

SENATE No. 1

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

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT



CHARLES BAKER
GOVERNOR

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To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives,

Mr. President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives, Lieutenant Governor Polito and Members of the Governor's Council and the Cabinet, Chief Justice Gants and Members of the Judiciary, Former Massachusetts Governors Weld, Swift and Romney, Reverend Clergy.

Jan Cellucci and Angela Menino - I've known and admired you both for many years. And remain a huge fan of the energy and joy your husbands' brought to public service. And other distinguished guests - My thanks to all of you for being here today.

To my fellow citizens, it's with great humility and high honor that I assume the office of Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

I'm well aware of the authority and privileges that come with this office. But they're inconsequential in comparison to the responsibility of serving and protecting the people of this great state. And the obligation to always live up to their trust.

The people have vested me with the title of Governor for the next four years. But I also hold other lifelong titles that I'm proud of. Son. Brother. Husband. Father. And neighbor. Those titles have shaped the values and vision that I bring to the corner office.

The Bible that I placed my left hand on a few minutes ago is the same one my mother held for my father 46 years ago. When he was sworn in as Assistant Secretary under then U.S. Transportation Secretary and former Massachusetts Governor John Volpe.

At a moment like this there's no way for a son to properly thank his parents for all they've done for him. Dad, I can only say that I love you both. You made me who I am today. And I wish Mom could be here in person to see this with you.

I want to especially thank my wife Lauren. For her love, counsel, sense of humor and endless support. I knew when we got married that I was a lucky guy. But I know now 27 years and three wonderful children later that I've been truly blessed.

On behalf of the people of Massachusetts, I thank Governor Deval Patrick for his service over the past eight years. And to wish him God speed.

I want to sincerely thank our public safety officers, first responders, and corrections officers for the work they do. It's a service that's always challenging and at times very complicated. And with very few exceptions these men and women do it every day with great skill and professionalism.

I also want to salute all those men and women from the Commonwealth who have or are serving in our country's armed forces. Since 9-11 many citizens of Massachusetts have answered our nation's call to service and have served with distinction. And when men and women serve so do their families. We must never forget that. As Governor, these men and women and their families will always be in my prayers.

Finally, to the people of France, our thoughts are with you during this difficult time.

Our Commonwealth is filled with hard working, talented and inspiring people. We're a global leader in health care, biotechnology, high technology, education, finance, energy efficiency and advanced manufacturing. And we've led the way for the nation on issues ranging from health care reform to marriage equality.

But we're nowhere near our full potential. Some of our toughest challenges have been ignored and lost amid the successes. Or have become the equivalent of kicking a can down the road because they're not politically convenient or easy to fix.

They range from having more than 1,500 homeless families assigned to hotels and motels. To dozens of lapses in performance that are frustrating for many. And in some cases devastating in their consequences.

I know we can do better.

The time has come to write the next chapter in the history of this great Commonwealth. To build on what makes us great. And get much better at what doesn't.

Lieutenant Governor Polito and I have recruited a talented, experienced, diverse and bipartisan cabinet and staff. They will approach their mission with a passion and thoughtfulness to make Massachusetts great. And they understand that policy pronouncements without follow through ---amount to empty promises.

Tom Menino taught us all many valuable lessons. He believed that government was about high ideals. But he also equally believed that basic services mattered and that every detail counted.

When people have to wait for hours to conduct a simple transaction at the Registry of Motor Vehicles they're not being served.

And when thousands of families continue to be confused and let down by the Health Connector we've not paid attention to the details.

Those are but two examples.

We will challenge the status quo, look for and try new approaches and recognize they might not always work. When that happens, we'll acknowledge it. Learn from it. And try again.

Our actions will be heard in many ways. But the loudest of these actions will initially be in dealing with an immediate budget deficit, building a job-creating economy, closing the achievement gap, confronting opiate addiction and revitalizing our urban centers.

With respect to the state's budget our Constitution requires that the budget be balanced. No one understands that better than I do. The responsibility now rests with us.

History will record that a budget deficit exceeding half a billion dollars is being transferred to my administration.

If we're honest with ourselves then we can't blame our deficit on a lack of revenue. We have to recognize that this is a spending problem. And that dealing with it now will make balancing next year's budget that much easier.

We will hold the line on taxes, we're already demanding enough from hard working people. And we will protect cities and towns and fulfill our promise to end the cuts to local aid. Otherwise, every line item will be looked at.

I look forward to working with House Speaker DeLeo, Senate President Rosenberg and the members of both legislative branches to close this gap.

While there are efficiencies to be gained and structural changes to be made there's no doubt that we have to make difficult decisions. We will do so with great sensitivity and careful judgment.

Massachusetts has an unemployment rate of 5.8%. But that's a cold-hearted statistic that ignores the 200,000 people seeking work, the hundreds of thousands of underemployed, and the tens of thousands who have dropped out of the work force altogether.

There's no single initiative that can start and sustain a job creating economy. But there is clear evidence that we're too complex, too expensive, and too slow to move and make decisions. On this we must do better.

Our administration will work to reduce red tape and streamline regulatory requirements on start-ups and established businesses. And we'll report regularly on our progress.

Healthcare costs are an enormous burden on everyone, dragging down our collective ability to grow and hire more people. We'll pursue many paths on this challenge.

But the simplest one - ensuring full price and performance transparency is long overdue. The same service in the same neighborhood, with the same outcome can vary in price by as much as 300 percent. This must change.

There's also a direct link between economic growth and a sustainable and affordable supply of energy.

But as we begin the New Year, families and businesses across New England are being hit with unprecedented increases in their energy and electric bills. At exactly the same time energy prices across the rest of the country are falling. This increase is being driven in large part by inadequate delivery systems, the result of poor planning and coordination.

