list. When the clerk returns, the ballots are distributed and residents cast them.

This all makes Leverett elections very neighborly, almost quaint. The problem is, residents come to town meeting not knowing for sure who

Residents come to town meeting not knowing who will be on the ballot.

will be running for the various offices, since not all candidates announce beforehand. Residents who want to research a candidate's views or qualifications before casting a vote are at a disadvantage. Furthermore, it's impossible to provide absentee ballots to anyone unable to attend town meeting, since no one knows who the

candidates will be.

In a recent community newsletter, Lisa Stratford, town clerk for the past six years, warned of “stealth candidates,” residents who hide their intention to run for office until the town meeting is underway.

“The atmosphere at town meeting is very casual and relaxed,” says Stratford, in an interview. “There is a lot of chatting going on. It’s not the way I would run an election at Town Hall.” In every other community, campaigning within 150 feet of the polling place is prohibited, as is wearing campaign pins or buttons inside the polling place. “The town can’t enforce a lot of these rules because we have not accepted the Town Ballot Act,” says Stratford. As a result, she says, “I think some people have figured out how to manipulate the system.”

Town Administrator Marjorie J. McGinnis, an appointed official who

lives in nearby New Salem, concurs that the process can be disorientating. “I could never have pictured it until I went through it,” she says, referring specifically to the verbal nomination procedure. “It’s a totally different environment.”

“We are thinking that maybe it is time to conform,” says Stratford. “As much as the way we vote in town is unique and it’s fun most of the time, I think it can be very hurtful at times, as it was this year. One candidate was caught off guard. He didn’t realize there was an organized effort to oust him.”

Once a working-class mill town, Leverett began to change in the 1960s, gaining a student population, thanks to the rapid expansion of the University of Massachusetts in bordering Amherst.

Soon afterward, pioneers of the back-to-the-land movement, including artists, craftspeople, and organic farmers, also settled in Leverett and surrounding Franklin County. Now the town has a striking mix of homes, from trailers to Yankee Candles founder Michael Kittredge’s mansion, which includes his own health club and Olympics-size pool.

Leverett claims to be home to first Japanese Buddhist “peace pagoda” built in the country, and the town has an array of religious institutions, including a Congregational church, two Baptist churches, a Quaker meeting house, a Cambodian Buddhist Temple, and the Gura Ram Dass Ashrum Community. (Leverett’s Catholics go to church elsewhere, however, mostly in Amherst.) The police chief, who is on disability leave, is an American Indian who favored an all-black SWAT-team-style uniform to

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patrol the woodsy town. The acting chief, Kelson Ting, is a Chinese-American, and his part-time deputy is Cambodian.

But as inclusive as the town considers itself to be, politics here can turn ugly. The intensity of some recent contests—especially those involving the board of health—have led some to argue that the town needs a more structured process to keep elections fair.

A few years ago, the five-member

trying to stop the renovation and expansion project in its tracks. “There is nothing farther from the truth,” he says. “But I would not compromise on children, period.”

At the time, however, Ayers had no idea of the extent of the campaign against him. At town meeting, Paul Bourke and John Prebis were nominated from the floor. Neither candidate had made public statements about their intentions to seek elective office

the state standards are stringent enough, and that the town is risking lawsuits from developers by going beyond them.

But at town meeting this past April, the balance of power on the health board shifted again. Bourke was ousted by Chris Kilham, an adjunct soil science professor at UMass. Kilham, who was supported by former board member Ayers, is opposed to changing the town’s standards because he fears the contamination of the groundwater. (Ayers concedes that some people don’t want to change the standards simply “because they don’t want to see any more houses built.”)

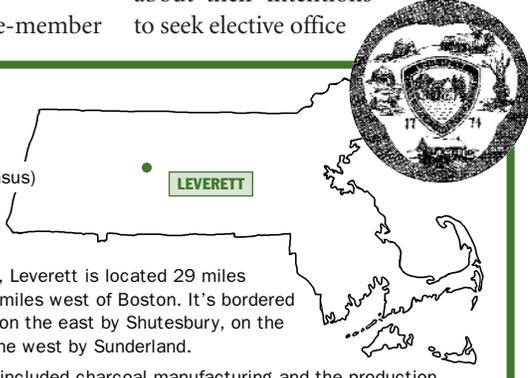
Some people complained that a letter in support of Kilham, sent to everyone in town, was deliberately timed to arrive the day before town meeting, catching voters, not to mention Bourke, off guard. The mailing was anonymous—which would be illegal if Leverett were bound by the Town Ballot Act. Stratford says that, as far as she knows, it was the first time during her 10 years as town clerk that such a mailing was sent to voters.

LEVERETT

Incorporated: 1774
Population: 1,663 (2000 Census)
Town Meeting: Open

FACTS:

- ◆ Covering 22.7 square miles, Leverett is located 29 miles north of Springfield and 93 miles west of Boston. It’s bordered on the north by Montague, on the east by Shutesbury, on the south by Amherst, and on the west by Sunderland.
- ◆ The town’s early industries included charcoal manufacturing and the production of hoes, chairs, scythes, yarns, tables, churns, baby carriages, and boxes.
- ◆ As of 2000, there were 612 households in Leverett, including 148 homes with married couples and children and 135 homes with neither married couples nor children. As of this year, the median assessed value for a home in Leverett is \$205,647. The 2003 tax rate was \$18.49 per \$1,000.



health board split over how much asbestos abatement and radon testing should be done at the elementary school, which was then undergoing an extensive renovation and expansion. There were also conflicts over installing carpet in the school (some residents were wary of the chemicals carpeting is treated with) and over where to locate the septic system’s leach field. At the time, the board of health’s chairman was Glen Ayers, a soil scientist who advocated the strictest possible environmental standards in renovating the school. For his troubles, he was the victim of what he calls “a slimy smear campaign” in 2001.

“A phone tree was established making a lot of phone calls, talking to people who really did not know that much [and saying] that I was trying to stop the school project,” Ayers says. There were allegations that he was

prior to town meeting. Bourke won, and Ayers learned a bitter lesson about small-town politics.

“It turned out to be a total blessing,” Ayers says. “I’m sure there are weeks when I put in 40 hours a week, in a volunteer job. You accept the grief when you take a small-town public office.”

The health board has also been torn apart over septic-tank regulations. Leverett doesn’t have a public water or sewer system, and there has been

Glen Ayers says he was blindsided by a ‘slimy smear campaign’ in 2001.

ongoing conflict over whether to scale back the town’s unusually tight regulations on septic tanks so that they conform to the state’s standards, known as Title 5. Bourke, who is a home builder, and others argue that

It’s still far from clear whether the necessary two-thirds of voters will approve a proposal to change the way elections are held, which could be put to town meeting October 26. Moderator Gary Gruber, for one, wouldn’t support it.

“I don’t think you’re going to know your candidates any differently if they are nominated two weeks before or if they get up at town meet-

ing,” says Gruber. “If someone wants to become known in town, it’s relatively simple. If you’re really serious, you spend two consecutive weekends at the transfer station and you get to meet most everybody.” After all,

that's where sixth-graders hold bake sales to raise money for class trips, calling their makeshift eatery the Dump Days Café.

Gruber says nothing that has gone on with the board of health is any reason to revise Leverett's elections. There is always tension somewhere in town government, he says, usually having to do with schools or public works, which together account for most of the town's budget.

"Is there going to be less tension if you have an election or if you have the nominations off the town meeting floor?" Gruber asks. "I honestly don't know."

But others think it's time to make a change. Though she says she never would have run for selectman if she had had to file nomination papers and run a campaign, Bonsignore thinks that having elections separate from town meeting would be more

democratic. Longtime residents wary of approving costly projects don't go to town meeting, she speculates, because they know they're outnumbered.

"They feel they're going to be outvoted anyway," she says. "Don't forget, our tax rate is very high. Everything we vote at town meeting is reflected in our tax rate."

Clifford Blinn, 87, agrees. Born and raised in Leverett, Blinn was a tree-cutter before he went to work at the now-shuttered Greenfield Tap and Die works, and he served as a selectman 40 years ago.

"Town meeting today is different than it used to be," Blinn says. "Most of the people don't want to come and stay all day waiting for things to come up. So, really, the only ones that come are the ones that want something passed. I don't think it makes for good representation."

He says more people might turn

out for elections if it were a simple matter of casting their votes and going home. As it is, he says, residents who go to town meeting don't necessarily know who they're voting for, or what they stand for. Blinn says he used to know almost everyone in town; now he figures he knows 10 percent of a more transient population.

"They're here for a few years and then they're gone," he says. "They come and they want city ways, and then they go."

Twice before, there have been pushes to change Leverett's voting ways, the last time in 1990. "This is Leverett's only claim to uniqueness," then-town administrator Jane Davis said at the time.

"People were just against it. They wanted to keep it the way it was," says Blinn. "In the past, I've been 100 percent against it, but the way things are going now, I'm not sure." ■

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Broadcast news

Does Fox25 on Beacon Hill signal a turn in State House coverage?

BY JEFFREY KLINEMAN

An ink-stained wretch no more, Joe Battenfeld wears a white T-shirt and dress pants as he walks through the Boston Common and up Beacon Street, carrying a camera-friendly suit jacket and a button-down shirt in a plastic dry-cleaning bag as he trods familiar ground. In a dozen years as a political reporter for the *Boston Herald*, Battenfeld drank late into the night with former Boston mayor Ray Flynn, broke the “booze cruise” story that drove Peter Blute out of Massport and out of politics, and covered dozens of state and national elections.

His destination these days is not the State House, but a building across the street. On the corner of Beacon and Park streets, in a space formerly occupied by a coffee shop called Curious Liquids, is Beacon Hill’s newest curiosity—the small storefront studio of WFXT-TV, Fox25. From the sidewalk, through floor-to-ceiling windows, passersby can see the station logo floating on LCD screens; an anchor desk vaguely reminiscent of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* sits under a bank of spotlights.

Battenfeld, who is finishing his first year as political editor, is an important part of the strategy at Fox25, a station that is trying hard to make itself a force in local news. So, too, is the fishbowl-like studio across the street from the State House.

“Both Joe and the Beacon Hill studio, those investments, they reflect our commitment to politics in this market,” says Gregg Kelley, general manager of Fox25. The station’s

‘I came here to try to break stories.’

political programming also features former state senator Warren Tolman and Republican consultant Rob Gray in a weekly left-vs.-right shtick; House Speaker Thomas Finneran used to trek across the street for appearances once a month.

The Beacon Hill presence is also a brand-builder for Fox25, Kelley says. The satellite studio gives the three-hour

Fox25 morning news show a *Today Show*-type street-level presence when it catches a “toss” from the station’s main studio in Dedham. The constant flow of foot traffic also lets reporters get those all-important “man on the street” reactions to breaking news.

“Obviously, being across from the State House is a unique location,” Kelley says. “It gives us a competitive advantage in collecting political news. But at the same time, the central location allows us to gather any other news happening in downtown Boston.”

Fox25 setting up shop on Beacon Hill also marks a reversal of the main trend in television news coverage of the State House over the past two decades, which is departure rather than arrival.



The new studio is a brand-builder for Fox25—and great for “man on the street” interviews.

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Whether that reversal is symbolic or substantive remains to be seen. Battenfeld admits he's still learning the TV game, trying to fit in with the blow-dried crowd. But the ethos he brings to his broadcast beat is no different from the one he followed at the *Herald*.

"I came here to try to break stories," he says.

STATION BREAK

Breaking stories on Beacon Hill is something most local television stations have all but given up on. Broadcast journalists were once such fixtures at the State House that they had their own office. But in the 1990s television reporters packed up and left the building, by 1998 giving up Room 439 and dropping in only for press conferences. Whereas stations once had one or two reporters assigned permanently to the State House, now only CBS4's John Henning, who is semi-retired, is on Beacon Hill regularly. Janet Woo, WCVB's veteran political reporter, is as likely to cover a car accident as she is a dustup in the Legislature.

"The news has changed," says Andy Hiller, longtime political reporter for WHDH. "Traditional political coverage—where you attend the meeting, you report the process—has lost its value."

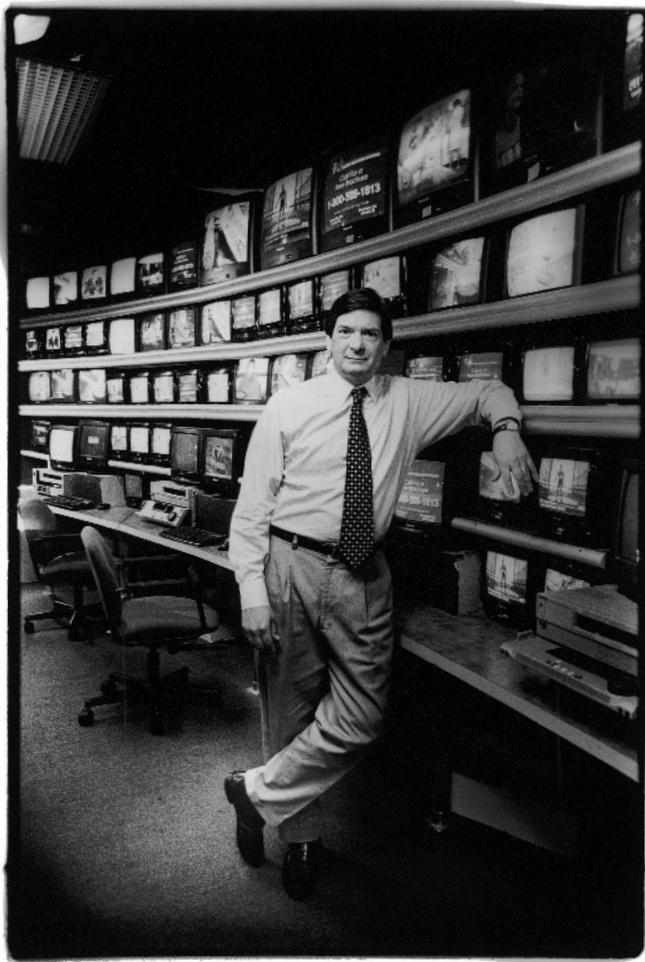
"They just marginalized the coverage little by little," says Henning. "You know your lifeboat is getting smaller, and all of a sudden there's no boat."

The shift in coverage has been away from process and toward personalities, and mostly away from the State House altogether. In part, that's a function of the way local newscasts have changed, beginning with Channel 7.

When Ed Ansin bought WHDH in 1993, fears were rampant among traditionalists that he would install the high-story-count, sirens-in-the-background formula—known among critics as "if it bleeds, it leads"—that had helped turn around his Miami station, WSVN. While the Boston version was a good deal less bloody than many feared, it was also highly successful, making Channel 7 one of the top two stations in most time slots. The other major-network affiliates followed suit at least partly, airing more and shorter stories, expanding crime and entertainment coverage, and killing longer features. Another casualty of the new thinking in TV: WCVB's long-admired *Five on Five*, the last locally produced Sunday morning public affairs show on a major-network affiliate here, disappeared three summers ago.

But a less noted factor in the decline in State House coverage is, ironically, too much airtime to fill. The evening newscasts on the three major-network affiliates now consist of three 30-minute blocks from 5 to 6:30 p.m. (or from 4 to 5 p.m. and then 6 to 6:30 p.m. at CBS4, which recently switched its broadcasts with *Dr. Phil*).

"That really was the beginning of the end of political reporting," says James Thistle, director of the broadcast



WHDH's Andy Hiller: Beat reporting has "lost its value."

journalism program at Boston University, who has served as news director at all three stations over the years. "Every half hour has to be interesting and compelling on its own, but you get less time spent on local items."

It also means more demands on producers and reporters. "When I started as news director in 1993, WBZ [now CBS4] was producing 26 hours of news a week,"

Ironically, one problem is too much time to fill.

says Peter Brown, who held that position for more than a decade before leaving earlier this year. "When I left, we were producing 43 hours a week on two television stations [CBS4 now produces morning and 10 p.m. newscasts for UPN 38]. Over that time, we probably introduced three [additional] reporters."

In this hurry-up news atmosphere, the first casualty was time, especially time spent prowling the corridors of the State House. "We simply didn't have the luxury of beats anymore," says Emily Rooney, a former news director at WCVB and now host of the local affairs show *Greater Boston*, on WGBH. "People had specialty areas, but then

we could not afford to *not* have them report a story."

It used to be, Brown says, that if Henning told him he didn't have a hot story that day, he could let the correspondent "gumshoe" off-camera, working his sources around the building, drumming up something big for later in the week.

"The days you're not reporting are often the gold mine days, the ones when you pick up the most information," says Henning.

But time spent away from the cameras is a gold mine stations can no longer afford, says Brown. "If you have a beat reporter at the State House and it's a slow day, then you've got a one-, or even a two-minute hole to fill," says Brown. "Not having anything, in this day and age, doesn't work anymore."

The stations have put themselves in this bind in pursuit of ratings, but none of what they've done has been enough to stem the loss of audience to cable stations and the Internet. Nationally, local news is a medium whose market share is falling, and so, arguably, is its credibility. According to Nielsen Media Research, from 1998 to 2002, between 70 and 90 percent of stations across the country lost viewers *each year*.

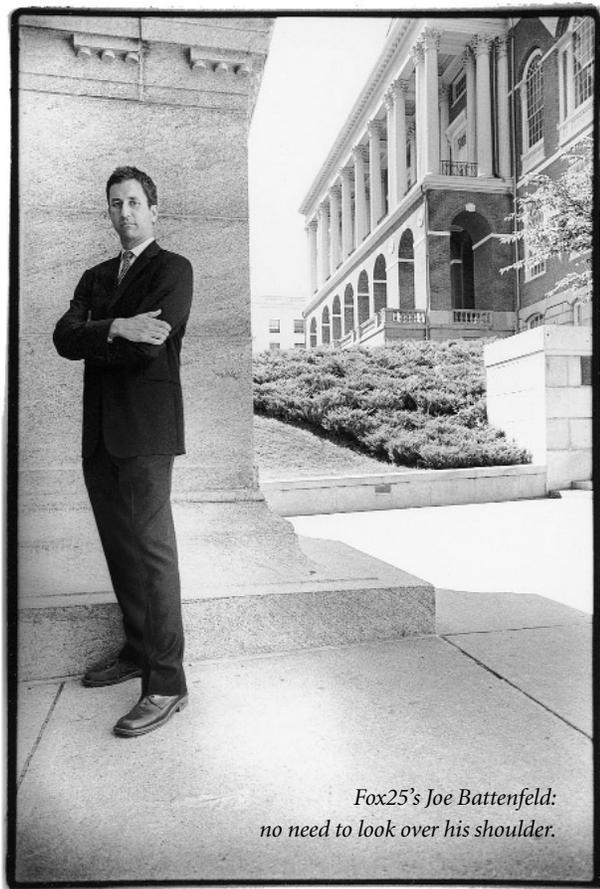
One news veteran says the changes made to stop the slide may be making things worse. "Audiences have been in decline, yet [local stations] have refused to pursue a different strategy," says Ed Fouhy, a veteran network television executive and founder of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism. "It's almost like lemmings going off a cliff."

CHANGING CHANNELS

Boston is the fifth largest television market in the country and has long been one of the most prestigious. Even today it's seen as one of the best nationally. Two years ago, the Project for Excellence in Journalism, sponsored by Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism and the Pew Charitable Trusts, concluded a five-year-long survey of local television news, awarding high praise and "A" grades to Boston's three major-network affiliates. The city's rankings in 2002 put it at the top of the 17 markets surveyed—and marked a turnaround from four years earlier, when the same stations earned grades ranging from "D+" (WHDH) to "C+" (WCVB).

But it has been the upstart stations, broadcast and cable, that have started to fill the politics-and-government coverage gap. Nearly 10 years ago, WLVI, now known as WB56, hired Jon Keller, then of the *Boston Phoenix*, as political analyst, taping sharp segments for its *Ten O'Clock News*.

"We've almost counterintuitively emphasized political reporting," says Keller, whose *Keller at Large* is now the only Sunday morning political talk show on the Boston airwaves. During the week, Rooney's *Greater Boston*, on local public television, has chewed over public affairs



*Fox25's Joe Battenfeld:
no need to look over his shoulder.*

nightly for more than seven years.

New England Cable News, with a full day to fill, adds another dimension, covering politics in Massachusetts and throughout the region. In addition, its *NewsNight* interview show brings in guests to talk over political developments with hosts Chet Curtis and Jim Braude.

“We have the ability to provide, in the overall context of our coverage and *NewsNight*, a much deeper level of information for our viewers,” says Phil Balboni, president and founder of NECN. “I’m not suggesting we’re fulfilling it all the time. We do live in the real world, and we have to pay our bills.”

And last year Fox25 tapped Battenfeld, rather than some eager-beaver “on-air talent” working his way up-market, to cover and analyze politics for its 10 p.m. newscast. Just being in the Beacon Hill studio, where Battenfeld goes three or four days a week, can be an advantage in breaking stories, he says—as it was when labor unrest threatened to dash Boston Mayor Thomas Menino’s hopes for a smooth-as-silk Democratic National Convention.

“In the weekend before the convention, when Menino was still having negotiations, I had parked my car and headed to studio, when I saw the firefighters coming out of [the] Parkman House,” says Battenfeld, who found himself first on the scene of the last city-worker contract settlement. “The photographer was right there, and then Menino came out, so we got him, too. We were the only TV station there, and part of that was due to the fact that we were on Beacon Hill.”

A few scoops like that may justify Fox25’s investment in Battenfeld and its Beacon Street storefront, but it’s unlikely to turn the tide at the major-network affiliates, where political reporting has apparently lost its romance.

“I came from Atlanta because Boston had a City Hall and a State House,” says Hiller. “If you were to say now, ‘Name the country’s most politically active cities,’ you’d

ANALYZE THIS

From Andy Hiller to Jon Keller to Joe Battenfeld, today’s political correspondents are as apt to give TV viewers their take on the day’s political developments as break the news of them. Indeed, Hiller, as much gadfly as journalist, is more likely to make news than report it. He’s become famous for the pop quizzes he inflicts on candidates, whether for the State House or the White House. Early in the presidential primary season of 2000, Hiller surprised George W. Bush by challenging him to name the leaders of Chechnya, Taiwan, India, and Pakistan. (Bush could only come up with the Taiwanese prime minister.) It was an old tactic for Hiller, who also tortured candidates in the 1984 US Senate race—including Ed Markey, who famously couldn’t name then-Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, and John Kerry—with a quiz during one of their debates.

Welcome to the age of the “political analyst,” who has superseded the mere political reporter. In journalism circles, it’s long been alleged that television chases print, but today, with 24-hour cable news channels like CNN and MSNBC, television is even chasing itself. By the time 6 o’clock or

11 o’clock rolls around, even the news seems like old news. What’s called for isn’t fact, broadcasters say, but perspective.

“By 10 at night, most people know what the big political story of the day is,” says WB56’s Keller, who considers his political commentary a form of consumer advocacy. “If they’re watching us, they want to see what Keller’s take is. I work my sources every day, but often the news breaks and we’re called in to analyze it.”

Some TV news veterans take a dim view of this development. Former news director James Thistle, head of Boston University’s broadcast journalism department, says the analyst role “has a lot more to do with personality news than with issues.”

Still, even John Henning of CBS4, the grand old man of the State House broadcast press corps, has succumbed to the trend, albeit as the voice of experience, rather than sarcasm. But that doesn’t mean he likes it.

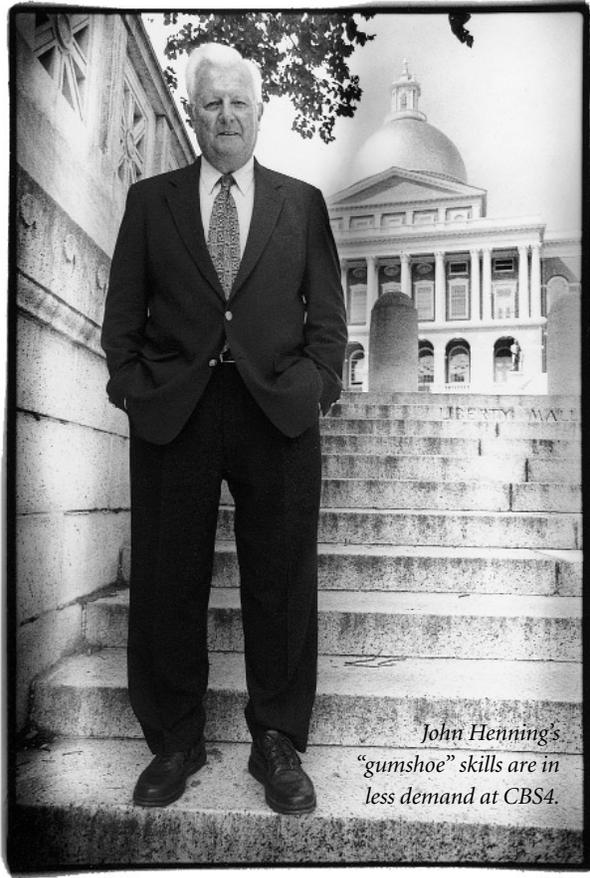
“I’m doing more analysis and commentary than I used to,” says Henning. “But I still believe it’s a beat job.”

—JEFFREY KLINEMAN

name Chicago and you'd name Boston. There are many people here who are experienced and sophisticated at playing the game."

