

December 18, 2024

---

## OPINION

# Lee & Portnoy: Voters give pols lesson in moderation

*By John T.C. Lee, Ph.D. and Adam Portnoy*

The opportunity to run a business, create jobs, and contribute to the overall economic health of the people in our Commonwealth is what motivates us every day. But rising costs and a dwindling talent pool have been huge obstacles.

The election made one thing clear: It's not just business owners that feel this way. People from all walks of life are feeling the squeeze.

Our state still retains its progressive values, but it's worth noting that we saw one of the largest shifts to the right of any state when it came to electing our next president. Donald Trump won approximately a quarter of cities and towns across the Bay State (87 out of 351 municipalities); 33 towns and cities that voted for Joe Biden in 2020 ended up flipping to Trump.

This outcome wasn't a result of party loyalty, but a clear desire for balance among our electorate. Almost 40% of people who identify as independent voted for the Republican presidential candidate. Exit polls show that in Massachusetts, voters viewed the economy and jobs as the most important issue facing the nation.

On ballot issues, the message of economic moderation remained constant: Voters roundly rejected Question 5, which would have raised costs for small restaurants and hurt tipped workers. And they approved of Question 1, which could provide more sunlight on how the Legislature is spending their money.

It's little wonder that it was economic issues, not social ones, that were top of everyone's mind.

Polling from the Mass Opportunity Alliance, where we are board members, showed that over 80% of residents believe taxes are too high. Another 76% said general cost of living concerns were one of the top issues driving people out of Massachusetts.

We do know people are leaving. An analysis of IRS data from Pioneer Institute found that outmigration from the state has climbed by a shocking 1,100% over the past decade.

Concerns about the high cost of living are clearly coloring public sentiment across the board – but that's not necessarily a bad thing. It provides us with an opportunity to look at the issues facing Massachusetts residents in a new light.

Several of our elected officials have said as much. House Speaker Ron Mariano struck the right tone when he called the election an “opportunity to renew our focus on the issues that drove voters across the country towards (the political right).” Sen. John Velis, of Western Mass., commented “We need to focus on the issues that are at the forefront of voters’ minds across the country.”

They’re both right: Massachusetts needs to refocus on the pocketbook issues (like high taxes and a high cost of living) that have accelerated our outmigration crisis.

We’re lucky to call Massachusetts home, but much of our state’s potential remains untapped. Leading with fiscal responsibility will take us down the path to reinvigorating our economy state-wide. A more competitive Massachusetts means a better quality of life for all.

*John T.C. Lee, Ph.D., is president and chief executive officer of MKS Instruments. Adam Portnoy is president and chief executive officer of the RMR Group.*