

Commonwealth Forum Transcript

No Ordinary Time: Advice for the New Governor in a Changed and Challenged Commonwealth

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Sponsors: Massachusetts Foundation For The Humanities

SUMMARY: The following is a summary of the main points of the forum. It is not an exact transcript and should not be relied upon. This summary was prepared by State House News Service and is reprinted here with their kind permission.

Governor-elect Mitt Romney's plan to trim the judiciary's budget further is a ruse. The governor-elect should use the bully pulpit to promote the arts. Massachusetts state government has revenue, not spending problems. The state might have to borrow its way out of trouble. And Romney resembles a type of governor Massachusetts has never seen.

Those were just a few of the assertions thrown around Friday morning at the Parker House, where experts measured up the sorry state of affairs on Beacon Hill. On the heels of an historic tax hike and the near-depletion of state reserves, state government still faces a \$2 billion divide between anticipated revenues and anticipated spending in the fiscal year ahead. And there are many more questions than answers.

The Commonwealth Forum was hosted by the **Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth** and the **Massachusetts Foundation For The Humanities**. MassINC publishes Commonwealth magazine, and the forums are often based on the issues covered in that publication.

Panelists:

Thomas Finneran, House Speaker (D-Mattapan)

Jill Medvedow, the James Sachs Plaut director of the Institute of Contemporary Art

Bruce Schulman, history professor and director of the American and New England Studies Program at Boston University

Michael Widmer, Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation President

Darnell Williams, Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts director

The following is an accurate summary of remarks, not a verbatim transcript.

MASSINC DIRECTOR, TRIPP JONES: On the heels of the election, we decided to do a couple of forums. The next one is in western Massachusetts. We are looking at where we are going as a Commonwealth at this important time. I thank the State House News, our partner in these forums, for putting out a transcript. Thanks to the Parker House. We have a straightforward program. I will turn this over to Commonwealth Editor Bob Keough. He will lead the discussion with our special panel. We are told the speaker is in traffic. We are assured he will be here. We have some wonderful journalists working with us, Bob Keough, Mike Jonas and our other associate editor, Robert Sullivan. He has

done a tremendous job looking at voting patterns and the demographics of our state. The reaction to his work has been tremendous.

MASSINC ASSOCIATE EDITOR, ROBERT SULLIVAN: Think of this as a cartoon before the main feature. In honor of our new governor, it's a Power Point presentation. We published an article about mapping Massachusetts politics. It put the elections in a geographic context. The article started because I had been looking at the 1990 and 1998 gubernatorial election results. As it happened, Weld and Cellucci won by almost exactly the same margin, 3.7 points. There were differences. Certain parts of the state were becoming more Democratic - the western part of the state and the western suburbs. The southern suburbs were becoming more Republican. Some of the trends have gone on longer than I first suspected. In 1978, the last time we had a really competitive election that the Democrats won, when Ed King won a close race, the Democratic Party was the eastern Massachusetts Boston party. The Republicans did best the further away you got from Boston. If you look at this year's election, it's a totally different political landscape.

This year it seemed like Shannon O'Brien and the Democrats did very well in the shadows of the State House or as far away as possible from the State House. The Republicans did very well everywhere in the middle, especially the 495 and 128 corridors. They've become in a geographic context the middle of the road party. The research breaks the state down into ten geographic regions.

The first region is Bigger Boston. It's a well-educated region, a third of adults over 25 have college degrees. Median household income is below the state average. It hasn't fallen behind. For decades Boston has been losing population and recently it's started to pick up again. Over the 24 years it's become more and more Democratic. Romney ran 20 points behind the state average in Boston. On issues of taxation and referendum in general, this is a far more liberal region than the rest of the state. Elimination of the income tax didn't get a third of the vote in Bigger Boston. That's our most liberal district.

The next district is Mini Metropolises, major urban areas like Fall River, New Bedford, Holyoke, Chicopee, North Adams, and Springfield. It's the least educated region and has the lowest household income. The gap has gotten worse over the 90s. It is the only region that lost population in the 90s. It's generally a Democratic region. But Paul Cellucci did very well here. He really connected. Mitt Romney did not. Romney lost about eight points from what Cellucci got. Unlike Greater Boston, it is not liberal on taxation issues. It voted the same as the rest of the state on getting rid of the income tax. More people here voted to get rid of the income tax than voted for Mitt Romney.

