

# **10.31.08 - Ethics Reforms Announced**

**Governor Deval L. Patrick**

**Ethics Announcement**

**October 31, 2008**

**As Delivered**

Thank you all for coming; good afternoon.

Several charges of unethical or illegal behavior by public officials over the last several months are both personally upsetting and institutionally self-defeating. Without singling out any one person or allegation, they upset me because they imply a repeated and careless disregard for the public trust. They are self-defeating because, whether true or false, they distract us from doing the people's business. In times like these, in particular, there is a lot of important public work to do.

In a successful democracy, the currency of government is not money. It's integrity. We in public office are not entitled to our positions. We are placed here by voters to do the best we can on their behalf. And we are expected to conduct their business honestly and openly.

I know from the nearly two years I have been here now that there are many, many serious and able office holders in the Legislature and elsewhere in government whose sole motivation is to serve the public good. They deliver outstanding results under difficult circumstances, they do so the right way, and they welcome accountability. They inspire me and those who know their work. I thank them for the example they set here on Beacon Hill.

But when a small few act out, it casts a shadow on the good work of those many good people, and it affects government's ability to function as well as it should.

That, I believe, is where we are today. And it must be addressed. But if all we do is use this occasion to score cheap political points or gain partisan advantage, we will have missed a chance and missed the point.

We need ethics and lobbying reform, and we need it now. Today we have inadequate penalties and a counterproductive duplication of enforcement effort. We need to fix this. I have therefore directed my Chief Legal Counsel Ben Clements to convene a task force of experts and other distinguished participants on a nonpartisan basis to develop a package of reforms in time for the Legislature's return in January. I want action on this package within the first thirty days of the new session. The public expects

and deserves no less.

I will also file a bill to reform the practice of home rule petitions. Home rule petitions are the bills by which the Legislature regulates local government actions -- everything from changing the day for Town Meeting to permitting an individual applicant to sit for the firefighter's exam. These decisions are inherently local, and more often than not routine and non-controversial. But they are also used as bargaining chips to deter action on other business or derail it entirely. In one recent example, a multi-million dollar mixed use development promising hundreds of jobs and lots of new economic activity has been held up by a petition to approve a single liquor license.

I filed a bill last year to begin to address this. I intend to file an expanded version in the coming session. Now more than ever, we on Beacon Hill must focus on getting our economy moving again and expanding opportunity and economic security.

In the same vein, we will continue to press our reform agenda, including pension and benefits reform, education reform, health care reform (particularly cost containment), and reform of the Turnpike Authority and other transportation agencies. Swift action on each of these measures is equally important both to move Massachusetts forward and to regaining the public's trust.

Finally, I want to offer a respectful reminder to the general public about your responsibility. As I said, there are many men and women of exceptional intellect and high integrity who serve in public office in Massachusetts. Don't lose sight of that. They share the sense of outrage and disgust the rest of us feel when a public official breaches the public trust.

However, in a Democracy, individual citizens have responsibilities, too. We have one of the lowest rates of electoral participation in America. Not only are voting rates low, but few incumbents are challenged at election time by competing candidates. I am not criticizing incumbency, long-term office holders or any one political party. I am only acknowledging the plain fact that none of us in public office is entitled to the positions we hold. We have to earn them, and we ought to have to earn your trust to keep them. We must be accountable not just to the law and to the ethics rules, but to you. And you - as citizens -- must hold us accountable.

So, I want to make a call on my fellow citizens to take responsibility for your government by standing for election to local and statewide office, by participating in civic life, and by voting. And I want to call on my fellow office holders to welcome that challenge. (I fully expect to be challenged when I run for re-election in 2010, and I welcome it. I will be ready.) Let's each use the prospect of that challenge as an opportunity to focus our work, to sharpen our game, and to step up our performance.

None of us will get it right all the time or will satisfy every voter with every action or position we take. But I

trust the electorate to see the whole picture and I ask the electorate to engage.

Now some will undoubtedly ridicule what I have said today. Some will dismiss these measures and views out of hand or try to use what I have said as another chance to take a political potshot. That is another predictable feature of this job. But I came to Beacon Hill to bring change, because I believe change is what we need to move Massachusetts forward. That agenda will continue. It's apparent from the circumstances that reform of how we govern - not just what we focus on - must now be a part of that agenda.

I want to thank you all for coming.