

SENATE No. 2

Message from His Excellency the Governor relative to the general concerns of the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts



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DEVAL L. PATRICK
GOVERNOR

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January 28, 2014

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives,

Madame President, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Senate and the House,

Fellow Constitutional Officers and Members of the Governor's Council,

Mr. Chief Justice and Members of the Judiciary,

Members of the Cabinet and my Administration,

Mayors, Sheriffs and other Elected Officials,

Reverend Clergy,

Distinguished Guests,

And Fellow Citizens of Massachusetts:

Please join me in welcoming our First Lady, Diane Patrick. Diane's advocacy for victims of domestic violence, for people suffering from mental illness, and for young children has made Massachusetts better. And her love and support for 30 years of marriage come this May has made me better. Diane, thank you.

Remembering that America is still at war in distant lands, and that the sons and daughters of Massachusetts still place themselves in harm's way for our sake, let us also acknowledge and thank all the men and women in uniform. We are grateful for your service and humbled by your sacrifice.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have journeyed a long way together these last many years, over ground both smooth and rough, along paths both expected and unexpected.

When I came to work here in 2007, I expected to face economic challenges, but not a global economic collapse. I expected to find a sub-par transportation system, but not a bankrupt and dysfunctional one. I expected to face public safety challenges, but not the failure of a key water supply, a tornado, or a terrorist attack.

We have faced up to these challenges -- and many others -- together. And it has made a difference.

Today, Massachusetts is first in the nation in student achievement, in health care coverage, in economic competitiveness, in entrepreneurial activity, in venture funding, in energy efficiency and in veterans' services.

Today, our biotech sector is one of the fastest growing in the world, our clean tech sector is seeing double-digit job growth, and we have trained over 100,000 people for jobs with these and other innovators.

Today, manufacturing in our state is growing more than 50 percent faster than in the nation as a whole, and seven times the rate it did during the previous administration.

Today, we are rebuilding our infrastructure throughout the Commonwealth. Multi-family housing starts have tripled and commercial development is on the rebound.

Today, a new 1,200 mile fiber-optic network serves to connect every community to high-speed Internet.

Today, over 110,000 acres have been added to our conservation lands, and over two million of our residents will by this year be able to walk to a local park.

Today, instead of leaving in droves, young people and families are moving into Massachusetts. Our population is growing again -- faster than the rest of the region, in fact -- reversing the long decline of past years.

Today, we're helping people with disabilities earn a living in the workforce with dignity and to live independently, because "Community First" is a reality, not a slogan. And families whose children need it have the most comprehensive autism coverage in the nation.

Today, our doors are open to new markets around the world through direct flights to Dublin, Madrid, Toronto, the Dominican Republic, Tokyo, Panama City, Istanbul, Dubai and Beijing; Logan saw record numbers of travelers in the last two years; and Worcester Airport is open for business.

We have saved citizens hundreds of millions of dollars by reforming municipal health plans and the state pension system, cutting health care costs, simplifying the transportation bureaucracy, turning around underperforming schools, using flaggers instead of police details, and making auto insurance competitive. And the government that has delivered those reforms has more women and minorities in leadership positions than ever before.

Today, our budgets are balanced, our rainy day fund is one of the strongest in the country, and we have the highest bond rating in Commonwealth history.

And today in Massachusetts, you can marry whomever you love.

I know there is unfinished business. But I also know that we are a more prosperous, more promising and more just Commonwealth for more people today.

I know that Massachusetts is back in the leadership business, and that the state of our Commonwealth is strong.

There are three essential reasons for these results:

First, our strategy for growth is sound.

It's all about investing time, ideas and money in education, innovation and infrastructure.

- We invest in education because that's the single best way to prepare our people for work and for life.
- We invest in innovation because focusing on industries that depend on our concentration of brainpower is the best way to play to our strengths.
- And we invest in infrastructure because these are the things the public builds as a platform for private investment and personal ambition.

That strategy creates good jobs now, and sustained growth into the future. It's the right strategy.

The second reason for our progress is that we work together. No, we don't agree on everything, and I never expected we would. But we have shown that we don't have to agree on everything before we work together on anything, and that you don't have to hate

the person with whom you disagree. By shaping and reshaping each other's ideas, by concentrating on what's meaningful, and by providing the tools needed to get the job done, we execute our strategy collaboratively.

The third reason we have produced the results we have is that we have governed for the long-term. In government, just like in business, there is enormous pressure to manage for the short-term, to lurch from crisis to crisis. I am determined to keep our focus on the next generation instead of the next news cycle. And more often than not you have shared that discipline. That, too, has mattered.

So, as I am thanking others, let me also and especially thank you, Mr. Speaker and Madame President, and all the members of the Legislature and of the administration, from the senior leaders to the junior staff, for working with me and above all with each other, and for toiling honorably every day on behalf of the best long-term interests of the people of the Commonwealth. I hope you share my pride in our Commonwealth's undeniable progress.