El Norte is north of Boston and features cities with growing minority populations. It lags in most demographic criteria but not as badly as Mini Metropolises. It's relatively less educated, with a low population growth. Historically it's been a very Democratic area. But it's been very competitive. Democrats should be winning this by very large margins. Mitt Romney almost matched the statewide average here. Even though this is a relatively poor area, it doesn't vote reflexively on taxation issues. Shopper's World is what we call the suburbs to the west of Boston. It's by far the best-educated region and the highest household income in the state. It's not been a fast growing population area. So much of it is already built up. This has been a swing area. When you had liberal Republicans running against conservative Democrats, Republicans did well here. Scott Harshbarger carried this region by a pretty substantial margin. Mitt Romney did start to

turn things around. He picked up several points. It is his home region. This was instrumental in him winning the election. But it's still a basically liberal region. On taxation issues, it's not conservative. It was really pro-tax when it comes to cigarettes.

What we call Vacation Land is the western third of the state plus Cape Cod. It's sort of similar to Boston, relatively high educated but household income is a little bit below the rest of the state. That has to do with service and tourism jobs. This region has become increasingly Democratic. In 1978, it was 60 percent Republican. Republicans have been losing ground ever since. Mitt Romney continued to lose ground. It's become more reliably Democratic. And it's slightly more liberal than the rest of the state on referendum questions.

The Up and Out region, we call it that because its communities are immediately south of Boston where people from Boston moved into higher income communities. It's slightly higher income, about the same level of education. It has been gaining population. And it's been trending Republican. This was Ed King territory. By the time Weld ran, he did well and Republicans have had advantages here. It's been slightly more against taxes than the rest of the state.

The Movers and Makers is basically Worcester County with high-growth areas around 495 sliced out of it. It's lagging in some demographic categories. It's taken a pretty sharp dive in population growth. But it's been trending steadily toward the Republicans. It's the only region Weld lost when he ran for governor, but he won it when he ran against Kerry. Mitt Romney lost a little bit here but still got a solid 54 percent of the vote. It's pretty high in anti-tax sentiment. The proposal to get rid of the income tax came very close to passing.

Cranberry Country is basically Plymouth County, very high population growth, more than any other region. Higher than average household income, but at the average for college education levels. It's just becoming more and more Republican. Romney got just under 60 percent here. He widened the gap here. This is technically Shannon O'Brien's home region. She ran strongest in the Democratic primary here. She lost all of some 50-odd communities here. Romney had to be very happy. It was the only region that voted to get rid of the income tax.

Stables and Subdivisions includes Groton, Andover, Beverly, Stow, Billerica. It's pretty high on household income and college education. It's been growing faster than the state as a whole. It's a Republican stronghold and always has been. It was Bill Weld's strongest region in 1990. It was Cellucci's second best region. It was Mitt Romney's strongest region. Clearly this is never going to be carried by the Democrats in a close election. They can't afford to lose it this badly. Romney won in some towns by a two-to-one margin. It's generally an anti-tax region, though they didn't mind the cigarette tax. They came close but did not pass the proposal to get rid of the income tax.

The last region, called Interchanges, includes larger Republican cities and towns along major highways, from Marlborough down to Attleboro. It includes Westfield and Agawam and Haverhill. It has very high population growth, high household income and just about average for educational attainment. It features a steady increase in the Republican vote. Romney got just shy of 60 percent. Slightly more sentiment against taxes.