But this game is one that today's television reporters are no longer fans of, industry watchers say. "We are developing new staffers who have been trained as generalists," says Thistle. "My fear is that there isn't another generation to cover politicians."

In this, the stations are also taking the advice of private news consultants, who Thistle says typically cite audience surveys that show less interest in government stories than in weather, medical news, and consumer issues. "But it's



*John Henning's
"gumshoe" skills are in
less demand at CBS4.*

in how you ask the question," Thistle insists. "Ask [viewers] whether they're interested in how politicians are using your money, or making decisions about your child's education. All of a sudden, interest goes up."

Except, maybe, among reporters. "I don't believe the new reporters aspire to be political reporters," says Hiller. "I don't believe they come in and say, 'Where's the State House? Where's City Hall?' And I also don't believe, at Channel 7, there's someone saying, 'When is Andy going to leave? Because I want to be a political reporter.'" ■

Jeffrey Klineman is a freelance writer in Cambridge.

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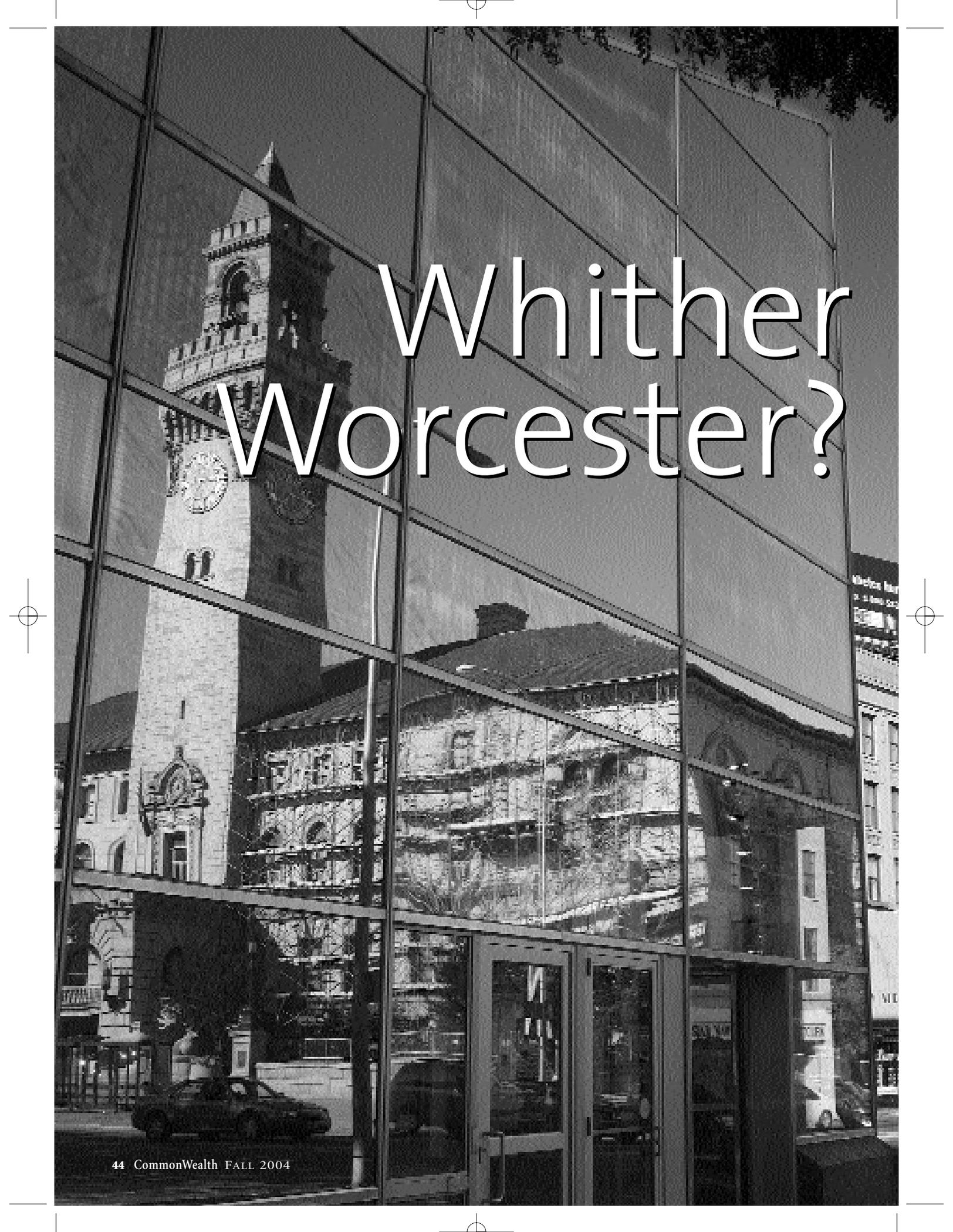
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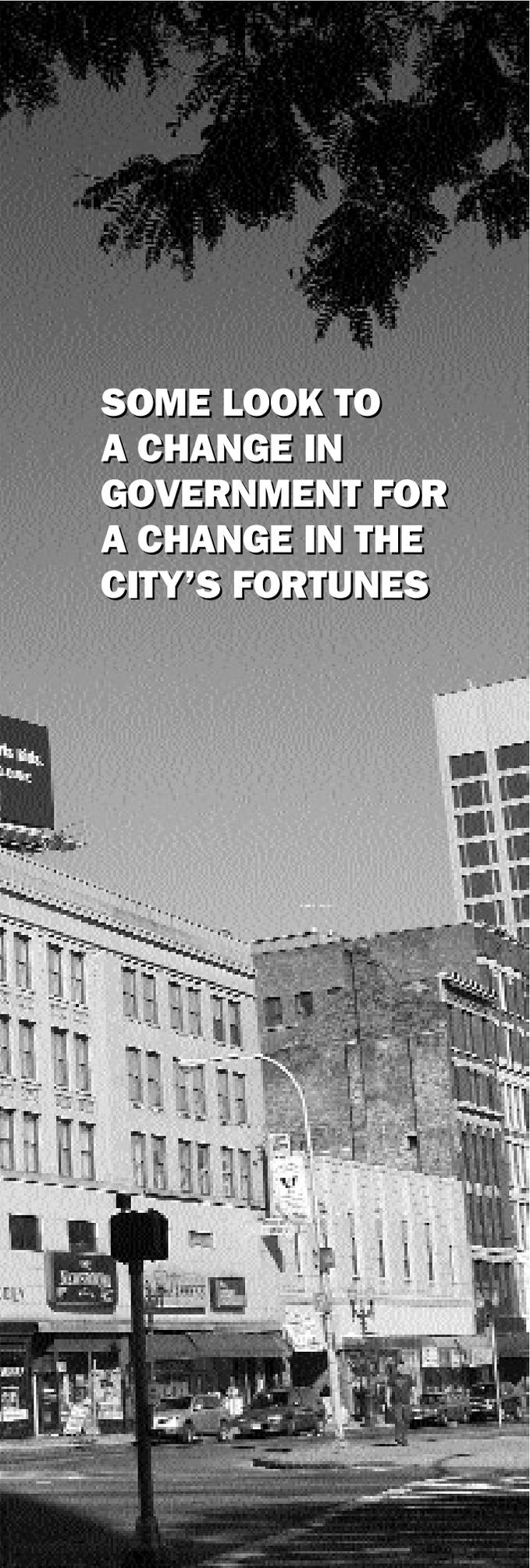
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Whither Worcester?



SOME LOOK TO A CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT FOR A CHANGE IN THE CITY'S FORTUNES

If and when Worcester converts its municipal government from city manager to “strong mayor” rule—a change some hope will take place as early as next year—it will be easy to pinpoint the moment when the move got its start. It was March 16, the day the Worcester City Council unceremoniously dumped City Manager Thomas Hoover, who had served in his post since 1994. Earlier in the day, Hoover received a letter signed by eight of the 11 city councilors demanding his resignation. At the weekly council meeting that evening, Hoover gave it to them. A few weeks later, a group calling itself Voters in Charge launched a petition drive, demanding for a change from manager to mayor. “Worcester needs a leader, especially now,” declared Marianne Bergenholtz, chair of Voters in Charge, in a May 25 announcement. “And our history of the past 20 years shows that managers manage, they don’t lead.”

It was not the first time the city’s legislative body had fired its CEO. If anything, the dismissal of Hoover’s predecessor, William “Jeff” Mulford, was more dramatic and bitter, the climax of years of quarreling between the manager and the council. And it was not the first time city manager government has been called into question. Worcester has long been obsessed with its method of municipal organization, with all manner of civic complaints—about representation, leadership, accountability, and especially economic development—channeled into one question: Mayor or manager?

But it could be that the question is finally going to be resolved. That’s because Hoover was relieved of his post not due to disgrace, scandal, mismanagement, or even a political grudge. If anything, the reason was disappointment.

While Worcester has never sunk to the lowest depths of urban despair, thanks to its retention of a solid middle class in stable residential neighborhoods, neither has it ever really rebounded from decades of industrial decay. Over the past 20 years, commercial and industrial property has declined

BY STEVEN JONES-D’AGOSTINO

**PHOTOGRAPHS BY
PATRICK O’CONNOR**

from 35 percent of the city's tax base to 20 percent. Although Worcester has one of the highest business-property tax rates in the Commonwealth, more of the city's tax burden is being shifted to homeowners.

The city's weakened economic state is especially evident in the downtown area, which has been touted as being on the verge of a comeback for years now and has little to show for all the promising rhetoric. The long-troubled million-square-foot Worcester Center mixed-use complex, located just behind City Hall, is beginning its *second* major overhaul in the past decade. Business and political leaders are hailing two just-started development projects (a new full-service hotel and a new state courthouse) as signs that Worcester, once derided by *The New York Times* as "the utility closet" of New England, is on the move. But even these steps come at a time when Worcester's business community—whose activist nature had once been one of the city's key strengths—is coming apart at the seams.

A switch to strong-mayor governance is something that Worcester has considered on three other occasions over the 55-year history of city-manager government—known here as Plan E, after the alphabetized options for city government allowed under state statute. But now, a shrinking business tax base and a longing for a kind of entrepreneurial leadership that has been lacking under the Plan E system have the conversation about charter change once again picking up steam, with even some longtime defenders of professional—i.e., nonpolitical—city management now giving up the ghost.

But questions remain: Does Worcester really need a strong *mayor*? Or does the city need a strong *leader*? And if it's the latter, will changing the form of government make any difference?

"There's always this question, 'Is the format [of the government] the correct format?'" says Worcester attorney Frederick Misilo Jr., head of the strategic planning committee for the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. "I think it's a question of leadership."

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

There has been a great deal of tinkering with Worcester municipal government over the years, in response to a range of political, economic, and social pressures. Under the first city charter, adopted in 1848, Worcester was governed by both an 11-member board of aldermen and a 30-member common council, along with a mayor who enjoyed limited managerial authority. Mayor Henry Marsh tried unsuccessfully to obtain the power to hire and fire city officials, but a new charter approved by voters in 1893 did give the mayor the right to veto appointments made by the common council. Worcester operated under this system—essentially a "weak mayor" form of government—for another half-century, until the city once again caught the charter-reform bug.

In the boom years immediately following World War II, Worcester was forced to face up to the widespread perception of a corrupt City Hall and the reality of a city infrastructure that had been falling apart for a long time. The reputed head of Worcester's Italian mob was rumored to have his henchmen delivering bribes in paper bags to the mayor's office in broad daylight, though the city's two-edition newspaper of record, the *Worcester Telegram and Evening Gazette* could never verify it, according to Albert Southwick, a retired chief editorial writer for the merged *T&G* who now pens local historical columns. "Illegal gambling parlors, specializing in horse betting, flourished [downtown] and in other locations," wrote former publisher Robert Achorn in a 1999 *T&G* column. "When there were complaints, the police couldn't seem to find the joints, even though the customers could."



*Francis McGrath: city manager
for a record 34 years.*

At the same time, Worcester's schools, roads, and water and sewer systems suffered from years of neglect, according to Southwick. One reason: the city's cumbersome bicameral legislature, and especially the common council, which consisted of 30 members—three each from the city's 10 wards (which have since been reduced to five wards)—who fought bitterly over which neighborhoods construction projects should be steered to.

City politics were also marred by partisan rivalries, which were as much ethnic as political. By the 1940s, Irish Democrats—who had secured a majority on the common council as early as the 1920s—were on the verge of totally eclipsing the Republicans, who had previously controlled City



Mayor Timothy Murray: He helped to show City Manager Thomas Hoover the door earlier this year.

Hall thanks to their base among Yankee and Scandinavian voters. In 1946, Irish Democrat Harold Donahue displaced Swedish Republican Pehr Holmes from a congressional seat he had held since the '20s. The next year, Democrats took the mayor's race and a majority of seats on both the board of aldermen and the common council.

Plan E was supposed to take party politics out of City Hall.

In 1947, the Republican power structure joined forces with academic and good-government reformers—including the heads of Clark University, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and the *T&G*—to push for a new form of municipal government, one that had been added to the options available under state law in 1938. Plan E consisted of an elected city council (nine members, all of whom would be elected at large) and an appointed city manager, who would actually run municipal operations. That November, Worcester voters approved the binding ballot question by a vote of 42,000 to 22,000—a margin of nearly two to one.

MAN FOR THE PLAN

Worcester's first city manager was George Merrill, who took office in 1950. Merrill, the head of a local steel company, accepted the office on a temporary basis and left after 15 months. After much debate about whether to conduct a nationwide search—a scenario that has played itself out two of the three other times Worcester has replaced its city manager, with Hoover the only out-of-town talent ever hired into the job—the brand new city council picked Merrill's right-hand man, Francis McGrath.

McGrath was not well known at the time (the backing of Merrill was crucial to his selection), but he would become a legendary figure in Worcester politics, serving for 34 years, the longest tenure of a city manager in US history. While Plan E was supposed to remove party politics from City Hall, McGrath was anything but apolitical. "The number of wakes and weddings he attended must have numbered in the thousands," Southwick wrote about McGrath in a *T&G* column last year. "Local celebrations and large public events alike usually found him on hand. Wherever he went, he was greeted by name by persons of all walks of life, as the saying used to go. He was scrupulously honest and, for all his prominence, unassuming. It never went to his head."

Under McGrath, Worcester saw the construction of a huge shopping and office complex (Worcester Center), a city-owned civic center (the Centrum, which was built only after two brutal ballot-question fights in the mid '70s), 22

new schools, a new main public library, a new police headquarters, a new outdoor sports stadium, nearly 3,000 units of public housing, and 3,600 units of government-funded private housing. All of it, Plan E supporters never fail to point out, was done without a hint of corruption. Upon retirement, in 1985, McGrath proclaimed that his proudest accomplishment was that “no shenanigans” had occurred during his third-of-a-century at the City Hall helm.

(McGrath’s most notable failure was not getting a Worcester exit on the Massachusetts Turnpike when the highway was built in the late ’50s. That mistake cast a shadow on the city’s economic-development prospects for nearly a half-century—until last year, when a new “Worcester” exit located south of the city, at Rte. 146 in Millbury, was com-

TWO-HEADED GOVERNMENT

It was when McGrath retired that Plan E began to unravel in Worcester, though it has not done so completely. Back in the early ’80s, Worcester Fair Share, a citizen-action group, held public forums to highlight the fact that the vast majority of the members of the city council, the school committee, and other city boards and commissions lived on the city’s affluent West Side. Fair Share’s political-education campaign led the city council to appoint a charter commission.

In 1985, the charter commission produced a compromise that seemed inherently unstable: keep a “strong” city manager but allow voters to directly elect the mayor—a post that, as simply chairman of the city council, was previously little more than ceremonial. To become mayor, a candidate would have to win office as a city councilor, then in a separate mayoral tally, outpoll any other city councilors who also declared themselves candidates for mayor. The voters approved the binding ballot question—which also called for 11 city councilors, five to be elected from districts rather than at large—by a nearly two-to-one margin that November.

In a sense, Worcester’s hybrid form of government is the weakest possible “weak mayor” system, since the mayor has no true authority beyond wielding the gavel at the Tuesday night council meetings, but it also weakened the city manager. The mayor is actually a “super-councilor,” empowered by voter mandate as the titular head of Worcester municipal government. The appointed city manager has the legal power, but the elected

mayor has the political power. The result is a two-headed government, with ample—and frequently realized—opportunity for confrontation and gridlock.

Firebrand City Councilor Jordan Levy became Worcester’s first directly elected mayor in 1987. The shotgun wedding of Levy and William J. “Jeff” Mulford, McGrath’s assistant city manager and immediate successor as city manager, produced marital spats that were legendary. “His responsibility as manager is to find ways of getting this city moving forward for the monies that he can afford to spend,” Levy once said of Mulford, as quoted in the now-defunct *Worcester Monthly*. “And you don’t do that by sitting on your rear end, week after week, and doing business as usual.”

At first, Mayor Raymond Mariano, elected in 1993, and City Manager Thomas Hoover, appointed the following



Granite Group’s P. Kevin Condron, who typifies new business leadership, now favors a strong mayor.

pleted. Set for completion in 2007, a massive interchange connecting I-290 to an upgraded Rte. 146—a project locals call the “Little Dig”—would make downtown Worcester a straight shot from the Pike for the first time ever.)

For supporters of Plan E, McGrath proved the virtue of council-manager government, but that didn’t mean the system went unchallenged during the McGrath reign. In 1959, voters rejected a binding ballot question to dump Plan E by a margin of just 4,000 votes—35,000 to 31,000. Three years later, a similar proposal for mayoral rule went down to defeat by a 12,000-vote margin—42,000 to 30,000. Each time, the proposed shift drew ferocious opposition from the nonpartisan Citizens Plan E Association, a good-government group that defended the council-manager system for a quarter-century.

year, got along famously, but over time they separated, like oil and water. The current mayor, Timothy Murray, got along no better with Hoover, though, unlike Levy, Murray did his blowing up mostly in closed-door meetings. That was, until Hoover's last year in office, when the mayor began to treat the manager to what one observer calls "sophisticated public floggings." It was Murray who, along with city

The two-headed government often leads to gridlock.

councilors Paul Clancy and Philip Palmieri, engineered Hoover's ouster earlier this year.

By 1999, in fact, the governmental meltdown that was occurring under the hybrid Plan E—Worcester is the only city in the Commonwealth with such an arrangement, as Cambridge and Lowell maintain traditional council-manager governments—led to yet another push for a switch

to a "strong" mayor with the power to run city government. This time, the campaign was driven by not only much of the city's political establishment—with the assistance of University of Massachusetts pollster and veteran political consultant Lou DiNatale—but also some prominent business leaders, including John Nelson, former chief executive of Norton Co. and Wyman-Gordon Co. Nelson was the kind of establishment figure that used to make up the Citizens Plan E Committee, which disbanded about 25 years ago. But run by power brokers more used to operating behind the scenes than in the spotlight, this campaign for strong-mayor government was over before it started.

POWER FAILURE

For much of Worcester's history, people like Nelson did a lot more than defend council-manager government. They determined, for good or ill, the city's economic—and even civic—prospects for generations.

Following World War II, Worcester's captains of commerce and industry drove the city's business and economic development. Chief among them was Robert Stoddard, head of manufacturer Wyman-Gordon and owner of the *T&G*, not to mention one of the co-founders of the virulently anti-communist John Birch Society.



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Voters in Charge leader Marianne Bergenholtz: "We've lost our democracy."

Stoddard and his ilk are all deceased now. But in their day, they dominated the Worcester landscape in a way that the city's present-day business leaders can only dream of. If you wanted to get something—anything—done, you had to make your way to that stuffy citadel of power and influence, the Worcester Club. (If you were a woman, you had to go through the side entrance.)

Back then, Worcester's power elite included the chiefs of the city's top three manufacturers (Wyman-Gordon; Norton Co., an industrial abrasives manufacturer now called Saint-Gobain; and Morgan Construction, builder of steel-rolling mills around the world); the top three law firms (Bowditch & Dewey, Mirick O'Connell DeMallie & Lougee, and Fletcher Tilton & Whipple); and two large insurance companies (State Mutual, now Allmerica, and Paul Revere, now UnumProvident). Of those eight companies that once dominated the Worcester economy, only five—Morgan, the law firms, and Allmerica—remain headquartered in the city. Two of them, Morgan and Allmerica, have been struggling in recent years, so their CEOs have been too busy putting out fires in their core business to spend much time on Worcester affairs, whether economic or political. At the same time, as a result of buyouts and mergers, no major regional banks are now headquartered in Worcester, which once had five (Guaranty Bank, Mechanics Bank, Peoples Savings Bank, Worcester County Institution for Savings, and Worcester County National Bank). In essence, Worcester has lost much of its executive class.

Even with this decline in corporate clout, Worcester has continued to be, in a sense, a company town, with the business community exerting its influence—and leadership—through the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, long billed as "New England's Largest." Well into the past decade, the Worcester chamber had a full-time staff of two dozen people, who not only advocated for business interests but also developed several industrial parks. Chief among these is the Massachusetts Biotechnology Research Park, a sprawling campus second only to Cambridge's Kendall Square as an incubator of biotech firms.

But Worcester's chamber of commerce, too, has been falling apart in recent years. William Short, the chamber's formidable chief executive, led the business group in the 1980s and '90s, but declining health forced him to resign in



2000. Since then, the once-dominant business group has been at sea. Six years ago, the chamber spun off its development arm, the Worcester Business Development Corp., leaving it without an important source of revenue, as well

In essence, Worcester has lost much of its executive class.

as leverage. Under Short's successor, Mark Love—an accountant by trade—the chamber's membership morphed from a healthy mix of small, mid-sized, and big businesses into a group of almost exclusively small firms, one that could not support the organization's own operations.

Early this year, the chamber's executive committee forced Love to resign, replacing him, on an interim basis, with chamber official Julie Ann Jacobson, who had several years of experience in city government. Then, this summer, Jacobson returned to City Hall, as assistant city manager. The executive committee hired another interim replacement—longtime Worcester business executive Richard Kennedy, pulled out of retirement—while it completed its second strategic plan in five years.



NEW MAYORAL PUSH

It is this leadership vacuum—both economic and civic—that is prompting the state’s second largest city (population 175,000) to once again raise the question of municipal governance.

On its face, council-manager government in Worcester is intact, if not exactly flourishing. Upon Hoover’s departure, the city council installed parks-and-cemeteries director Mike O’Brien as interim city manager; three months later, it made his appointment permanent. The well-regarded O’Brien seems to have the full support of the council, and especially of Mayor Tim Murray. But dispensing with the kind of national search that, 10 years ago, gave Hoover a managerial mandate (seemingly, at least) hardly qualified as a ringing endorsement of O’Brien.

Meanwhile, a nascent campaign to overthrow Plan E is underway, though its prospects are unclear. Behind the move is Marianne Bergenholtz, a former small-business owner and Worcester resident since 1987 who has never been involved in city politics before. But she says alienation from city politics has become the norm in Worcester.

“We’ve lost our democracy in this city,” Bergenholtz says. “There are so many layers to go through, if you need to get anything done, that [residents] are completely frustrated. If you want to save your sanity, you do drop out. You say, ‘Well, I’ll take care of my yard and house, and that’s all I’m going to do.’”

In June, her group, Voters in Charge, announced “an unprecedented petition-signature drive” to place a binding referendum for strong-mayor government directly before the voters, bypassing any charter commission. The plan, at that point, was to petition the city council this fall or winter to

approve the switch, which would then go before the Legislature, and finally the voters, in a special election next spring. But far fewer voters tend to participate in special elections than general ones. For that reason, Voters in Charge is now thinking about putting the question on the November 2005 municipal-election ballot, when the mayor and city councilors are elected to two-year terms, instead. That, says Bergenholtz, “would cause more excitement about the election, and it would get many more people involved.”

But it might also cause confusion, since it would raise questions about the position voters are electing a mayoral candidate to. Would it be the weak mayor of today, or would voters approve the new charter and elect a strong mayor? To further complicate matters, even if Worcester voters approve a strong-mayor charter in that election, the state Legislature would still need to act on the matter—and that might occur *after* the new mayor takes office in January 2006. In that case, the city manager would still be running the show at City Hall—at least until the Legislature finalizes the charter change.

Bergenholtz, for one, is not worried about the confusion. “Well, it’s already confusing for most people because they think we [already] have a mayor,” she says.

Presented with this scenario, city solicitor David Moore says that if voters approve a strong-mayor charter in a November municipal election, the first election of such a mayor would take place in the next municipal election—two years later—and not in the same election in which the

LOW RATINGS FOR WORCESTER

Worcester is near the bottom of the heap when stacked up against other major New England cities, according to *Cities Ranked & Rated* by Bert Sperling and Peter Sander. The book, published earlier this year, ranks 331 metropolitan areas in the US and Canada in 10 categories: economy and jobs; arts and culture; climate, cost of living; crime, education, health and health care; leisure, quality of life; and transportation.

