

Common Cause Massachusetts 2014 Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Thomas Conroy
Office: State Treasurer

DEADLINE: Monday, August 18, 2014

Thank you for taking the time to indicate your position on the following issues. If desired, you may also include any other ideas on how you would work to make Massachusetts government more open and accountable. We reserve the right to summarize or shorten particularly long answers but will make the full text available on our website. We appreciate your prompt response. Thank you!

1) Are you concerned about the amount of money in politics and what would you do to promote policies to limit its influence in elections and governing? Do you support public financing of elections? Please be specific about which offices it should cover and any other information about what kind of support should be provided.

Yes, I remain deeply troubled by the amount of money pouring into politics, and I do support public financing of elections. When I worked for U.S. Senator Gary Hart from 1985–1986, we were shocked by the massive \$100 million that was spent on the 1984 presidential campaign—which seems like spare change next to the cost of the 2012 presidential race, where spending exceeded \$2.6 billion (a 2,600 percent increase). If this rate of growth continues, it's worth being concerned about the implications it will have for our democracy in the future.

Money increasingly drives campaign decision-making, electoral successes, political access, legislative outcomes, and regulatory results. Candidates and elected officials spend less and less time learning about voter priorities, exchanging ideas, and crafting a vision for the office. Instead, they spend countless hours raising money to ensure campaign viability and reelection. I applaud Common Cause for its dedication to campaign finance reform and to ensuring that our democracy offers access to and a voice for *all* people, not just the wealthy and privileged.

I strongly support public financing of elections for all statewide public offices and, if elected, will join Common Cause in advocating for it. If Massachusetts can enact public financing of elections, perhaps we will

once again be a model for our federal government and for other states around the country.

Massachusetts has a modest public financing program for elections, and, if comprehensive public financing is not politically viable in the short term, I would like to see this existing program expanded and funded in a way that allows all candidates for statewide offices to participate. I would also like to partner with Common Cause to explore alternatives such as Connecticut's public financing law as a potential model for Massachusetts.

1a) Do you support a constitutional amendment to allow the government to limit political spending and to clarify that corporations do not have the same rights as people? Why or why not.

Yes. I support a constitutional amendment to limit political spending and to ensure that corporations are not treated the same as people. I am proud that Massachusetts does not allow corporations to contribute to state candidates; rulings such as *Citizens United* and the more recent *Hobby Lobby* remind us why we should not treat corporations the same as people.

At a basic level, the *Citizens United* decision is unfair—it has enlarged the dark cloud of plutocracy in our nation and should be repealed. Leaders of corporations, just like every other citizen in our country, have a voice in our democracy and the ability to contribute to campaigns as private citizens, and they should not have special access to a second pathway of giving and influence.

2) What would you do to bring more transparency to government operations?

I strongly supported the Massachusetts Open Checkbook program as a state representative, and, as state Treasurer, I would like to expand it. The portal enhances our state's commitment to open and transparent government, and it provides Massachusetts residents with accessible and understandable information about how their taxpayer dollars are spent. This type of transparency enhances the public's trust in government—one of the motivations behind my desire to serve in government. The Open Checkbook is a worthy program, and, as Treasurer, I would continue to support and add more information to it wherever feasible.

I also support Governor Patrick's MassGoals initiative—an internal management tool designed to align operations and resources across state government in order to get better results for Massachusetts residents. MassGoals, combined with Governor Patrick's executive order establishing the Office of Commonwealth Performance, Accountability and Transparency, are both part of a comprehensive effort to ensure the public has access to information and that evidence-based results are driving our

decision-making. As a result of these types of initiatives, MASSPIRG now counts us as a leader in making state government spending more transparent and accessible.

My record as a state representative proves my commitment to transparency and accountability. As House Chair of the Labor and Workforce Development Committee, I championed the codification of the Joint Task Force on the Underground Economy, another Governor Patrick's initiative. This task force promotes cross-agency collaboration by shining a light upon fraudulent contractors, thereby protecting vulnerable workers throughout the state, while also ensuring compliance with Massachusetts wage and hour, employee classification, and tax laws.

If elected Treasurer, I would promote transparent practices within my office on Day One. From hiring and spending practices to the way the Treasurer's office makes procurement decisions, I would prioritize accountability and transparency to ensure the public has the utmost trust in the office and in how their taxpayer dollars are being spent and invested.

3) The legislature passed a terrific elections bill earlier this year that will make great steps towards modernizing our elections. Would you support Election Day registration for the commonwealth? Is there anything else you think we should do to improve our elections in Massachusetts?

I voted for this year's elections bill, and I have been a long-time supporter of Election Day registration in Massachusetts. Increasing accessibility to the voting process is a laudable goal and one I wholeheartedly embrace, especially as an elected public servant. There are many commonsense measures that I hope more states will embrace in upcoming cycles, such as utilizing online registration, early registration for teenagers, and post-election audits—all of which I was proud to support in the landmark bill we passed earlier this session. The more information that we can provide and the more we can ensure all people have equal access to the ballot box, the more transparent and representative our government will be. The results will be beneficial for everyone: democracy cannot function properly without an engaged, educated, voting population.

4) What do you think should be done, if anything, about the issue of political patronage?

The probation scandal has been an unfortunate blight on the public sector. While I am a part of the institution of the legislature, I have never been a part of the Beacon Hill culture. I entered public service to enhance the public's trust in government, and this latest scandal is another example of why we need leaders in government who care about process, transparency, and accountability—three attributes I have exhibited and prioritized throughout my time as an elected public official.

As a committee chair during this legislative session, I insisted we hold public executive sessions, including debates and discussions on the bills we were voting on, rather than online polls via email. I believe the public should see and hear the debate around legislation, and, whenever I can, I try to lead by example and demonstrate how transparency and accountability can help make us better public servants.

We must continually examine the culture on Beacon Hill and look for ways to enhance the public's trust in all of its government's processes. We must demonstrate through action that we are working tirelessly to protect taxpayer dollars, increase transparency, and set an example for others to follow.