One last point, we had about 300,000 more votes cast than in 1998. More than half of the increase came from four regions. The first was Bigger Boston, a Democratic region. The other three are Republican areas. They outpaced the state as a whole at bringing more voters in. The largest was Cranberry Country. The regions that didn't do so well at bringing out new voters are considered more Democratic regions. The Democrats are going to have to do better in areas that they've been doing worse and worse in and that are getting bigger and bigger. [Sullivan's full article is accessible at [here](#)]

FORUM MODERATOR ROBERT KEOUGH: There are 97 people advising Governor-elect Romney. But we saw no reason not to put together our own transition team. We have Speaker of the House Thomas Finneran, Jill Medvedow, Michael Widmer, Darnell Williams and Bruce Schulmann, an historian at Boston University. I will start with Mike Widmer. He works in a counter cyclical industry. The worst things get in the fiscal scene, the more valuable Mike Widmer becomes. He has become downright indispensable. Let me ask you to explain it all. Romney takes office in the second year of what is at minimum a three-year fiscal crisis. We have a deficit that could hit \$150 million this year and is projected at between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion next fiscal year. How do we find ourselves in this situation after a \$1.2 billion tax package and millions of dollars in service cuts.

MTF PRESIDENT MICHAEL WIDMER: We had in fiscal 2002 a huge dropoff in tax revenues, because of the stock market collapse and the dot-com bust and bonuses. The wealth of the late 90s largely collapsed. We have an economic recession that is relatively mild, but the fiscal situation is worse as measured by tax revenues. Tax revenues dropped 15 percent in fiscal year 02. A third of that was the tax cut. But it was the largest single reduction in our history. The only reason that pain has not been as severe is because we had a huge rainy day fund built up in the 90s. Speaker Finneran is virtually single handedly responsible for building those reserves. In fiscal 2002 we used up almost \$2 billion in those reserves. We solved things with one third tax increases, one third spending cuts and about a third in rainy day reserves. In this fiscal year, we appear \$300 million shy still. I assume we will draw the final \$300 million to balance fiscal 2003. That sets up '04. It's going to be more difficult than '02 or '03. Given the latest developments, it will be closer to a \$2 billion gap even with some economic recovery. We are carrying forward a structural deficit carried by one billion dollars in one-time revenues. On top of that we have a weak economic recovery and then there is Medicaid, a quarter of the state budget, growing by 15 percent. That's \$900 million. That's a structural deficit of \$2 billion.

FORUM MODERATOR KEOUGH: That's a grim outlook. What steps should Gov. Romney take?

MTF PRESIDENT WIDMER: There really are four areas. We have \$500 million in tobacco reserves. I am not talking about future payments. Speaker Finneran has put those monies aside. Inevitably we will and possibly should use those reserves. Revenues, if taxes are off the table, there are other revenue sources. Casino gambling, Lottery payouts, federal reimbursements, co-payments, a variety of things. None of those in total begin to close the gap. One thing you are likely to see are inflated revenue estimates around these proposals. Especially with casino gambling. We have begun to look at that. I would be skeptical of any claims above \$200 million in '04. The third area is spending. Programs and services are going to be hit in a major way. We have built a

system of universal health care. We don't have a financial strategy to support it. The Medicaid program is cannibalizing the rest of the state budget. The only way to get savings is eligibility and benefit reductions. There's no more give there. Medicaid is going to be a target. Education and local aid, a quarter of the budget, will be a target of cuts. Human services, courts, environmental affairs have already had big reductions. The fourth area is deficit borrowing. It is a last resort. If we are not able to close the gap, it's a last resort alternative. If we do it, we should do it directly – short-term borrowing paid back before the next economic cycle. The idea of borrowing against 30 years of tobacco payments is a horrible idea. But eleven states have done it. It's the height of fiscal irresponsibility. I don't think we will end up doing that here. If we have to do deficit borrowing, we should do it straight up.

MTF PRESIDENT WIDMER: The only way we should think about restructuring is it should be seen as a one-term and beyond effort. It makes sense for Romney to come in and look at service delivery and the organization of state government, issues like pensions. We are unlikely to wring out substantial savings from that effort. Most spending is in direct services or passed through in local aid or cash assistance. There are some small opportunities for savings. What you can really do is improve services. Registrar of Motor Vehicles Grabauskas improved services at the registry but really didn't save any money. And if you do save some money in restructuring, it's likely to take time and not be accomplished in fiscal 2004. Sometimes it costs money.

FORUM MODERATOR KEOUGH: On most matters, the governor can not act alone. We have a card-carrying member of the Gang of Three here. Speaker Finneran, when Romney is sworn in, he will continue a 12-year tradition of divided government. As one of the Democrats leading a legislative body, what kind of leadership are you looking for from the new governor?