—STEVEN JONES-D’AGOSTINO

	TYPE OF GOVERNMENT	2002 ESTIMATED POPULATION	OVERALL METROPOLITAN-AREA RANKING
1. Stamford, Conn.	Mayor	117,083	30
2. Boston, Mass.	Mayor	589,141	71
Cambridge, Mass. (included in Boston)	City Manager	101,355	71
4. Bridgeport, Conn.	Mayor	139,529	145
5. New Haven, Conn.	Mayor	123,626	149
6. Providence, RI	Mayor	173,618	173
7. Lowell, Mass.	City Manager	105,167	230
8. Manchester, NH	Mayor	108,398	235
9. Springfield, Mass.	Mayor	152,082	251
10. Hartford, Conn.	Mayor	121,578	253
11. Worcester, Mass.	City Manager	172,648	286
12. Waterbury, Conn.	Mayor	107,271	312

SOURCES: EACH MUNICIPALITY’S WEB SITE; US CENSUS BUREAU; CITIES RANKED & RATED.

charter change occurred. But he also says that he would need to look into the case law on the matter to be sure.

CHANGE OF HEART

Perhaps more important than the incipient grass-roots campaign is the erosion of support for council-manager government among establishment figures, many of whom are now making rumbling noises in favor of a strong mayor. Take Philip “Flip” Morgan, scion of a prominent and wealthy Worcester family and now chief executive of Morgan Construction. In the 1970s, Flip Morgan headed the Citizens Plan E Association, and in the 1980s his father, Paul Morgan, chaired the city’s last charter commission. But Flip Morgan has become disenchanted with the hybrid his father helped put in place.

“What we have now is an abortion of a Plan E system,” declares Morgan.

Another business leader who supports a move to a strong mayor is P. Kevin Condrón. If Morgan represents the old guard of Worcester’s business community, then Condrón—chief executive of the Granite Group, which does business as Central Supply Co., a wholesale purveyor of plumbing and heating supplies—typifies the new. Unlike Morgan, Condrón was born and raised outside the Bay State, and he married into the business he now runs. But Condrón has become a key player in Worcester, having chaired three of the city’s most powerful business and economic-development drivers: the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Worcester Redevelopment Authority, and, until earlier this year, the private, nonprofit (and relatively successful) Worcester Business Development Corp., the chamber’s development spin-off.

Oddly enough, Condrón traces the decline of city-manager government to the days of Francis McGrath. “He kept ceding power to the council to be able to continue in his role,” Condrón observes. “As the council developed that power, they didn’t want to give it up—and they haven’t given it up.” The result, he says, is gridlock.

“There should be only one [steering] wheel on a bus, and then somebody drives the bus,” says Condrón. “Here we have 12 drivers, including the [city] manager, with 12 different agendas.” Because of that, Condrón notes, City Hall stumbles over its own feet when it comes to new commercial/industrial business and development. Businesses and developers looking to invest in Worcester “find it difficult because of that multi-headed monster,” he says.

Many current and former Worcester politicians agree with the assessments of these businessmen and others. Former mayor Jordan Levy—who hosts a weekday talk show on radio station WTAG, in addition to being chief executive of Parker Affiliated Cos., a Worcester manufacturer, and a board member of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority—says Worcester needs a strong mayor like Boston’s. “Watch

Menino!” he declares. “People make fun of the way the guy speaks—the guy’s just coy. He’s a master at what he does. He’s a neighborhood mayor, and he’s effective at doing it.”

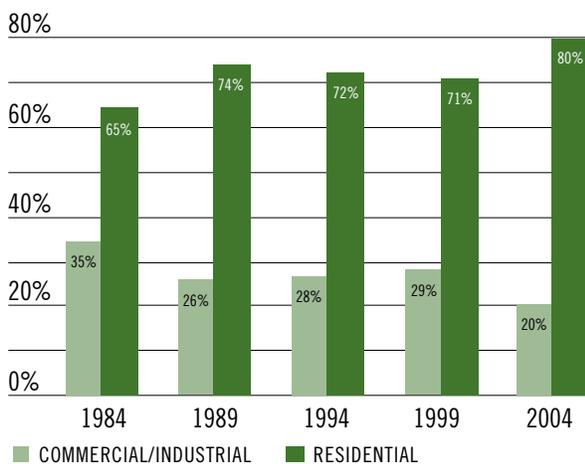
Worcester’s current “weak” (but directly elected) mayor, attorney Tim Murray, agrees with Levy. Murray, who’s been on the City Council since 1997 and mayor since 2001, also points to “a leadership void” on economic development initiatives. “There isn’t anyone who can say, ‘Hey, listen, I’ve been charged by the voters to drive this thing through, and I’m going to build a coalition by begging, borrowing, pleading, stealing, and kicking in the ass,’” he explains.

IS MAYOR THE TICKET?

But, as always in Worcester, the fears of strong-mayor government—centering on machine politics, corruption, and mismanagement—run as deep as the yearnings for it. Opponents of strong-mayor government don’t talk about Tom Menino; they drop the name Vincent “Buddy” Cianci, the former mayor of Providence, RI, now serving time for City Hall racketeering. And they talk not about Boston but about Springfield, now near bankruptcy and operating under the supervision of a state-appointed financial advisory board, one step short of receivership.

When it comes to projected political machinations under mayoral rule, the defenders of Plan E also invoke Worcester realities, past and present. Take City Councilor-at-Large Konstantina Lukes, an eight-term officeholder known for her contrarian views. A Democrat, Lukes got tossed off the Democratic City Committee a few years ago after she backed a Republican, Paul Cellucci, for governor. She says strong-mayor government would mark a return to the ethnic warfare of the ’40s, with all politics funneled through the Democratic Party. With the GOP practically nonexistent in Worcester, she says, it would be “so impossible to run for office that only a person who has the bless-

A Declining Commercial and Industrial Tax Base



SOURCE: MASS. DEPT. OF REVENUE



Councilor Konstantina Lukes says a strong mayor will deepen machine politics.

ing of the Democratic City Committee and the labor unions [would be] eligible to run because of money and people.”

Lukes conjures up the corrupt ghosts of Worcester Past in decrying the city’s ruling political structure today, and what that structure would mean for mayoral rule. “What we have developing in Worcester is a political machine, which is really a throwback to what happened years ago,” she says. “It’s an ethnic machine, a Democratic machine, and it’s marked by *personal* bonding of the people in that machine to each other. It [runs] from the congressional level, to the county, to the state, to the City Council.” A switch to a strong mayor would makes matters only worse, she says. “That machine will accept only certain people,” Lukes predicts. “The strong-mayor form of government is going to get [Worcester] locked into a partisan form of government [with] a very clear structure and pecking order. It will isolate people [from city government] more.”

Even for some who are now longing for a mayoral strongman, the ideal municipal leader seems to be more an empowered city manager than a glad-handing pol from the neighborhoods. City Manager Mike O’Brien, says industrialist Morgan, “is off to a great start, and maybe he could be

your mayor.” Condrón says much the same thing about the new city manager. “I think he’s a great, energetic young person who would make a terrific strong mayor of the city,” says Condrón. “And I felt Tom Hoover would have made a great strong mayor of the city.”

Or is it really Francis McGrath they’re all pining for?

“Some people claimed he really was the mayor,” recalls Demitrios Moschos, a Worcester attorney who served as McGrath’s right-hand man from 1968 to 1980. “He envisioned his role in a political context—not as an administrator and not in simply seeing that things were accomplished, but also in developing support for things to be accomplished.”

The first thing Worcesterites want to see accomplished now is the transformation of Worcester Center, a 1960s-era shopping-and-parking complex that failed as a retail mall in the 1980s and, after reopening in 1994 as an outlet mall, failed again less than a decade later. Last June, Berkeley Investments of Boston purchased the 20-acre site with the intention of redeveloping it into 900 condos, 450,000 square feet of office space, and 300,000 square feet of retail stores.

Whether, in its latest resurrection as a downtown residential and commercial district, New Worcester Center will succeed is up for grabs, but the city clearly needs more of that kind of ambition and energy on the development front. Attorney and business leader Frederick Misilo says a strong

Proponents cite Menino; opponents talk about Cianci.

mayor is not necessary for that. All that’s needed, he says, is a chamber of commerce whose prime directive is driving economic development—not just pitching group-insurance plans and breakfast-club tickets to its membership—teamed up with a city manager strong enough to strike deals with local, state, and federal officials. In other words, all it would take to put an end to the strong-mayor talk, he says, is for City Hall and the business community to become functional again.

“To the extent that there is achievement, success, and development—certainly that would reduce the level of dissatisfaction and thereby reduce the level of chatter,” says Misilo. ■

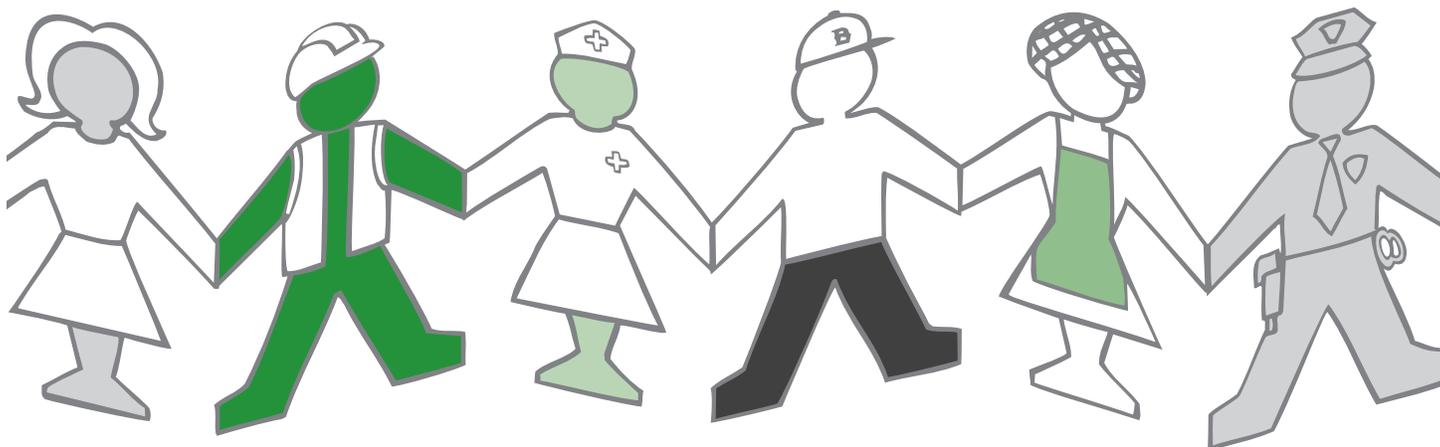
Steven Jones-D’Agostino was editor of Worcester Business Journal from 1992 to September 2004, and before that a reporter for Worcester magazine and managing editor of Business Worcester.

the Connectors

If it's who you know that counts,
those who know everyone count
more than others. That's as true
in civic life as in anything else.

BY MICHAEL JONAS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY FRANK CURRAN



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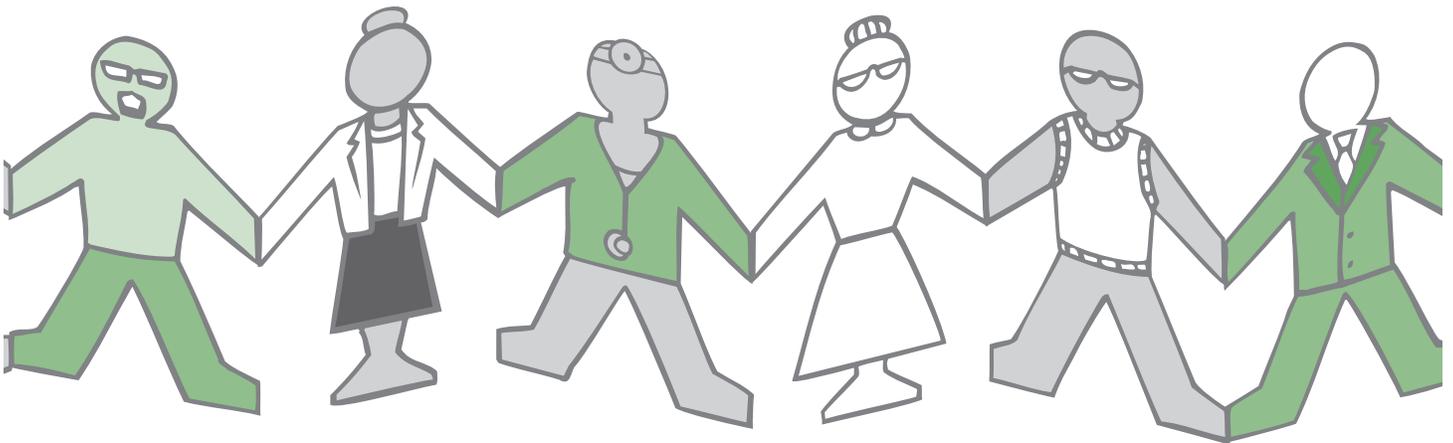
When 250 children joined together to sing at the dedication of the Leonard P. Zakim Bunker Hill Bridge two years ago, it marked the first performance of what would go on to become the Boston Children's Chorus, a multicultural mix of young voices from throughout Greater Boston. But the harmonies heard that day on the soaring, cable-stayed span also represented another kind of orchestration.

Hubie Jones, a former dean of the Boston University School of Social Work and longtime black civil rights activist and children's advocate, founded the chorus to unite in song children whose paths might not cross regularly in life. The idea came from a visit Jones made to Chicago, where a similar children's chorus was started. The Chicago trip was part of another project of Jones's, one that takes groups of Boston civic leaders to other cities, where they scout out fresh ideas to bring home but also spend time getting to know one another far from the everyday demands of busy lives in Boston.

These are the sorts of things the 70-year-old native of the South Bronx has been doing for nearly 50 years, ever since he arrived in Boston to attend graduate school. Over that time, Jones has helped found or lead 30 different organizations, and he has become a well-known figure in academic circles, in the world of nonprofit organizations, and among government and business leaders.

Hubie Jones clearly has a capacity for making big things happen. He is, for example, probably the individual most responsible for a 1972 state law that established a broad mandate for the education of children with special needs, a measure that became the model for federal legislation defining the educational rights of children with disabilities.

The clout that Jones wields, however, whether in pushing policy change or forming a new choral group, doesn't come from any of the usual hallmarks of a big-time powerbroker. He doesn't preside over a large company. He holds no high office, nor does he have deep financial pockets. Instead, the key to Jones's long reach may lie in the breadth of his con-



nections across the many worlds of Massachusetts life, and the credibility he has built as someone who puts those connections to work toward public-spirited ends. There are plenty of people in business or politics who are well connected, but Jones is a connector.

“Hubie Jones is the iconic civic connector in town,” says Linda Whitlock, president of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston.

People like Hubie Jones can make things happen.

The concept of civic connectors gained recognition four years ago, in Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point*. Gladwell’s book describes how “social epidemics,” ranging from New York City’s sharp drop in crime in the 1990s to the sudden re-emergence of Hush Puppies as high-fashion footwear, can be set in motion by small, seemingly inconsequential events. Such “tipping points,” he writes, can yield sweeping change in a relatively short time. And often crucial to a tipping point, he says, are a small number of individuals who wield inordinate influence within a community. Gladwell calls this principle “The Law of the Few.” Among the few who count more than others are people Gladwell refers to as “connectors.” People like Hubie Jones.

“What makes someone a Connector?” writes Gladwell. “The first—and most obvious—criterion is that Connectors

know lots of people.” But, he continues, “their importance is also a function of the kinds of people they know.... [Connectors] are people whom all of us can reach in only a few steps because, for one reason or another, they manage to occupy many different worlds and subcultures and niches.”

Just like Jones. State Rep. Byron Rushing, who has known Jones for 25 years, says that if there is a model for connectors in the Boston area, “he would be it.” Whenever he meets someone new to Boston, Rushing always tells them, “You should try to get connected with Hubie.” As Rushing explains, “he’ll know somebody that will have an interest in whatever that person is interested in.”

Jones is not the only connector around. In every community there are people who serve as critical links in the civic chain, often in very different ways (see profiles, beginning this page). They aren’t always people who make *Boston* magazine’s annual “power” list. But these citizen schmoozers can have an impact every bit as large.

KNOW (THEM) ALL

What good are connectors? Consider this evidence from Hubie Jones’s long career.

In the late 1960s, Stephen Rosenfeld worked with Jones to establish a task force whose work eventually led to the 1972 law mandating comprehensive special education services for Massachusetts children. At the time, Jones was director of a Roxbury social service agency, while Rosenfeld was head of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights. “What

Man for all causes

David Coyne fits nobody’s image of a mover-and-shaker, in Worcester or anywhere else. Brooklyn-born, Jewish, five-foot-six with a dark beard flecked with white, wearing sandals and a Hawaiian print shirt on a hot August day, Coyne looks more graying child of the ’60s than go-to guy in the state’s second-largest city. But he is just as much the latter as he is the former.

Coyne wears his left-leaning politics on his sleeve—and on the bumper of his red minivan, which is covered with stickers for various causes and candidates. But far from being a political agitator operating on the periphery, the 49-year-old director of the Hillel campus program at Clark University is a vital cog in Worcester’s civic wheel.

“There’s not an elected person in

Worcester who doesn’t know him,” says US Rep. James McGovern, a Worcester Democrat. “Some may like him better than others because of his views, but everyone knows him because he’s everywhere.”

Within months of arriving in Worcester, in 1989, with his wife, Margot Baret, a chiropractor and fellow citizen-activist, Coyne got involved with an organization of minority parents pushing for desegregation of the city’s schools. Though neither a parent nor a minority, Coyne dove right in and made himself welcome.

Gladys Rodriguez-Parker, then a leader of the group Families United/Familias Unidas, says Latinos came to regard Coyne as an “honorary member” of their community. “The envi-

ronmental community would tell you the same thing. The gay and lesbian community would tell you same thing,” she says, naming just two of the many constituency groups whose campaigns Coyne has taken on as his own over the years.

Coyne turns his van onto a side street in the Main South neighborhood, a low-income area that is home to the Clark campus. The Regional Environmental Council of Central Massachusetts, whose board of directors he formerly chaired, is holding a block party at the community farm it operates on a large vacant lot, and Coyne promised to drop by. The group hires about a dozen Worcester teens each summer to help work the garden and learn the economics of food produc-

he did, and he's done dozens of times since then, is draw together people he knew, people who were advocates, social service providers, public school and public education experts," says Rosenfeld. "You come 35 years later to the children's chorus, and everything else in between, and it's the same set of skills. He reached out to people he knew. What's happened to Hubie over 35 years, of course, is that the circle has widened."

Though Jones saw early on that things get done when people reach beyond the circles they usually travel in, by the 1990s he was growing frustrated by a civic culture in Boston that he thought resisted that ethos.

"For the last 10 years, my work has been focused on trying to build a culture of collaboration in the city," he says. "This is a city with a silo mentality, where institutional leaders believe they can achieve progress and the goals for their



David Coyne: a vital cog in Worcester's civic wheel.

tion. Of the council's six-member staff, three are Clark graduates who found their way there in part because of Coyne's day job on campus and his after-hour ties to the grass-roots environmental group.

"David is the connection to everything," says Peggy Middaugh, executive director of the environmental council. "He knows everyone at City Hall. He knows everyone in the advocacy groups. And at Clark, he's our big connection."

Sometimes, those connections pay off big-time, in politics and for individuals. In 1996, Coyne served as field director for McGovern's successful congressional campaign, which un-

seated Republican Peter Blute. When the campaign was looking to expand its base of support demographically, Coyne introduced McGovern to Rodriguez-Parker and other Latino leaders. Today, Rodriguez-Parker is McGovern's district director, overseeing his four Massachusetts offices—and the congressman enjoys strong support among Worcester Latinos.

Coyne is "someone who connects all the dots," says McGovern.

Connecting the dots is not the reason he does what he does, Coyne says, but it's a happy byproduct of his wide-ranging passions. "I don't think about, 'Gee, I need to spend more time with the NAACP on their local chap-

ter,'" he says. "I work with the NAACP because I care what's happening there, and I work with the gay and lesbian community for the same reason. You do it because you believe in it, not so you have an IOU in your pocket."

He also does it because he knows it can make a difference. Coyne quotes anthropologist Margaret Mead's well-known paean to civic action: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

"I really believe that," Coyne says. "And I believe it not based on theory, but because I've seen it happen."

—MICHAEL JONAS

The best-laid plans

Helen Lemoine is the first to admit that, for someone who would turn into one of MetroWest's biggest cheerleaders for regional cooperation, affordable housing, and tolerance for a growing immigrant community, she had an unlikely beginning.

"I got started in the whole civic realm as a NIMBY," she says of the not-in-my-backyard campaign she helped lead 13 years ago, when BJ's Wholesale Club was trying to build a huge warehouse store in the middle of her Framingham neighborhood. After studying up on zoning, however, "I realized that battling to say no was probably not going to get us real far," Lemoine says. "So I tried to orchestrate negotiations between BJ's and the neighborhood, some of them right here at my dining-room table."

The talks led to design changes that made the store something neighbors could live with, and they launched a new career for Lemoine, then a 37-year-old stay-at-home mom, as a civic activist with a bent for bringing disparate groups together.

Lemoine dove into local affairs, winning a seat on Framingham's elected planning board, where she served for nine years. She helped win passage of a mixed-use zoning bylaw at town meeting, thanks to a six-month public information campaign that convinced business leaders and residents alike of the benefits of allowing more residential units in downtown business districts.

Taking civic activism region-wide, she served for two years as chairman of the board of the MetroWest Growth Management Committee, a group trying to foster regional approaches to planning. And for the past four years, Lemoine has been executive director of Leadership MetroWest, a nonprofit organization founded by the local chamber of commerce to strengthen civic leadership and promote

institutions pretty much on their own."

In 1997, borrowing from an effort started two decades earlier by Seattle business leaders, Jones launched the City to City Program, an initiative that takes 25 to 30 leaders from a cross section of Boston institutions to visit other cities. In places ranging from Atlanta to Barcelona, these local luminaries open their thinking to new ideas for Boston, drawing on everything from arts programming to urban revitalization projects in the host cities. But having these



Helen Lemoine takes a regional approach to civic activism.

greater understanding among leaders in various fields. The program offers a yearlong set of monthly classes on local issues for approximately 30 leaders from business, government, and nonprofit agencies. Lemoine herself was a fellow in the program in 1993.

Andrew Porter, chairman of the Holliston board of selectmen, who is also a graduate of the leadership program, says she's done a great job bridging the "great divide there is between private and public interests."

When it comes to breaking down the barriers that divide groups or pit communities against each other in a state where residents fiercely guard municipal borders, Lemoine is

hunchos spend several days together, far from their home turf, also encourages them to do the sort of connecting with one another that comes naturally to the likes of Jones.

"A lot of the leaders who were on these trips, many of them only knew each other through the newspapers," says Jones.

It was also out of City to City that the Boston Children's Chorus, another Jones-inspired connecting project, was born. On the Barcelona trip in 2000, Jones was struck by

hardly prepared to declare victory. One Lemoine-supported housing plan that took years to get approval in Framingham is now hung up in litigation with neighboring Wayland. Still, she is convinced that programs like Leadership MetroWest are paying dividends.

"In my mind, talk is cheap, and I use that in a very positive sense," she says, explaining that it costs nothing to sit down and look for common ground on an issue.

"A lot of people are comfortable with bringing people together who are from like perspectives. You have to make a concerted effort to bring people together who wouldn't necessarily sit and talk." But that effort is worth it, says Lemoine.

"It's easier to solve border disputes when people in the communities know each other," she says. "It starts over coffee."

If Lemoine has enjoyed the rewards of public participation, she has also suffered its punishments. In March 2003, a Framingham resident accused Lemoine of hitting him with her car as he walked in a supermarket parking lot and then leaving the scene of the accident. Lemoine maintained the incident never occurred. But for more than a year she lived with a cloud over her head, as the case made headlines locally until July, when an insurance investigator offered proof that the man's claim was bogus and authorities dropped all charges.

"It was personally devastating for me and my family," Lemoine says of the ordeal. She has no doubt that her positions on the Framingham planning board and especially with Leadership MetroWest were the reason that the story had "legs" in the media.

"I'm in a position where credibility is everything—head of a community leadership program teaching others basically to be good citizens," she says, and so the accusation first appeared to offer an example of how "good people go bad." Now she's happy to be back in the ranks of the good guys.

"I'm glad it's over, and life as I knew it is here again," she says. So are those who depend on her to make things happen in MetroWest.

—MICHAEL JONAS

the city's use of major public events to raise the profile of important initiatives. Two years later, in Chicago, a children's choir made up of kids from diverse backgrounds caught his eye. Then, in his mind, the two started to come together.

"Let's see if we can take the dedication of the Zakim Bunker Hill Bridge to elevate the arts," he said to his City comrades, and they put together a consortium of seven different children's choirs from the Boston area for the



CHRIS & JEAN EGAN FAMILY FOUNDATION

"The greatest good we can do for others is not just to share our riches with them, but to reveal theirs to themselves." —Anonymous

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event, in October 2002. But Jones was determined to form a permanent choir of children from city and suburb, with a racial and ethnic mix to match that of the metropolitan area. So today there is the Boston Children's Chorus, now preparing to celebrate its second anniversary.

Jones says one key to the choir's success is a top-notch board of directors that, like the chorus itself, draws from many sectors of the Boston-area community. In recruiting members ranging from Boys and Girls Club president Whitlock to William Van Faasen, the longtime CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, Jones, who serves as president, cashed in on his wide range of contacts in both corporate and nonprofit worlds.

