

11.07.13 Governor Patrick gives remarks at the Statewide Conference of Higher Education Board of Trustees

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY:

Governor Deval L. Patrick

Statewide Conference of Higher Education Board of Trustees

UMass Worcester

Thursday, November 7, 2013

Thank you, Secretary Malone, for that warm welcome. And thanks to you and Commissioner Freeland for your commitment and service to the future of our students.

In that same spirit, Trustees, thank you for all you do. Nearly 250 of you have stepped forward to serve our students, our communities and our Commonwealth as Trustees of a public college or university.

While your respective institutions may have unique programs, or serve different regions, they share a common mission: to provide an affordable, high quality educational alternative to our students – and in so doing to promote the future growth and prosperity of our Commonwealth.

That mission is critical. And it's perhaps for some of you more complicated than you may first have imagined. Supporting the leadership team and their strategy by offering guidance and feedback, helping to raise money, planning for the future or even managing through a crisis – all of that is vitally important.

Of even greater importance is your role as steward. Your responsibility is not just to be informed about the plans of the president and his or her team, but respectfully to test them, to ask the tough question, to draw the given proposal back to the question whether and how it serves the longer term objectives and interests of the institution and of the state.

In my own experience on boards, I know there is a balance to be struck between being on the leadership's team and being their boss. If you add to that the growing sensibility among students and their families that education is more like a service of which they are consumers, and among the public that is far less accepting of what they perceive as waste and excess, the scrutiny that public colleges and universities receive is even higher.

However delicate, that balance between your role as supporter of the leadership and independent steward must be struck. Because when the wheels come off the bus, the Trustees are not bystanders. Your job is about accountability.

I mention all this not to scare anybody off, but to underscore why your role is so important and why I am so grateful to you for assuming it. Indeed, I want to take a little time at the podium today to place what you are doing in a larger context.

I have spoken often over the past several years about how we support public education and close the achievement gap, how we expand quality, affordable health care and control costs, how we stimulate innovative industries, how we rebuild our roads, rails and bridges. Over and over again, I have stressed the importance of investing in education, innovation and infrastructure, because doing so is a winning strategy for growth. That's all about "how."

As we look ahead, as both leaders of our public higher education institutes, and as citizens of Massachusetts, let's remember why growth matters. For me, it's all about opportunity.

The opportunity to build a better life for ourselves and our families is what drives most of us in this room. We have a generational responsibility to position our state to succeed in the 21st century. Meeting that responsibility by expanding opportunity for people all over Massachusetts is why I wanted this job in the first place.

Well, opportunity requires growth. An expanding economy needs well-prepared and competitive talent. It needs inventors and innovators and investors. Opportunity without growth is a zero-sum gain, just a rearranging of the pieces on a checkers board. Opportunity through economic growth lifts us all.

That growth comes mainly from the private sector. Business creates jobs, not government. In my private sector experience, what business wants first from government is a light touch on regulation and taxes. So, we eliminated or simplified over 130 unnecessary regulations; reduced the permitting time for state approvals from two years to about 60 days; cut business taxes three times so far; slowed the growth in health care premiums; and much more. By any reasonable measure, Massachusetts is a more competitive place for business today than it was seven years ago.

Another, larger lesson I learned in the private sector is that growth requires investment. And to support business growth – and the opportunity that depends on it – government must invest alongside business.

So, for the past seven years, we have invested strategically in education, innovation and infrastructure. Here's why.

In Massachusetts, education is our calling card. With over 300 colleges, universities and research institutions within a 90-minute drive of where we are right now, education is our most significant resource -- as important to Massachusetts as oil is to Texas and corn is to Iowa. Meanwhile, the global economy is in the midst of a knowledge explosion – so being educated is how our children and grandchildren will compete.

So, with the Legislature's help, we funded the public schools at the highest level in our history, even when the bottom was falling out of the budget. We worked to bring kids off the wait-list into quality early education programs and to make college more affordable. And we engaged our community colleges in the vital work of meeting our workforce needs, leveraging our training dollars.

We invest in innovation because there are a handful of high growth industries that depend on the concentration of brainpower we have. That's what the life sciences initiative is about, our \$1 billion, 10-year commitment to strengthen our biotech sector. That's what our clean and alternative energy programs are about, from stewarding the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, the nation's first successful cap and trade market, to enabling a 30-fold increase in wind generation and a 90-fold increase in solar. That's why we travel to other states and overseas to promote our financial services and digital gaming and robotics and cyber security and Big Data expertise, and why we built – with five universities and two IT companies -- the fastest and greenest high performance computing center east of the Mississippi in downtown Holyoke.

And because we are making more of the things we invent, advanced or so-called “precision” manufacturing is making a strong comeback, too.

And we invest in infrastructure – the unglamorous work of government – because it supports everything else. Roads, rails, and bridges, as well as broadband, public and affordable housing, lab and library facilities, even health care -- all things the public sector builds as a platform for private sector investment and personal ambition.

Education, innovation and infrastructure. That's our growth strategy. And it is working.

Massachusetts has climbed out of recession faster than most other states and is growing faster than the national growth rate. Early this year we re-gained all the jobs lost in the Great Recession, one of the first states in America to achieve that milestone, and we have continued to add jobs since. September was the best month in home sales in Massachusetts since 2005.

