

ISLAND COMMENTARY

Massachusetts was a straw in the wind

By Gene Ward

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Hawaii and Massachusetts are among the most unionized states in the country, with super majorities of Democrats controlling their state governments. So how was it possible that a Republican managed to sneak into one of the highest offices in the nation in one of the most Democratic-controlled states in the nation?

If we examine all that was happening in Massachusetts at the time of Scott Brown's election to the U.S. Senate, we can see that there were some bad policies in motion that conditioned the electorate, and Hawaii seems determined to follow Massachusetts' lead.

Most of the media coverage of Brown's victory focused on a weak opponent and his disagreement with health care and other policies associated with the Obama administration. While there's truth to this, there was more going on than meets the eye.

Just months before Brown's election, the Massachusetts Legislature increased taxes by more than \$1 billion. The state's sales tax was increased to 6.25 percent and extended to the retail sale of alcohol. The Legislature also created a new 0.75 percent local option tax on restaurant meals, and allowed municipalities to raise the room occupancy tax for hotels and motels. After sharp exchanges in each chamber over the tax increases, the House voted 110-46 for the budget and 31-8 in the Senate. All 21 Republicans in the legislature, including Brown, voted against it.

The point is that the people of Massachusetts were angry long before the Kennedy seat was vacated and Brown took his place.

Hawaii's legislators are getting closer to following the Massachusetts model in the 2010 legislative session after passing more than 15 tax increases.

Most of the increases are job-killers and will raise taxes and fees by almost a billion dollars on Hawaii's small businesses. These bills are sponsored by Hawaii's majority Democrats who have 45 of 51 House seats and 23 of 25 senate seats, and seem determined to repeat the mistakes of their colleagues in Massachusetts by disregarding how everyday folks in Hawaii feel about tax increases.

Some of these job-killing measures include bills to raise taxes on hotel rooms, banks, insurance companies, liquor, gasoline, electricity, and even a new tax on the HMSA and Kaiser Health plans. They catch you at home, at work, in your car, or in the hospital.

And remember, the Senate just passed a 1 percentage point increase in the general excise tax.

But Hawaii goes one step beyond Massachusetts' huge tax increases: It adds insult to injury with its continuous policy of dumbing down our schoolkids through its Furlough Fridays, and doesn't seem to want to kick the habit.

To many it is inconceivable that the Legislature would allow the school year to be cut to 163 days, the lowest in the nation.


The good news is that Massachusetts reminded the nation that the dominant political factor in the U.S. is still the will of the people, not political parties or special interests.

Bad policies changed Massachusetts and can change Hawaii. After all we're all Americans first, Democrats and Republicans second.

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