But they didn't join the board because they're all Jones's best friends. "We don't have tight personal connections, but we've spent time together," Jones says of Van Faasen. The health-insurance executive says much the same thing. Though he has known Jones and admired his work ever since arriving in Boston 14 years ago, Van Faasen says, "We don't hang out together."

Oddly enough, such loose connections are typical of connectors, and a source of their effectiveness. In *The Tipping Point*, Gladwell calls this "the strength of weak ties," a term he credits to sociologist Mark Granovetter. The

strongest ties people have are often not the most helpful ones, since such people share many of the same interests and contacts. It is the extent of people's reach outside of their own circles—to people with whom their ties are often weaker—that often determines how much "social power" they have.

Acquaintances are a source of power.

"Acquaintances, in short, represent a source of social power, and the more acquaintances you have the more powerful you are," writes Gladwell. By that measure, Jones is powerful indeed.

INFORMATION, PLEASE

It is not only those whose Rolodexes runneth over who stitch together the social fabric. "Just as there are people we rely upon to connect us with other people, there are also people we rely upon to connect with new information," Gladwell writes in *The Tipping Point*.

Gladwell could have had Robert Winters in mind. The 49-year-old Cambridge math instructor has taught for

Village person

Spending time with Jovita Fontanez can be a challenge. It's not that she's difficult to get along with; it's that she seems to get along with so many people. "If you sit with her at an outdoor café in the South End, forget trying to have a conversation," says Joanne Hilferty, CEO of Morgan Memorial Goodwill.

"My poor kids, they stopped going to the grocery store with me years ago," says Fontanez. "They said it takes too long, I know too many people." Her son and daughter are now grown, but the longtime resident of Boston's South End has continued to be one of the ties that bind her neighborhood, as well as the Latino community across the city and state.

With a background that includes helping to found the South End Community Health Center in the 1970s,

serving as Boston's first Hispanic election commissioner in the early 1990s, and surviving many years on the Democratic State Committee, Fontanez is the hub of a personal network for everyone from state-level political candidates to neighborhood leaders. When the Boston Foundation recently started assembling committees of residents focused on different areas of urban life as part of a civic renewal project, foundation officials dialed up Fontanez for help in identifying community leaders to serve on the panels.

"It's not my job, but it's my passion," Fontanez says of her connector role.

Fontanez's credentials as a feisty grass-roots activist are impressive. She took part in the battle against urban renewal plans in the late 1960s that threatened to displace poorer residents

from the South End. "We called it urban removal," she says.

But she's also seen as someone who manages to be pragmatic as well as principled, making her a natural go-between in sticky situations. When a plan to build dormitories for Northeastern University students in Lower Roxbury ran into opposition from residents worried about institutional expansion in the neighborhood, Fernando Domenech, an architect whose firm was designing the project, says the developers turned to Fontanez as someone who could help them enter into conversations with the Latino community.

Howard Leibowitz, the former director of intergovernmental relations for the city of Boston, says Fontanez often stays out of the limelight, but that doesn't keep her from playing a

more than two decades at Harvard and Wellesley, where calculus, linear algebra, and differential equations are his specialty. In Cambridge civic circles, though, Winters is known as the guy who knows everything. It's not that Winters is so smart—though with a mathematics Ph.D. from Boston University he is certainly smart enough. Rather, he has amassed the most comprehensive collection of information on Cambridge municipal matters outside of City Hall and the public library.

"I respect information," says Winters. "I'm a bit of an archivist. Call me a junk collector, too." But for the advent of the World Wide Web, that "junk" would have taken over Winters's five-room apartment in the three-decker he owns. But since 1997, he has been slowly building an online archive of Cambridge civic doings and public records.

Winters's "Cambridge Civic Journal," located at www.rwinters.com, provides one-stop shopping for everything from campaign finance reports

for local candidates to the results of every city election since 1941. Though the site serves principally as an information repository, Winters doesn't eschew commentary altogether. Over the summer, Winters posted a summary of his testimony before a council committee considering whether to change the city charter to provide for direct election of the



Jovita Fontanez: a natural go-between in sticky situations.

key role in getting things done, whether in a political campaign or a community organization. "It's a point guard as opposed to a shooting guard," he says of her role, making a basketball analogy. "They set up other people to score the points, so they don't necessarily get the credit."

Democratic State Committee member MarDee Xifaras says Fontanez stands out from other people in political circles. "You go to them for advice and help and you end up on the proverbial three-by-five card, meaning at some point in time there's going to be a payback request. Either it's help with a campaign or help with fundraising," says Xifaras. "With Jovita there's no formal payback other than friendship and a better community."

Explaining her broad network of contacts, the outgoing New York

native says, "I think in part it's my personality." It may also be a product of her life experience. Married young and divorced soon thereafter, Fontanez was a single mother at 22, but managed eventually to earn bachelor's and master's degrees.

"To me, it's one way of giving back and sharing, because someone must have helped me years ago," she says. "It's been used too much and it's kind of corny, but it's this whole 'village' mentality."

—MICHAEL JONAS

city's mayor (he's against it) and his account of a council meeting in June, at which the antics of one councilor created a considerable stir.

Still, Winters says he's more comfortable as purveyor than player. "I'm not a very partisan guy," he says. "I'm much happier being the diplomat that wants to post information about every candidate than to promote a particular candidate."

HEAR YE, HEAR YE

If certain connectors tie people to one another, and others serve as information conduits, some manage to play both roles. Take Bill Walczak, founding director of the Codman Square Health Center, who's been a fixture in the Dorchester section of Boston for 25 years. His health center hat doesn't begin to describe what the 50-year-old New Jersey native does.

"When we organized the health center way back in the 1970s, for me the issue was rebuilding the community," he says. "I had no knowledge of health care, and very little interest in health care. It was a vehicle for saving the Codman Square community," he says of the surrounding neighborhood, which was in steep decline at the time. "That's probably one of the reasons why the health center has moved in all sorts of different directions."

Indeed, along with becoming one of the city's most successful health clinics, the center has become a pillar of the Dorchester community. A program launched seven years ago, called the Civic Health Initiative, has pushed voter registration and supported neighborhood groups, all part of Walczak's expansive vision of what makes a community healthy.

The civic dimensions of the health center's work are a direct reflection of Walczak's philosophy and temperament. "I really like people. I like talking to people about all sorts of things," he says. "It's a personality trait."

Despite Hubie Jones's complaints about the city's "silo" mentality, Walczak finds Boston an

easy place to make connections. "Boston is a small town," he says. "I have never been to downtown Boston without seeing someone I know." Referring to the pop-culture idea that there are no more than six degrees of separation between any two people, he says, "in Boston, it's like one-and-a-half."

It is for Walczak, anyway, if not for everyone else. But these days, people are as likely to hear from Walczak by e-mail as they are to bump into him on the street. This summer, there were four job openings at the health center, so Walczak spread the word, electronically—to his e-mail list of 4,000 addresses. How did he come by such a massive address book? E-mails sent out to large lists often hide the addresses of recipients, but not always. To Walczak, those

Taking it to the bank

"I tend to be a little bit of a contrarian," says Elliott Carr, admitting a trait few would associate with bankers—but no one on the Cape would quarrel with.

In a variety of ways, the president of Cape Cod Five Cents Savings Bank cuts an unbankerly figure. Playfully disdainful of convention, Carr is famous locally for walking the entire perimeter of Cape Cod, an activity that landed him in the back seat of a police cruiser for violating shoreline property laws. In the newspaper column he's had for years, he dissects everything from hurricane forecasting to the shambles he says development-friendly zoning boards have made of the Cape.

"He would probably be a miserable failure as a politician," says Bob Wilkinson, an Orleans real estate agent who is part of an informal walking club with Carr. Still, the blunt-talking banker has come to be seen as an honest broker between competing views—and as someone who ties together more parts of Cape life than anyone else.

State Sen. Robert O'Leary calls Carr the Cape's "universal joint," because of his habit of being in the middle of divergent interests. In the mid-1990s, he chaired a task force established to smooth over dissension among towns that make up the Cape Cod Commission, a regional governing body

established to manage development. And Carr was a leading business voice in favor of the Cape Cod Land Bank, which buys and preserves open space using a surcharge on property tax bills. Since 2000, Carr has been moderator of the Business Roundtable, something of a misnomer for a group that brings together leaders from business, government, and environmental advocacy to search for common ground on Cape issues.

"[Some] would say I'm more of an environmentalist than banker," says Carr, and the thought does not displease him. Even more, the 65-year-old Brewster resident says he'd rather be known as a "generalist" or "Renaissance man" than as "the best numbers man in the banking industry."

Still, as a numbers man, Carr has done pretty well. The assets of Cape Cod Five have soared under his reign, from \$220 million in 1982 to \$1.25 billion today. And as other banks on the Cape have been swallowed up in mergers, Carr's bank has cashed in, reaping big profits on stocks held in competitor banks. Carr has poured the proceeds of these deals into a \$13 million community foundation, ensuring a steady stream of funding for nonprofit organizations whose health is often threatened by the disappear-

all-addressee e-mails are civic gold. Whenever he receives one, he promptly adds the names to his stockpile, sorting them by affinity group.

“I have about 30 different groups,” he says. “People associated with Ted Kennedy, people associated with health

care, people associated with Lower Mills in Dorchester, people associated with Savin Hill,” he says, the last being the Dorchester neighborhood he lives in. Walczak is judicious in his use of this electronic bullhorn. “I don’t send out jokes, I don’t send out prayer wheels,” he says. “I try to make it just sending out information.”

In his home neighborhood, Walczak is using e-mail as a tool for crime prevention. Produced in collaboration with the Boston police, a local weekly newspaper, and another Dorchester health center, the weekly “E-Lert” consists of a simple rundown of the locations and times of crime incidents in

Elliott Carr: a blunt-talking banker with a “wonderful life.”



ance of locally based businesses.

As the Cape’s pre-eminent local banker, “I certainly have a unique perch to be able to do these things,” says Carr. But much of his persona—and contributions to local life—have been crafted outside of banking, in a range of pursuits former state senator Henri Rauschenbach calls Carr’s “Birken-

stock stuff.”

Carr’s circumnavigation of the Cape on foot in 1995 resulted in a book, *Walking the Shores of Cape Cod*, which in turn launched his side career as a newspaper columnist, first for the *Cape Cod Times* and now for the *Cape Cod Voice*, a four-year-old weekly of which he is also one of about 25 part owners.

“I started out just wanting some exercise,” he says of the 200-plus-mile walk, which took Henry David Thoreau’s famous hike from Eastham to Provincetown to new lengths. “I wound up as a guy with an image as a great populist banker.”

For someone who has so often been at the center of things on the Cape, Carr has little appetite for working a room or reaching out to put events in motion. “Part of my style is to let people come to me,” he says. And come to him they do, which is not difficult, since he answers his own phone at the bank.

“There’s just this constant thread of people moving through him, of people from many walks of life who go to him,” says Seth Rolbein, editor and publisher of the *Cape Cod Voice*.

Carr is stepping down as head of the bank in January, and he says he will do so without regrets.

“I can’t for the life of me figure out how anyone else similarly situated would be sitting back trying to figure out how to make a little more money instead of doing all the sorts of things I’ve done,” he says, adding a note that’s positively Capraesque. “It’s a wonderful, wonderful life.”

—MICHAEL JONAS

David Tibbetts gets business and government to row in the same direction.



Savin Hill over the previous week. Now a pilot project that may be expanded into other areas, this electronic police blotter is intended to make residents more aware of crime patterns, allowing them to spot suspicious activity and take preventive measures.

Not only does Walczak combine personal connecting with electronic connecting, he also wants to connect other connectors, for the benefit of Dorchester's health agencies and their clients. In what they're calling their "Town Crier" project, staff from Walczak's center and the Dorchester House Multi-Service Center, a

ting contacted by [US Rep.] Marty Meehan's office," Ansin says. "And David Tibbetts's fingerprints were on a lot of the phone calls and notes I was getting."

Former state senator Patricia McGovern, who represented Lawrence for 12 years, calls Tibbetts "a minister without portfolio." The 53-year-old lawyer, who served as secretary of economic development under governors William Weld and Paul Cellucci and as acting secretary of energy under Gov. Michael Dukakis, does claim a portfolio, though it's one of his own making. When he left state government in 1999, Tibbetts founded the Merrimack Valley Economic Development Council, a nonprofit office to help coordinate and promote economic development throughout a 24-community area in the northeast corner of the state.

Armed with a penchant for bad puns and what Ansin figures must be "cell phone numbers for the entire power elite in Washington, on Beacon Hill, and throughout the Merrimack Valley," Tibbetts set out to smooth the way for private enterprise and get local leaders in business and government rowing in the same direction. Despite the good intentions of people in government and the private sector in the Merrimack Valley, they "weren't making as much progress as they might like, in part because they weren't all talking to each other," says Tibbetts.

Daniel Grabauskas, the state secretary of transportation, who was chief of staff for Tibbetts in the state economic development office, calls him a "shameless shill for the Merrimack Valley and the city of Lawrence."

Not exclusively. Tibbetts started a similar effort along the South Coast while in state government, and he still spends time in New Bedford and Fall River, representing the region in its attempts to bring commuter rail to this pair of

By no means run of the mill

When developer Robert Ansin was weighing whether to place a big bet on Lawrence by paying more than \$4 million for a huge mill building along the Merrimack River, he wasn't worried about the business potential of the deal, which he felt was sound. It was the regulatory and permitting thicket he would have to clear that weighed on him. "What I did need to be sold on was that there was local leadership to get it done," says Ansin.

One lunch with David Tibbetts and Ansin had all the assurances he needed. He bought the mill last October, and within 10 months the planned \$200 million redevelopment was on track. Ansin felt he was given the red-carpet treatment.

"I was getting contacted by the mayor's office, I was get-

nearby agency with which Codman Square is affiliated, are looking to harness the civic connecting skills of those who work at the two facilities.

“In every organization there are people who talk to just about everybody,” says Walczak. Not only do they mix easily within the workplace, he says, they are the people who “tend to talk to their state representative and people in their churches and people in civic groups.” Of the 525 people employed between the two centers, Walczak figures about 40 fit this bill. The goal is to identify these “town criers” and tap their talent for talk to spread information within the health centers and in the broader community.

Such a network might have been helpful, he says, earlier

old textile centers. Tibbetts is convinced that regional approaches to economic development are crucial to urban areas like these, burdened by widespread poverty and high unemployment.

If Tibbetts, a Byfield resident who serves as part-time general counsel to the Merrimack Valley group, has a particular affection for Lawrence, it's because he grew up in a three-decker in the hard-luck mill city. Raised in a foster home, Tibbetts attended the elite Phillips Academy in Andover (one class ahead of presidential brother Jeb Bush) on full scholarship. This early training in navigating wildly different worlds now comes in handy as Tibbetts glides through meetings with selectmen, state bureaucrats, and corporate CEOs with similar ease.

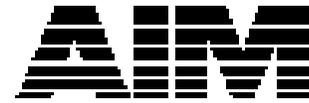
“David's out there pitching every day in every way, both on the government side and the business side, just trying to make things happen,” says McGovern. “Most people tire of it. David just seems to find second winds all the time.”

Part of his secret is an indefatigable optimism. “There are plenty of people who look at New Bedford and Fall River and see the glass as about to fall off the table,” says William Kennedy, publisher of the New Bedford *Standard-Times*, whom Tibbetts recruited to help lead the SouthCoast Development Partnership. Tibbetts “assumes the glass is half full.”

Tibbetts admits that's the case, “even if there are only about four drops left in the glass. That is my nature.”

But it's also Tibbetts's nature to make connections between the people and the institutions that can jump-start economic growth in two areas of the state that sorely need it. Says Ansin, who recently joined the board of the Merrimack Valley Economic Development Council, “He's not only a connector, he has in essence created a connection machine.”

—MICHAEL JONAS



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this year when the state moved to cut Medicaid benefits for immigrants who are not US citizens. Not only do health center officials oppose the move on principle, but the two centers stand to lose \$1 million a year between them in reimbursement for services they will now have to provide for free. Employees in both clinics received information on the issue, but had the Town Crier network been in place, health-center leaders would have put added effort into informing the small group of employees who would spread the word—and make themselves heard by neighborhood leaders and elected officials.

“We want to be able to connect with people who will connect to important people,” says Walczak. “We’re trying to systematize the natural abilities of certain individuals who can be really effective networkers or communicators, for the purpose of advancing our cause.”

It’s an idea straight out of Gladwell, Walczak is glad to acknowledge. “*The Tipping Point* book made an impression on anybody who cares about community organizing or producing a better world for people,” he says.

Which raises the question of whether the ideas in *The Tipping Point* have reached their own tipping point, helping to fuel civic-connecting initiatives across the country. “Much to my delight and surprise, [the book has] become a kind

of manual for people who are thinking about how to leverage social change,” says Gladwell, in a telephone interview.

GREAT MAN, EVERYMAN

Connectors have always been around, in one form or another. Indeed, it was Gladwell’s *Tipping Point* description of Paul Revere’s gift of gab—and social connectedness—that inspired the Dorchester Town Crier project and gave it its name.

But civic connectors may be more valuable today than ever. The year before Gladwell’s book was published, describing the pent-up civic energy that could be set loose by someone with tipping-point powers, Robert Putnam offered an especially somber, and influential, assessment of the civic zeitgeist in *Bowling Alone*. In his book, the Harvard public policy professor argued that the decline in fraternal organization membership, voter turnout, and even families sharing meals together added up to an era of low “social capital.”

“If we’re living in an age where there’s less social capital, there’s more value in people who can spot new civic opportunities or create new civic institutions or get people to collaborate who weren’t collaborating before,” says Tom Sander, executive director of the Saguaro Seminar, a program at

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Harvard established by Putnam to brainstorm ways of reviving civic culture. (The seminar is named for a desert cactus that grows underground for years before emerging with a hardy trunk.)

And as immigrants reshape the face of Massachusetts communities, it will become increasingly important that the “next generation of civic leaders be fluent in a number of different cultural languages and able to link people who at first glance have disparate associations with each other,” says Kevin Peterson, director of New Democracy Coalition, a Boston-based group promoting civic literacy and policy.

Interestingly, Gladwell and Putnam both tell the story of Paul Revere’s famous ride from Boston to Lexington, but they draw different lessons from it. In the towns Revere sounded the alarm in, Gladwell writes, local militiamen were ready for battle when the British approached the next

Ordinary people can be more than bit players.

day, but towns visited by a fellow patriot, William Dawes, ignored the call to arms. What accounted for the difference? Gladwell says Revere was a “connector,” while Dawes was not. Revere knew the right people to talk to in each town, and his news spread quickly to militia leaders, whereas Dawes’s warnings fell on deaf ears. “Revere’s news tipped and Dawes’s didn’t because of the differences between the two men,” writes Gladwell.

Putnam, on the other hand, says the difference lay in social capital. “If you look at the history of that ride,” he said, in a 2000 interview with *CommonWealth*, “those towns that had dense networks of engagement, where there had been trust and connectedness among the citizens, were the ones who showed up when Paul Revere and Rev. Dawes issued their call.” Other towns in the area, which he says lacked similar networks of connections, “were AWOL that morning.”

The dueling interpretations at first seem to be a variant of the debate over the “Great Man” theory of history. Adherents believe the course of events is often shaped by looming historical figures of the time, while those rejecting the view place more stock in the prevalent social and economic conditions. In the Battle of Lexington, Putnam leans toward the latter view, ascribing differences in civic responsiveness to differences in indigenous social capital. Gladwell chalks up the gap to Revere’s gift for igniting social capital, and Dawes’s inability to do the same.

But that reckoning, like the examples of civic-connector power today, is not an argument for the Great Man Theory. It’s really an argument for the Everyman Theory. It suggests that ordinary people—armed with a knack for knowing lots of people and connecting them to one another—can be much more than bit players on the civic stage. ■



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Taking the nation's pulse

Gallup's top pollster says the public is upset by the economy, terrorism, and Iraq and baffled by No Child Left Behind—and argues for taking 'the wisdom of the people' more seriously

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILLIAM MOREE

IN THE HOME STRETCH of a hotly contested presidential campaign, it seems hard to imagine that public opinion is not getting sufficient attention. After all, hardly a day goes by without the release of a new national poll on the presidential horse race, which remains, at press time,

neck and neck. It could hardly be said that the opinions of the American people are not being adequately attended to. But that, in fact, is what Frank Newport argues in his recent book, *Polling Matters*: that public officials, especially, don't pay enough attention to "the wisdom of the people," as ex-

pressed “scientifically” in public-opinion polling.

That Newport should be favorably disposed toward polls comes as no surprise. As editor in chief of the Gallup Poll, Newport is, by many reckonings, the nation’s leading pollster. With Gallup doing national polling for CNN and *USA Today*, Newport is a frequent commentator on politics and public perceptions, and his “The Nation’s Pulse” column is a mainstay of the Gallup Poll Tuesday Briefing, which circulates nationally by e-mail every week. But, oddly enough, Newport claims that polling gets no respect, or at least not enough for his taste. The public mistrusts polls, he says, misunderstanding their methodology and their reliability, and fearing they influence public opinion more than they reflect it. Even politicians, who would never go into an election campaign without their trusty pollsters at their sides, hate to be called “poll-driven,” the information-age equivalent of craven and spineless. Even the lowliest officeholder wants to be thought a statesman. For that reason, many politicians stop paying attention to polls the minute they take office. And that, he says, is a mistake.

“Polls are simply a scientific method for measuring the collective opinion of all of the people,” says Newport, by phone from Gallup headquarters outside Princeton, NJ. “In a large society, like we have today, you cannot simply get a ‘sense’ of the people without using some kind of scientific tool. And the point is, there is great wisdom, in my opinion, in the collective views of an aggregate of individuals. Politicians should be proud of the fact that they are trying to understand the wisdom that’s embodied in the collective views of the people when they make decisions, rather than being ashamed of it.”

That collective wisdom may be hard to define, considering the depth of division in the American people today. But if anyone could find it, Newport could. So I called him up to talk about polling, politics, and the public mood. What follows is an edited transcript of our conversation.

—ROBERT KEOUGH

CommonWealth: We’re right now in the middle of a hotly contested presidential election, so it feels as if we’re inundated with polls. But particularly when it gets to this point in a campaign, the polls and the media reporting on polls seem to be obsessed with the horse race question: Who’s going to win? And with tactical questions: Who’s putting across their message better than the other candidate? Are attack ads working or backfiring? That sort of thing. But that

isn’t the kind of public opinion you think is getting short shrift in politics or the press. It is this whole matter of the “wisdom of the people” that is neglected. But given how divided the American public seems to be right now, at least with regard to the presidential election, what wisdom is there to be drawn from public opinion?

Newport: Well, that’s a couple of questions. First of all, I believe that horse race polling has its place. In fact, I just published a piece in *Editor and Publisher*, which goes out to all the editors of newspapers, arguing that in this election season they shouldn’t wring their hands so much. Horse race polling—that is, where the election stands and what impact events in the election are having on the way the public is viewing the candidates—is important and valuable information. If nothing else, the campaigns themselves are polling extensively, and that’s really driving their campaigns, and it can be argued the public needs access to the same information. If there are Swift Boat ads, and if there is a Republican convention and a Democratic convention, and when there are debates, the average American is quite interested in knowing the impact of them. I think Americans want[ed] to know in ’92 that Ross Perot was catching on. That’s important information for them to know. In 2003 in California, I point out in the book, the fact that horse race polling showed Schwarzenegger was actually moving ahead and was likely to win the recall election was important for voters to know ahead of time, because they got to figure out that, gee, this looks serious; we really may have an actor as governor. They got to know that ahead of time and I think that was important when it came time for them to vote. But with that said, yes, I think that in terms of guiding the direction of society forward, the broad scale societal direction and policies, it’s policy-related polling that is neglected to a large degree by our elected representatives.

CommonWealth: From the sort of polling that you’re doing at this point and in a context where the public seems to be deeply divided over the direction of the country, at least in terms of their choice of who they want to be president for the next four years, what can you tell me about the public mood going into this election? Not who people are going to vote for, but what’s on their minds?

Newport: Well, the mood is quite mixed. The question that we ask frequently, every month as a matter of fact, at Gallup is: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are

going in the US? And consistently throughout this year it's been below 50 percent. So you have a majority of Americans who are dissatisfied. The overall mood is not ebullient. Americans are concerned and they do believe that we are in a time in the United States that is not nearly as positive as, say, the late '90s, where we would consistently get that satisfaction level much above 50 percent. So we have a concerned American public. When we ask them about their concerns, like what is the most important problem facing the country, we come back first and foremost to the economy. We still have about 60 percent of Americans who say it's not a good time to be looking for a quality job. It is our number one problem. Quite less than half of Americans are willing to rate the economy as good. A plurality, in fact, in some recent polling, has said that the economy is getting worse, not better. So we have a significant concern over the economy as our number one concern, and that's despite the emphasis on international things. But I do believe the polling shows that secondary to those kinds of domestic concerns—which include, by the way, long-term anxiety about Medicare and retirement, as well as education—there is the continuing concern about terrorism and, on a more topical basis, we certainly have concern about the war in Iraq. All of those issues are kind of commingling in Americans' consciousness as they go about their daily lives. That's why we have over half who say they're dissatisfied with the way things are going.

