

Creating Jobs in Our Region

Senator Marc Pacheco's Interim Forums Report

September 2010

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Dear Citizen:

This past June I held a series of four community forums throughout the First Plymouth and Bristol District, meeting with neighbors across the district to get your ideas on what you would like to see here in our region. I organized these forums to give citizens the opportunity to let my state and local government colleagues and me know what the people we represent think we should be doing to stimulate the economy and how we can create more jobs for our area.

In an effort to inform people about the forums, fifty thousand announcement fliers were put in every local newspaper and also were placed at coffee shops, restaurants, stores, and on my websites. In addition to the forums announcement, the fliers contained a questionnaire for people to submit their ideas about we should be doing on the state level.

With hundreds in attendance offering their ideas and advice, it was no surprise that jobs were at the top of everyone's list. Other major regional issues like the rail to Southeastern Massachusetts, gaming, renewable energy, and education were highlighted, and many more topics were brought up. A wide range of people attended the forums, including state and local officials, business leaders, education leaders, and many more constituents and neighbors. We continued to receive letters and replies to the fliers throughout July and August, hundreds pouring into the office full of advice from interested, involved citizens. Included in this report is every citizen proposal, my response, and the actions that I will be taking in the coming months.

I heard your ideas and comments and I plan to use that information on Beacon Hill as a blueprint for the district and Commonwealth we're working together to create. Thank you to all of those that showed interest in these forums. Your input is a crucial tool as I represent you at the State House and I look forward to continuing to work to solve the issues most important to you. Please don't hesitate to share your ideas with me in the future, and I'll continue to keep you updated as we fight through these difficult times.

Sincerely,



Marc R. Pacheco
State Senator

TOPICS DISCUSSED AT COMMUNITY FORUMS AND IN QUESTIONNAIRES

MOST MENTIONED TOPICS:

- Education
- Energy and Environment
- Small Business Assistance
- Rail to Southeastern Massachusetts
- Regional Tourism/Recreation
- Gaming
- Infrastructure/Transportations Improvements

Below is an expanded list of the topics from your replies and comments. I have tried to represent the intent of each speaker as closely as possible in the expanded list.

EDUCATION

- Meet with Massasoit Community College and other public colleges to discuss job training programs
- Arrange meetings between Massasoit Community College and Middleboro businesses in the downtown area to discuss procurement opportunities
- Establish a Bristol Community College location in downtown Taunton
- Increase volunteerism and service learning opportunities

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

- Support land-based renewable energy (wind, solar, etc.)
- Focus on all renewable energy and green job creation
- Place wind farms in cranberry bogs
- Provide resources for new water treatments methods
- Improve waste-water treatment
- Focus on creating, encouraging and using renewable energies
- Increase recycling
- Clean up parks and the environment, particularly in and around the Taunton River
- Provide tax incentives and grants to hire local citizens to be trained to work in energy and environmental fields
- Create wind turbines and solar manufacturing in vacant state owned buildings
- Support establishing an ethanol gasification plant in City of Taunton
- Support TMLP proposal for Unit 10 Power Plant

GAMING

- Support slots at the tracks/Logan Airport
- Support resort casinos, particularly proposals to build a casino in Middleboro
- Support smoke-free casinos
- Oppose measures to bring casinos to the state or region and consider the social costs of gambling

GOVERNMENT

- Ensure that state budget cuts in public sector jobs are having the least negative impact on the private sector and regional economy
- Create financial incentives for regionalization
- Continue funding education
- Give greater incentives to film industry
- Speed up construction projects
- Focus on encouraging bio-technology firms to locate in the area
- Utilize non-protected state land
- Pay attention to state debt
- Focus on downtown development/revitalization in district communities
- Reform zoning laws to streamline permitting process
- Minimize focus on affordable housing
- Require education for local officials on planning, zoning, and health boards
- Form economic development partnerships domestically and internationally
- Increase funding for higher education to alleviate waiting lists at state colleges
- Reach out to emerging technology firms
- Support flood prevention initiatives
- Stop escalating tax on property, give seniors a discount
- Cut state sales tax
- Support tax breaks for small businesses
- Continue with the tax-free shopping day

SMALL BUSINESS SERVICES

- Provide referral services for small businesses
- Investigate international opportunities for small and medium size businesses
- Create a state-based matching-funds program, by which the state temporarily assists businesses paying for new hires
- Establish mentoring for entrepreneurs to help new businesses understand how to obtain financing, advertise and market their business, and navigate the state's regulatory process

