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Essay

The days of "Don't blame me, I'm from Massachusetts" may be on their way back. When Nixon was elected by an overwhelming margin our fine state took a bit of ridicule in being the only state that did not vote Nixon's way. Cambridge, the home of Harvard, started being referred to as The Republic of Cambridge or the "Red" zone. It was not until Mr. Nixon was caught engaging in politics as usual that the bumper stickers started to reflect an attitude that we were right and the rest of the nation was wrong.

It turned out to be oxymoronic for the citizens of the commonwealth that when the republican party took a big hit on the national level it started to have a resurgence here. Somehow the seed was planted during the Dukakis administration and was fertilized when he ran for the nation's high office. The Willy Horton debacle made Mr. Dukakis appear to be soft on crime and the republicans seized upon this. They blamed all the ills of the commonwealth on the fact that the democrats had focused too much attention on those who did not deserve it and that they were wasting taxpayer dollars on programs that just did not work. I think the picture of Mike Dukakis in a tank bookened with the most unglamorous photo of Willie Horton may have pulled some independents surely over to the republican side.

Ed King came to the state house and showed that a republican could take the spoils system to as soaring of heights as any democrat. The cronyism was pretty out in the open and it almost put a roadblock in the way of the resurgence that it appeared the party was experiencing. It was fortunate for the republican party that Mr, King was not around -

- too long, and that William Weld came along. My opinion is that it was certainly beneficial for the republicans at that time that Mr. Weld came along, but it turned out to be to the detriment of the citizens.

William Weld had a strong oratory voice, he sold the platform well, and without giving any real rock solid plans for economic stability, plans for the low and middle class, he touted how the state would benefit from less government and wiser spending of taxpayer dollars. His tough on crime platform sealed the deal. It came along at a time when the state had rising crime rates, rates that were rising at lower levels than in other big cities but rising just the same. The increase in crime rates, especially property crimes and drug offenses, was directly related to the national epidemic of cheap drugs and crack cocaine. Mr Weld talked of returning prisoners to the joy of breaking rocks, while painting some fantasy picture that the democrats had constructed palaces for the states prisoners to live. Mr. Weld had no plan for addressing the social ills of drug addiction and the impact it has on the members of families who don't use drugs, and he failed to put in place real strategies for bringing jobs to the lower income communities.

Big business celebrated the arrival of Mr. Weld. He opened his arms to their needs, touted the jobs he would bring through his associations with companies that he claimed would bring a wealth of jobs to the state, but he failed to let the people know that these jobs were jobs that would only be available to the folks whose demographic had the lowest percentage of unemployment. In other words he was increasing jobs for those who did not need them, while doing nothing to bring the types of jobs that the neediest demographic required. Who filled these new positions? People from out of state. Massachusetts saw an incredible influx of people coming to fill these positions, while also consuming the state services that were already stretched to the limit.

The interest and pressure groups took up most of Mr. Weld's attention. The Mattapan corridor in Boston was going through a radical series of changes. Many neighborhoods that had once been middle class -

- working folk strongholds were becoming lower class borderline welfare state areas, with single parentage and socially stripped programming zones. The schools were falling to the level of those in East St. Louis and South Chicago, with plights just like those described in Jonothan Kozol's book Savage Inequalities. In Roxbury the average classroom size was 40 students per teacher, with decade old textbooks and equipment, while in Wellsley the class size was 20-25 per teacher with new books, state of the art audio visual equipment, and a sense of hope that just did not exist in the inner city schools.

The political organizations of the time seemed to be big business servants who were thowing fuel on the fire the republicans had burning for their interests. The "no nukers" and "socialists" from Red Cambridge were being ridiculed by the media. Men and women who were perceptive enough to see what the lack of funding for the poor, lacking education for their children, and nonsense tough on crime fantasies, were going to have on the furture of the state were made to look like they were out of touch bleeding hearts who were blind to the realtime benefits that were happening around them. Today the high rate of homicides in the Mattapan corridor is directly related to the tough on crime policies that stripped the area of fathers and role models, while being complicated by the fact that cutting the social aid programs left the mothers and children out in the cold leaving a whole new generation of underpriviledged hopeless. When you strip vast numbers of folks of hope what is left? Despair. What comes from dispair? Drugs, crime, mental illness, and a myriad of tragedies.