CommonWealth: Let's flesh those concerns out a little bit, if we can. It's true that the economy pops up in all the polls right at the top. That is people's number one concern. How surprising is that at a point when, at least formally speaking, we're two years out from the end of the recession?

Newport: Well, W.I. Thomas, a famous social psychologist, said many years ago, if you define the situation as real, the consequences are real. In polling, we're dealing with people's perceptions, not reality. We ran into that in 1992 when Republicans claimed the economy was getting much better but, at least up to the election, the public didn't agree. They still saw it as a problem and they threw out Bush the elder. So we're saying now, regardless of what economists tell us in terms of hard numbers or statistics, the average American out there still is not robustly optimistic about this economy. They still see problems, be it inflation concerns, with oil and gas, or be it the fact that although there may be jobs, they're \$7-an-hour jobs, not \$20-an-hour jobs. These concerns are still there, and that's what we measure in polling. But if perceptions are real, the consequences are real, in terms of people's daily lives, and that's why polling in this situation can be very, very important. Economic numbers to some degree don't matter if the people still perceive it as a bad situation.

CommonWealth: Exactly. And that extends not only to the public as workers and consumers but also to investors. You regularly do a poll of investors and for them you've pinpointed the price of energy—gas and oil prices going up a good deal over the last year—as a blow to their optimism, but there is also the outsourcing of jobs and accounting



irregularities in the wake of the Enron and other scandals. So there are a number of things that investors are worried about in the economy.

Newport: Yes, our monthly poll, the UBS Gallup Index of Investor Optimism, is quite important because it measures the views of investors, and in the stock market it's the same thing as with the average American—it's perceptions, not reality. It's investors' perceptions that drive the stock price, not the reality. Every CEO has had a situation where he believes his numbers are great but his stock still won't go up. And vice versa. There are companies with bad numbers but the stock soars because perceptions are somehow that the company's got a great future. So investor optimism is extremely important to measure, and we're nowhere near the kind of optimism levels we had, say, in the late '90s. Although it's up a little from its nadir, its low point in the past year or

two, investors are still quite skittish for the reasons we've been talking about. They're worried about jobs. They're worried about outsourcing. They're worried about oil and gas. They're worried about a lot of things.

CommonWealth: I also note that in one of your recent polls, among people who are employed, 28 percent are worried about their benefits being reduced. Is this a sign of anxiety around health care coverage?

Newport: Yes. That number may not be as wildly negative as one might think because there's always going to be some residual concern. Even in boom years, some people are worried. But there's no question, looking at our data, that people are concerned about health care coverage. There also is tremendous concern about being laid off not only because one no longer has a salary coming in, [but because] one loses health care coverage, and it's extraordinarily

The electorate is a 'hung jury' on the issue of Iraq.

expensive to try to fund that on one's own. So we do find that although health care is not way up at the top when we ask what is the most important problem facing the country, when we ask other questions about it, that is a significant concern to Americans.

CommonWealth: Now, other than the economy, the war in Iraq is generally cited as the public's top concern, with questions about terrorism and homeland security either close behind or mixed in with their thinking about Iraq. But what Americans are thinking about these issues is less clear to me. One of your August polls said that Americans had become less negative about the war in Iraq, with 49 percent saying that it was worth going to war and 48 percent saying it was not worth it—this being the first time that “not worth it” had dipped below 50 percent. At the same time, there was no consensus about what the country should do now in Iraq, whether to send in more troops or to withdraw. In fact, the majority was split between more middle-of-the-road options, either standing pat, keeping things pretty much as they are, or a partial withdrawal. What is it the American people want the American government to do in Iraq?

Newport: That's a great question. One of the theses of my book is that our representatives should look to the collective wisdom of the people to help guide the direction of the

country. At this moment in time, however, there is not a clear-cut direction coming from the people of the United States. The wisdom of the people is mixed at this point. We do not have a consensus of Americans, as is the case in some other situations historically and internationally, that says we should totally immediately withdraw from Iraq. In fact, I reviewed a number of questions and generally speaking, the majority of Americans say that the troops should stay there at least for the time being. We have split even on whether or not the war was worth going into to begin with, but by no means is there a consensus that that was a mistake. We have found, historically, a fairly good consensus that it is important to get other countries and nations involved in the war—that was there even before the war began, although there was support for President Bush's decision to go to war as he went to war.

By the way, Arnold Schwarzenegger, in his speech at the Republican convention, said Bush went to war despite the fact that it was unpopular and against public opinion. He was wrong. In our polling in March before the war began, we had upwards of 60 percent of Americans who approved of Bush's decision. Bush went to war with the majority of the public behind him, so Schwarzenegger was incorrect in that assertion. But today, this is an instance where leaders looking for guidance from the people find a hung jury. They find an American public that is split. In a way, both Bush and Kerry are kind of following the wisdom of the people in this situation. Both of them are advocating no immediate withdrawal. Kerry has advocated getting more allies involved and now more recently Bush has also advocated that as well. So at this point, it is a situation where the leaders, to some degree, are doing what the public would have them do.

CommonWealth: And what about the questions of homeland security, specifically? Your polls show that only one out of three Americans seems to have any worries about personally becoming the victim of terrorist attack, and that proportion has even been dropping steadily since the attacks of September 11. At the same time, a majority, 56 percent of the people, feel that the US war against terrorism is going well, but that majority has been declining over the past two years. What is it that the American public is looking for from the president, from their governors, from their mayors, in terms of homeland security?

Newport: Well, that's fairly straightforward. The people are looking [for] from their government on homeland security what they look for from their police in their local communities, and that is to protect us from harm. I believe there's a little less satisfaction with the war on terrorism because we have seen more instances internationally, not locally, of terrorist attacks, particularly in Iraq itself. We hear of

terrorist actions in Russia and, of course, in Israel. So when you ask the American public how well the war on terrorism is going, we're not finding any increase in optimism. There are acts of terrorism still going on around the world. But what they want their government to do, in particular, is try to protect them here locally. Liberals and Democrats have argued that the USA Patriot Act and other efforts to curb terrorism have gone too far, that they have encroached on civil liberties. But our polling, generally speaking, shows the American public is supportive of the Patriot Act.

CommonWealth: I can't help but turn to one domestic policy issue that is an enduring one at this magazine: education. You annually perform the Gallup Phi Delta Kappa poll, which covers a range of educational issues. What strikes me, as I look at the results of that poll, is the divide between the general and the local. The public thinks education in America is seriously deficient—only 26 percent give grades of A or B to American schools overall—but they think better of their local schools, with 47 percent giving A or B grades. When you drill down further, parents think their local school merits an A or B at a rate of 61 percent, and when it comes to their own oldest child's school, they give As and Bs at the level of 70 percent. In terms of public policy, what conclu-

sions do you draw from this? What do you do with the knowledge that the public is disgusted with the state of the public schools generally but when it comes to their neighborhood schools, they're perfectly content?

Newport: Well, a couple of points. First of all, we find that phenomenon—and it's encouraging, actually—across a variety of dimensions. People are more negative when you ask them to rate the state of some institution of society nationally than they are about their own situation. To some degree, when you ask them to speculate about the state of something nationally, people reflect the more negative news they hear in the media. But locally, they're actually muddling through their lives pretty well. In fact, I had mentioned earlier in this interview about satisfaction at the way things are going in the US being below 50 percent. When we ask Americans, "How satisfied are you with the way things are going in your personal life," it's up around 80 percent and hardly ever moves. So the good news is that Americans—

CommonWealth: We're pretty happy campers after all.

Newport: Most of us are getting by okay. But when we ask them about things internationally or nationally they reflect



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more negatively, and that's true for schools. It's also true for health care. Most Americans, despite all the hoopla on worry about health care in the future, which I do believe Americans are very concerned about, at the moment the majority of Americans say, "I have adequate health care." And we find that for education. The rate of satisfaction with one's own schooling and one's community or one's kids is pretty good.

vantaged in society. Americans are a very charitable people. So, in terms of education, you have majority white, middle-class people whose kids are doing all right in schools, who are still sensitive to the fact that there are those whose kids aren't doing well. And they are, in fact, willing to do something about it. That's what we find in the data. Now, whether or not the No Child Left Behind law is the right way to handle it is a different issue. Our polling shows that significant numbers of Americans don't know anything about that. We don't have good polling data from the general public on whether No Child Left Behind, which is so controversial, is an effective way to remedy these problems.

CommonWealth: Isn't it interesting that, regarding a law that has been so controversial and will continue to be controversial, certainly up through Election Day, Americans don't, by and large, feel they know enough about it to have an opinion one way or the other?

Newport: Well, that's where you use polling data effectively. Were I in the US Department of Education, I would commission significant research focusing on school administrators and teachers across the country and perhaps even school board members, so we can get the wisdom of these smaller groups of people who really do deal with NCLB on a day-to-day basis. Based on that information, that collective wisdom, we could make some decisions about

what needs to be modified with No Child Left Behind. So, following the premise of my book, you could use scientific survey research to assemble what I think would be a pretty good indication of the direction we need to go. Otherwise, you're flailing around, with Democrats trying to modify No Child Left Behind in some ways and the Bush administration getting its back up and saying we knew it would cause problems but that's the price of progress. The heck with all that. Let's get in there and go to the front lines and use research to find out what the wisdom is from these people who have to live with it. That's how I would use research to move us ahead educationally. By the way, we just asked Americans, what's the number one thing you would do to improve education nationally? Interestingly, nobody mentioned No Child Left Behind. A lot of the focus was on two elements, money and teachers. The average Joe and Jane American out there, when asked about improving K-to-12 education, said we need better teaching, better teachers, better pay for teachers, and, generally, better funding for schools. So that's where the wisdom of the people comes down. Broadly speaking, that's what they focus on. ■

'Americans are a charitable people.'

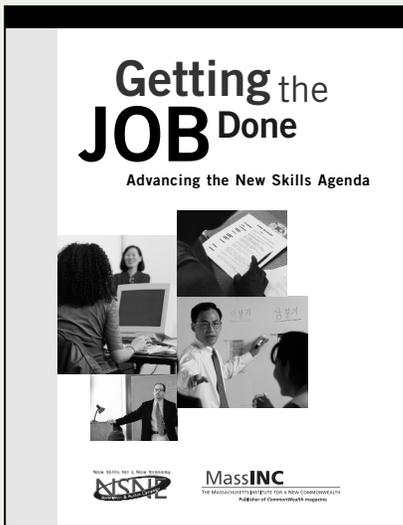
Part of that is that people vote with their feet and find good schools for their kids. But finally, and this is the most important part of all, the key problem in education is that the majority are doing fine but minorities and those with very low incomes are not doing as well in terms of any outcome measures. So, to some degree Americans are being rational. They are saying schooling in general has problems. Why? It's because minorities and poor people aren't doing as well. The majority of people we interview on any poll are, in fact, white, middle-class and above middle class, and actually have pretty good schooling.

So, in a way, we're getting a charitable response. It's a positive, charitable response. Consistently, we find Americans are willing to give up their own money, forgo tax cuts, and do other things along those lines if it will help the disad-



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The state still doesn't provide equal education

BY NORMA SHAPIRO

June 15, 1993: an important day for education in Massachusetts. On that day, the Supreme Judicial Court issued its decision in *McDuffy v. Secretary of Education* and defined the Commonwealth's duty to educate all public school students, without regard to their personal wealth or poverty, and without regard to their district's fiscal capacity. The SJC relied, in part, on the words John Adams wrote in the Massachusetts Constitution describing the obligation of the state to "cherish" the public schools to preserve knowledge among the people of all classes—in order to secure democracy and enable economic productivity. The court also held that the Commonwealth was failing in its duty to provide students with the requisite education.

Less well known, however, are the standards the justices adopted from a similar case in another state to be used as the benchmark of a Massachusetts education. The court ruled that public education must equip children with seven capabilities: (1) sufficient oral and written communication skills to enable students to function in a complex and rapidly changing civilization; (2) sufficient knowl-

It has been almost 12 years since the *McDuffy* decision.

edge of economic, social, and political systems to enable students to make informed choices; (3) sufficient understanding of governmental processes to enable students to understand the issues that affect their community, state, and nation; (4) sufficient self-knowledge and knowledge of their mental and physical wellness; (5) sufficient grounding in the arts to enable students to appreciate their cultural and historical heritage; (6) sufficient training or preparation for advanced training in either academic or vocational fields to enable students to choose and pursue life work intelligently; and (7) sufficient level of academic or vocational skills to enable public school students to compete favorably with their counterparts in surrounding states, in academics, or in the job market. The court ordered the state to develop the specifics of how to deliver the required education to all students, to find a means to finance that education, and to meet its responsibilities within a reasonable time.

By the time the Supreme Judicial Court issues its decision in the latest round of the legal battle on behalf of public school students, *Hancock v. Driscoll*, it will have been 12 years since the *McDuffy* decision—enough time for an entire generation of children to pass through our schools—and the state is still far from meeting its constitutional obligation.

FROM MCDUFFY TO HANCOCK

Three days after the *McDuffy* decision, then-Gov. William Weld signed the Education Reform Act of 1993 with what *The Boston Globe* described as a "lukewarm pen." The otherwise much-praised legislation contained three important changes in the roller coaster history of state support for education: It established a process for setting standards; it required assessment and evaluation, by multiple means, of how the standards were being met; and it included a new "foundation level" of financial support for schools, based on an estimate of what it should cost to educate the mix of children in each district. In addition, a seven-year program of increased funding was undertaken to pay for these reforms. While each of the three major changes has sparked controversy in its particulars, hardly anyone believes that the public schools are not better off today than they would have been without education reform.

Under the 1993 law, and in response to the court's requirement under *McDuffy* that it develop a specific educational plan to provide children with an education that equips them with the seven capabilities, the Commonwealth developed curriculum frameworks in English, math, history and social studies, science and engineering, arts, health, and foreign language. The foundation-budget program gave the schools a significant infusion of new resources, much of them going to school districts with the neediest students.

So why, a decade later, was it necessary to file the new lawsuit, *Hancock v. Driscoll*? The answer is simple: The Commonwealth is still not meeting its constitutional obligation to provide the required education to all students, particularly students at risk for school failure. First, the foundation budget was developed prior to the curriculum frameworks and never reassessed in light of the new state standards established in the Education Reform Act, and it has proven inadequate to the task of paying for the edu-

SYMPOSIUM: THE HANCOCK CASE

cation required under *McDuffy*. Second, much more needs to be done to improve our schools in order to educate our children to the constitutional standards.

Accordingly, 20 plaintiff children from 19 poor school districts across the Commonwealth returned to court on the grounds that many students across the state, including the plaintiffs, were still not receiving the education necessary to meet the seven *McDuffy* capabilities and master the curriculum frameworks; the school districts in which the plaintiffs attend school continued to be unable to provide necessary programs and services; strong research-based evidence demonstrated that many educational deficits, particularly those of especially challenged students, can be significantly ameliorated, but have not been in the plaintiffs' school districts; and the state has failed to provide appropriate help, evaluation, and support, including necessary funding, to ensure every child a constitutionally adequate public education. The *Hancock* case was referred by the Supreme Judicial Court to Superior Court Judge Margot Botsford to conduct a trial and make findings of fact and recommendations to the SJC.

On June 12, 2003, the *Hancock* trial began in Superior Court in Boston. The trial lasted 78 days over a seven-month period and included the testimony of 114 wit-

nesses and more than 1,000 exhibits. On April 26, 2004, Judge Botsford issued a 300-plus-page report of detailed findings of fact and recommendations to the SJC.

The trial focused on four of the districts—Brockton, Lowell, Springfield, and Winchendon—because the conditions in those districts were typical of the districts in which the plaintiffs attend school. In addition, evidence was presented comparing these districts with Brookline, Concord, and Wellesley, as in the original *McDuffy* case.

Districts lacked resources to provide adequate education.

Although the court offered the state the opportunity to offer similar evidence about any district it chose to demonstrate that there were low-spending, high-performing districts, the state declined to do so.

During the trial, superintendents, teachers, and specialists from the focus districts described—without contradiction—conditions not unlike those found at the time of the *McDuffy* case. After considering this evidence, Judge Botsford concluded in her report that these districts continued to be plagued with “overcrowded classes”; “extra-

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ordinary’ staff reductions”; “abysmal” libraries; “difficulty filling positions for mathematics, science, special education teachers, bilingual teachers and certified librarians”; “a virulent dropout problem”; and SAT scores that “are flat and frighteningly low, if one considers the importance of college education to future success.” In her report, Judge Botsford noted that on every performance measure used by the Department of Education to assess district and school educational quality, the plaintiffs’ districts, with few exceptions, “have not improved at all” since 1993.

THE EVIDENCE

How is it possible that after so much money has been poured into schools, they have not generally improved? The evidence presented during the trial answered this question. First, funding has not kept up with the demands of the new curriculum or spiraling costs such as health insurance, nor has it matched the needs of school systems dealing with particularly difficult populations to educate. Judge Botsford was especially impressed that the focus districts were spending between 100 percent and 110 percent of their foundation requirement, while the state average for the 75 highest performing districts was 130 percent of foundation and the wealthier comparison districts were spending an average of 160 percent of their foundation budgets.

Second, abundant evidence showed that the focus districts lacked adequate resources to provide the required education. While the specifics differed from district to district, there was evidence of glaring educational problems, including: (1) class sizes that were too large, especially for districts with large clusters of poverty, English-language learners, and children with special-educational needs; (2) teachers not certified in the field they were teaching; (3) a lack of essential materials, such as manipulatives and graphing calculators in math, and laboratories equipped with microscopes and the other equipment

needed to provide a hands-on experience in science; (4) libraries with inadequate technology and out-of-date books not well aligned with the curriculum frameworks —one Winchendon school library still had *The Miracle of Asbestos* and *The Boys’ Book of Tools* on its shelves; (5) minimal or no alignment of curricula with the frameworks, including minimal or no teaching of health, the arts, and foreign language; (6) textbooks that were either out-of-date or not aligned to the frameworks, and even those were in short supply; and (7) not enough slots for those applying for early childhood education, and an inability to offer full-day kindergarten.

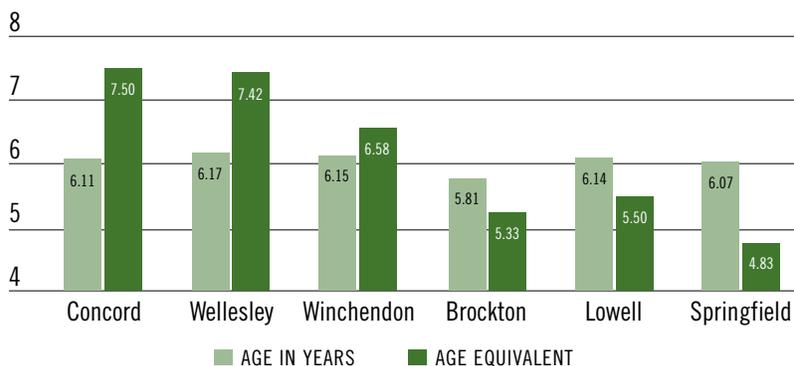
Expert witnesses also testified about the proven effectiveness of programs that were needed in these plaintiff districts, but not available due to a lack of resources. Long-term studies (including some lasting for decades) have proven beyond dispute that high-quality early childhood education taught by certified teachers increases school readiness, lessens the learning gap for children who are poor or bring special challenges to school, and results in far greater success in school and in later life. These quality programs have been shown, over time, to result in returns to society of between \$4 and \$7 for every dollar spent. Yet the plaintiff districts are unable to provide sufficient early childhood education programs because of a lack of resources. In original research for this case, the disparities in school readiness toward the end of kindergarten were detailed, demonstrating that children in the urban districts —Brockton, Lowell, and Springfield—were far behind the norm for their age and even further behind their peers in more affluent districts. (See Figure 1.)

Similarly, evidence was presented about the benefits of small classes, especially for early grades. As Judge Botsford concluded, the pre-eminent research in this field is the Tennessee STAR study, which established that children who are in classes of fewer than 20 students in their early school years enjoy long-term benefits in school success. Yet, in the plaintiff children’s districts this was often not the case. (See Figure 2, next page.)

The court also heard evidence about the “virulent dropout problem.” In the urban districts, as many as half of students do not graduate on time. (See Figure 3, on Springfield, next page.) The court noted that the drastic reduction of remediation programs as a result of state budget cuts had exacerbated this already serious problem.

After considering all the testimony and reviewing all the exhibits, Judge Botsford concluded that “the factual

FIGURE 1: Age and Age-Equivalent Scores, Kindergarten



SOURCE: STEVEN BARNETT, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR EARLY EDUCATION RESEARCH, RUTGERS UNIVERSITY; AND NANCY MARSHALL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN, WELLESLEY COLLEGE.

FIGURE 2: Number of Classes with More Than 20 Students*

GRADE	FOCUS DISTRICTS				COMPARISON DISTRICTS		
	BROCKTON*	LOWELL	SPRINGFIELD*	WINCHENDON	BROOKLINE	CONCORD	WELLESLEY
K	0	37	65	2	7		5
1	4	39	55	0	10	2	6
2	7	38	54	0	2	1	7
3	9	37	64	1	9	5	7
4	29	43	57	6	6	3	6
5	47	27	63	6	5	6	10
Percent of students receiving free/reduced lunch	36.4%	61.1%	66.9%	23.7%	10.0%	3.6%	3.1%
Largest classes	28-29	28-29	31-32	24-26	24-25	23-24	23-25

* Does not include two-teacher bilingual classes

SOURCE: JEREMY FINN, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK—BUFFALO, BASED ON DATA SUPPLIED BY THE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

record establishes that the schools attended by plaintiff children are not currently implementing the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks for all students, and are not currently equipping all students with the *McDuffy* capabilities.” Furthermore, the inadequacies of the educational programs in these schools are “many and deep,” and “even more profound” for those students at greatest risk of failure, such as “children with learning disabilities, children with limited English proficiency, racial and ethnic minority children, and those from low-income homes.”

Judge Botsford found that the ability to address these issues is limited by both inadequate funds and the Department of Education’s inadequate capacity to provide assistance to school districts. The department has shrunk from 1,000 employees in 1980 to less than 400 today, in spite of all the additional responsibilities under the Education Reform Act. This lack of capacity was undisputed at trial and was exemplified by the evidence that, although there are hundreds of low-performing schools across the state, the department has reviewed only a small fraction of them. “In the meantime,” Judge Botsford concluded, “the plaintiff children in the failing schools continue to suffer.”

THE REMEDY

In her report to the SJC, Judge Botsford concluded that the state was not meeting its constitutional obligations and that the plaintiffs were entitled to further relief. She recommended that the state be directed to perform a study under the supervision of the court to determine what it would cost to provide the appropriate education to all children as described in the curriculum frameworks and to determine the cost of providing adequate resources to the Department of Education to carry out their tasks to improve the districts. She further recommended that the state be given a limited time—perhaps six months—to conduct the study and to implement the changes and

funding necessary to accomplish the tasks.

Based on the evidence at trial, Judge Botsford identified certain educational programs that “must be included” in the determination of necessary costs and others that “should be considered.” Those that “must be included” are sufficient funding for (historically underfunded) special education, including professional development for all teachers who have responsibility for teaching children with special educational needs; sufficient funding to cover all seven curriculum frameworks, including health, arts, and foreign languages; adequate school facilities; and a public pre-school program for 3- and 4-year-olds, taught by certified teachers, free for those unable to pay, and available to all children at risk.

Judge Botsford also identified programs and strategies that “should be considered” in the determination of cost. These included increased teacher salaries, especially in

FIGURE 3: On-Time Graduation and Progress, Springfield

ENROLLMENTS	CLASS OF 2000	CLASS OF 2001	CLASS OF 2002
Grade 8	1,731	1,585	1,777
Grade 9	2,216	2,267	2,366
Grade 10	1,764	1,668	1,825
Grade 11	1,343	1,451	1,439
Grade 12	1,119	1,234	1,223
Graduates	1,034	1,173	1,131
On-time progress grade 9 to 12	50.5%	54.4%	51.7%
On-time graduation rate (from grade 9)	46.7%	51.7%	47.8%
On-time graduation rate (from grade 8)	59.7%	74.0%	63.6%

SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

poor districts; increasing the factors in the foundation budget for low-income and limited English proficiency students; adding factors in the foundation budget for technology, teacher coaches, and school leadership training; implementation of class sizes of less than 20 through third grade; provision of adequate libraries; and institution of regular, established (as opposed to episodic) remedial programs for children at risk.

At this time, the Supreme Judicial Court has received Judge Botsford's Report and recommendations, as well as briefs filed by the Commonwealth and the plaintiffs. In addition, the court has received 15 amicus, or friend-of-the-court, briefs representing more than 40 organizations, virtually all the urban superintendents, and almost 50 state legislators. Every single one of these amicus briefs supports Judge Botsford's recommendations. After oral arguments, which the court heard in early October, the SJC will deliberate, and is expected to issue its decision by early next year.

It was 1974 when the Council for Fair School Finance

was formed to support litigation on behalf of students who are not receiving the education to which they are constitutionally entitled. Now, 30 years later and 12 years after the landmark *McDuffy* decision, it is apparent there is more work to be done to reform and equalize public education in Massachusetts.