TOURISM

- Promote and try to establish regional tourist attractions, including theme parks
- Support agr-tourism (using farms and agricultural resources as a tool for tourism)

- Erect highway signage directing people to restaurants, businesses, attractions
- Focus marketing efforts on tourism
- Build sports stadium in Southeastern Massachusetts
- Create partnerships with state, local, and non-profit agencies to develop cohesive marketing plans and discuss further opportunities for the region.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

- Support the Rail to Southeastern Massachusetts with extensions to Cape Cod and to Wareham
- Articulate funding mechanism for rail to Southeastern Massachusetts
- Improve regional transportation networks, like buses, trolleys, etc.
- Expand Route 44 to four lanes
- Convert Route 24 to I-93 to qualify for federal funds
- Improve road and bridge conditions
- Offer ferry service to various parts of Cape Cod
- Help secure funding for ring road in Middleboro and general improvements to rotary

GENERAL

- Create more accessible parking in downtown Taunton
- Support new Sysco facility at Old Lakeville Hospital
- Build a new Taunton City Hall
- Use the now-vacant Paul Dever campus for housing
- Hire civilians for directing traffic instead of police officers to save money
- Reduce welfare assistance by requiring recipients to “earn” assistance
- Encourage manufacturing in region
- Restrict cell phone use while driving
- Prohibit building more Wal-Mart stores in the area

MOST-MENTIONED TOPICS AND FUTURE ACTIONS

This report is the first in a series of direct responses to all of those who attended the forums and responded to the questionnaires. Although the preceding section of this report includes every topic discussed, my following comments do not cover every single suggestion. Rather, periodically over the next few months, I will issue reports with the progress we have made and provide further information and opportunities for people to present new ideas.

The forums were a step in continuing the conversation between residents and officials. This interim report marks a blueprint for building a stronger, united region to your specifications. By continuing this conversation, we can have a better understanding of our goals for the region, knowing what is most important to all of us.

EDUCATION:

Education was a common topic at the forums and in the questionnaire responses. People frequently expressed their desire that education remain one of Massachusetts's highest priorities. As it stands today, Massachusetts ranks at the top of just about every list for education standards. It is and has been my goal to keep our state at the top, ensuring that our children and adults are provided the very best educational opportunities.

If we look at recent developments, like the creation of the UMass Law School and the newly passed legislation allowing state colleges to be universities, there is proof that this has been an important area of focus for me and other legislators. The new UMass Law School provides people looking for a more affordable law school with that option and complements the existing educational opportunities right here in Southeastern Massachusetts. Also, the legislation allowing colleges to use the title University will provide the option for additional funding and international recognition, a major benefit to our neighbors at Bridgewater State University and for students now graduating with a University diploma.

The CONNECT partnership is another example of the commitment to keeping education a top priority in the state. CONNECT links public higher education institutions in Southeastern Massachusetts, including Bridgewater State University, Bristol Community College, Cape Cod Community College, Massasoit Community College, and the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. The goals of this partnership are to improve the quality, accessibility, and affordability of higher education and advance the economic, educational, and cultural life of Southeastern Massachusetts. CONNECT accomplishes this through partnerships with school districts, businesses, social service agencies and governmental organizations.

I am committed to making sure our region and state remain competitive in education. Currently, Bridgewater State University is building a state of the art, world class Math and Science Center. This new center will not only make the school more competitive in Massachusetts but internationally. It will help BSU students achieve more advanced education and training levels in

emerging high technology fields, creating a workforce of highly trained regional workers and helping attract tech-based businesses and jobs to the area.

In addition, the numerous partnerships BSU is creating will provide valuable research opportunities that will help improve our state's math and science initiatives, which will keep our state competitive for many years.

Another project that is moving forward is in Middleboro, where Massasoit Community College is putting an education center in the downtown area. This new center will provide people in the Middleboro region the opportunity to receive a quality college level education. The addition of this center will increase foot traffic in the downtown area, which will provide additional economic opportunity.

One suggestion that was provided at the Middleboro forum in response to this new center was for the state and local officials to hold a public meeting for citizens of Middleboro to discuss the establishment of job training programs at the new center. Another suggestion was to encourage procurement between Massasoit Community College and Middleboro businesses in the downtown area and to create relationships to further provide assistance and coordination with the downtown business community.

