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Anderson: Mass. Must Stay Engaged on Economic Reform

Innovation leader defends ballot question effort after court removal

By Christopher R. Anderson – Massachusetts High Technology Council, Inc.

Recent commentary surrounding the Supreme Judicial Court's decision to remove the income tax ballot question from the November ballot has focused heavily on identifying winners and losers.

Politics often encourages people to view public policy debates through the lens of victory and defeat.

Innovation leaders see things differently.

Every day, Massachusetts companies invest in research, product development, acquisitions, and new technologies without knowing exactly how events will unfold. Not every initiative succeeds on its original timeline. Not every investment follows its intended path. Yet companies continue making those investments because meaningful progress comes from experimentation, learning, adaptation, and the creation of new capabilities.

The same principle applies to public policy leadership.

The income tax ballot question was designed to be the first in a series of strategies intended to elevate awareness of the Commonwealth's affordability and competitiveness challenges while building support for practical solutions to address them. The objective was not simply to raise awareness, but to translate concern into action.

By that measure, the effort achieved far more than many observers acknowledge.

Over the past two years, we helped create something Massachusetts did not previously have: a dedicated and respected research, communications, and citizen-engagement platform focused on affordability, competitiveness, and economic opportunity.

The [Mass Opportunity Alliance \(MOA\)](#) was established to identify emerging challenges, elevate data-driven analysis, engage residents in conversations about public policy, and ensure that issues affecting Massachusetts' long-term competitiveness receive sustained public attention. In less than two years, [MOA](#) has produced influential research on outmigration and affordability, engaged hundreds of thousands of

residents through digital media, and helped move competitiveness concerns from the margins of public debate to the center of policy discussions.

In innovation-driven organizations, new capabilities are often among the most valuable outcomes of any strategic investment. The creation of MOA represents exactly that kind of capability. The ballot question was one initiative. MOA is long-term infrastructure.

Over the past year, affordability and competitiveness have become central topics of discussion among business leaders, policymakers, the media and residents. Data on outmigration, tax burdens, housing costs, and economic competitiveness have entered the mainstream policy debate. Legislative leaders, administration officials, employers, and civic organizations are increasingly engaged in conversations about how to strengthen Massachusetts' competitive position.

Those developments did not occur by accident. They occurred because leaders were willing to step onto the field.

Earlier this year, I wrote that Massachusetts faces a choice between being spectators and participants in shaping our future. The same principle applies today. Progress rarely comes from those watching from the sidelines. It comes from leaders willing to engage, test ideas, challenge assumptions, and remain committed even when outcomes are uncertain.

That is true in innovation. It is true in business. And it is true in public policy.

Leadership is not demonstrated when outcomes are guaranteed. Leadership is demonstrated when individuals and organizations are willing to advance ideas, engage in difficult conversations, and stay focused on long-term objectives even when circumstances change.

The court's decision changed one pathway for advancing reform. It did not change the challenges facing Massachusetts.

The commonwealth still faces affordability pressures. We continue to lose residents and taxable income to other states. Employers continue to compete for talent in an increasingly competitive environment. The need for policies that strengthen Massachusetts' competitiveness remains as important as ever.

The lesson from this experience is not that leaders should disengage when the path becomes more difficult.

The lesson is that meaningful progress requires leaders willing to stay in the game.

Innovation does not advance because every experiment succeeds. It advances because organizations learn, adapt, and continue moving forward. And the work of strengthening our affordability, competitiveness, and economic future will continue.

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