The constitution requires that the state provide public education that prepares students to participate in the civic and economic life of the Commonwealth, and the Council continues to believe that it is in the interest of the Commonwealth to do so. The *Hancock* case seeks to define the challenges ahead for government and educators. The council looks forward to the SJC's decision in *Hancock*, and to working with the legislative and executive branches of government to make the promise of education that John Adams enshrined in our state's constitution a reality for all students. ■

Norma Shapiro, legislative director for ACLU of Massachusetts, is president of the Council for Fair School Finance.

Wrong answer on school finances

BY ROBERT M. COSTRELL

In the first week of October, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court heard arguments in the *Hancock* school finance case. The arguments addressed the opinion issued last April by Superior Court Judge Margot Botsford that funding is constitutionally inadequate in the districts of those who brought the suit and, by extension, in high-poverty districts across the Commonwealth.

Much has changed since the SJC last examined school finance 10 years ago. Massachusetts now ranks fourth nationally in expenditures per pupil. The state has vastly reduced, eliminated, or even reversed spending gaps that previously existed between wealthy and poor districts, including the four plaintiff districts that are the focus of *Hancock* (Brockton, Lowell, Springfield, and Winchendon). Education Trust, a national organization devoted to narrowing achievement gaps, consistently finds that Massachusetts spends significantly more in poor districts than in wealthy ones, ranking at or near the top of the nation by various such measures.

In her opinion, Judge Botsford acknowledges this progress, but holds that funding is still inadequate. This

opinion has been widely publicized, but the basis for it has not. A hard look at the evidence reveals a surprisingly weak case.

Much is at stake for the next round of education reform. Should the Commonwealth, once again, pursue the monetary solution that featured so prominently in the first decade of reform? Or, instead, should we focus on developing the leadership, accountability, flexibility, and intervention capabilities needed to turn around low-performing schools? Just as important is the constitutional issue of whether the legislative and executive branches should decide our future policy direction, as opposed to the courts doing it.

ADEQUACY STUDIES INADEQUATE

In order to demonstrate the inadequacy of funding, the plaintiffs commissioned two studies to estimate what an adequate education would cost in Massachusetts. The court found neither of these studies helpful, and it is important to understand why, for several reasons. First, it explains why the court's opinion rests instead on what were clearly secondary arguments presented by the plaintiffs. It also

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explains why the court's opinion that spending falls below what is necessary is unaccompanied by any indication of how much spending *is* necessary, since the court found no reliable basis for determining it. Finally, it is important to understand the shortcomings of these studies, since the nature of the opinion, if adopted by the SJC, may force the state into the very types of flawed studies that Judge Botsford rejected.

The plaintiffs' two studies are representative of those produced by consultants for school finance cases, each of them following one of two frequently used methods: the "professional judgment" model and the "successful schools" model. The professional judgment approach asks educators to build an ideal school budget to meet certain educational objectives. In the plaintiffs' study, those objectives were the seven state curriculum frameworks (English Language Arts; mathematics; science and technology; history and social science; foreign languages; the arts; and health). The panelists build the budget from the bottom up, by answering questions such as: What is the optimal class size? How many teacher aides and computers should there be? They are encouraged to "be creative and innovative," to design new programs or services, and to assume there are no revenue constraints.

Predictably, the plaintiffs' professional judgment study implied that almost every district in the state—even the wealthiest—was underfunded (with the ironic exception of Cambridge, a high-spending but low-performing district). Judge Botsford rejected this study as "a wish list of resources that teachers and administrators would like to have if they were creating an ideal school with no need to think about cost at all."

In contrast, the "successful schools" approach is based on spending and performance data. The plaintiffs' study selected the 75 districts with the highest MCAS scores on math and English Language Arts and went through a series of calculations to estimate what it would cost for other districts to attain the same level of success. For a variety of technical reasons, the calculations led to the nonsensical conclusion that two-thirds of the successful districts were not spending enough to be successful. Consequently, Judge Botsford also rejected this adequacy study.

WEAK FOUNDATION

Despite rejecting both of the plaintiffs' attempts to calculate funding adequacy, Judge Botsford nonetheless concluded that the Commonwealth's "foundation budget"—the state's measure of the minimum cost for an adequate education—is too low to meet constitutional muster. But the basis for Judge Botsford's conclusion is problematic.

Since the court discarded the plaintiffs' direct estimates of the cost of adequacy, the court's opinion relies instead on three strands of indirect evidence. The court relies most

heavily on disparities in the ratio of spending to foundation budget between high-scoring and low-scoring districts. Second, the court's opinion cites shortcomings in the foundation budget formula, especially for the cost of special education. Finally, the court sounds a note of alarm that "the funding inadequacies have been exacerbated by profound cuts in public school education funding by the Commonwealth in the last two years."

The foundation budget is central to the funding-adequacy issue. As the state's benchmark for the minimum cost of an adequate education, it is the cornerstone of state education financing. For any school district unable to fund schools at the foundation-budget level from property tax revenue, the state has pledged to make up the difference, and it has made good on that pledge even during the recent recession and fiscal crisis.

High-scoring districts are not all high-spending.

Last year, the foundation budget in wealthy districts was about \$6,700 per pupil. For districts in the poorest quartile, it averaged about \$8,300, some 25 percent higher. This is because the foundation budget formula assigns a premium of \$2,000 to \$2,500 for low-income children (depending on grade level), and an additional premium for limited-English-proficiency students.

These premiums have provided a powerful mechanism for closing or reversing the spending gaps between poor and wealthy districts. But the foundation budget is the minimum every district must spend; it's not a limit. Any school district is free to spend as much as localities choose, and many affluent communities fund their schools at levels well above the required minimum. As a result, while K-12 school districts in the poorest quartile spent, on average, more than \$8,700 last year, districts with the least poverty spent about \$8,500. Poor districts spent a bit more per-pupil than affluent districts, on average, but not by as big a difference as in foundation budget.

Here is what the plaintiffs made of that data. Rather than comparing per-pupil expenditure, they expressed spending as a percentage of foundation budget. By this measure, poor districts spend less than wealthy districts, even though, in real dollars, they spend more: Wealthy districts spend, on average, well above 100 percent of foundation budget, while average spending among poor districts is not much more than 100 percent. The plaintiffs postulate that wealthy districts would not spend more than necessary, so their foundation budget (about \$6,700) must be inadequate for them to obtain their high level of performance. Thus, they conclude, the poor districts' foundation budget (about \$8,300) must be inadequate as well,

even though it is far higher.

The court acknowledges the sketchy nature of this argument, describing the approach as offering a "rough" insight. Nonetheless, this is the main basis of Judge Botsford's recommendation to the SJC regarding the constitutionality of our funding system.

Specifically, her opinion cites two facts as evidence that today's foundation budget levels are inadequate: (1) the state's highest scoring districts spend, on average, about 130 percent of foundation; (2) the state average is about 115 percent. From these facts, the court infers "it is difficult not to conclude that the minimum 'adequate' funding level for every school district in Massachusetts lies above the current foundation budget formula amount."

This inference is not justified. Four flaws in the argument are as follows:

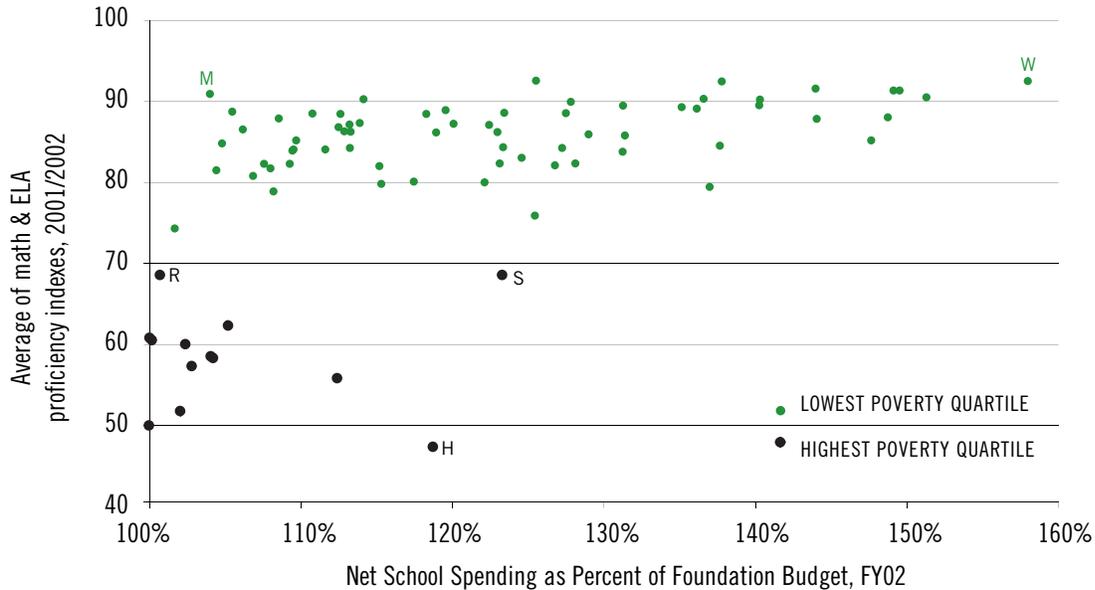
1. Average spending is no indication of necessary spending. The court uses the *average* ratio of spending to foundation budget to conclude that the "*minimum* adequate funding" ratio materially exceeds 100 percent for successful districts. However, among high-scoring districts, there is a wide spread of spending levels, including some that are close to the foundation budget minimum. Figure 1 (next page) plots MCAS scores (scaled on the state's 100-point "proficiency index") against percentage of foundation-budget spending for two groups of districts. The districts depicted by the green dots, which are in the lowest-poverty quartile, include almost all the highest-scoring districts, and their average spending is 125 percent of foundation. But the average is no indication of necessary spending, since a number of districts that obtain this high performance spend much closer to foundation. District M, for example, is at 104 percent, but its performance level is among the highest. More than one-fifth of the students who earn these high scores are in districts that spend less than 110 percent of foundation.

Similarly, it is wrong to infer anything about minimum necessary spending from the statewide average of 115 percent: So long as districts are free to spend more than the minimum, many of them will do so, and the average will exceed the minimum. To ignore this is to fall prey to the Lake Wobegon fallacy.

2. Association is not causation. On average, high-scoring districts spend more above foundation than low-scoring districts. From this fact, the court infers that higher spending is necessary for higher performance. But this confuses association with causation. After controlling for demographics, the association disappears.

Consider the black dots in Figure 1, representing districts in the highest poverty quartile (there are fewer of them, since they are larger districts). On average, these

FIGURE 1: Performance and Above-Foundation Spending, Highest and Lowest Poverty K-12 Districts



districts spend closer to foundation than low-poverty districts (106 percent vs. 125 percent). But these districts also score below low-poverty ones with the *same or lower* spending ratios. For example, *each* of the low-poverty districts spending 100 to 110 percent of foundation scores higher than *all* of the high-poverty districts, no matter how high they spend. Clearly, demographics are a powerful influence, so we cannot infer the effect of spending on performance without controlling for that.

To do so, look horizontally among black dots or green dots. There is no association between performance and percentage of foundation-budget spending. For example, among high-poverty districts, the worst performer, district H, spends nearly the highest, 119 percent. One of the best performers, district S, spends 123 percent of foundation, but district R does just as well at 101 percent. Turning to low-poverty districts, district M at 104 percent does about as well as district W at 158 percent. If we were to fit a line through the green dots or through the black dots, it would be virtually flat, signifying no association between performance and spending ratio among demographically similar districts.

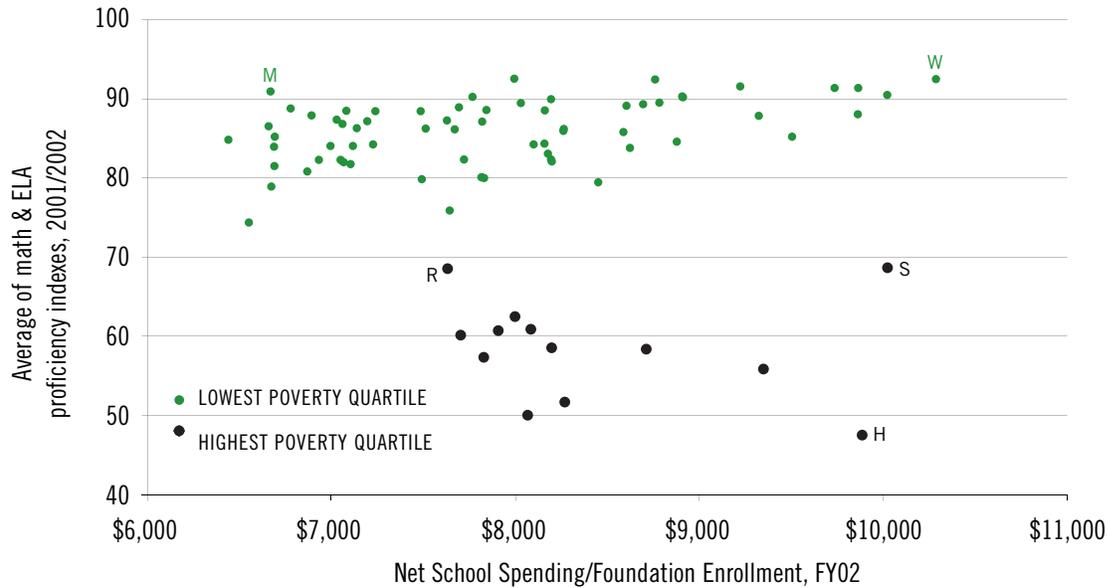
Dozens of more formal analyses prepared for the court also show no such association. These analyses apply standard statistical methods to district and individual student data, using such demographic controls as district income and parental education, individual LEP, SPED, and free-and-reduced-lunch status. The court chose to disregard all such statistical analyses. In Judge Botsford's opinion, the "real world" is better represented by simple averages, without attempting to control for demographics.

3. Comparing spending ratios of wealthy and poor districts uses a variable yardstick.

Figure 2 depicts the same data as Figure 1 in terms of spending per pupil, instead of percentage of foundation. The minimum spending per pupil is higher in the high-poverty districts, because the foundation budget is much higher. After concluding, on a highly tenuous basis, that minimum spending is substantially too low in the wealthy districts, the court takes a further leap, concluding that minimum spending must be too low in the poor districts as well. As the diagram indicates, this rests on the assumed difference between minimum spending in poor and wealthy districts. In other words, the percent-of-foundation argument is that the base level of foundation (for students who are the least challenging to educate) is wrong but that the low-income premium is right.

The truth is, neither the base level nor the appropriate premium for low-income students can be known with certainty; at best, one can only determine a reasonable range, based on available evidence. That means policymakers should have some latitude in designing a foundation formula. A progressive formula consists of a base level toward the low end of the range (since most wealthy districts will spend more anyway) and a low-income premium that is on the high side (since high-poverty districts are less likely to be able to exceed foundation spending levels). Massachusetts has a relatively high low-income premium, resulting in one of the nation's most progressive funding systems. Reasonable proposals have been advanced to increase the low-income premium even more, most notably in Gov. Romney's fiscal 2004 budget.

The irony is that raising the low-income premium (a

FIGURE 2: Performance and Per Pupil Spending, Highest and Lowest Poverty K-12 Districts

measure recommended for consideration by the court) would not remedy the constitutional violation, under the court's percentage-of-foundation logic. Raising foundation in poor districts from, say, \$8,300 to \$9,300 would increase spending by up to \$1,000. But, *as a percent of foundation*, spending would be unchanged, still close to 100 percent. (The black dots in Figure 2 would move right, while those in Figure 1 would stay put.) For wealthy districts, with no change in either spending or foundation budget, the spending ratio would remain unchanged. Thus the disparity between average spending in relation to foundation budget in rich and poor districts would be undiminished. By the criterion used to justify the finding of inadequacy, it would be as if no solution had been adopted at all. *Under the court's criterion, no increase in the low-income premium, no matter how large, could eliminate the finding of inadequacy for low-income districts.* This deterrent to a more progressive formula, no doubt unintended, vividly illustrates the perils of judicial intervention in policy-making.

4. There is no association between spending ratios and improvement over time. High test scores often reflect favorable demographics; whether scores are *improving* is often better evidence of what the school is actually doing. By focusing solely on a snapshot of test results, the court ignored evidence that a number of districts spending near foundation have shown strong improvement over time, while many districts spending well above foundation show little improvement. On average, high poverty districts have improved faster than low-poverty districts, despite lower spending ratios.

These four flaws show there are important differences in performance and rates of improvement among demographically similar districts that are unrelated to spending. There are even greater differences among *schools* within these poor districts. There are high-poverty schools whose scores on the proficiency index rival those of low-poverty schools and districts. How do we bring the lowest-performing districts (e.g. district H) up *at least* to the level achieved by the similarly poor district R, and to the higher levels yet achieved by some schools within these districts? That is the challenge in the next round of education reform, and it involves such elements as leadership, accountability, flexibility, and intervention, not funding levels.

COMPONENTS OF FOUNDATION

The second strand of the court's argument is that certain components of the foundation budget formula underestimate true costs, most notably of special education. To evaluate this argument, one must consider changes in special-education funding made by the Legislature and the executive branch in recent years. The special-education component of foundation budget itself has been increased, and "circuit-breaker" legislation has been enacted to help pay for the extraordinary costs of severely disabled children. The circuit-breaker was implemented last year for the first time, providing an increase in funding over the program it replaced by 72 percent. As the court points out, this was still well below "full funding" of the new program, since claims jumped faster than expected. This year's appropriation (enacted after the court's report was issued) raises circuit-breaker funding by another 66 percent, to \$201 million. State funding for special education

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cannot be evaluated on foundation formula alone without the circuit-breaker. And it would be premature to declare that circuit-breaker funding is inadequate, as its implementation is rapidly ratcheting up and the new program is still being evaluated.

The court also believes that the component of foundation budget for teacher salaries is inadequate. The basis for this conclusion is that the ratio of actual expenditures on salaries to that component of the foundation budget averages well over 100 percent and is particularly high in certain high-spending districts. But since teacher salaries are the largest component of the foundation budget, this simply reproduces the spending-to-foundation-ratio argument, with all its shortcomings. Moreover, it is misleading to decompose spending ratios and focus only on those components where spending exceeds foundation level, while ignoring those where districts often spend less than the foundation formula allots, such as support staff and central office.

LESSONS FROM THE DOWNTURN

The final strand of the court's opinion involves spending cuts during the recent economic downturn, the result of what the judge called "profound cuts" in state aid. This

strand is subordinate to the other two, since the court's assertion here is that the cuts "exacerbated" funding inadequacies. But the data underlying this assertion are flawed. Specifically, the court reported in April that spending was expected to drop in each of the four plaintiff districts last year, most notably by over \$10 million in Brockton. Instead, Brockton's spending *rose* by about \$2.6 million. The report also contains erroneous figures for fiscal year 2004 spending in the other plaintiff districts.

No dramatic decline in spending took place last year in any of the four plaintiff districts. Spending fell by about 1 percent in two of the districts, and rose by about 2 percent in the other two. Nor did spending drop as a percent of foundation, in three of the four districts. Finally, since enrollment dropped in each of these districts, spending per pupil fell only slightly in one district and rose by 2 or 3 percent in the others, in this last, hardest year of the fiscal crisis for public education.

More generally, the record of education spending during the three-year economic downturn is rather different from the impression conveyed by the court, as well as by press accounts and ads aired by the Massachusetts Teachers Association. From fiscal year 2001 to 2004, Massachusetts school spending grew by 12.7 percent (15 percent, if we

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include construction, transportation, grants, and federal funds). For the state as a whole, spending never fell in any year of the recession. On a per-pupil basis it grew 10.9 percent over this three-year period.

Spending growth certainly slowed during this period, but schools were generally able to avoid sharp revenue cuts due to the mix of local and state funding sources. For most districts, local tax revenues are the major source of school funds. Statewide, property taxes grow steadily at about 5 to 6 percent per year. That is because new development of residential and commercial property roughly doubles the base allowable tax growth of 2.5 percent under Proposition 2½. In general, local contributions to the schools closely track this steady growth in property taxes, in compliance with state law.

In contrast, state tax revenues are highly volatile. In fiscal 2002, state tax revenues fell by a devastating 14.6 percent. Education aid, however, based on a previously enacted budget, continued to rise at a healthy pace (including 15 percent hikes that year for three of the four *Hancock* districts). Over the next two years, as the fiscal crisis continued, state aid declined modestly. In all, by fiscal 2004 education aid remained 4 percent above fiscal 2001, despite a 4.5 percent drop in state revenues. The cuts in aid, though painful, were far more muted than in the last recession, when school aid fell 23 percent over three years, despite a much smaller drop in tax revenues.

For those districts with few local resources, the state was able to minimize cuts in aid. For the four *Hancock* districts, which rely on the state for 80 percent of their school funding, state aid rose 9.7 percent over this three-year period, about two-and-a-half times the state average. (The modest recovery in aid for fiscal 2005 also favors the *Hancock* districts. Their aid will grow 2.7 percent, or 4.2 percent per student, vs. 2.8 percent per student statewide.) This allowed their spending to grow 9.1 percent from

2001 to 2004. It would have grown 10.4 percent if the local contribution of these four districts had all kept pace with their tax levies, as it did in other low-income districts and in the rest of the state.

The lessons to be drawn from the downturn are not those drawn by the court, which seem to be that any cyclical slowdown of state education aid growth is a potential constitutional violation. Rather, one lesson is that because state revenues are far more volatile than local revenues, it would not be prudent for the Commonwealth to continually increase the share of education spending borne by the state. Aid should be carefully distributed to those communities whose local resources are most scarce, so that when the next downturn occurs, they can again be spared sharp cuts. Increasing the share of funds provided

Growth certainly slowed, but spending never fell.

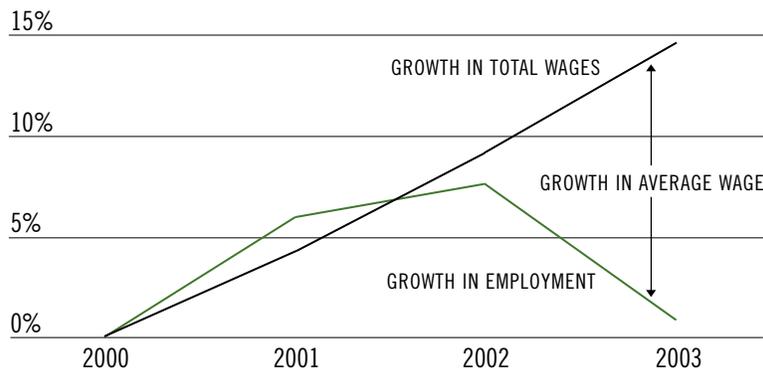
by the state could well make education spending more vulnerable to economic cycles.

An additional lesson from the downturn concerns collective bargaining. Figure 3 depicts the growth in education wages and employment in the four *Hancock* districts. (The picture, and the story it tells, is similar for the state as a whole.) Total education wages grew steadily throughout this period, from calendar year 2000 (the last year before the downturn) through 2003, for a rise of 14.8 percent in the four *Hancock* districts. (During the same period, total private sector wages in Massachusetts *fell*.) In the four *Hancock* districts, the average wage in education grew 13.4 percent during this period, exceeding inflation and several times higher than private sector average wage growth (3.3 percent). Education employment continued to grow in these districts through 2002, but layoffs

occurred in 2003 as revenues became tighter while wages continued to rise unabated.

Several factors affect the growth of average wages, but the main factor is collective bargaining. In some districts, raises were rigidly locked-in prior to the downturn. Brockton, however, negotiated its teacher contract in January of 2003, well after the state's revenues went into free fall. This was the month Gov. Romney came into office and determined that the state faced a \$600 million deficit. He was authorized by the Legislature to implement immediate mid-year budget cuts, including local aid. And yet, Brockton negotiated a three-year contract raising

FIGURE 3: Growth in K-12 Public Education Wages and Employment, Hancock Districts (percent change from calendar year 2000)



SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DIVISION OF UNEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

SYMPOSIUM: THE HANCOCK CASE

school payroll costs by 11 to 12 percent. Under this contract, any individual with fewer than nine years of service could expect to receive raises of 25 to 37 percent over three years.

In response to testimony that districts such as Brockton made painful program cuts, the defense pointed out that those cuts wouldn't have been necessary if they had negotiated less generous contracts. Judge Botsford dismissed this statement, and rejected the suggestion (that had not been made) that Brockton and Lowell teachers were "overpaid." The court did not find that teachers in these districts were underpaid either. As the court reported, Brockton's average teacher salary of \$57,398 in 2001 exceeded that of Wellesley and Concord, two of the plaintiffs' preferred "comparison districts." The most recent data show that the average salary among the four *Hancock* districts exceeds the state average, which is seventh highest in the nation, according to the American Federation of Teachers. Nor did the court find persuasive evidence that salary levels kept plaintiff districts from attracting and retaining qualified teachers. In short, there was no evidence of any educational downside had the teachers' unions showed modest restraint to avoid the painful program cuts cited by the court.

REPAIRING THE FOUNDATION

The court's opinion that funding is constitutionally inadequate is based on a weak case: None of the three strands of evidence stands up to scrutiny. Consequently, the court's recommended remedy also rests on weak ground. That remedy would have the state revise its foundation budget within six months under court guidelines, and remain under judicial review, presumably until it meets the court's criteria for adequacy.