HOUSE SPEAKER FINNERAN: I expect what he said in the course of the campaign. I am curious about it and eager to help him succeed. I supported Shannon O'Brien without hesitation. She was a political centrist and a fiscally responsible Democrat. But we put aside the campaign rhetoric and gratuitous attacks and ambushes. The parties might not like to hear that. But it's similar to what occurred in 1991 and 1992. If Romney succeeds, we succeed and the political turbulence settles down. Even if it's only psychological, that would be an important step. He will find support and encouragement and an enthusiastic audience. We are however very very curious as to how \$2 billion can be addressed without any new taxes, revenues or a substantial reduction in services. To give the benefit of the doubt to him, he has an extraordinary record. His education is first rate. We have never had a person in state government with this type of pedigree. We have had people with broad backgrounds, but perhaps there is a way. I am curious. I do think it will be a challenge to close this gap in one year. It would be wise to consider a four-year effort. No matter where you fall on the political spectrum the tax increase was imperative last year. I was happy about the 40-plus tax cuts but there is no way to sustain the programs we have embraced without that revenue. The problem is the fiscal urgency has not subsided. We thought we were purchasing time, an important asset in economic turbulence. At the time, early in 2002, all the economists talked about a second or third quarter turnaround and 2.5 to 4 percent growth. That has clearly not materialized. Things have gotten worse, not better. Now they say second or third quarter next year with three asterisks.

FORUM MODERATOR KEOUGH: The budgets since 1993 have been declared DOA. What is it going to take for the Legislature to meet Mitt Romney half way?

HOUSE SPEAKER FINNERAN: It's going to be an awful lot about attitude. Are we going to be receptive? It's a great sound bite but it's trite and irresponsible to say a gubernatorial message is DOA. We should give the benefit of the doubt to the governor and the new team. It will not be declared DOA in the House. The title of this forum, advice to the new governor, is presumptuous. I would ask Romney to try to avoid gimmickry. We had quite enough of that in the late-80s, the gimmickry and denials and finger pointing. It was incredibly destructive to Massachusetts. And to please also, a request not advice, avoid reliance on one-time revenues. We were forced to do it this year. We have exhausted them. It will only exacerbate the present difficulty.

FORUM MODERATOR KEOUGH: What are we counting on state government to do? Darnell Williams, you are focused on people looking for fair opportunities for advancement. What should not be given short shrift?

URBAN LEAGUE DIRECTOR WILLIAMS: From the perspective of community-based organizations, my purpose here is to be part of the answer not part of the problem. It is summed up by progress and responsibility. How does the Commonwealth treat those in the dawn of life regarding early education and literacy and those in the twilight of life, seniors who are homebound? They are out of view, not even in this room today. How does state government treat the homeless and working poor? When times are not flush we make difficult decisions, but the impact on vulnerable populations seems to be the hardest. My advice is not to seek security but to look for opportunities. Winston Churchill said the price of greatness is responsibility. We have a revenue problem and not a spending one. There may be areas in state government that call for reexamination. The governor should seek advice from those on the front line. We have current and direct experience. Jobs and job training. More than one million workers don't have skills required in this economy. It must stay on the radar screen. Education and higher education, the gap in performance and the allocation of adequate resources. We have to make smarter investments in higher education. Our community colleges are emerging as collaborators and partners. Thirdly, affordability and access to health care is at the center of the stage. People are making stark choices between eating and buying medication. The other biggest challenge is faced on housing and the quality of life. People are working two or three jobs to afford rents. The Legislature has funded money for incentives to expand the supply of housing, but we need more. People are being trapped on the housing level as being permanent renters. When you have a professor teaching at an elite college saying they would move to a lesser known college because of quality of life issues, what does that say to the person who cleans a hospital or hotel? In closing, the message should go out that the meaning of our democratic freedom is to demonstrate by example.

FORUM MODERATOR KEOUGH: Education and health care are two of the areas the state has made the biggest commitment to in the 90s. Is the most important thing to maintain those commitments, even at the cost of other services and functions, or is the mandate really to make good on that commitment in ways that are smarter?