Future Action:

We need to continue to work to keep Massachusetts at the forefront of education worldwide and create more opportunities for higher education and advanced job training right here in Southeastern Massachusetts.

- *I will continue to ensure the Math and Science Center stays on course.*
- *I will continue fighting to make sure education in this state remains at the highest level.*
- *I will ensure a meeting is put together with Massasoit Community College to address the Middleboro center job training program and the procurement process for town and area businesses.*
- *I will continue working with Bristol Community College officials, local officials and business leaders to secure a location for a center in the downtown Taunton area.*

GAMING:

Expanded gaming in Massachusetts has been the subject of much debate during the past few years and especially at each of the forums held. This bill has received overwhelming support across the state and by many citizens throughout the First Plymouth and Bristol district. I realize not everyone agrees on expanded gaming but there is one thing everyone does agree on: job creation.

After a long legislative session, the legislature sent the Governor a bill that allowed for three casinos and two racinos. This bill projects to create 15,000 jobs statewide, not including the secondary jobs that would result, and would solve the employment troubles of many of our struggling neighbors.

Some people who responded in questionnaires mentioned that they were concerned about racinos and casinos because they believe the social costs will be too much for our communities to handle. The bill provides additional provisions to create programs aimed at helping people with addiction as well as added revenue necessary to manage existing and predicted social and public safety issues. Today, we are only receiving the social costs, and not the revenue necessary to sustain a healthy, citizenry.

People also mentioned that they wanted the proposed casinos and racinos to be 100 percent smoke free. This was also a provision in the bill we sent to the governor.

I support job creation and restoring local aid to our communities and it is my position that expanded gaming legislation provides the opportunity to create thousands of long-term jobs in Massachusetts and, subsequently, provide more local aid to our underfunded communities. While expanded gaming is not the only means of creating jobs and stimulating our economy, it is one that has been crafted and considered for over a decade, will create thousands of jobs, and can quickly resolve many of the lingering issues faced after the closure and downsizing of dog tracks and other businesses. That's why I supported the legislation that was passed by both the House and the Senate.

Future Action:

I will continue fighting for the passage of expanded gaming legislation, even if it means going into a special session before the end of this year. If the bill is not successful, I pledge to work with Republicans and Democrats alike to find a workable solution to preserve the jobs we have and create new jobs and revenue streams here in the region.

RAIL TO SOUTHEASTERN MASSACHUSETTS:

A commuter rail to Southeastern Massachusetts was a popular topic at the forums and with over one hundred people who responded to the questionnaire. Many reasons were given as to why people believed we should extend rail access, but the most common was that it would create jobs.

Estimates say that there would be 7,800 construction jobs created over the next 20 years and over 3,800 permanent jobs by 2030. In addition, the rail project is expected to bring in an estimated \$18 million in revenue by 2030.

Over the past several years, I have worked hard to convince state leaders that expansion of commuter rail to Southeastern Massachusetts is a vital component to our region's success. I am

very pleased the Patrick/Murray Administration is working hard on this project because the potential it has for our region is tremendous. The overwhelming majority of people who mentioned the project were in support of it.

Future Action:

I will be creating a rail task force over the coming months to ensure this project stays on track and meets the needs of our area, creating jobs and building a connected, cohesive region. This task force will meet to address the concerns mentioned, including a source of funding for the rail project from Boston to Southeastern Mass., which could include a proposed extension from Middleboro to Wareham that I will strongly fight to include. We will push hard to keep the project on time and on track.

TOURISM/ RECREATION:

A topic mentioned was the need to increase tourism and recreation opportunities in our area. People suggested over and over that we need to find creative and innovative ways to increase our region's tourism and recreational opportunities. Some suggestions were to build a sports stadium, a casino, a racino, and to promote agritourism, using farms and agricultural resources as a tool for tourism. Like me, most of you have enjoyed the cultural and scenic attractions already existing here in the district. One person mentioned putting together a major marketing effort to promote our region's current attractions. I thought many of these thoughtful suggestions would be great and I agree we should find ways to promote and create opportunities for our area.

I believe this region's tourism and the rail project to be a linked opportunity. Many people mention that it will take more cars off the road heading into Boston and that it will allow more people the opportunity to head into Boston on the weekend due to the ease of a commuter line, but I believe we will also benefit greatly by the reverse commute. The people that live in the Boston area will be more likely to take a trip to this region, whether for a beach trips, apple picking, or visiting the historical sites in Southeastern Massachusetts. People in the Boston area, especially the student population, will have an affordable option to venture to our beautiful and varied region through day trips. With a rail option, we open a whole new door of opportunity for tourism in Southeastern Massachusetts.

