

## State Representative - 7th Plymouth District - Republican Party Primary

With a spate of retirements this year, the next session of the Massachusetts Legislature will feature a number of new faces. Democrats have a large majority in both the House and Senate, and this fall's elections are unlikely to change the balance of power significantly. But Republicans have targeted a host of races they believe they can win, and the party could succeed in altering the dynamic on Beacon Hill if they gain several seats.

Both senators and representatives are elected every two years; the Senate has 40 members and the House, 160. Each branch elects its own leader from its membership. The Massachusetts Senate is the second oldest democratic deliberative body in the world.

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**Geoff Diehl (R)**

Account executive

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### Details

#### Biographical Information

**Incumbent:** No

**Age:** 41

**Family:** Wife KathyJo; daughters Kaylee, 8, and Emily, 4

**City / Town:** Whitman

**Education:** Lehigh University: Bachelor of arts degree in government and bachelor of arts degree in urban studies.

**Experience:** Account executive with Poyant Signs, the largest sign manufacturer in New England. Co-owner of Boss Academy of Performing Arts, where my wife is director. Member of Whitman Finance Committee. Member of both South Shore and Metro South Chambers of Commerce. Eagle Scout.

**Why are you running for this office?:** The Massachusetts Legislature no longer represents the interests of the hard-working families of the Commonwealth, and real reform requires that new voices take over and make the smart choices that will get our economy back on track and get people back to work again. One-party rule on Beacon Hill has led to wasteful spending and cuts to local aid, which affects the education of our children and the care of seniors, and compromises the safety of our towns with reduced emergency services. I will work every day to represent the interests of the people of my district and of the state of Massachusetts, and I will push for legislation that keeps government from intruding on our lives and restricting the growth of businesses that allow us to achieve our individual and collective goals in life.

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The Mass. Taxpayers Foundation recently recommended that local officials be given the power to design their own health plans without having to negotiate with the unions, and that state retirees use Medicare for their primary health care coverage. Do you support these proposals?

The MTF's outline of proposals that could save \$100 million in the first year, and over \$2 billion over the next 30 years, are excellent and I fully support them. Most changes only affect new hires, and they allow our towns to mitigate some of the 12% cuts that have hit local aid over the last three years.

As a member of the Whitman Finance Committee, I see the direct impact of cuts by the state to our local budgets, including unfunded mandates like the Quinn Bill. I am also the Finance Committee liaison to the Whitman-Hansen School Board, and when the state broke their promise to hold schools "harmless," 1.5% was cut from Chapter 70 funds.

Town are put into a bind each and every year, forcing departments to go head-to-head and causing fear and suspicion among citizens as they wrestle to make budgets work each year. I believe that local aid should be fully funded at 100% each year, plus the cost of living adjustment (if possible), THEN let the state fund the remaining services required instead of putting pet projects and pork at the front of the line in the "business as usual" attitude held by the Legislature.

Allowing municipalities to move their health plans outside of collective bargaining, adjusting overly generous benefits like the \$5 co-pay, and asking retirees to utilize Medicare, which will lower the overall costs of municipal health plans by approximately 5%, are simple yet effective steps we can take toward allowing our cities and towns to manage the taxpayers' hard-earned money.

The foundation also proposed changes in state and municipal pensions, such as increasing the retirement age and capping annual pensions at \$100,000. Do you agree?

My job in the sign industry allows me to meet many business owners, either starting up a company or re-branding their business. Contrary to what people may want to believe about the people who run small- to medium-sized businesses, these folks don't have corporate jets or offshore bank accounts. In fact, many of them make less than some of their key employees. And when times are tough, they often take drastic cuts or forgo a salary altogether in order to keep the business afloat. Many small business owners dream of a time when their annual salary can reach \$100,000.

Yet we seem to be living in an age where government spending beyond its means is acceptable and that, somehow, justifies allocating more than we can afford for municipal employee salaries and pensions. I believe that a cap at \$100,000 for pensions is more than fair, and I hope that we have learned our lesson as a state, and a nation, in allowing irresponsible government spending.

Regarding retirement, we would all like to be able to achieve the "American Dream" as early in our lives as possible. But to expect our fellow neighbors, who still work well into their late 60s, to carry the burden seems wrong. Something as simple as moving the minimum retirement from age 55 to 60, which is lower than the national average, seems to me to be a fair expectation as well.

**Do you believe in keeping the requirement that a student must pass the MCAS or an MCAS-like test in order to graduate from high school?**

Since 1993, we've spent billions developing a school curriculum that is ultimately judged by the results when students take the MCAS test. The test was put in place to insure that the system of teaching would be fair and balanced across all towns and cities of the Commonwealth. It may not be a perfect test, but it has been the benchmark that has allowed education in Massachusetts to rank near the top in the nation for years.

The sudden and, as I see it, ill-conceived plan to move to the "Common Core" plan that utilizes national standards jeopardizes the commitment to MCAS testing. And what do we gain from it? \$250 million, spread out over four years. Thirty-three cents a student.

