

Putting the 'Mass' in Massachusetts

By Frederick Clarkson

By reputation Massachusetts is the most Democratic state in the country, with good reason—its entire congressional delegation is Democratic, as are 171 of the state's 200 legislators.

Despite this overwhelming majority, many progressives have been disenchanted as conservative Democrats held sway. But after a decade or so retired into the political wilderness they are now deploying innovative grassroots strategies that could reshape politics in Massachusetts—and provide a model for the nation.

"[Legislators] have failed to enact any of the progressive planks in the party platform, including universal single payer health care and clean elections," says Leo Mader, a progressive union and community activist from Amherst.

Rather than giving up and backing third-party protest candidates, Mader and other progressives are seeking to make ideological inroads by increasing their numbers within the Democratic Party. Their principal target now is the state's House of Representatives, where, they believe, a shift of 25 seats could be enough to make the House a decidedly progressive place. "If that happens it will be an earthquake," he says.

Three organizations epitomize this search for new ways to conduct politics and foster civic engagement: Neighbor-to-Neighbor, Boston Vote and Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts.

Neighbor-to-Neighbor

The Boston-based Neighbor-to-Neighbor organization began in 1996 after an analysis showed that 47 House districts ought to have more progressive representatives than they had. Using grassroots organizing, leadership development, electoral campaigns, legislative lobbying and voter registration and education, the group "built power" in low-income and working-class communities.

Neighbor-to-Neighbor now boasts an impressive record of turning around the problem of low levels of voter participation in lower-income urban communities. The group was able to dramatically increase 2002 voter turnout in low-income precincts of several cities: These included increases of 185 percent in Salem, 900 percent in Lynn; 210 percent in Leominster; 589 percent in Fitchburg; and 131 percent in Worcester. Such remarkable successes have contributed to the election of progressive candidates in several cities as well as two progressive democratic members of Congress, Rep. James McGovern of

Worcester and Rep. John Tierney of Gloucester. Sustained organizing by Neighbor-to-Neighbor in Worcester, Salem and Holyoke was credited as the deciding factor in the 2003 election of progressive, Latino city councilors in those cities.

"Since 1997 we have selected or swung a large bloc of the target legislators," says Executive Director Harris Grubman. He admits about 25 are needed to make the House a reasonably progressive place, but that goal is in sight. "There is nothing quite like the persuasive impact of seeing your colleagues go down."

Neighbor-to-Neighbor's success is based on "targeted organizing" in low-income communities around what it calls "The Working Family Agenda." As the group's Web site puts it, this agenda "guarantees jobs, education and training, affordable child care, health care and housing, and a welfare safety net"—is the cornerstone of the program. Neighbor-to-Neighbor's methods include year-round intensive voter contact and issue mobilization across the election cycle, followed by personal, telephone and mail contact during electoral campaigns. "With year-round voter engagement," Grubman says, "you change the equation dramatically. Most people don't pay much attention to politics until the candidates are running around."

Boston Vote

Another different and innovative model with electoral implications has been pioneered by Boston Vote, a nonprofit, tax exempt organization founded in 1999 to encourage social service and other nonprofit agencies in low-income urban areas to register their clients to vote and help to turn them out on election day. Boston Vote is, in its way, targeting the same kinds of communities as Neighbor-to-Neighbor, but their main method has been to encourage nonprofit service organizations to integrate non-partisan voter registration and mobilization into their existing programs. Boston Vote and several participating agencies have received major foundation funding to develop a civic education program to increase voter participation among low-income communities of color. Some 140 groups participate in the program, of which about 50 are very active.

"We've gotten out the message that these nonprofits really depend on voter turnout in order to get their voices heard, to fulfill their missions and to receive continued funding," says George Pillsbury, policy director of Boston Vote. "What progressives have done over 30 years is set up good nonprofit organizations

that have grown out of various pieces of liberal legislation—organizations that the communities fundamentally trust.”

These efforts have ratcheted up voter participation in the targeted communities, Pillsbury says, which is responsible for the reelection of Felix Arroyo, a Latino Boston councilor. “Voter turnout in the black, Asian and Latino communities went up 80 percent, while [turnout in] the white communities went down 12 percent,” Pillsbury says. “Felix Arroyo came in second in a field of 5 [for four seats], because our precincts turned out.”

Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts

Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts (PDM) grew out of the 2002 gubernatorial campaign of former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich—whose spirited yet unsuccessful bid for the Democratic nomination attracted thousands of previously alienated and uninvolved progressives. After Republican Mitt Romney defeated Democratic regular Shannon O'Brien in the general election, some former Reich supporters decided to create a permanent progressive electoral organization that would continue to invite progressives into the party, and train leaders and activists with the goal of increasing the political and electoral power of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party.

PDM has quickly grown beyond the initial group of Reich supporters. Local organizing committees have been formed in a dozen towns and cities, including Gloucester, Lexington, Worcester, Springfield, Amherst and Williamstown. The secret of the group's success to date is the organizing method of PDM board member

Marshall Ganz, a former top organizer for the United Farm Workers who is now teaching at Harvard. Ganz's method focuses on one-on-one recruiting, the development of personal political relationships and leadership training—all aimed at expanding the pool of progressive voters and activists. According to fellow PDM leader Joan Lancourt of Boston Ganz's model is “based on the cumulative experiences and best practices of a long, proud history of American efforts at progressive organizing—the union movement, civil rights, the women's movement and a wide array of community-organizing approaches.”

While these initiatives hold great promise, they all have arisen from a resurgent progressive movement in the state and are building on the work of other organizations, notably the statewide Commonwealth Coalition. Its 22 member organizations of unions and women and environmental groups engage in more traditional electoral campaigns and have trained thousands of activists in the past 15 years. The coalition also was instrumental in creating a progressive caucus of state legislators.

Such efforts have made headway, but many progressives feel it's long past time to make Democratic values real in public policy.

“If we are going to have political party,” says Grubman, “it needs to mean something.” The next few years will be pivotal in determining what that will be. ■

Frederick Clarkson is a writer and lecturer based in Northampton, Mass., and is a member of the Interim Coordinating Committee of Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts.



Three Ways to Shape a Better World with Your Investments

Domini Social Equity Fund®
offers growth opportunities through a portfolio of stocks selected for their social and environmental performance.

Domini Social Bond Fund®
provides diversification while supporting homeowners and small business owners in struggling communities.

Domini Money Market Account®
offers safety and liquidity through FDIC-insured deposits that help promote community development.

Please obtain a current prospectus for more complete information including risks, fees, and expenses, by calling 1-800-530-5321 or online at www.domini.com.

Domini 
SOCIAL INVESTMENTS®
The Way You Invest Matters®

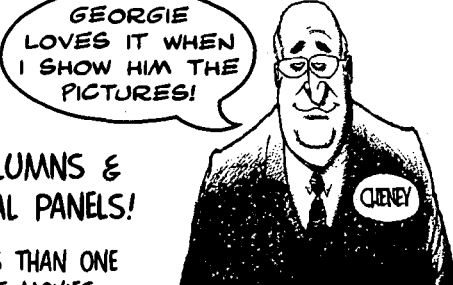
Visit www.domini.com or Call us at 1-800-530-5321

The Domini Social Equity Fund and the Domini Social Bond Fund are subject to market risks and are not insured. You may lose money. The Domini Social Bond Fund's community development investments may be unrated and carry greater credit risks than the Fund's other investments. The Domini Social Bond Fund currently holds a large percentage of its portfolio in mortgage-backed securities. During periods of falling interest rates these securities may prepay the principal due, which may lower the Fund's return by causing it to reinvest at lower interest rates. DSIL Investment Services LLC, Distributor (DSILD). 10/03

CHEAP LAUGHS AT BUSH'S EXPENSE!
SUBSCRIBE TO THE


HUMOR TIMES!

HILARIOUS
POLITICAL
CARTOONS,
AS WELL AS
HUMOR COLUMNS &
NON-POLITICAL PANELS!



YES, FOR LESS THAN ONE
NIGHT AT THE MOVIES,
YOU CAN LAUGH ALL YEAR!

GO TO WWW.HUMORTIMES.COM OR SEND A CHECK
OR MONEY ORDER FOR ONLY \$15⁰⁰
(FOR 12 ISSUES) TO:



Humor Times
P.O.B. 162429
Sacramento,
CA 95816

ALSO... SAMPLE ISSUES CAN
BE HAD FOR MERELY \$1⁰⁰ !!!