Future Action:

Over the coming months I will put together meetings with state and local leaders, businesses, and relative organizations to further tourism and recreation opportunities for our region. In addition, if you have specific ideas that were not mentioned on this topic, please let me know.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS:

Infrastructure and transportation improvements were concerns mentioned frequently during the forums and in the questionnaires. It's no surprise that people want their roads and bridges to be in good condition, but there were also specific projects mentioned that I wanted to address.

Through assistance from the federal government, Massachusetts has received \$13.8 billion in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds. These funds are being used for a multitude of purposes, including spending for education, health care, infrastructure, renewable energies, among others. These funds are all intended to create jobs, promote investment, and increase consumer spending.

Today, many of the projects in this region have been made possible because of ARRA funds. As your State Senator, I fought to ensure that some of this funding benefited our region. Projects like the Routes 18 and 28 road resurfacing in Bridgewater and Middleboro, roadway reconstruction on sections of North and Birch Streets and Village Gate Drive in Bridgewater, and surfacing and related work on a section of Routes 6 and 28 in Wareham. All of these projects have been funded by ARRA funds and help maintain and further develop our infrastructure and transportation needs.

Another project that is finally moving forward is the Berkley-Dighton bridge project. There is now a temporary bridge in place to allow traffic through and will allow the old bridge to be taken down while new construction begins. This project took a long time to get the green light, but it's finally on its way.

Two projects of particular interest were brought to my attention at the forums: Middleboro's ring road project and rotary redesign. The people in Middleboro have mentioned to me that these projects are top priorities for the town.

Delivering Results:

In response to the citizens of Middleboro I am pleased to announce that we secured \$1.9 Million dollars for the ring road project. This long sought after project had overwhelming support in Middleboro and I am very pleased we were able to secure these funds. This project will make crucial transportation improvements that will allow for numerous economic development projects, including a healthcare facility which will create jobs and further promote commerce in our region. This announcement proves to the people of Middleboro that we are on the same page and that the state is listening. In Lt. Governor Murray's speech at the announcement, he referenced the importance of this project to the residents of Middleboro and how they continued to make it clear at the Middleboro forum that they wanted this project to move forward. I am very pleased that we were able to get the funding for this as it's crucial for the area.

Future Action:

I will continue fighting to secure funding for our region's necessary road improvements, bridge repairs, and general infrastructure improvements. I will work closely with Congressman Frank's office to see what federal funds we can secure to get the Middleboro rotary redesign project moving. In addition, the legislative delegation has met several times on these priorities and will continue to focus on these issues.

SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE:

Help for our small businesses! This was a common topic that was brought up and made very clear that people would like to see more resources made available for small businesses. One specific topic mentioned was a need for the state to put provisions into law to assist small business owners during these tough times.

As a legislator, I am committed to making sure our small businesses receive the necessary assistance to be successful. Recently, the legislature passed two pieces of legislation that I believe will significantly help small businesses. While they will not solve every problem our businesses are facing, they are a step in the right direction.

The economic development bill promotes a business-friendly environment that will help small businesses open, expand, and create jobs. This will be accomplished by overhauling the state's network of business development agencies to reduce redundancy and waste and provide a streamlined model with built-in oversight. This legislation also allowed this year's tax-free holiday, which was a topic mentioned by someone that attended a forum.

In addition, there is a measure aimed at revitalizing twenty-four of the Commonwealth's older industrial cities through tax incentives and urban investment commitments. As one of these cities, Taunton will have access to more resources to pursue economic development and revitalization projects. The tax credits and grants provided in the legislation will prove very helpful to increase employment and investment opportunities in Taunton.

Another recent piece of legislation that will assist small businesses is the health insurance reform bill. This bill reduces premium fluctuations in the market while also requiring insurers to offer more affordable health plans. Further provisions include allowing small businesses to group together and buy health plans at a lower cost and the requiring insurers to file premium rate increases with the Division of Insurance 90 days before their effective date. The Division of Insurance may disapprove the increase if excessive administration costs are found. This will all help reduce costs to small businesses, which will help them retain and create jobs.

