

SENATE No. 1

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts



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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
STATE HOUSE · , MA

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To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives,

Mr. Speaker, Madame President, and members of the Legislature,

Madame Chief Justice and members of the Judiciary,

Members of the Governor’s Council and the Cabinet,

Former Governors,

First responders, members of the armed services, veterans, and distinguished guests,

Residents of our beloved Commonwealth,

We gather today to transfer the power of government and to renew the miracle of democracy.

We gather in the public trust, and commit ourselves once more to the work of the people.

I thank Governor Baker, who has led this Commonwealth with a steady hand. He has governed with integrity and care — eager to study problems and work together on solutions. The example he set for eight years was in the best traditions of public service, and it now becomes his legacy. Governor Baker, I thank you, and our state thanks you.

I thank Kim Driscoll, the best teammate I could ask for. In Salem, she has led with an eye to the future — protecting the coastal treasure of our state, and making sure we preserve it for generations to come. Kim, I can't wait to get to work.

I thank my family, many of whom are with me in this chamber. And so many teachers, coaches, mentors, and friends, who are in my heart.

I assume this office with humility — mindful of the weight of history and lightened by the gift of gratitude. It is the honor of my life to lead this state.

My family's story is a Massachusetts story, more than three centuries in the telling. My ancestors landed on a river bank in Newbury. On the journey they were borne along by dreams of greater freedom, and hope for the blessings of life. Decades later, in the Massachusetts Constitution — the first of its kind — those same dreams were written into a covenant and protected for all time. A model for a young nation.

My great-great-grandfather grew up in Newburyport. When he was 16, his father signed a permission slip so he could fight for the Union in the Civil War. My grandmother as a young girl would visit the Grand Army of the Republic Hall to hear their stories, and she'd later share them with my brothers and sisters and me. I think about them as I look at the servicemembers here, and honor the sacrifices they make each day.

My grandparents met on the fishing docks in a Gloucester summer. She was in nursing school; he worked at the GE factory. Later, when I was to be born at a naval hospital in Maryland, they worried that I wasn't starting my life on Massachusetts soil. So she dug up a little dirt from the woodlot, caught a plane, sneaked into the hospital room, and put the little bag under the delivery table.

Massachusetts is my home. Its natural gifts take my breath away, and its people fill me with inspiration in return. The majesty of Mount Greylock and the hairpin turn at North Adams on the Mohawk Trail. The light at Cape Ann and the cranberry bogs of Plymouth. The port of New Bedford and the sparkling waters of the Quabbin. Long Point Peninsula and the Boston harbor islands guiding us on a flight home.

We share a legacy in this state. Our nation was born here, not with a whimper but with the spark of revolution. A hunger for something new and a demand for something better. We established the first public park and the first American public library. The first American lighthouse, railroad, and subway. The first basketball game.

Our state Constitution recognized our natural and essential rights and declared them to the world. The people of Massachusetts have always believed in protecting these rights, and dedicating them to a higher purpose. We were the first to guarantee that health care is universal,

and, twenty years ago now, that love is, too. It is in that spirit of common humanity that I stand before you today, representing another historic first.

This state achieves its higher purpose when the bedrock of individual freedom meets the bond of the public spirit. This is our common wealth, in the truest sense — equally ours, equally yours, whether your Massachusetts story began in an older time or in our own time.

This is why people come to Massachusetts. To write their own story, to become their own first, to take up the common good.

What do they see?

They see the shared heritage of our beautiful land. They see a call to higher learning, to enlightenment. They see research and innovation, joined to build a better future. They see culture and charity. They see the granite dignity of hard work and an everlasting commitment to equality. They see people reaching for something better, something more.

But they also see barriers that are holding back our people and our state. Keeping just out of reach what might be, what could be.

We have untold wealth in Massachusetts. But record public revenue does little good when families can't pay the rent, or buy a house, or heat their homes, or hire child care.

Our health system is the envy of the world. Yet our hospitals are desperate for staff. Patients are boarding in emergency rooms — spending hours and days in an agonizing wait for care. We sense the shadows of a mental health crisis, and too many suffering from substance use.

Our companies are eager to expand, but they can't find workers with the skills they need.

Communities and people are yearning to grow and thrive, but they haven't been given the tools to do it.

This is the greatest state in the union. But people are leaving at some of the highest rates in the country. Giving up on the Massachusetts story.

All this would be challenge enough at any time. But we meet today as our state and our country feel their way toward the other side of the Covid pandemic. This crisis has brought out and lifted up the best of our state. Our companies, our ingenuity, created vaccines and saved lives. We came together, all of us, with courage and caring, patience and persistence.