Yet, even as we celebrate that progress tonight, some things have not changed enough.

We lead the country in student achievement but some of our students remain stuck in achievement gaps. We're using better tools to combat youth violence but still lose too many people to a cycle of violence. We are the only state to guarantee emergency shelter but too many people need it.

As we emerge from recession, for those already college educated and with transferable skills, the knowledge-based job market is wide open. For those already with money to invest, the resurgence of the Dow is great news. Our economy is growing, booming in some quarters. But we are leaving some of our neighbors behind. The recession is not over for everybody. It's not just that income inequality is widening; it's that it's harder for average people to bridge that gap and get ahead.

If we are to be in the leadership business, we need to lead in rebuilding the ladder to success, too. Because there are children here in our own Commonwealth whose future is still defined by the zip code in which they were born.

I was once one of those kids. And for all my many blessings I have not forgotten. I see the working poor struggling to keep their heads above water. I see the middle class family one paycheck away from being poor. I see the person who has been out of work for a year and has lost not just her way but her self-confidence. I see the parents working two and three jobs and sacrificing everything so their kids can go to a school that sometimes doesn't meet their needs.

I see those people. And so do you. For too many of our neighbors, the American Dream is in trouble. And, I refuse to accept that their Dream is out of reach. Government cannot deliver that all on its own, but government – we here in this chamber tonight – have a solemn duty to help all our people help themselves.

The single most important solution is economic growth, growth that reaches out to the marginalized not just up to the well-connected. An expanding economy needs well-prepared and competitive talent of all kinds. It needs inventors and innovators and investors. It needs techies and carpenters, teachers and cooks, Ph.Ds. and plumbers. Economic growth lifts us all.

Our strategy is a proven path to job growth, to helping people help themselves. So, tonight, I am asking you to recommit to that strategy and to working together to meet our citizens' unmet needs.

Education

First and foremost, let's keep leading in education. Let's make quality early education and all-day kindergarten available to more young children. Let's keep lifting higher our strong public schools and keep strengthening our weaker ones. And let's give our public colleges and universities the funding they need to freeze tuition and fees once again. Let's keep going.

Innovation

Let's keep playing to our strengths by supporting the life sciences and advanced manufacturing, by expanding our clean tech initiatives, including in the burgeoning water technology cluster, by encouraging technology clusters of every kind. Each of these sectors has seen strong job growth and investment, in both small companies and large ones, well outpacing the average. This is where our present and our future lie.

Working together we can double the size of our innovation economy in the next decade. Let's keep going.

Infrastructure

And let's keep rebuilding our infrastructure. This year, we will open the Assembly Square station in Somerville and the Yawkey station in Boston; increase commuter rail service to Worcester; resume seasonal service to the Cape; and launch automated tolling. With your help, Mr. Speaker and Madame President, we can begin construction on the Silver Line to Chelsea, the I-91 viaduct in Springfield, and the last mile of broadband in underserved communities. We can hire the builder for new Red line and Orange line trains, and start building them right here in Massachusetts. And yes, in this year, we can escalate construction on South Coast Rail.

So, I ask the Legislature to pass the bond bills before you now so that we can put more people to work and deliver the public works worthy of a world class economy. Let's keep going.

Our growth strategy is wise, our execution is collaborative, and our eye is on the future. Let's continue that progress in 2014.

Effective Government

And I pledge that we in this administration will continue our work to make government more effective. From a local housing authority to the crime lab, from the Boston area main water supply to compounding pharmacies, we have dealt with serious failings before. Now, we must strengthen the Department of Children and Families and fix the Connector's website. It's inexcusable to lose any child we are charged with protecting. And it's frustrating to offer a public convenience that is anything but convenient. Time after time, when problems arise, we have kept our wits about us, gathered the facts soberly and thoughtfully, and stepped up to find solutions, not just fault. Now, as in the past, we will do it again.

[PAUSE]

Progress on any of these fronts, whether on legislation, on investing or on reforms, will like always take working together, and elevating the public good above all.

Challenge to Our Partners

As I ask for the continued partnership of policymakers, and pledge my own, I also ask for the continued partnership of the public. I am thankful for the strong working relationships we have with municipalities, with the business community, with organized labor, and with citizens themselves. But working together has to mean more than cooperating for the good of your own interests. It has also to mean cooperating for the common good.

The Commonwealth has worked hard and well to strengthen cities and towns. Ably led by former Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray, we have done much good together. Education funding and local aid have grown half a billion dollars since when we got here. At the same time, we have doubled local capital investments. Through health reform, telecom reform, pension reform, and the local option meals and rooms tax, we have delivered some \$3.8 billion more in new savings and revenues as well.

This Commonwealth has done much to respond to the needs of local cities and towns. Now, I ask you to do what only you can do: Make your local permitting processes timely and more predictable, so that small businesses can get up and running smoothly and reduce their business costs. Work with us to fix the retiree health system

so that it is both fair and fiscally sustainable. And, yes, hold the line on local property taxes.