Ralph Wright talks about the excitment of change in a political era in Vermont. Religion and pressure groups behind the faith based lobbyists certainly played a big role, but Vermont has a real big chasm of difference between its problems and the prblems we face, and have historically faced, here in Massachusetts. Religion has always played a large role here, and probably more than in most states the Catholic church has had some powers over our officials, but when you can get a mormon elected in a state with almost no mormons, I think it is indicative of the fact that there are more -

- glaring issues to the voters than religion in their decision making process. Vermont does not have a Roxbury. There is no Lynn in Vermont. You can't compare Brattleboro to Lowell. We have vast expanses of underprivileged with all the social ill baggage that comes with it. I think the voters of our fine state would trade their problems for the problems of the green mountain state anytime.

The legislative process here in the commonwealth has always revolved around the power brokers and their issue of the time. It has always been clear that the minority communities are under represented. The composition of the senate and house does not reflect the racial breakdown of the state. How many black judges do we have? How many hispanic jurists? There is a Sullivan in every courthouse. Not too many Rodrigues' to be found. Now this does not mean that the process has not made valiant attempts to address the needs of the poor and the minorities, in many cases it has, but to have an actual real understanding of the needs and complexities of such communities you have to have had some hands on experience. Trying to understand what's really going on, from the outside, many times offers a truly distorted view. You don't have to be from Roxbury to understand Roxbury, but you certainly have to go there and get your hands dirty to really know what is going on. You have to listen to those effected by the proposals, policies, and laws. Feel it, taste it, and see it.

The democratic party may have lost touch with the real reason you need to put money into social programs. It got away from the fact that real effective change sometimes takes many years and that you can't rely on the band aid fixes that William Weld and the like put in place, always protecting the bottom lines of businesses who care little for the welfare of the state. When you begin to fix education by pumping money for learning tools into the schools, the results of that may not be seen for a couple of decades. When you address the use of drugs by the youth of an area, the lower crime rate may not be displayed for years to come. The new value system may not appear for another generation or two. Is it all worth it? The democratic party knows it is, but they have to go back to stating -

- loud and clear and getting the voters to believe it. Just like the tough on crime legislation and ideas are now clearly seen for the damage they caused, so can the long term programs to help those most in need be crystal clear as to how they pay off for everyone in the commonwealth down the road.

Deval Patrick is here. Our first black Governor. A social change democrat. he has already felt the wrath of the good ole boy political network here over minors issues such as his Cadillac and office curtains, but I believe that he sees the big picture. The party is back and he needs to be at the head of the resurgence. This has historically been a democratic state and that means he will have some support in place, but he really needs to use the most effective aspects of the democratic platform to bring bipartisanship. You've got to throw big business a bone, but you must first look out for the needs of the people. Education must become a priority. We can't allow our neighborhoods to fall into the vast depth of disrepair and hopelessness that befell the neighborhoods of East St. Louis and South Chicago. The rich sometimes have to pay a little more for the poor. The haves must help the have nots. It may anger the rich and powerful that their republican tax breaks are not as lucrative under the democratic rule, but for the interests of the people to be best served it just has to be that way, and in many cases the rich fair just as well as the poor from the benefits these measures take. Less crime = lower insurance. Higher level of education = more productive workforce.

The democrats are certainly back here in the Commonwealth. Mr. Patrick has the big desk in the executive chamber. The house and the senate have democratic majorities. The task at hand can't be to rule with an iron fist jamming the platform down your foes throats. It is time for the democrats be the catalyst to bring the divisions closer. It is time for bipartisan social reform. Real change must be supported by all. It is going to be interesting to see how it all plays out.

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