Together we are healing, but we must acknowledge the scars. Our people have lost loved ones. Their lives and livelihoods have been disrupted. The toll on our physical and mental health is real. The pandemic exposed and widened gaps in learning and health care and equity.

I also think people are tired. We can speak honestly about that. We've come through difficult days.

But here's what you and I both know.

The people of Massachusetts are resourceful. And resolute. And hopeful. They're ready for what comes next. They're ready to walk forward. We just have to set the path. We just have to light the way.

If we do this right — if we act and choose in a way worthy of this state's proud history and its great people — we will make a difference right now. And we will lay a foundation of success for generations to come.

So let's chart a path forward, and walk it together. Into the next chapter of our Massachusetts story.

Many challenges are before us, but let's start here.

We love this state because it's our home. A home for us all.

We want people to come here. And we want people who grow up here to stay here. Our country looks on Massachusetts as a gleaming example of liberty and equality and success. But too many states are beginning to pass us by.

We have to make Massachusetts a place that people can afford to call home. Our people can't realize their dreams until we end the nightmare of high costs.

The average rent in our state is 50% higher than the national average. We have some of the lowest homeownership rates and some of the highest housing prices.

Now, one reason for this is that Massachusetts is a great place to be. People do want to live here. That's a good thing. But the cost of housing is also out of control because we simply don't have enough of it. If we want Massachusetts to be a home for all, we need to build more places to live, and we need to make sure those homes are within reach.

High housing costs are unacceptable for our people, our businesses, and our state's future. To fix that, we need to think big. We will build a state with room for all its people.

To lead this effort, in my first 100 days, I will file legislation to create a Secretary of Housing. The Secretary will work across government and support every city and town, to make sure we meet our goals.

We'll use property that belongs to the people ... to help the people. I've already directed my Secretary of Administration and Finance to identify unused state-owned land and facilities that we can turn into rental housing or homes within one year.

We'll get first-time homebuyers the help they need, and reduce costs for renters by expanding tax deductions.

This is a fine start, but we need to do more — and we need your help. We rise and fall as a state with the choices and commitments of every neighborhood. Today I'm asking every citizen to join this cause. That means building more housing next to transit hubs, taking another look at zoning, and preserving the housing we already have.

Loosening the grip of rising costs also means tax reform. I know the Speaker and Senate President share this goal, and I thank them for that.

I've already proposed a child tax credit for every child, for every family. The legislature also put forward several worthy tax cut proposals during the last legislative session.

This would mean real relief for the people who need it most. Let's get this done.

The strength of Massachusetts is its families. And they sorely need our help. Our state has some of the highest child care costs in the country. Our care workers don't make a livable wage.

So today, let us pledge to be the first state to solve the child care crisis. Let's finally pass legislation in line with Common Start to make sure every family pays what they can afford, and that care workers are paid what they deserve. This is something our families, workers, and businesses all agree on.

We also need to build a Massachusetts economy for the future.

We can't lead tomorrow if we settle for what's good enough today. To keep attracting the best workers in the world, our economy has to compete.

Let me speak directly to the business community. You help drive our economy and you will help build our future. In me, you will have a partner every step of the way.

That begins with making sure you have the work force you need. Tens of thousands of jobs in health care, transportation, and technology are going unfilled because the skills of our workers don't match the demands of our economy. Let's work with our community colleges and vocational schools, and make sure the training we offer meets the needs of our companies in every region.

In my first budget, I will create and fund a new program called MassReconnect. This will offer free community college to students over 25 who don't have a college degree. We'll also enhance early college opportunities and increase funding to our state university system so everyone can afford a higher degree.

What we're talking about is an investment — and it's the most precious kind because it's an investment in our people.

But it can't wait until college. We must make Massachusetts a place where every child — every child — can reach their potential. The first free public school in America was established in our state almost 400 years ago. Public education has been guaranteed ever since. Today, we need an equal guarantee for our children: That we will continue to offer not just an education but the best education.

That means funding the Student Opportunity Act to make sure every student and every school gets the resources they deserve. It means doing more for mental health care and food security. Our students can't reach their potential if they are homeless or hungry or suffering from untreated mental illness.

To support our state, we have to support our children. And we will.

Ensuring we have the best workforce also means ensuring our workers have the training and protections they deserve, and workers will have a partner and a seat at the table every step of the way.

Now, we can't get our state where it needs to go until our people can get where they need to go.

And let's face it: The state of our trains and roads and bridges today is unacceptable.

Let's acknowledge that we can't have a functioning economy without a functioning T. So I will appoint a GM with deep experience and a laser focus on making our transit safe and reliable. In the next 60 days, we'll appoint a Safety Chief to inspect our system, top to bottom and track by track.