This Commonwealth is working with municipalities for the good of municipal interests. Work with us now for the common good.

This Commonwealth has been a friend to organized labor. We've worked together to make organizing easier through card check legislation, and by extending the right to organize to Personal Care Attendants and Home-based Early Ed Providers. We've worked together to crack down on the misclassification of workers and the abuse of wage and hour laws. We've used project labor agreements on large, complex infrastructure projects where we can show (and you can deliver) significant savings. And we've given you a seat at the table in my Cabinet and in every major reform we have undertaken. I am proud of our work with Massachusetts unions.

Now, I ask you to work with us to reform our unemployment insurance system. We ought to change the incentives in our UI system to encourage the hiring of the long-term unemployed, to make it easier for those on unemployment to start their own business, and to make it more straightforward for companies to comply. I submit that we can have a system that encourages hiring, not one that raises even a second thought about it.

This Commonwealth is working with labor for the good of labor interests. Work with us now for the common good.

This Commonwealth has been a friend to business as well. You have advocated for what you need to flourish and, in the spirit of partnership, we have responded. We have eliminated or simplified over 210 outdated regulations; reduced the permitting time for state approvals from two years to less than 60 days; cut business taxes three times; slowed the growth in health care premiums; reduced auto insurance premiums; realigned our workforce training programs; frozen unemployment insurance rates; expanded science, math and technology education; and much more. By any reasonable measure, Massachusetts is a more competitive place for business today than it was seven years ago. And I am proud of that.

Now, I ask Massachusetts businesses to do what only you can do to grow our economy. Hire somebody. Hire a graduate of one of our sterling colleges or someone who's been out of work too long. Hire someone with a disability or a CORI, or a student looking to help his or her family make ends meet. We offer training grants and a community college system that is better integrated than ever to meet your skills needs, and I have been all over the world to open new markets for you. Use these tools. Hire somebody.

And let's work together to raise the minimum wage. Raising the minimum wage would bring a little relief to the working poor, many of whom do jobs we could not live without and who, by the way, will recycle that money right back into the economy. To those who are reluctant to raise the minimum wage, I ask only that, before you resolve to oppose it, consider whether you could live on it.

This Commonwealth is working with business for the good of business interests. Work with us now for the common good.

And I challenge all citizens to consider what they can do to make our Commonwealth stronger. We have put every element of the budget and the state's checkbook on line for anyone to see. We have encouraged service opportunities for middle-schoolers through Project 351 and for others through Commonwealth Corps. We must and we will this year enact legislation to make registration easier and voting more convenient. All this and more is about making government more accessible for you to shape and to strengthen – the way a democracy is supposed to work.

So, for the good of the Commonwealth, I ask you to get engaged. Learn about the candidates for local and statewide office, work on a campaign, register to vote, and show up to vote on Election Day. Run for office yourself. Step up and lead. Find a way to serve your neighbors, your schools and your community. And insist from us and from each other a modicum of civility as the condition for serving you. If you want a better Commonwealth, don't just sit on the sidelines and complain. Because in a strong community we have a stake in each other's dreams and struggles, as well as our own.

Why Growth Matters

With all of us doing what we can, with effective implementation of our strategy and our eye on the common good, we can be confident of sustained economic growth. Economic growth matters -- not just because it creates wealth, though that is good; and not just because it expands a given industry or reduces unemployment rates, though that is also good. Growth matters because it creates opportunity, and opportunity is fundamental to who we are.

Every one of us has a stake in that.

Creating opportunity, keeping the Dream within reach, is the agenda now, just as it has been for the past seven years. Frankly, it is the only goal I have ever had in this job and the only one worth having.

Conclusion

I expected that serving as your governor would be the great honor of my professional life. But I didn't expect it to be so enlightening, so humbling, and so much fun. And I want to thank the people of Massachusetts for that.

I also knew that the people of Massachusetts were caring and generous. I knew that from my life here well before I was ever governor, and from the countless, quiet gestures of encouragement shown me in the last 7 years. But I could not have been prouder of the kindness and grace on display in the wake of the Marathon bombings. And I want to close with a reflection on that.

The way first-responders and bystanders alike ran to help the injured; the way people offered their homes to stranded runners; the way we came together to grieve and support the families of those lost; the way we worked together to find the killers; the way we turned to each other, not on each other -- I still believe all this and more reflects the best of who we are.

These are the firm and big-hearted, pragmatic and compassionate people I know the people of Massachusetts to be. These are the people, at the most trying moment in the last seven years, when the eyes of the whole world were on us, who showed the world and each other what a strong community looks like. These are the people, and this is the community, for whom I have brought for the last seven years, and for whom I will bring until the very last day, the best that I have and the best that I am.

So, now is no time for valedictories. We have work to do. Let's get to it.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Sincerely,

Deval L. Patrick,
Governor