I look forward to working with my colleagues here in Massachusetts and with leaders like Governor Raimondo of Rhode Island as well as the other New England Governors to solve this problem while we continue to reduce our carbon footprint.

I'm a proud product of the Massachusetts public schools. And to this day, I can still name almost every teacher I had growing up. They moved me, challenged me and made me feel like my opinion mattered.

Across Massachusetts, there are many talented and inspiring educators doing for their students what their predecessors did for me.

I was in Lawrence yesterday witnessing firsthand the progress that's been made in just a few short years there. Despite all their issues, and they have many, a renaissance is underway in their public schools.

Attendance is up. Dropout rates are down. Test scores and graduation rates are up. The school day is longer.

And Lawrence is hardly alone. There are exceptional schools in many of our most disadvantaged neighborhoods throughout the Commonwealth. Proving they can get it done for kids, no matter what their circumstances.

But other schools really do need to step it up for the children and the families that they serve. Poor performance given the dramatic success of other schools can no longer be tolerated.

And while traditional public schools will always be the backbone of our education, we need more high performing public charter schools in underperforming school districts to complement them. As I speak, there are more than 45,000 Bay State kids and their parents on waiting lists for these schools.

It's wrong for any of us to stand on a front porch or in a city neighborhood sympathizing with a mom or dad when they tell us their child is not getting the education to succeed in life and then oppose lifting the charter school cap or making the changes we need to ensure that every school is great.

Last year, Governor Patrick called opiate addiction a public health crisis. He was right. It is an epidemic. One that cuts across every community in the Commonwealth.

Several months ago I met John and Stephanie Green of Easton. After a routine medical procedure their 19-year-old son Evan was prescribed opiates for pain. Slowly and unknowingly, he became addicted to them. When the prescription ended he turned to heroin.

Over a period of years, John and Stephanie tried as hard as any parents could to help their son. It was an agonizing, yet all too familiar story. Tragically, Evan fatally overdosed almost a year ago to this day.

As a parent, my heart goes out to John and Stephanie for their devastating loss. As Governor, I intend to tackle this problem head on because too many families have gone through the grief and pain that John and Stephanie have.

I look forward to working with Attorney General Maura Healey, Boston Mayor Marty Walsh and many others on this issue. Because without strong action many more individuals and families like the Greens will have the same terrible experience.

When Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito and I campaigned last year, we said we were chasing 100 percent of the vote. And we campaigned hard in many communities of color.

We did so because we believe these neighborhoods have not benefitted from the economic success that has become more commonplace in other parts of our Commonwealth.

But there are inspiring points of light in these communities. Because individual economic development, education, community development and social service entrepreneurs are turning so-called lost causes into definite winners.

My friend and the Commonwealth's new Secretary for Business Development Nam Pham and the folks at VietAID worked with their neighbors to literally turn their neighborhood in Dorchester from a dangerous place into a community on the move - where businesses want to create jobs and families want to live.

Robert Lewis Jr. at The BASE in Roxbury has attracted millions of dollars in scholarships from colleges across the country. These scholarships are designated for the young men from communities of color who participate in his baseball and mentoring program.

And the kids at United Teen Equality Center (UTEC) in Lowell are turning gang members into productive citizens through programs like their culinary institute. In talking about their success, their enthusiasm to do more is contagious. Our problem is not that no one has figured out what works. Just the opposite.

The entrepreneurs and leaders that I just mentioned as well as many others have cracked the code. Our government just hasn't had the will or the foresight to support what they are doing and do more of it.

The tragic events in Ferguson and New York City speak loudly. And their message is a simple one. When people lose hope, bad things happen.

I've said a thousand times I want every community to be a place where people believe tomorrow is going to be better than today. I say that not just because I believe it, but because I believe in it.

The great writer and philosopher Samuel Johnson once said, "The natural flights of the human mind are not from pleasure to pleasure but from hope to hope."

Put another way, if you think things are heading in the right direction, then you believe in and can't wait for tomorrow, no matter where you might be today.

And that faith in tomorrow needs to be based on something beyond the word of our Lord. It has to include the here and now. The quality of the schools you send your kids to, the parks they play in, the main streets you can walk to from your house or apartment, the job you have and the future it offers to you and your family.

If we are to avoid the tragedies that make the front page --like Ferguson, as well as the ones that don't like the awful shooting death of Dawnn Jaffier, then it's imperative that we renew our commitment and re-double our efforts to provide everyone, no matter where they live with the kinds of opportunities that exist across our Commonwealth.

Decades ago, John F. Kennedy stood where I stand today when he delivered a farewell address to the General Court of Massachusetts before traveling to Washington D.C. to become our 35th President.

In that address, he said success in public service should be measured against four historic qualities: courage, judgment, integrity and dedication.

The President-elect defined these qualities for his time in office. Today, I offer them as this administration's compass in the years ahead - but redefined for our time.

First we must have courage to set partisanship aside and embrace the best ideas and solutions, no matter which side of the aisle they come from.

Second we must have judgment to make our government as efficient, responsive and innovative as it can be.

Third we must have integrity to assure accountability and transparency because when we make honest mistakes they must be acknowledged and corrected.

And finally we must have dedication to serve the best interest of the public and only the public.

It's undeniable that the ability and responsibility to make a real difference in the lives of people, a growing and competitive economy, quality and affordable education for our kids, responsible, forward looking environmental policy as well as strong and safe communities lies with and within us if we approach our work every day with courage, judgment, integrity and dedication.

Only by working together will we make Massachusetts great. With your help, I know we will.

God bless you all and God bless the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles Baker,
Governor