The time is certainly ripe for the state to take a fresh look at the foundation budget, and it has already begun doing so. Unlike a decade ago, we now have considerable information on educational outputs to help move away from a strictly input-based approach. As a national leader in standards-based reform, Massachusetts is positioned to develop new methods to estimate the cost necessary to achieve continuing educational progress, as we consider raising the standard on math and English Language Arts and phasing in accountability for other subjects at a judicious rate. We can experiment with a foundation budget formula that guides districts toward the kind of reforms that are most promising. We need also to carefully consider if and how the foundation budget can be constructed to put educational needs over the sometimes-dysfunctional

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dynamics of collective bargaining.

None of this will happen if the state is handcuffed by a rigid and unrealistic court decree. Judge Botsford's recommended court order would require the state to determine the cost of educating students to state standards in all seven curriculum frameworks. Our state standards still have a large aspirational component. Since only two of the frameworks (math and English Language Arts) are currently tested for graduation, there are no reliable data from which to estimate what it will take to generate acceptable student outcomes on the other subjects. Consequently, such an order would result in a highly speculative exercise, suffering from the same problem as all professional judgment studies: There is no attempt to tie observed spending levels to actual student outcomes.

After rejecting just such an estimate, produced for the plaintiffs, as a "wish list," Judge Botsford would have the SJC order the state to produce another "wish list." (Predictably, the Massachusetts Teachers Association has already filed a brief providing a host of such studies for emulation.) Should the SJC force the state into such inflated cost estimates, as a result of the state setting ambitious performance goals, there may well be a chilling effect on the standards movement, both here and elsewhere.

When considering evidence on individual elementary schools in Springfield, Judge Botsford found some high-poverty schools, spending less than their peers, that perform quite well—schools that outshine a number of the low-poverty districts depicted in Figure 1. The judge candidly notes "as a matter of puzzlement and concern...such great disparities in performance and quality. This variation within the same district, shown not to be particularly related to

funding, indicates unaddressed problems of management and leadership."

At this stage of education reform, funding is neither the problem nor the solution. After committing billions of additional dollars to schools over the last decade, and leading the nation in establishing high standards and assessments, we have made great progress. State policy always envisioned that the next phase would focus on accountability and intervention to address the problems of management and leadership cited by the court. This will require resources to ramp up state efforts in educational auditing and intervention in low-performing schools and districts.

But it will also require a host of non-monetary measures, some as yet unknown, and some laid out in various reports, including that of the Governor's Task Force on State Intervention in Under-Performing Districts, which is favorably cited by the court. Unfortunately, the teachers' unions continue to block many of these measures. The thrust of the *Hancock* suit—funded almost entirely by the unions—is to redirect state policy away from key concerns flagged by school reformers, and back to another round of school funding hikes. If we become distracted by another huge monetary fix, our energies will be entirely absorbed by questions of how to finance it, how to distribute it, and so on, pushing aside the central issues of accountability, leadership, flexibility, and intervention that are so critical to fulfilling the promise of education reform. ■

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Remedy lies in new goals, new strategies

BY MARK ROOSEVELT

We are really just beginning to understand that schools are indeed our most important social institutions. And only recently have we faced up to the reality that, rather than being the great equalizers that mythmakers proclaim, schools have been reflective of the enormous inequalities in American life. The good news is that for the past two decades or so we have been working very hard—state by state—to extend educational opportunity to children who have heretofore been left out.

In Massachusetts, we are attempting to accomplish this through a far more equitable distribution of state education dollars, as well as through newly established guidelines for what all children need to know at every grade level and as high school graduates. "Standards-based education reform" is an unfortunately bland, bureaucratic description for what is in truth the great progressive undertaking of our time.

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of the task before us. We have yet to fully comprehend the extraordinary changes in state budgets, school management, and educational practice that will be required. Indeed, if our goal is to educate all students to a reasonable standard, to literally "leave no child behind," then we are just at the beginning of what will be a long, arduous, intellectually challenging, and, yes, expensive struggle.

Judge Margot Botsford's lengthy and well-considered report to the Supreme Judicial Court in the *Hancock* case confirms how large and complex an undertaking we are really pursuing and how much work is still to be done. She fully acknowledges the enormous financial commitments made in the 1993 Education Reform Act and the considerable achievement represented by an over 96 percent pass rate on the MCAS graduation exam. Yet she still finds that the Commonwealth has failed to meet the constitutional standard laid out in the 1993 *McDuffy* decision—to adequately "educate all its children."

And how could she have decided otherwise? After even a cursory analysis of student achievement in many of our urban centers, would anyone in good faith seriously argue that children in all the state's districts and schools are now receiving an "adequate" education, much less a fair opportunity to learn to the rather high if vague standard of the "seven capabilities" laid out in *McDuffy*? Certainly, no one should.

As we—and the state's highest court—consider what needs to be done, we should keep in mind that the great achievement of these past 10 years has been that we have finally stopped the process of systematically writing off a great many of our children—poor kids, urban kids, rural kids, kids of color, English language learners, and kids with disabilities. Prior to 1993 and the imposition of state graduation standards, many, if not most, of these kids did not take algebra in high school, to take just one example; at the end of 12th grade they were awarded diplomas more for attendance than for any ascertainable accumulation of knowledge. Now every Massachusetts school must educate all their students to be able to pass the 10th-grade MCAS, and as we have seen in the 2004 results they are doing that in higher numbers than anyone predicted just a few years ago.

In 1993, we set some goals. First, that all school districts should be spending at their "foundation budget" level by 2000, and they are. Second, that all students should be required to pass the math and English portions of the MCAS exam, and over 96 percent of our kids have done so. What are our goals today? And what are we willing to do to reach them?

Although it represents significant progress, having all students pass the 10th-grade MCAS is only the first step toward educational fairness. As Achieve Inc. detailed in its report *Do Graduation Tests Measure Up?*, the passing score

of 220 on the MCAS only means that a student has absorbed eighth-grade material.

Nonetheless, there may well be a problem reaching consensus that it is time to make major new commitments to K-12 education. As Commissioner David Driscoll often notes, there is no sense of urgency on this issue right now.

Today, there is no great public outcry, as schools do not appear to be in crisis. Educators may feel hamstrung by recent cuts, but no community has anything like the 73 kids in a classroom that the town of Wales had back in 1992. And legislators and the public are aware, as Judge Botsford noted, that despite recent cuts, we are still spending more than twice as much today on K-12 education as we did in 1993. And depending on which numbers you prefer, the spending gap between rich and poor communities has either been greatly reduced or eliminated entirely.

No, 2004 is not 1993. It is doubtful there's the energy in the public sector to go through the kind of tumultuous political battle necessary to produce another major reform bill. So, we who are committed to this enterprise of educational equity should be grateful for the SJC's ongoing involvement. The *Hancock* case represents a great opportunity for an honest assessment of the first decade of reform, a look at what worked, what didn't, what we can do better in the years ahead—a chance to make adjustments, improvements, and additions that will quicken the pace of reform.

In that process, Judge Botsford's report to the SJC represents an important contribution. In a trial that lasted more than seven months and included 114 witnesses and more than 1,000 exhibits, Judge Botsford got a good taste for the intricacies of education politics. She heard a great deal from those who want large sums of additional money to be sent to local districts to spend as they will, as well as from folks who argue that such expenditures are unlikely to make a bit of difference in the educational achievement of students. In her report, she sorts it all out in a fairly reasonable manner, concluding that some critical new expenditures need to be made, as well as some critical management changes.

In her recommendations to the SJC, Judge Botsford touches on a long list of what "should" or "must" be done. There is a great deal in the judge's list that can—and should—be debated, in terms of deciding what is worth investing in to improve student outcomes in districts where achievement is lagging, and in the emphasis between additional funds and management reforms. She concludes that "capacity problems are a cause of the inadequate educations being provided to the plaintiffs," but that "inadequate financial resources are a very impor-

tant and independent cause." The order she recommends to the SJC addresses both resources and capacity, calling on the state to determine the "actual cost" of providing an adequate education and of "provid[ing] meaningful improvement in the capacity of these local districts" to deliver it.

But in her detailed listing of "musts" and "shoulds," the emphasis is on funding for services, not on management reforms. The judge does not require a plan to improve the management and leadership skills of school and district administrators, nor does she direct attention to what it will take to expand state capacity to get failing schools to change. Finally, she does not direct the state toward an investigation into whether administrators currently have the power and flexibility to evaluate, train, and remove professional staff so as to make effective use of available resources. Yet without such tools, additional resources sent directly to local districts might be inefficient or simply wasteful.

For either the SJC or our elected officials to decide what new expenditures or reforms are most urgent, they need much more research into the years since the 1993 Act was passed. Where has the money gone? What has been effective? What has not? And what are the most important missing pieces?

The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE) and the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy at MassINC are currently engaged in a research project in this area, but even while the research is going on, there are some things that are already abundantly clear.

We need to rally around the goal of proficiency.

First, we need to rally educators, parents, and the community as a whole around a new goal. That goal should be proficiency—technically, a score of 240 on the MCAS. Proficiency represents a reasonable standard for high school students, an achievement level more likely to equate with *McDuffy's* seven capabilities. We should consider whether and how to ramp up the passing score to that level, and we should charge the Department of Education and all of our school districts with developing realistic plans for getting our students to proficiency over the next 10 years. (This is already required by the federal No Child Left Behind legislation.)

Second, we need to understand that the responsibility for effective schooling and attainment of proficiency by all of our students will continue to shift from local governments to the state. As *McDuffy* established and Judge Botsford reiterated, "This duty lies squarely on the executive (magistrates) and legislative branches of the Com-

SYMPOSIUM: THE HANCOCK CASE

monwealth. That local control and fiscal support has been placed in greater or lesser measure through our history on local governments does not dilute the validity of this conclusion. While it is clearly within the power of the Commonwealth to delegate some of the implementation of the duty to local governments, such power does not include a right to abdicate the obligation imposed on magistrates and Legislatures placed on them by the Constitution.”

Schooling will continue to shift to the state.

To a considerable degree, the idea behind the 1993 Act was that if the state sends out significantly more money to school districts on an equalizing basis and establishes curriculum frameworks and a testing system to measure results, then the local districts will figure out what needs to be done to raise student achievement. Judge Botsford’s examination of the four focus districts and the district audits performed by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability show that this is often not the case. Many districts have not implemented even the most basic

elements of standards-based reform, including aligning their curriculum to state standards and using student achievement data to inform personnel reviews and professional development plans.

The current lack of state capacity to assist districts with essential reform and to intervene with districts that cannot make progress towards raising student achievement appears to be a clear abdication of the Commonwealth’s constitutional duty, and a critical flaw in the implementation of education reform. Figuring out how best to build that capacity is a critical next step if we are to continue to make progress toward our goal.

Finally, the changes that we make in state law and funding, whether expanding early childhood education, extending time on learning through a longer school day, or establishing a more rigorous value-added system of adult accountability, must be made after consideration of how they will contribute to the attainment of our goal. More money may well be needed. Tough reforms in the way we operate our schools may be needed as well. ■

Former state representative Mark Roosevelt, co-author of the Education Reform Act of 1993, is managing director of the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education.

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Split-level personality

Optimism, pessimism, and the American psyche

BY ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

In 1980, Republican presidential nominee Ronald Reagan, running against Democratic incumbent Jimmy Carter, asked voters, “Are you better off than you were four years ago?” Note that he said “you,” not “we” or “the United States.” Reagan believed that when things get better for individuals, society is better off; since his victorious campaign, few American politicians mention the possibility that a rising standard of living for many could be detrimental to the nation as a whole. Even fewer suggest that, regardless of recent history, America—or the typical American—is likely to be worse off in the future.

Writers are a different matter. Scads of best-sellers are based on the premise that America is going to hell—at least if readers fail to rally round their clarion call. Still, most of these books echo Reagan’s campaign query. That is, they deal in short time frames, citing something in recent memory—an election, a sensational crime, the 1960s or the 1980s—as the point of (almost) no return. And they blame one segment of society, usually a political party or ideological faction, for our (impending) doom.

A few recent books have taken a more nuanced and long-term view on the question of whether the United States is in decline—and especially whether the way we Americans choose to live is hastening our social demise. But even these works divide sharply between optimism and pessimism, between believing that we are sowing the seeds of our own destruction or that the best is yet to come. This year, David Brooks’s *On Paradise Drive: How We Live Now (And Always Have) in the Future Tense* and Michael Barone’s *Hard America, Soft America: Competition vs. Coddling and the Battle for the Nation’s Future* take up the Reaganesque argument that individuals pursuing their own American Dreams will make this country stronger and happier. The opposite tack is taken in Jane Jacobs’s starkly titled *Dark Age Ahead* and Jeremy Rifkin’s *The European Dream: How Europe’s Vision of the Future Is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream*, both of which depict our fabled American individualism as something closer to pigheadedness. Journalist and Brookings Institution fellow Gregg Easterbrook splits the difference: In his 2003 *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*, he asserts that conditions are improving

but the way we’re feeling about them is deteriorating. In this, Easterbrook turns American hopefulness on its head, saying that we have developed a genius for turning reasons for optimism into grounds for pessimism.

Lurking in the shadows behind all these books is another one. It is Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*, published in 1999, which sounded the alarm about a decline in “civil society” in the form of fraternal organizations, neighborhood groups, and, of course, amateur sports leagues. Just about every sociologist—whether “comic,” as Brooks sometimes calls himself, or serious—writing about the American character these days feels compelled to address Putnam’s findings, and just about everyone agrees that it’s a bad thing for people to isolate themselves from their fellow citizens. However, the optimists (especially Brooks) believe that new forms of connection are being formed, based on real shared interests rather than mere geographical proximity. More dubious writers (including Jacobs and Rifkin) suggest that the trend identified by Putnam is only getting worse as Americans—at least, those with enough money—separate themselves into gated communities and sparsely settled suburbs. While the optimists argue that suburbanization is part of the road to progress that America has been traveling for decades, Jacobs and company worry that we’ve missed our exit.

Jacobs is best known for her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, which eviscerated urban planning policies that tried to impose suburban characteristics on city landscapes. *Death and Life* helped to save Boston’s North End “slum” from being razed and the South End from being paved for the proposed Southwest Expressway. *Dark Age Ahead* is even more ambitious in intent, with Jacobs declaring, “The purpose of this book is to help our culture avoid sliding into a dead end.” Her major theme is that Western societies have fallen into dogma and fundamentalist thought (both secular and religious). American education, she asserts, has been eclipsed by “credentialing,” which focuses on job skills to the exclusion of teaching methods of scientific inquiry. Furthermore, more and more professions are insulating themselves from serious criticism. Herself a former editor for an architectural journal,

Jacobs claims that architects effectively “ban criticism of [each] another’s work,” which only allows bad or outdated practices to continue. In a comment that particularly stings after 9/11, Jacobs also claims that “sincere but sentimentalized public appreciation of the risks police run” often undermines attempts to curb corruption and inefficiency in police departments.

Aside from offering education and political reforms that are not particularly original, Jacobs seeks a solution by returning to the argument that has threaded together her most successful books, which is that high population density and mixed-use development lead to social and economic vitality, and thus to society’s salvation. Indeed, in this book, she comes close to suggesting that suburban sprawl, as misguided as she thinks it is, may be self-correcting, speculating that today’s Boxfords and Kingstons will eventually become so densely populated that “smart growth” will occur without purposeful action on the part of state and federal governments to make it come about.

“When the housing bubble bursts,” she writes, referring to a phenomenon that seems long overdue in Massachusetts, “the force driving densification of suburbs could become irresistible in some places, overriding zoning and other regulations as owners of suburban houses and land discover that these can no longer supply cash passively but must somehow earn it instead.” In other words, today’s McMansion owners will one day cash out by selling their properties to multi-unit housing developers, much as farm owners once sold their unprofitable land to the McMansion developers.

If Jacobs spreads deterministic gloom about America’s future—if it gets bad enough, it might get better—in order to promote a different course, Rifkin seems to take pleasure in downgrading the stock of the United States, thereby validating a competing vision from another continent. “Much of the world is going dark, leaving many human beings without clear direction,” he writes. “[But] the European Dream is a beacon of light in a troubled world.” For Rifkin, *Bowling Alone* is not an early warning signal but something close to an epitaph for our culture. “If [Putnam] is right, it suggests that the American character has hardened, and that time and money pressures and pursuit of personal pleasure has made us even less willing to look out for the social well-being of our neighbors,” Rifkin writes. Europeans, he claims, are much less concerned with personal enrichment and more accustomed to thinking of the social good. He also argues that Europeans, less burdened by a Protestant work ethic, are better able to appreciate the good life. If Rifkin is correct, the late Julia Child was a social prophet, not just a whiz in the kitchen.

Optimist Barone would agree with Rifkin that “the American character has hardened,” but he sees that as our saving grace, a necessary correction to the welfare-state mentality he says almost ruined us. (And presumably has

hobbled Europe, though Barone doesn’t bother to say so, treating that continent’s irrelevance as obvious.) A century ago, “many Americans faced a difficult, even cruel existence,” says Barone, identifying a “hard” America that even he would not want to bring back. Still, he argues, “The Softened America of the second half of the twentieth century created terrible problems of its own”—welfare dependency, over-regulation of private industry, and the “lenient” treatment of criminals. “The Hardened America of the present is a much better place,” Barone concludes, citing with approval such trends as work requirements for welfare recipients and accountability standards in education. “And the future can be better still.”

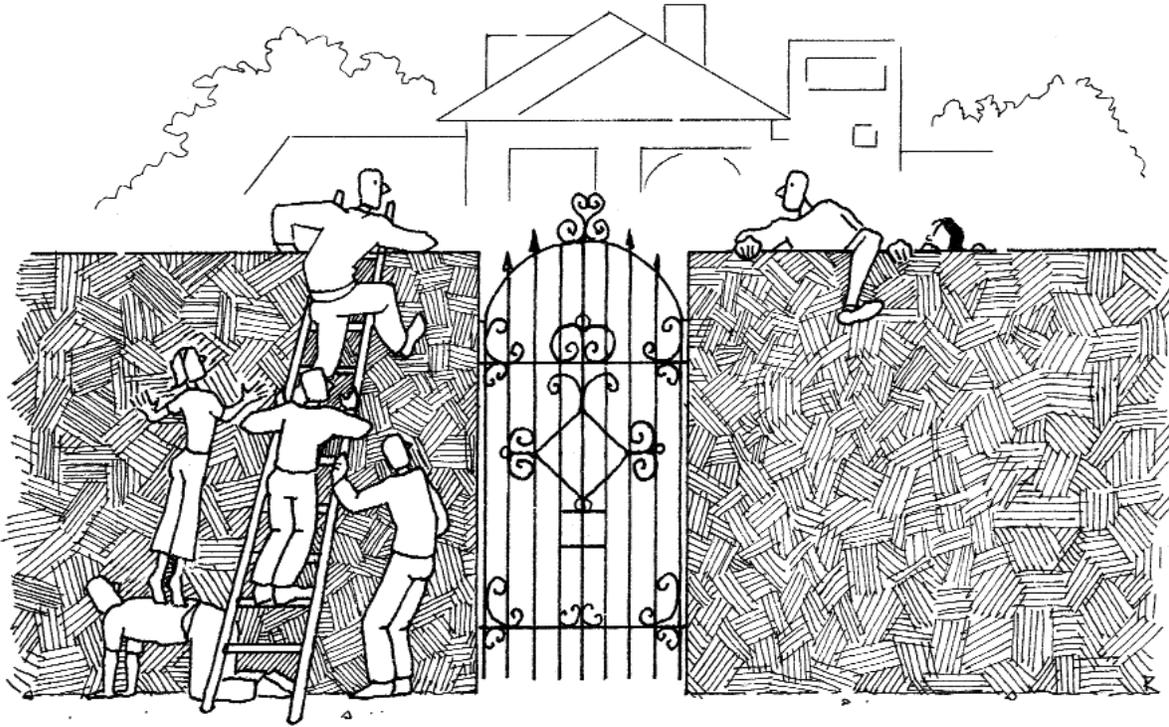
Fellow optimist Brooks also argues that America is getting stronger—and, in the pursuit of creature comforts, is actually reversing the *Bowling Alone* phenomenon. “The paradox of suburbia is that people move there to pursue their private dreams,” he writes. But their “energy and productivity” have allowed the United States to maintain a global supremacy that Brooks likens to one of the most powerful, if not necessarily one of the most fear-inducing, animals: “If there were a rhino in the middle of your room, you wouldn’t be reading this book, you’d be staring at the

America has become ‘hard,’ for better or worse.

rhino. The United States is the rhino of the world.” (He doesn’t mention that the rhino is an endangered species.) Brooks also asserts that our increasingly dispersed population is creating new ways of getting and staying connected. “In America,” he writes, “people find their own social circles, usually with invisible buffer zones. You may have moved to suburban Des Moines, but then you find a quilting club.... You’ve found your community.”

Like Brooks and Barone, Easterbrook rejects the idea of America in decline. “In the United States and Western Europe,” he writes, “almost everything is getting better for almost everybody: This has been the case for years, and is likely to remain the case.” (In contrast to Rifkin, Easterbrook makes little distinction between the US and Europe, instead suggesting that Europe is becoming *more* like America—and hence in no position to lead the world on much of anything.) He offers plenty of statistics on the rising standard of living even among America’s poorest citizens, but my favorite fact in the pantheon of progress is this one: “In the year 1850... the typical American was twice as likely to be the target of a lawsuit as the typical American today.” If we can’t even fret over American litigiousness, what can be left to complain about?

Plenty, says Easterbrook. “The percentage of Americans who describe themselves as ‘happy’ has not budged since the



1950s,” he writes, “though the typical person’s real income more than doubled through that period.” Indeed, medical data suggest that depression “just keeps rising in incidence, with no end in sight.” Happiness, it would seem, is priceless.

Ask why this is so, and we’re right back to *Bowling Alone*. “The same forces that are causing standards of living to rise and longevity to improve also promote loneliness,” Easterbrook writes. “Steadily smaller households, made possible by prosperity, mean steadily less human interaction.” The result is that “for increasing numbers of Americans and Europeans, life is like being in a really nice hotel room, but not having a good time because no one else came along on the trip.”

Rifkin returns, as always, to the supposed cultural difference between America and Europe to depict Americans as cut off from each other and from the past, even intentionally so. “Europeans seek inclusive space—being part of extended communities, including family, kin, ethnic, and class affiliation. Privacy is less important than engagement,” he observes. “For Americans, time is future-directed and viewed as a tool to explore new opportunities. For Europeans, time is more past- and present-oriented and used to reaffirm and nurture relationships.”

Just so, says Brooks, who sees Americans’ self-absorption and future orientation as parts of our belief that we can make ourselves happy, if not today then sooner or later. “In American culture, the self becomes semidivined,” he writes without apology. “People feel free to pick and choose their own religious beliefs, because whatever serves the self-

journey toward happiness must be godly and true.... Only a radically hopeful nation would pile so much complexity and richness onto individuals.”

Better that than labor under the dead hand of the past, in the form of class resentments, ethnic divisions, and ancient grudges, in Brooks’s view. Indeed, our willingness to overlook differences, if not exactly appreciate them, makes American society, deep down, pretty civil, he insists. “As you look across the landscape of America—from hip bohemia to ethnic enclaves such as South Boston, through the diverse suburbs into exurbia and the farthest farm towns—you don’t see a lot of conflict,” Brooks writes. “You see a big high school cafeteria with all these different tables. The jocks sit here, the geeks sit there, the drama people sit over there, and the druggies sit somewhere else.”

To Brooks, the hope of a better future on the suburban frontier makes the abandonment of central cities a natural phenomenon rather than an urban tragedy. “What defines us as a people is our pursuit, our movement, and our tendency to head out,” writes Brooks.

But Easterbrook finds happiness hard to capture in suburban creature comfort, which is increasingly defined by a fast car and a soft couch. “Somehow Americans...have come to believe that a listless activity—sitting in a car and pressing a pedal—represents virility,” he writes. And although “the average person has ever more time in which no one is compelling him or her to do anything, most people use the bulk of their newfound free time to watch more television.” The latter activity is one source of Americans’ increasing anxiety about a world in which they are growing, materially speaking, ever more comfortable. “[Studies] have shown

that the more television a person watches, the more likely he or she is to overestimate the prevalence of crime,” Easterbrook notes.

That fear can make people less likely to walk about their neighborhoods, the kind of scenario that has bugged Jacobs ever since *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. In *Dark Age Ahead*, Jacobs does a few more riffs on the old saying that “city air makes you free.” Referring to ancient cultures, she writes, “Large and dense populations—in a word, cities—were able to support individuals and institutions engaged in activities other than direct food production.” While few of us in present-day Massachusetts work in agriculture, I wonder whether daily commutes, not to mention weekly excursions to Costco, can be counted as “direct food production” that keeps us from more rewarding activities. How is bringing home the bacon via I-495 different from dragging a carcass home to a cave?

Not surprisingly, Jacobs argues that dense population centers can better sustain small businesses and cultural institutions, but she also argues that they facilitate the most basic of human activities outside of one’s own survival. She writes that without “membership in a functioning community,” childrearing tasks can destroy a family from within. “The neuroses of only two adults (or one) focusing relentlessly on offspring can be unbearable,” she explains. “Two adults who have too little adult companionship can easily drift into isolation from society and become lonely, paranoid, resentful, stressed, depressed, and at their wits’ ends.” Though Jacobs doesn’t say so, these parents and their offspring may become the undecided voters who swing presidential elections.