URBAN LEAGUE DIRECTOR WILLIAMS: I think the latter part, reexamining to make sure the spending is invested well. We are pitting education against health care. How do

we make the choice? The areas are very critical in terms of where we need to be as a society. I am stretched to say how do I take a razor and say one is more important than the other. The challenge is finding revenue streams. It's the people that become impacted when we make the decisions.

FORUM MODERATOR KEOUGH: Does the state have a role to play in the caring and feeding of the soul? For this I turn to Jill Medvedow. What's at stake in the cultural climate?

ICA'S JILL MEDVEDOW: I do feel a little bit like on Sesame Street where one of these things doesn't belong here. Here's what is at stake. Many people think arts are a frill. I have never met anyone who has not surged with pride when his or her children or nephews come home with a drawing, or when we sit through a piano recital. Why do we burst with pride? We see children developing creatively and learning the power of self-expression. When they harness that power, the effects are intangible.

We see what the absence of that power does to young people and it manifests itself in ways that are dangerous to our collective security and prosperity. What is at stake is an awakening of the infrastructure that nurtures and provides access to creativity. What is at stake is the ability to help young people. The arts help young people gain academic and social advancement. We have to use all the tools we have. Mozart and Monk, they do make us smarter. When we talk about a bridge to the future, the arts have a role to play. The not-for-profit cultural economy employs 45,000 people statewide. This new so-called creative class talks about what makes cities and towns vital. Cultural tourism is an additional reason. Culture rates second in the reasons people visit Massachusetts. Leaves alone do not do it. A safety net is different from investment. The MFA has more attendance than the Celtics and Bruins combined and they never threaten to leave Massachusetts. Art is not always easy. We would not expect someone with a third-grade reading level to sit down and enjoy Tolstoy. But we are going to get the society we create. If we want one full of creativity, then we are going to have to make that investment. [Applause]

FORUM MODERATOR KEOUGH: Clearly some art lovers in the audience.

ICA'S MEDVEDOW: Is there anyone else from the transition team here? [No hands went up, although education subcommittee chairman and MassINC director Tripp Jones said "I'm listening".] Use the bully pulpit of the executive office. We know there's a crisis in funding. If you look inside arts organizations, you see some of the greatest efficiencies of restructuring. Leadership is something we have not seen in the arts in Massachusetts. I am looking for the governor to help facilitate some great projects that are in place and need to be in place. I would like the governor-elect to be deeply knowledgeable about the arts and to be visible. We would like him to understand the arts in the broadest definition. It is not a luxury. That answer is too simple. The arts help sell Massachusetts. If we work together, we can bring the kind of attention to the state. And I do think it is important for the governor and Legislature to restore some of the funding to the arts council and to support the Massachusetts cultural facilities bill.

FORUM MODERATOR KEOUGH: Bruce Schulman, in your book "The Seventies," you say the cultural transmission belt transformed the 1960s and everything before it into the

glorification of private enterprise and individual responsibility. What social currents are framing the public debate today?

HISTORIAN SCHULMAN OF BU: Jill gives you some soul and my job is to shake some dust on you. There are a number of forces, longstanding trends, that are just emerging on the Commonwealth's doorstep. The first current is the relationship between government and business. The governor-elect had to fend off the challenge that he was ineligible to run. That conflict made it plain that Romney was not your typical Massachusetts Republican, not like Weld, Cellucci or Swift. He fits the model of a Sun Belt Republican, the familiar figure of a businessman in politics. In so doing, the Commonwealth is flowing into a political current that we call the blurring of the differences between the managing and governing classes. For most of its history, the United States possessed a political elite separate from the economic elite. Republicans dueled with big business just as often as Democrats. They rarely were outright hostile to corporate America, but they asserted that politicians assert values other than a strong economy. In this city, Mayor Curley rewarded friends with sweetheart deals and persecuted newspapers. He also prided himself on building public facilities. Curley denounced his opponents as puny economists. It's almost impossible to imagine a big city mayor voicing such sentiments today. A generation ago, people and money and jobs migrated south and west. Commerce came to more and more dominate public life.

