

# STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT

BY ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

## FOLLOW THE MONEY TO BEACON HILL

Legislative elections nearly always go to the candidate with more money, and the candidate with more money is almost always an incumbent. That's the upshot of the 71-page report released in June by the state's Office of Campaign & Political Finance. According to the report, legislative candidates spent \$12.46 million last year, which was an increase of \$64,295 from two years before—even though the number of candidates on primary and general election ballots across the state dropped from 339 to 311. (This was the lowest number since 1990, when the office started keeping records.) The OCPF calculated that 98 percent of the incumbent legislators seeking re-election last year are back in office.

In the Senate, winning candidates spent an average of \$88,827, even though 68 percent of them faced no opponent in the primary or general election; losing candidates spent an average of \$43,897. On the House side, winners spent an average of \$40,233, even though 60 percent of them were unopposed in the primary and general election; losers spent an average of \$19,029.

Twelve members of the 200-member Legislature can say they won office despite being outspent by their opponents, including two members of the Senate (Sonia Chang-Diaz and Susan Fargo). Half of the victorious underdogs were women, even though women make up only about one-quarter of the state Legislature overall.

## JOB SPRAWL REVERSES IN BOSTON, ACCELERATES IN SPRINGFIELD

Commute times may be maxing out in Greater Boston. *Job Sprawl Revisited*, a Brookings Institution report released this spring, looked at the geographic distribution of jobs in 98 metro areas, dividing the jobs into three categories: within 3 miles of the center city's downtown, 3 to 10 miles from downtown, and 10 to 35 miles from downtown. Between 1998 and 2006, the percentage of the Boston area's jobs that lay in the outermost circle dipped from 48.6 to 47.9, while the percentage in the middle circle rose from 21.9 to 24.2. This was contrary to the shift at the national level, where the percentage of jobs in "outer ring" communities continued to rise, from 42.5 percent to 45.1 percent.

But at the other end of the state, Springfield still seems to be in the early stages of job sprawl. Over the same eight-year period, the percentage of Springfield area jobs more than 10 miles from the city center went up 6.2 points, to 32.4 percent.

The share of jobs in urban cores fell in 95 of the 98 areas in the study (Milwaukee was the largest city to buck the trend), suggesting that even if people are moving back downtown, employers aren't necessarily following them.



## COUNT YOUR TWO-BUCK DUCKS

People complain about the taxes on what's in their garages, but did you realize that farm animals are also under the thumb of the Department of Revenue? For fiscal year 2009, the DOR has determined the value of certain critters, for excise tax purposes, as follows:

One chicken, duck, or goose is valued at \$2, or the equivalent of one subway ride on the MBTA. One mule or sheep is valued at \$100, or 50 cents more than a hunting license for "big game" in Massachusetts. And one llama is \$800, or the equivalent of the combined fines for misusing a handicap parking plate (\$500) and driving on the Massachusetts Turnpike at 90 miles per hour (\$300).

### NEW HOMEOWNERS IN MASS. STICK TOGETHER

Things are cozier for buyers of new homes in Massachusetts than in the rest of the US. According to the Census Department, 52.4 percent of the permits for new housing units in the first third of this year went to units in multifamily buildings; the comparable figure nationally is only 29.1 percent.

During the first third of this year, permits for new homes in Massachusetts dropped by 30.6 percent compared with the same period in 2008. But that was not as bad as the 48.2 percent drop at the national level—and last year already logged the lowest number of new homes since 1959.

### LOOK IN YOUR TREADMILL'S REARVIEW MIRROR

Has Massachusetts smashed into an exercise wall? According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's latest survey data (from 2007), 51.4 percent of adults in Massachusetts regularly engage in "moderate physical activity." That's higher than the national rate of 49.2 percent. But the Bay State figure is exactly the same as it was in 2001, whereas the national figure is up from 46.1 percent.



### SAVE MONEY: GO OUT TO DINNER, BUT DON'T DRESS UP

Restaurants seem to be a relative bargain in the Boston area, according to the federal government's Consumer Price Index for May, which measures costs against the same month in 2008. "Food away from home" was up 3.1 percent, while "food at home" was 3.3 percent costlier. That's the opposite of the national trend, in which restaurant food cost 4.2 percent more than it did a year ago and groceries were only 1.5 percent higher.

Overall, the cost of living was down 1.5 percent in Boston (compared with a drop of 1.3 percent nationally). The decline was mostly due to a sharp drop in the price of energy (down 33.6 percent). But the cost of medical care continued to rise—by 5.9 percent, considerably higher than the 3.2 percent increase nationally. And it's almost as expensive to look good as to feel good: The price of clothing went up by 5.2 percent in the Boston area while it rose by only 0.8 percent nationally.

### IF ONLY WE'D INVENTED THE SPORK...

Most of the talk of new jobs in Massachusetts has to do with biotech, renewable energy, and other New Economy industries concentrated in the Boston area, but a new book reminds us that the western part of the state has a history as a manufacturing powerhouse. *Metal Fatigue: The Demise of Metalworking in the Connecticut River Valley*, by UMass–Lowell professor Robert Forrant, includes these nuggets:

- In 1860, 49 percent of the nation's cutlery was manufactured in Franklin County.
- In 1920, one plant in Springfield produced "50 percent of the electrical starter parts required by the US vehicle industry and employed 3,000 workers."
- In the late 1920s, the average weekly manufacturing wage in Springfield was \$25.42, one of the highest in the state (far better than Lowell's \$19.13).



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