



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

House of Representatives

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The Road Ahead

The history of the mid-70's, late 80's, and our current circumstances teach us that economic cycles will exact a hard punishment on those who fail to anticipate and prepare. While we were much more disciplined and proactive in our preparations during the 90's, even our good decisions have proven insufficient to the magnitude of the challenge.

Therefore, over the next few weeks and months, I will lead a process which is designed to draft a constitutional amendment of "best practices."

The framework for this amendment will incorporate those practices which have earned high praise, while preventing those practices which are now seen as mistakes, and protecting those public services which are essential to our survival and our success.

Specific best practices to be embraced as part of the permanent policies of the Commonwealth are:

- The establishment of a budgetary reserve fund to act as a shock absorber to deteriorating economic, fiscal, or revenue circumstances;
- Automatic and guaranteed annual replenishment of the budgetary reserve fund in order to provide public stability during periods of economic stress. Such replenishment and stability is far too important to be left subject to the willpower or whimsy of public officials;
- A limitation of withdrawals and uses of said reserve funds in order to protect this crucial public asset from too rapid a depletion. The lessons of 2001 and 2002 are obvious and painful. Gradual reductions during times of fiscal emergency will provide the essential stability which all parties now see as necessary;

- Harmonizing the first three objectives in order to secure a fourth and all encompassing objective which is to ensure, to the best extent possible, steady, stable, predictable funding for those core services which move our economy and our society forward.

The budgetary upheavals of the past and present cause frustrating setbacks in our forward progress. Such upheavals cause the loss of good people who do important work for us. Their careers are whipsawed by the absence of preparation and prudence and they become lost to us as they depart for more predictable professional pursuits. We can do better—much better—in preserving important progress and in recruiting and retaining bright, energetic people to important public service.

I believe that these four objectives, enshrined in our Constitution, will be seen as an imperative public policy improvement over our heretofore passive acceptance of economic fate which is then followed by reactionary panic. Preparation, prudence, and constitutional discipline will provide stability and stability will sustain our progress.

I envision a collaborative process which will guide me in the drafting of these constitutional practices.

The process will involve an invitation to business and labor leaders as well as local and regional officials. Their common interest in stability and in expanding economic opportunity will help shape this four point framework into a constitutional mechanism which puts Massachusetts in the vanguard of states which are both wealthy and wise.

Upon completion of the drafting stage, I will undertake a public discussion across the entire state with local leaders from labor, business, the media, and various civic organizations. Should we be able to earn support for these best practices in the next two legislative sessions, we will then place before the voters of Massachusetts one of the most important public policy decisions in many years.

I believe that the stakes are high and that the choice is obvious. The status quo is passive, reactionary, and pregnant with risk. The adoption of these best practices is based on history, hard experience, and lessons learned. It is a new and better way to move Massachusetts forward, to protect its taxpayers, and its future.

I invite you to join me in this important cause.