VOTING MACHINES GONE WILD!

BY MARK LEWELLEN-BIDDLE

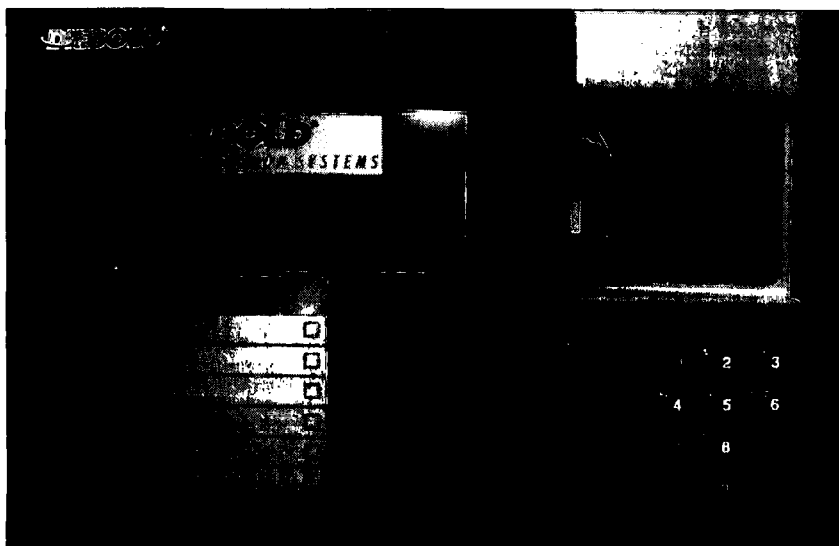
As the federally mandated deadline nears for state election officials to replace lever and punch-card voting machines with electronic systems, disturbing and systemic problems are emerging.

E-voting has obvious downsides—no ability to check recorded votes, no ability to perform meaningful recounts and susceptibility to electronic voting fraud. Nonetheless, the 2002 Help America Vote Act (HAVA) mandates that by January 1 states submit plans to make the switch in time for the 2006 elections.

More troubling, the backers of the act and the manufacturers of e-voting machines are a rat's nest of conflicts that includes Northrop-Grumman, Lockheed-Martin, Electronic Data Systems (EDS) and Accenture. Why are major defense contractors like Northrop-Grumman and Lockheed-Martin mucking about in the American electoral system? And who are Accenture and EDS?

Until January 1, 2001, Accenture was known as Andersen Consulting, a part of Arthur Andersen. Despite having offshore headquarters, Accenture is a member of the U.S. Coalition of Service Industries (USCSI), an industry association that promotes vastly extending the privatization and free trade in services via the WTO and GATT. It also is a member of U.S. Trade, the coalition that pushed for fast-track trade authority. In February 2001, Accenture and election.com, the leading global election software and services company, formed "an alliance to jointly deliver comprehensive election solutions to governments worldwide. ... The companies will combine their strengths and experience in the development of election software and the use of technology to offer governments new efficiencies that aid election administration." Election.com also has a contract with the Federal Voter Assistance program to provide online absentee balloting for the armed services. It is expected to be completely electronic, that is, have no paper trail against which to check results.

This is worrisome because Accenture already has been involved



in scandals in the United States and Canada. In the late '90s, the company was hired to overhaul Ontario's welfare service for \$50 million-\$70 million. By 2002, the project was capped at \$180 million, although the total reached \$246 million. To meet its contractual agreement with Accenture, the Ontario government was forced to cut welfare payments to \$355.71 per child in poverty and fire large numbers of social service workers. Election.com also had problems in Canada. The company contracted to provide online Internet voting for the National Democratic Party in 2003, but hackers paralyzed the central computer and disrupted voting. The security and accuracy of election.com's voting software has since come under attack by Canadian voters who also challenged the ballotless software.

EDS, another internationally oriented information technology corporation, recently received a \$51 million subcontract from Sytel Inc, a software and service provider to the Army, Air Force and Dow Chemical, among others, to "support personnel systems including personnel management, hiring and job postings, employee training, job exchange programs and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complaint tracking for the Department of Homeland Security."