HISTORIAN SCHULMAN OF BU: More members of Congress and mayors have replaced lawyers and party operatives in government posts. Massachusetts has long resisted this trend. When Speaker Finneran blocked a sweetheart deal for the Patriots, they were asserting autonomy. The arrival of a business level-type private sector Republican in the Corner Office suggests that a tradition might be in play. A second trend came from the telling way that Romney concluded his campaign, claiming victory over what he called an entrenched machine. Party organization and labor organizations have faced almost a catastrophic decline. Labor enrollment, at 15 percent, is just above the national average. Unions are exerting far less influence even over their own ranks in the voting booths. Partisan attachments have weakened dramatically. Party registration means less. The Massachusetts Democratic Party, like the national organization, has become an entirely political organization. Its only purpose is to win elections. That wasn't always the case. Parties once provided economic and social services, funeral expenses, help filling potholes, kind of overt patronage. It's a thing of the past. But parties must provide more concrete services like discount services, youth sports. He embodies this Sun Belt ideal of the private sector prince in the political realm.

FORUM MODERATOR KEOUGH: So what advice do you have?

HISTORIAN SCHULMAN OF BU: He has already shown remarkable skill in this area. His primary mission is reassurance. He needs to show he will bring the benefits of his managerial background and his independence from the Beacon Hill machine. Shannon O'Brien's campaign tried to but couldn't convince voters that Romney was a smiling and polite version of Newt Gingrich or Tom Delay. They managed to convince me, but not the voters of Massachusetts. He has to avoid that kind of association. He has to remain smiling and reassuring but to succeed, he can't simply ignore Massachusetts' tradition of a vibrant, autonomous, deeply committed political class and become a Sun Belt businessman anti-government conservative. It's too soon to draw definitive conclusion, but we are reaching toward a rethinking of rights and responsibility of citizenship. The

Pentagon and Post Office are symbols of democracy. Tapping into historical trends, he will try to slim state government and connect with independents, but he has to be careful to respond to the Commonwealth's great traditions. That's not going to be easy but he might pull it off and I hope he does.

FORUM MODERATOR KEOUGH: We have time for folks in the audience to chime in with advice.

FORMER REP. MARC DRAISEN: I'm from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. There has been a fair amount of talk and rhetoric about restructuring state government, most of it devoid of substantial savings. There's not been much discussion about consolidation or encouraging collaboration in delivery of municipal services. About ten mayors in metro Boston have been looking to consolidate health care services. They will probably save \$14 million in the provision of those services. Do the panelists feel the stress we are under might be used as an incentive to discussions about savings on those areas?

MTF PRESIDENT WIDMER: It's a good point. These kinds of changes, efficiencies and consolidations largely get a life only in this kind of crisis. That kind of initiative at all levels is something that we as a Commonwealth should put on the table. We can achieve some savings. My only caution is that the amount of savings in my view is small relative to the size of the fiscal problem. And secondly, achieving it in the timeframe? This is an opportunity we should seize but it's not likely to have an impact on the short-term fiscal picture.

HOUSE SPEAKER FINNERAN: It is only at a time like this when those types of changes can occur. The mayors will be discouraged by what they will go through, but you will be encouraged because they will be forced to talk through and around the barriers.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Darnell, what do you think of the practice of New York State exporting their severely mentally ill on the condition that they not return to New York and dumping them at nursing homes in New Jersey? California is doing the same with their welfare recipients.

URBAN LEAGUE DIRECTOR WILLIAMS: I am not familiar with the specifics but that is shifting problems from one state to another and that does not address the problem. It's borderline irresponsible and a money shell game.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: I am from the Merrimack Valley Labor Council. We have a lot of mill towns with high unemployment. We don't have a stable sector right now. State government might have strong restructuring, which will lead to more unemployment. We feel it might benefit to strengthen human services and to create direct employment so money stays in the state. Transitional assistance and employment and training have not received enough money to increase the tax base. We have sectors that don't have enough people.

FORUM MODERATOR KEOUGH: So does downsizing deepen our problems rather than solve them?

MTF PRESIDENT WIDMER: In some aspects, it absolutely does. You have to take steps that undercut our long-term well being. Human services are an important part of the Commonwealth and our quality of life and culture. All of that gets hit in a fiscal crisis and it does undercut the long-term well being. There are lots of contradictions.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Given what happened in the national elections, was it due to the brilliance of Karl Rove or is it change in the way our country is thinking about what it wants to be?