We know the MBTA is woefully understaffed — and we know that lack of staffing has had grave consequences. My first budget will include funding to hire 1000 additional workers focused on the operation of the MBTA within the first year of our administration.

The roads and bridges that get us from here to there are falling apart. Billions of dollars in federal funding are available to fix it, but we are competing with every state for those dollars. So I am forming an interagency task force — the first of its kind — to compete for federal infrastructure money.

We want to win every available dollar for shovel-ready projects across our state.

The people of this state deserve the best transportation system we can offer. So let's build it.

Finally, our greatest strength is our people, but we can not reach our potential as a state when so many are held back from reaching their own. People of color, people with disabilities, women, LGBT residents - they continue to face barriers that have held them back for generations.

We must center equity in all we do. I will be directing each agency in my administration to conduct a full equity audit. Let Massachusetts be the place that shines a light on every systemic barrier, and then does the hard work to break them down. Because that's who we are.

I've talked about our shared history, the pride of this state and every citizen. Now we must devote ourselves to cherishing and protecting our shared future — and meeting the climate crisis.

Let me be clear about this. Where others may see hopelessness and resignation, I see unparalleled opportunity. We can protect our climate and create jobs. It's not too late to do either. It's urgent that we do both. And I believe Massachusetts can lead the world.

The legislature has already laid out ambitious goals. I share that ambition. I've pledged to double our offshore wind and solar targets, and quadruple our energy storage deployment. In transportation, we will electrify our public fleet, and put a million electric vehicles on the road by 2030.

Meeting these goals will take unprecedented focus, and a leader who can get the job done. Tomorrow, I am submitting an executive order to create the country's first Cabinet-level climate chief — reporting directly to me. She will work across government and with every city and town to meet our climate goals and achieve our economic potential.

We will match our ambitions with our investments. For the first time in our state's history, we will commit at least 1% of the state budget to environmental and energy agencies. We will triple the budget of the Clean Energy Center. We'll create a Green Bank to foster investment in resilient infrastructure and attract new businesses to Massachusetts.

I know we can do this. Over a decade ago, Governor Patrick and the legislature made a bet on life sciences in this state — offering funding and support and leadership to make Massachusetts a leader in biotech. Now, the results are nothing short of remarkable.

Let's commit to making climate innovation our next big investment, our next first, our next frontier.

Let's build a Climate Corridor that stretches from the Berkshires to Barnstable harnessing research, innovation and manufacturing. We'll create thousands of new jobs in clean tech and blue tech, coastal resiliency, and environmental justice. And I believe 10 years from now, we will look back and see the undeniable benefits for our workers, our economy, and our planet.

We can do this. We will do this.

The plans I've just described to you are bold. And I'm mindful of the moment. This is a time in our nation of poisoned discourse and ugly politics. Governors are using people — using children — as props for their cynical political agendas. Elected officials are putting partisanship over the interests of the people they serve.

But not in Massachusetts. That's not who we are.

In Massachusetts, we come together. We lift people up. And we lead.

No matter what challenges we face, no matter what lies ahead, we will stay true to the best of ourselves. We will act with empathy and with equity. We will work together.

As your Governor, I can promise you that these principles will be my North Star.

Let the word go out to people and businesses here and in every part of this country. In Massachusetts, you are welcomed. You are included. You are protected.

This is a state where we will never relinquish the right to reproductive freedom. Where we prize and protect human rights. And civil rights. And gay rights. And equality. And democracy.

That is the Massachusetts we love. And we will make it stronger than ever before.

I think about the people arriving in Massachusetts just today, just now, to make a go of it. Their hopes echo back through our history. Their dreams are the dreams of those who came before me. To live in freedom and equality. In safety and in happiness. To go forward with grateful hearts and pursue the blessings of life.

Those are the words of our state Constitution. Perhaps the proudest of our many firsts.

I assume this office as the first woman and first gay person elected governor of our state.

But every one of us, every citizen, is a first. You may be a first-generation immigrant, choosing Massachusetts as the foundation of your American dream. You may be the first in your family to go to college, or to send your child there. The first in your neighborhood to start a business.

In this state, we are all trailblazers. We are all leaders. That's why we live in Massachusetts.

What story will we write together?

Today is a day to celebrate, to think about how far we've come and where we need to go.

But I'm even more excited about tomorrow. Because tomorrow we get to work. We get to work in the greatest state, for the greatest people, at a moment when we can make the greatest difference — now and for a generation to come.

So with great optimism and pride, I thank you all, and now let's come together and get this done.

God bless you, and God bless this Commonwealth.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Maura Healey,
Governor