The South Eastern Economic Development (SEED) Corporation, a strong proponent of helping small businesses, had members at every forum highlighting the options available to small businesses and the need for a better system to inform the owners about these opportunities. They mentioned that many business owners do not know of the great resources available and that an informational website or an entire marketing plan should be put together to increase awareness.

Another suggestion mentioned by a guest at one forum was for our state to investigate international opportunities for small- and medium-sized businesses. This person emphasized the resources that would be available to businesses that expand beyond the U.S.

Future Action:

The ideas from the SEED Corporation are exactly what we should be looking into. Over the coming weeks a meeting will be set up with the SEED Corporation so we can examine all options to continue to be helpful to small businesses in our area. It is my hope that they will help craft a

specific set of recommendations to bring to state officials. I will also continue examining legislation that will assist our small businesses.

In response to the speaker that suggested we should investigate international opportunities for small businesses, I have decided to put together a meeting with international agencies to provide training opportunities and information to small businesses. I plan to provide a regional opportunity for small and medium size businesses to learn new information on export trade and other best practices that can be helpful. I aim to have more information by my next report and I will use my Senator's Business and Economy Advisory Council meeting to focus on these two issues.

ENERGY AND OUR ENVIRONMENT:

With energy prices continuing to rise and the tragic situation in the Gulf, it's no surprise that energy and our environment was a major issue mentioned throughout the forums. All across the area, people want to see more environmentally friendly, clean energy alternatives and jobs. I believe we need to look further into alternative energy sources as well as renewable energy opportunities to put this state on a path toward being fiscally and environmentally secure and energy independent for many years to come.

There were multiple suggestions mentioned, one of which was for our state to focus on renewable energy initiatives like solar power, wind power, biomass, and other projects that reduce our reliance on oil. People who shared these concerns also mentioned that we need to find ways to create green jobs and offer companies incentives if they do create these green jobs.

Each day we send one billion dollars out of our country because of our reliance on foreign oil. Why not keep a portion of that here in alternative energy sources that we supply and control? On an environmental level, switching to cleaner energy sources will reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and at the same time will help make our communities more livable for future generations.

Although Massachusetts is one of the most progressive states in the country for renewable, clean energy initiatives, there is much work to be done. We are fortunate we had the foresight and progressive attitude with regard to renewable, clean energy alternatives. We have invested millions of dollars this year alone toward these types of projects and have backed legislation that will greatly help our state for many years to come. Key pieces of legislation like the *Green Communities Act*, the *Clean Energy Biofuels Act*, the *Green Jobs Act*, the *Global Warming Solutions Act*, which I authored, and the *Oceans Act* will keep our state on the right path for many years to come.

Future Action:

My office is presently working collaboratively with a number of communities that are interested in moving forward with wind and solar power projects. I will continue to pursue initiatives that will keep this state and our region, at the forefront of environmental and energy issues. I will

continue fighting for grants and other funds to help initiatives move forward in our region. I hope the people I represent will continue to inform me of the initiatives they find most important to them in terms of energy and environmental issues.

CONCLUSION:

I would like to thank everyone who attended the forums and sent in questionnaires offering their suggestions. I found this process to be a very productive means of public engagement and I have been very pleased with the overall response from the people throughout our district.

These forums have already helped bring state and local attention to many suggestions offered. On his recent visit to Middleboro to announce funding for the ring road project, Lt. Governor Tim Murray mentioned that the attention the project received at the Middleboro forum was a testament to its importance to the citizens of Middleboro. This report will provide further local, state, and federal attention to the topics mentioned and, I hope, will encourage people to provide additional ideas for us to consider.

Over the next couple months I will issue additional reports with the progress we have made, provide further information and opportunities for people to present new ideas. I wholeheartedly believe that if we can continue to open the path of communication between our state and local officials, then our region will continue to benefit. That was the whole goal of these forums, to receive ideas from you so that we know what is most important and so we can continue to achieve progress together.

Thank you for taking interest in these forums and our region. I look forward to continuing to work with the people I represent over the coming months on particular issues of concern. If you would like to offer further suggestions please contact me. Thank you

I also would like to send a special thank you to featured guests and members of the Administration who attended the forums:

- Ian Bowles, Secretary of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
- Michael Hunter, Undersecretary of Housing and Economic Development
- Tina Brooks, Undersecretary within the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development
- Local and State Officials
- Steve Smith of SRPEDD
- Representatives of SEED Corp.

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