We are first in the nation in student achievement -- at or near the top in the world in math and science. We are also first in the nation in economic competitiveness, entrepreneurial activity, health care coverage, veterans' services and energy efficiency.

We have emerged as the top international supercluster in the life sciences and biotech, attracting more biotech venture capital per person than any other state.

We have become a national leader in clean and alternative energy, with double-digit job growth in the latter sector in each of the last few years.

We have trained almost 100,000 people statewide for jobs in the innovation economy.

And we have done it responsibly. Our budgets are balanced and on-time, our bond rating is the highest in our history, and we have one of the largest rainy day funds in America.

That's what our strategy has produced for the Commonwealth as a whole. And public higher ed has been central to that progress.

Under the Commissioner's leadership, the Vision Project, a comprehensive plan to position Massachusetts as a national leader post-secondary learning, is identifying innovative ways to improve college readiness, increase graduation rates, close persistent achievement gaps, and improve the degree to which the higher education system is meeting the state's workforce needs.

Framingham State and UMass Lowell, for example, have achieved significant improvement in their graduation rates, up 9 and 10 percent respectively in the last 6 years.

We are closing Achievement Gaps by providing comprehensive retention and support services to students, notably at Holyoke, Massasoit and Northern Essex Community Colleges and at Bridgewater State University.

Students at Bunker Hill Community College now have paid work experiences at our largest companies, and we've launched a new partnership between Roxbury Community College and Madison Park to enable students to graduate in five years with both a high school diploma and a job-ready associate's degree.

This fiscal year, at long last, Massachusetts ranks among the top five states in the nation in the increase of state appropriation for public higher education over the previous year. That meant no tuition and fee increases this year. But it also means we are on a path to restoring the public's role in public higher education.

And we are rebuilding your campuses. Today, higher education investments represent more than 10 percent of the Commonwealth's entire bond cap, up from three percent in fiscal year 6 years. More new labs, libraries and academic space are opening or underway on public college and university campuses than in a very long time -- eventually on every campus in the Commonwealth.

The point is: this strategy is not rhetorical. It's real. This is how we use public investment – of time, money and ideas – to stimulate private sector growth. But there is still so much more to do, faster growth to support, more opportunity to create. As numerous and worthy as these projects are, they don't fully meet our needs.

To meet more of that need, I proposed new taxes for education and transportation last January. The Legislature provided more modest resources, limited primarily to transportation. So, this community will have to return to the subject in just a few years. I hope you will.

After all, economic growth, across the whole of the Commonwealth, is our goal. Investing in education, innovation and infrastructure is how we stimulate growth.

As I wrap up, I want to return to why that matters, why economic growth and the opportunity it promises matters.

Opportunity is central to who we are as a nation.

America, unlike any other nation on earth, is organized around civic ideals. Not religion or race, not language or geography, like other countries, but transcendent statements of civic purpose. And we have defined those ideals, over time and through struggle, as freedom, equality and fair play. That's what America has been about for more people, for a longer time, than any other nation in human history.

Opportunity is what makes all our other civic ideals possible. But opportunity is not inevitable; it doesn't just happen. Each generation of Americans has had to strive and to sacrifice to make opportunity real. Whether it was freeing the slaves or giving women the vote in one era; the GI Bill, rural electrification or the interstate highway system in another; or expanding broadband and early education, and closing the achievement gap today, making opportunity real requires action.

Renewed action is critical today.

In a society dedicated to equality, income inequality is getting worse. As we emerge from the global recession, for those already college educated and with transferable skills, the knowledge-based job market is wide open. Those already with money to invest benefit from the resurgence of the Dow.

But the ability of people to bridge that gap is harder than ever. The poor are no longer just the abject destitute: nearly half of food stamp recipients in Massachusetts are working people. Just a few weeks ago, the homeless population living in motels hit an all-time high, many of them school age children. Many middle class families where both parents work still can't get ahead, let alone imagine a better life for their children. According to Opportunity Nation, for the first time in America, today's young adults risk having lower educational attainment rates, on average, than their parents. Only six percent of children born to parents at the bottom make it to the top. Children in many European countries now have greater socio-economic mobility than those in the United States.

The American Dream is in trouble. For this Commonwealth and this country to be true to her civic ideals, opportunity has to be accessible to all our residents, not just the favored few. And again, opportunity requires action. That means we must make public investments mindful of the lack of opportunity of the left out and left back. If the American Dream is to endure, we who benefit first from economic recovery need to care about those who benefit last, or not at all.

One of the traditions of Massachusetts governors is that you hang the portrait of a former governor over the fireplace in the governor's office, as a source of inspiration, I suppose, or perhaps just as a reminder that you are but one in a long line of others. I'll bet every one of my predecessors wondered at some point, as I do now, whether anything they accomplished would last. We have shown that investing in education, innovation and infrastructure, alongside reform and modernization of government itself, is a way not just to endure recession but also to shape a brighter future. More than anything, I hope what lasts is a broad understanding that growth is a choice and that opportunity for all is why that choice matters. For the sake of the next generation's opportunity, choose wisely.

Thank you again for the work you do. I look forward to our continued work together, and to some conversation.