The question, which none of these authors can answer definitively, is how many American suburbanites are finding their way toward Brooks’s quilting clubs and how many are living out the film *American Beauty*.

The urban-suburban divide is just one way that Americans choose distance and privacy over closeness and commonality in their endless pursuit of happiness. It needn’t be this way. Another writer who shares Jacobs’s sensibilities—and her penchant for succinct book titles—is Alain de Botton, whose new work *Status Anxiety* offers alternatives to suburbanization and the “keeping up with the Joneses” ethos it breeds in an almost wistful tone. De Botton suggests that improving public spaces can be as effective as a thousand federal programs—whether they promote job training, homeownership, or voter participation—in encouraging social connectedness.

“We may find that some of our ambitions for personal glory fade when the public spaces and facilities to which we

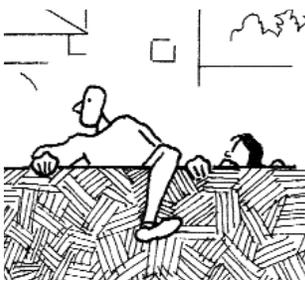
enjoy access are themselves glorious to behold,” he writes, describing a situation difficult to imagine in today’s era of tight budgets at all levels of government. “In such context, ordinary citizenship may come to seem an adequate goal.”

Yet even the best-intentioned public programs in the US tend to offer people an escape from shared space—say, from apartments to homes of their own. Even public transit systems, which make commuting a communal experience, provide entirely separate service systems for wealthier professionals from the suburbs (who ride commuter trains) and the urban working poor (who typically ride slower, less reliable buses). Only on a handful of subway systems that traverse centers of commerce, whether in Boston or Manhattan, do the great and the lowly truly rub shoulders, happily or not.

Then there is the increasing popularity of “gated communities,” which add a physical dimension to the segregation of housing by class. “Millions of Americans have transformed large swaths of America’s public space into privatized communities,” writes Rifkin, “denying millions of other Americans access to and mobility through whole parts of America. A country that once prided itself on its openness and expansiveness—its lack of boundaries—is being systematically walled off into exclusive domains.”

For centuries, churches were the most dramatic examples of public space, their spires serving as compass points to city dwellers of all classes. In a more secular age, the private sector has taken over that role, to a degree, transforming displays of private success into celebrations of societal progress. “In 1973 Sears was America’s greatest merchant, proud enough of its standing to build the world’s highest skyscraper in Chicago,” notes Barone, approvingly. But of course, there have always been restrictions of public activity on privately owned property, including shopping malls. And after 9/11, corporations began to bar the public from the grand lobbies of their downtown skyscrapers. Here in Boston, the John Hancock Tower closed its 60th-floor observatory, which once gave any citizen the chance (for \$6) to survey one of the country’s great urban landscapes. The 103rd-floor observatory in Chicago’s Sears Tower has been reopened since 9/11, but the retailer is long gone, having moved its headquarters to what Barone calls “a nondescript building in the suburb of Schaumburg, Illinois.”

Not that Barone has anything against nondescript buildings in out-of-the-way places. Indeed, he says the much-needed “hardening” of the American economy happened a world away from the showy skyscrapers of Manhattan and the public monuments of our capital city: “These entrepreneurs who did so much to change the private-sector economy and make it much more productive for the most



part did not operate out of New York or Washington. Gates, Walton, and Smith [founders of Microsoft, WalMart, and FedEx, respectively] built their companies far from these centers." Kicking Boston where it hurts, Barone adds, "Nor did they learn much of what made them successful from the nation's elite universities."

It's true that major cities can be class-conscious and tradition-bound, but there's still something to be said for old-fashioned office towers, from which executives emerge in the evening to share a sidewalk with the rest of us. With corporate chieftains now preferring remote headquarters that resemble the lairs of James Bond villains, they can hardly complain about their increasingly sinister reputations in popular culture.

Still, office parks continue to proliferate, as do the subdivision suburbs that dot more and more formerly pristine landscape, the greenfields of the American mind. "The split-level/rancher suburb is an entirely self-contained civilization," writes Brooks. "These places were designed to be utopias set apart from the crowding and congestion and customs of the old places, from the problems of the past and the flow of human history. They are immune to time, geography, life, and death."

They also use up a lot of land, a fact that increasingly worries planners and public officials. But Easterbrook sees elitism in attempts to keep turf away from developers. "When people object to development per se, what they almost always mean is that they have achieved a nice lifestyle and now wish to pull up the ladders against others," he writes, "and, not coincidentally, to make their own properties more valuable by artificially limiting supply." He concludes that "opposing sprawl can be a financial boon to anyone who's already entrenched."

Actually, Easterbrook has it backward. Suburban homeowners mostly don't oppose sprawl; they're happy to have it continue, as long as it's in the same pattern. People who want to get away from others don't mind if new homes are built even farther from the city than they are. What they oppose is the construction of new homes *among* their own, infiltrating density into their keep-your-distance environment.

That new density, of course, is exactly what Jacobs is hoping for: "It may be that when a formerly sprawling suburb becomes dense enough to populate a boulevard with strollers, users of mass transit, and errand goers, it will also have enough clout to lobby for a boulevard, and win it, to replace a stretch of bleak and more dangerous limited-access highway."

Of course, Brooks would counter that, even if it does happen, the urbanization of suburbs will be simply another reason for the restless to search for a new place untainted by "the flow of human history." If so many Americans have already gone to so much trouble to flee cities where they'd



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have to share buses and trains—with strangers!—it's hard to believe that they won't keep moving, and keep thwarting Jacobs's dream.

Perhaps there is nothing to be done but let Americans continue to be Americans and hope for the best. Or is "hope" too loaded a word in this context? "Call it delusional," writes Rifkin (he certainly does so), "but the sense of personal empowerment is so firmly embedded in the American mind that even when pitted against growing evidence of potentially overwhelming global threats, most Americans shrug such notions off as overly pessimistic and defeatist. Individuals can move mountains. Most Americans believe that. Fewer Europeans do."

There's nothing wrong with perseverance, or belief in its power. But is it always necessary to move mountains, or is there something uniquely—even pathologically—American in thinking that it is? "To really enjoy life, my European friends say to me, one must be willing to surrender to the moment and wait to see what might come one's way," Rifkin writes. "Americans are less willing to surrender their fortunes and happiness to fate. Most Americans believe that happiness isn't something that comes to us, but something we

must continually work toward."

And "work" is meant literally. Even Easterbrook, who's generally bullish on good old American grit, says that we're a little nuts when it comes to the Protestant work ethic: "Parents and schools teach the concept of delayed gratification, of always looking ahead while keeping the nose to the grindstone. Many people learn this lesson so well that they can only look ahead, growing excessively concerned about future improvement."

"Hard America" enthusiast Barone wouldn't understand what the fuss is about. Not one to fret over the disappearance of after-school activities such as drama club, he writes, "Teenagers working after school may be seeking, and in any case are often getting, the Hard standards they don't encounter during school hours." He even cites a McDonald's job as an ideal way to introduce teens to the benefits of a Hard existence, though I suspect that Barone would be horrified if his own children looked for life's lessons there.

One possible downside of this Hard emphasis on personal responsibility is a lack of empathy for those who don't manage to parlay an after-school job flipping burgers into lifetime financial security. "In a survey taken in 1924, 47 percent of Americans said it was your own fault if you did not succeed," Easterbrook reports; "by 1979, 65 percent of

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Americans answered yes to that question.” Once again putting his critique in terms of cross-Atlantic culture clash, Rifkin points to the *1990 World Values Survey* (sponsored by the University of Michigan-based Institute for Social Research), which “found that 71 percent of Americans ‘believe that the poor have a chance to escape from poverty,’ while only 40 percent of Europeans believe that’s the case.”

Maybe these numbers are no surprise, given that Americans are famous for their belief in self-reliance. To Barone, sympathy and introspection are, at best, the dividends of American toughness: “Soft America lives off the productivity, creativity, and competence of Hard America, and we have the luxury of keeping parts of our society Soft only if we keep enough of it Hard.”

Intriguingly, Rifkin identifies an American “softness” of his own: a penchant for patting ourselves on the back. “Because Americans are constantly over-empowering one another, the bar for performance continues to be lowered,” he hears from his sources on the other side of the Atlantic. “After all, if you are always being told that everything you do is insightful, well conceived and thought out, and effectively executed, then why try harder?”

Rifkin says this is a function of American smugness, a belief that we have nothing left to prove to the rest of the world: “For some, the American Dream, with its emphasis on unfettered individual accumulation of wealth in a democratically governed society, represents the ultimate expression of the end of history.” Another theory he advances is that we believe we are playing a game that is rigged in our favor. “Nearly half of all Americans (48 percent) . . . believe that the United States has special protection from God,” Rifkin writes, citing a 2002 survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.

The belief that we have nothing to learn from the rest of the world is especially worrisome to Jacobs. “Cultural xenophobia” is frequently associated with “a society’s decline from social vigor,” she warns. It’s another way that, Jacobs fears, America is turning away from *logos*, or the Greek word for reason, to “*mythos*, meaning conservatism that looks backward to fundamentalist beliefs for guidance and a worldview.” It’s a charge that seems plausible enough as one listens to politicians and opinion leaders invoking America’s “founding fathers” and using phrases such as “a return to values” to describe their visions of the future. (While nostalgia is more commonly associated with conservatives, Democratic candidates have been using similar revanchist language since George McGovern adopted the slogan “Come home, America” for his 1972 presidential campaign.)

Jacobs spots this retreat from reason in such homely calculations as traffic engineers’ continued insistence that closing or narrowing city streets only forces cars to clog up

other routes; contradicting such zero-sum-gridlock dogma, she provides evidence that it’s possible to reduce automobile traffic in one place without increasing it anywhere else nearby. And she faults the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for seeing the cause of hundreds of deaths during a July 1995 heat wave in Chicago in purely commercial-product terms. The CDC said, among other things, that not enough people had air-conditioners, while Jacobs says people in depopulated urban neighborhoods had too few stores and other gathering places to retreat to, and that fear of crime kept them stranded in overheated apartments. In both cases, the American affection for solving problems with road construction and consumer goods seems to have created blind spots in thinking.

In contrast, Brooks finds his inspiration elsewhere, paraphrasing George Santayana to justify, if not glorify, American avoidance of consequences. “Americans don’t solve problems, they leave them behind. . . . The exurban people aren’t going to stay and fight the war against the inner-ring traffic, the rising mortgages, the influx of new sorts of rich and poor. . . . They can bolt and start again where everything is new and fresh.”

At this point, Brooks’s optimism starts to sound pessimistic, or at least irresponsible, while Jacobs’s gloom sounds at least instructive, verging on hopeful (even without Rifkin’s Europe-worship). If nothing else, it seems like less of a “paradox,” as Easterbrook calls it, that progress leaves us all questioning the value of what we have, even as we value having it.

In the face of such contradictions, one starts to wonder whether it might not be preferable to opt out of the argument over America’s future altogether. Perhaps it’s healthier to emulate the people in de Botton’s chapter on “Bohemia”—the artists, scientists, and others inhabiting small apartments in the less affluent neighborhoods of New York or Boston, the ones who ignore our society’s constant championing of upward mobility and material acquisition. After all, de Botton writes, “A mature solution to status anxiety may be said to begin with the recognition that status is available from, and awarded by, a variety of different audiences—industrialists, bohemians, families, philosophers—and that our choice among them may be free and willed.”

Sounds like a good alternative to the rat race. It also sounds very similar to Brooks’s celebration of “private dreams” and quilting clubs in the midst of sprawl—except that it requires one to abandon the type of community where most Americans now live, and to place self-fulfillment above the task of finding a way to make suburbs and the city alike more fulfilling and sustainable places for all inhabitants.

Is narcissism the only alternative to America’s cult of individualism? One hopes not. As far as social purgatories go, bowling alone sounds bad enough. ■

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A literary guidebook to the Hub

The Good City: Writers Explore 21st-Century Boston

Edited by Emily Hiestand and Ande Zellman

Boston, Beacon Press, 175 pages

REVIEWED BY FRANCIS J. CONNOLLY

July's Democratic National Convention did not, as it turned out, produce most of the consequences predicted in the seemingly endless pre-convention hype. Neither the calamitous prophecies of the *Boston Herald*—which portrayed the coming DNC as a sort of Siege of Leningrad, waged by godless ward-healers from the Dakotas—nor the El Doradan fantasies of Mayor Tom Menino came to fruition. For close to a week the city resembled the restaurant of which Yogi Berra famously observed, “Nobody goes there any more. It’s too crowded.”

But in the end, the convention produced what it was supposed to—a campaign kickoff for the Democrats—and several ancillary pleasures, from the eloquence of Barack Obama to the flower boxes arrayed along Boylston Street. In the latter category, be sure to include this nifty little book.

The Good City was conceived as a convention-time ode to Boston, a collection of 15 essays on the Olde Towne by some of the area’s sharpest writers. Copies were distributed to the convention delegates, though this exercise seems akin to casting pearls before—well, before people who couldn’t even figure out that the North End is where we hide all the good food. No, the delegates were not likely to appreciate this piece of work, but the rest of us surely can.

Paul Grogan, president of the Boston Foundation, which sponsored *The Good City* and its distribution to conventioners, writes in his introduc-

tion that Boston is “the Comeback City,” rescued from the mid-’70s slough of urban despond by strong leadership, smart planning, and a heritage of civic activism. He argues forcefully that cities are essential to any well-ordered society: “Only cities create and sustain the great symphonies, museums, theaters, and universities. Only cities are magnets for the creative talent and innovation that talent produces.”

Thomas Jefferson, among others, might beg to differ, but Grogan makes a strong argument for the centrality of the city in American life. The essays that follow all accept that basic premise, and proceed to make the case for Boston’s inclusion in the first rank of the nation’s urban centers.

These essays run the gamut, from Patricia Powell’s autobiographical tale of an immigrant girl’s education and development as a writer to Anita Diamant’s thoughts on Boston as a latter-day Yavneh, a haven for Jewish culture and learning.

Like Boston itself, there is enough good stuff in *The Good City* to appeal to a broad range of interests; the pieces you like best will reflect who you are and where your heart lies. My own tastes being what they are, I greatly enjoyed Jack Beatty’s holding-forth on James Michael Curley and Boston’s history of ethnic political warfare—familiar territory for Beatty,

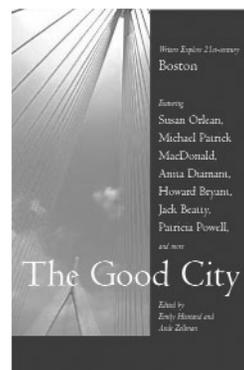
author of *The Rascal King*, but always worth revisiting—and Howard Bryant’s shrewd examination of the intersection of sports and race in the city’s popular culture.

Scott Kirsner, too, has a fascinating piece on the city’s place at the forefront of innovation and technology. Journeying through time from a tinkerer’s shop operated by one Charles Williams on Court Street—a shop where Thomas Edison and Alexander Graham Bell both rented

lab space, and where the telephone was born—to a drug discovery lab at Genzyme’s main facility in Cambridge, Kirsner does a wonderful job of explicating “Boston’s technology ecosystem.”

For those whose interests range beyond the all-guy nexus of sports, politics, and technology, Alan Chong offers an insightful piece on the history of the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum, where he is curator, and John Hanson Mitchell expounds on the city’s natural history and its relationship to the great outdoors. Also of interest, especially to new parents like myself: Irene Smalls looks at the city through the eyes of a child, and holds forth on the importance of play for children of all ages.

Despite the boosterism inherent in any project of this sort, *The Good City* also manages to confront the ugliness of Boston’s troubled racial past. The busing crisis of the ’70s receives



only brief mention in these pages, but Derrick Z. Jackson recounts more recent outrages against the city's African-American community, including the Charles Stuart murder investigation and the death, during a police raid, of retired Rev. Accelyne Williams.

While clear-eyed about the problems that continue to confront Boston's minorities, Jackson also cites examples of real progress—the sharp decline in youth violence, the signal success of many African-American entrepreneurs—before concluding on a cautiously hopeful note: “We never give up thinking that this city can be a solution that helps the rest of the nation cure its ills.”

For that to happen, though, the city must be a home for the people who can make that solution an everyday reality—

the middle-class families of all races whose kids go to the same schools, play in the same parks, and walk the same safe streets. Without a thriving middle class, Boston will always be divided by economics as well as by race—and yet the fate of the city's middle class remains woefully uncertain.

The solution—more, much more, affordable housing—is obvious in theory but, as recent history has shown, damnably difficult to bring about in the real world. Still, the need is urgent; as Jane Holtz Kay notes in her piece on the city's architectural evolution, we need “to stop the exodus to distant enclaves... Good planning is the agent of good living, history teaches us, and we forget it to our sorrow.”

That's about as close as *The Good City* comes to offering anything like a policy prescription. This book is a

celebration, not a symposium, and for the most part these essays follow a single, reader-friendly formula: interesting ideas, entertainingly argued, hold the footnotes.

Not all the essays deliver the goods, however. Two of the biggest writerly names, Susan Orlean and Michael Patrick MacDonald, sadly disappoint. Orlean has penned a fluffy little account of returning to Boston after her recent marriage—but a little more Boston, and a lot less Susan, would have been in order. And MacDonald, author of the searing *All Souls: A Family Story From Southie*, offers up an earnest screed against gentrification, but one that incongruously focuses on the evil yuppie menace lurking in and around Park Slope, Brooklyn, where he is now living.

Of course, no tribute to Boston would be complete without the requisite dose of intellectual snobbery,

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and James Miller seems happy to oblige. Miller, the editor of *Daedalus*, writes about his club, the Examiner, an ancient Boston institution that exists to bring together local intellectuals “interested in the enlightenment of society.” Founded in 1863, it has included among its ranks Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry and William James, and William Dean Howells. In recent years, though, as Miller tells it, the club’s influence on the real world has been on the wane:

The future of American politics, I mused, lay not with writers and scholars and talkers like ourselves, but rather with pollsters and unlettered politicians, entrepreneurs unashamed to sell their souls to the rich, leaders anxious to tell people what they want to hear—in short, political operatives profoundly uninterested in the type of upright liberality of spirit and intellec-

tual self-reliance that we Examiners presumably epitomized.

Yikes! To paraphrase legendary Governor’s Councilor Sonny McDonough’s retort to US Sen. Leverett Saltonstall: On behalf of my fellow pollsters, I’d like to thank you for letting us borrow your country, sir.

The sad state of affairs that Miller deploras is, of course, nothing new; it’s the way the world works. America has always had to rely on the unlettered politicians—like the one who, at the time of the Examiner’s founding, was busy ending slavery and saving the Union—to get things done, when the writers and scholars and talkers have packed up their upright liberality of spirit and gone home.

Ray Flynn and Tom Menino, to mention just a couple of recent mayors, might not fit in all that well in the intellectually rarefied atmosphere

of the Examiner, but they are two of the reasons Boston has become a world-class city—and worth writing about in the first place.

In the end, Boston is worth writing about because it truly is a special city, a place that celebrates its past without wallowing in it and looks to the future with confident anticipation. It’s a city where the Bulfinch State House and the Zakim Bridge, symbols of two very different Bostons, look as if they belong together.

As Jane Holtz Kay writes, “Is Boston living on its legacy? Yes, and splendidly...but we need to do more.” And indeed we do, to make sure this good city remains all that it is today—most especially, a place where real people can actually afford to live. ■

Francis J. Connolly is a senior analyst at Kiley & Co., a Boston-based public opinion research firm.



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China journal

BY PAUL REVILLE

You would think that traveling with a 2½-year-old would be enough to discourage trips halfway around the world. But when Primary Source, a regional professional development group, invited us on a two-week tour of China for “education leaders,” my wife and I jumped at the chance. For me, the trip represented an opportunity to explore a fascinating culture and civilization from the vantage point of my life’s work, education. My hopes were fulfilled in every way.

Our motley crew of superintendents, principals, and other educators visited four cities, several schools, a university, the Ministry of Education in Beijing, and lots of museums, religious sites, and cultural centers. We met Chinese people in formal settings, in restaurants, and in their homes. We returned home overwhelmed with impressions, memories, and the intellectual residue of a fortnight of nonstop exploration.

One of the most potent symbols in Chinese culture is the dragon. The head of a dragon is so striking that we focus on it, paying scant attention to the dragon’s enormous and powerful body. Similarly, looking at China today, there is a tendency to be captivated by the transformation underway in cities like Beijing and Shanghai, where thousands of skyscrapers have sprouted seemingly overnight and thousands more are on the way. Then there is the body of the dragon, the countryside, where 70 percent of the nation’s 1.3 billion citizens live. Rural China looks like an agrarian, feudal society centuries removed from the present. Will the dragon’s body fuel or constrain the ambitions of its striking head?

Take education, a challenge of mind-boggling scope. There are 360 million school-age children in China; 80 million of them live in cities, the rest in the countryside. Outside of Beijing and Shanghai alone, we were told, there are 20 million children of migrant workers, children who have little or no access to schooling. (Bear in mind that, in the US, we have 50 million schoolchildren; the Boston Public Schools serves 65,000 students.)

We traveled to a small village in central China to visit a school that Primary Source and affiliated educators had been supporting financially on a very modest scale, by American standards. The school had a library and computer room it would not have had otherwise, but the school’s other assets were meager. We were embarrassed to be greet-

ed as conquering heroes. As we walked around the village, in hundred-degree heat and 100 percent humidity, we watched peasant women washing clothes in brackish water and teenagers making bricks practically by hand.

In the cities (which are environmentally threatened by runaway growth), we saw the opposite extreme, evidence of an ambitious nation furiously modernizing while struggling to resist Westernization. The schools that served the privileged were models of success, on a par with elite private schools anywhere in the world. Above all, we saw a work ethic among students and faculty that was impressive, if not necessarily healthy. We had dinner in the home of a trainer of teachers, a young mother who worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week, and was essentially separated from her 8-year-old child. Her husband, a doctor, worked similar hours, the two of them barely scratching out what is, in Chinese terms, a “middle class” living for their family.

The implications for the world that our children will inherit are enormous and frightening. How long can our students, who so often pursue their studies almost casually, compete with students who will work ceaselessly and for whom academic success is everything? One in every five people in the world is Chinese, and the Chinese are ready to compete not only for low-skill jobs, but increasingly also for high-end, high-skill, high-knowledge jobs.

There it was, in China, on a scale we had never seen before: the educational paradox of great success side by side with vast, devastating failure.

We saw a Chinese nation roaring into the 21st century as the world’s next great economic power. We in the US will be profoundly affected by this country and its people in the coming decades, our students—our children—especially. As teachers, we must think about the implications here at home of the re-emergence of this ancient culture and civilization on the world stage. How can we persuade our students to look outward toward China and other emerging nations when forces in our own culture tell us that self-absorption is the key to happiness?

But as we arrived home, we weren’t thinking about educational policy and practice. Our hearts were stuck on a more elemental, but by no means simpler, problem. What is to be done about the 9-year-old migrant worker boy we saw, growing up on a trash heap just outside of the prosperous city of Beijing? ■

Look Who's Talking About After-School

"They chose to protect my tax cut ... while cutting 300,000 poor children out of their after-school programs when we know it keeps them off the streets, out of trouble, in school, learning, going to college and having a good life."

- Former President Bill Clinton's Speech to the 2004 Democratic National Convention, July 27, 2004

"...Providing a supervised and structured after school haven for our most vulnerable youth not only protects our school children, it keeps our neighborhoods safe."

- Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger upon the passage of Proposition 49, November 5, 2002



"... [I]f somebody writes a history of American education 50 years from now, it's actually not going to be about what happens in the public school day. It's going to be about all the things we made up to do before kids get to kindergarten, all the things we made up to do in the period of 2:00 to 6:00 in the afternoon when their parents were still working, all the things we made up to do during the summer when some of the kids slipped back and fell into trouble. The after-school efforts are a very, very important part of that."

- Harvard President Lawrence H. Summers remarks at the United Ways of New England Annual Meeting, April 27, 2004

"The best thing we can do for business people is find a way to put their minds at ease about their kids after school, so they can focus on their tasks at hand. This is a problem we can conquer together."

- New Hampshire Governor Craig Benson announcing "*The 3 To 6 Challenge*", June 29, 2004

"I have talked with parents all across this country who are trying to get ahead and do right by their families. They are working two and sometimes three jobs just to make ends meet ... That's why I'll make child care more affordable and invest in afterschool. Together, we can give parents peace of mind and build a stronger America for working families."

- Senator John Kerry's remarks on increasing the child care tax credit and expanding after-school programming, June 16, 2004

"Like many others, in the aftermath of 9/11, I felt the country's unity. I supported the decision to enter Afghanistan and I hoped that the seriousness of the times would bring forth strength, humility and wisdom in our leaders. Instead, we dived headlong into an unnecessary war in Iraq, [w]e ran record deficits, while simultaneously cutting and squeezing services like afterschool programs."

- Bruce Springsteen in a New York Times Opinion piece, August 5, 2004

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