What is the old adage? If it ain't broke, don't fix it... We've just sold our children's souls for immediate cash because our state Legislature has a spending monkey on its back and it needed a quick fix from the federal government.

I certainly hope we retain the MCAS testing as our standard because I don't believe that we need to "dumb down" our kids to a federal standard; rather, we should lead by example.

**Should the state Legislature be exempt from the state's public records law?**

What the state Legislature requires most is greater transparency to the process of drafting and enacting legislation for the Commonwealth. The current closed-door, back-room deals prevent true representation of the people; plus, it masks the underhanded dealings of those who would serve in office only to enrich and/or empower themselves and their friends at the expense of hard-working taxpayers.

My opponent voted "No" in a roll call vote (No. 09-19, dated 2/11/09) that would have made public, via the state's website, all committee votes and "No" to another roll call on the same day (No. 09-022) which would make committee meetings open to the public.

The Legislature has created a system by which votes are taken at night, are made difficult to locate, and are taken in a way that is purposely confusing to the public - e.g. a "Yes" vote will sometimes be to send a bill or amendment "to study," which effectively kills it. However, people are led to believe that their senator or representative was in favor of the legislation.

The Legislature needs to have its rules restructured and we also need people to serve who are not afraid of taking a stand on issues, then defending their vote. That is the whole purpose of a representative democracy and it is what defines our nation as a leader in the free world.

**Cite any votes (if an incumbent) or positions (if a challenger or newcomer) you have taken that disagree with the stance taken by your party's legislative leadership.**

I, like the Massachusetts Republican Party, believe that everyone should have access to affordable health insurance, but I am not a proponent of the health insurance legislation requiring every Massachusetts citizen to purchase health insurance, which was enacted during the Romney administration. Much like the recently passed national health care plan, I don't see it being sustainable without serious reforms taking place in regards to tort reform and the liability costs imposed on caregivers.

**Will you make public any questionnaires you fill out in pursuit of the endorsement of unions or other groups?**

Questionnaires I have filled out are communications I consider private correspondence between myself and the party interested in my views and beliefs. I have no problem whatsoever if any of those groups wish to make my answers public. Mark Twain (aka Samuel L. Clemens) once said, "If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything." I'm happy to share whatever people want to know, as I believe in a personal and professional life of honesty and integrity.

**Should the Legislature be subject to a full audit?**

With a track record of three indicted Speakers in a row, and with all the scandals involving bribes, patronage, and unaccounted spending, I am 100% behind a full audit of the Legislature.

On Feb. 2, 2009, the House took up an "amendment [that] would ensure that independent auditors have access to all financial records for the House and would also require that audits be conducted with generally accepted standards to ensure the public trust." [Roll call No. 09-013] My opponent voted "No" to that amendment, just one of the 97.8% of votes in line with what Speaker DeLeo voted (an improvement over his 99% voting record in '08 with indicted Speaker Sal DiMasi - whom he voted to elect as Speaker, despite the knowledge of an impending indictment).

People want to know where \$60 million goes each year, as we certainly aren't getting our money's worth from the current make-up of the legislative body with single-party domination on Beacon Hill. I support a full audit and would like to enact harsher penalties for financial misconduct that occur at the hands of the legislators entrusted to run our state.

**Is the Legislature holding enough full formal sessions?**

Anyone who's able to find out how long the Legislature convenes for knows that, on most days, the gavel is pounded to open the session, a move to close the session is entertained, and the gavel is swung, once again, to announce the close of the day's "activities."

Let's face facts: in Massachusetts, we pay a full-time salary for a part-time Legislature. The Legislature is given 5 months of paid vacation, and they've had 6 raises in the last 15 years. With base pay, committee assignments, district allowances, and reimbursements, a legislator can make anywhere from \$61,439 to well over \$100,000 annually.

So the question is, are we getting our money's worth? A year ago, the Legislature was debating whether the "Fluffernutter" should be the state sandwich, right in the middle of our massive economic recession. This year, when they had the opportunity to actually enact something meaningful - a casino bill that would have brought immediate cash and jobs to the Commonwealth - they put off the vote until the last hours of the last day of the session and STILL fumbled the ball!

Do I think the Legislature holds enough formal sessions? No. Not nearly enough.

Should there be term limits for the jobs of House Speaker and Senate President?

In an ideal world, where patronage and influence peddling were not the order of the day, I would say that there should be no limits, as it would be unwise to force effective leadership out of office due to arbitrary time constraints. In the state of Massachusetts, however, it might be time to review the term of power we give to the leaders of the elected bodies of the Legislature. Political office should be "for the people" and, in a state that has not seen true balance between parties for decades, laws have been passed that insure that the same party and people stay in office, often at the expense of those for whom they're purported to serve.

My opponent, ironically a member of the House Ethics Committee, voted for Sal DiMasi as Speaker despite the impending indictment of corruption, so it should be no surprise that these bodies cannot regulate themselves through unselfish leadership. I would like to see REAL reform on Beacon Hill, and setting term limits for the Speaker and Senate President is a sound foundation toward the achievement of those efforts.