HISTORIAN SCHULMAN OF BU: That's a very good question. The landscape seems so different from two years ago. Maybe it hasn't shifted all that much. Very small shifts can produce seemingly dramatic effects. I think there were two ways of understanding the changes at the end of the 2000 and 2002 elections. Al Gore won the popular vote, getting more than Clinton ever won. Add the Nader vote, and the center-left won. On the other hand, look at Bush winning the election. Since JFK, every American president elected has come from the South or southern California. Does this make us think we are turning that way? My sense is the president won a stunning victory and maybe Rove deserves some respect. We don't hear so many jokes about Bush being dumb? The results have to do with the specific international situation. That was really the dramatic change. I don't know that we can say 2002 represents such a dramatic shift, even though it changes the policy regime dramatically. Two years from now, I may have a better answer.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: The governor-elect wants to cut \$100 million from the judicial budget. What will the effect be on the economy and on individuals and what does it say about the long-term social compact about getting differences resolved?

HOUSE SPEAKER FINNERAN: It says something about the remarkable glibness of our campaigns that someone would pluck out that number. We make a \$440 million investment in the judiciary. If I was a journalist, I would have speed-dialed Margaret Marshall or Barbara Dortch Okara and asked for their response. It would paralyze the judicial system as we know it. The ramifications are in speedy prosecutions of criminal events and proceedings. I don't think anyone likes the idea of that. On the civil side I don't know an investor or person who does not want timely resolution of the challenges that surface in civil proceedings. A \$100 million cut in the judiciary is simply unsustainable and would be a serious setback on several fronts.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: I am a representative-elect from Beverly. With the level of voter apathy and our voting for tax cuts and Clean Elections, the issue of trust looms large as barriers to coming up with solutions that address the purpose of government, which has to do with pooling resources to address the quality of life. Could someone address the future and how political officials would start to address this problem with a lack of trust with what government does and can do?

URBAN LEAGUE DIRECTOR WILLIAMS: Voting has really come down to popularity contests and has deteriorated in my opinion. We want everything in a pill or quick sound bite. The substance of debate has really gone away. The real challenge is running for office and making pledges is one thing; governing is another aspect. Mr. Speaker, you pledged no taxes and Gov. Romney pledges that and we have a revenue shortfall. Well what are we going to do about it? Politicians tell us what we want to hear. They stroke us

on the back and at the end of the day we get the short shrift. To increase voter turnout, we have to find a way not to increase the sound bites.

ICA'S MEDVEDOW: We should make it a holiday and make voting mandatory and if you don't vote, there would be a fine. [Laughter] It is done in other countries.

HISTORIAN SCHULMAN OF BU: It's time for the governor and the Speaker to rethink the initiative and referendum process. It has not lived up to its original idea as a vehicle for direct democracy. It never was really intended for that. In some ways, that system has a lot of offputting effects and creates all kinds of complications. It may have outlived its usefulness. Political participation is more than just voting. To increase voting without political participation, I don't know that that's really the idea. People have to feel they have some stake in their community and that they are involved in meaningful local activities. That's got to be what fuels more voting rather than the consumerist model of politics.

MTF PRESIDENT WIDMER: The issue of trust in government is hugely complicated. The notion of the attention span and the issues is really striking. Campaigns can close that gap in theory. In practice, we see the fiscal crisis facing the Commonwealth and a campaign in which there was virtually no direct credible attention to how government should handle a crisis of this magnitude. The outcome that the government will be forced to resort to, the public isn't even really prepared to face.

HOUSE SPEAKER FINNERAN: It's a good question and you are about to participate in it. Pretty soon you may even be asked to do a drive-by shooting. [Laughter] It may be an illusory pursuit. In the end, the buck will stop on your desk. Our system works, as frustrating as it may seem. It brings divisions and controversies into the assembly. These are things that divide the citizens, the level of taxation, the appropriate burden on business. In the end, you have to make a decision about the \$22 billion budget. And your own list of what you will want to do will add up to \$25 or \$26 billion. You will make decisions that will disappoint people who just voted for you. You will be tested by your ability to explain that this is really the reality of life. We have to make choices, none of which are appealing.