



Senator Thomas M. McGee: Making Changes for the People

By Debbie Swanson

Growing up in Lynn, public service was always a part of Sen. Thomas M. McGee's life.



"My father, Thomas W. McGee, was elected to the Lynn City Council a month before I was born," says McGee. "Watching him and other family members involved in public service, and seeing events unfold in the '60s and '70s, inspired me to become an elected official."

McGee attended St. Mary's Elementary school in Lynn and St. John's Preparatory High School, then graduated from University of Lowell with a degree in political science. After graduating from the New

England School of Law, he worked as an assistant district attorney for two years, followed by four years in private practice.

In 1994, McGee was elected state representative representing West Lynn and Nahant. In 2001, McGee was elected into his current office in the Senate, representing the Third Essex and Middlesex districts, which includes all or part of Lynn, Marblehead, Nahant, Saugus, Swampscott and Melrose. McGee serves on several committees, and presently chairs the Labor and Workforce Development Committee and the Public Service Committee.

Improving the Education of Young People

After more than a decade of public service, making a difference to the peo-

ple who elected him is still what McGee finds most rewarding. He feels particularly passionate about efforts underway to promote the education of young people. As part of his involvement with the Massachusetts Special Commission on After-school and Out of School Time, McGee has been advocating for quality programs for students outside of the school day.

"A student spends about 20 percent of their time in classroom. What are they doing with the other 80 percent?" he asks. "We're looking at more than just creating an after-school program – we're looking at ways to help students connect what they're learning in the classroom with what goes on in the real world. We're finding opportunities for students to see how math or engineering, for example, connects to real life."

Developing partnerships has been a key element in this project. By working with local businesses and community groups, the After-school and Out of School Time Grants have created hands-on opportunities, fostered confidence, exemplified the larger picture of education and helped students recognize their full potential.

"Another effort along similar lines is a push to mandate quality physical education time in the schools, whether it be dance, basketball or other activities to help young people to realize this is an important part of their lives," he says.

Promoting Fair Payment

McGee recognizes the problems faced by the businesses and workers in the construction industry, and looked favorably upon the "Prompt Pay" bill, H.1804, filed by Rep. David Flynn (Bridgewater) and Sen. Mark Pacheco (Taunton), on behalf of the Associated Subcontractors of Massachusetts (ASM). Modeled after similar legislation in other states, the bill attempts to

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prevent slow payment in the industry by requiring all private construction contracts to include fair and reasonable payment terms. This bill has been a high priority for ASM for several years, but has met with resistance from general contractors. McGee has encouraged both sides to work together to achieve consensus.

"That bill moved favorably out of our committee," McGee says. "There has been a lot of work done to find solutions and to resolve issues, and continued discussions are ongoing. We're hoping to see it in play during this legislative session." (Editor's note: The bill was signed into law on August 10. See cover story.)

Creating Opportunity in a Tough Economy

McGee sees the continued problem of joblessness as one of the biggest challenges ahead for the Bay State.

"Massachusetts is ahead of most states. We've seen an uptick in revenue, and our bond rating is one of the best in the country. While we're going in the right direction, there is still a lot of progress and tough decisions to make," he says. "The budget crunch will continue into the next budget cycle, and the challenge will be to continue to the push to move forward."

There are a number of projects moving through the Legislature that will help create job opportunities for the commonwealth. One of them, the construction of the Essex North Shore Agricultural and Vocational Technical School, is championed by Sen. Frederick Berry and supported by McGee. "This high school will serve 18 communities, and provide agricultural skills and educational opportunities for many well deserving students," he explains.

A longer-term project includes the redevelopment of 300-plus acres of the Lynn Waterfront. This involves efforts to create of a year-round ferry to Boston and the relocation of major power lines, which will open up of 80 to 100 acres of waterfront property to retail and investment interests.

"The Lynn master plan is a huge development, spanning 10 to 20 years, and will provide opportunities for local subcontractors, general contractors and investors," says McGee.

Bringing a Voice to the People

McGee feels that participation is vital to making change; the public must take advantage of how the legislative process works and let their voice be heard, he says.

"Massachusetts is a 'free-petition state,'" McGee says, meaning that every citizen is able to take an active role in the lawmaking process. Residents or organizations such as ASM can bring concerns about issues important to them to their legislatures.

"There are 6,000 to 8,000 bills filed a year; it's an ongoing process. People should contact the elected legislature in their area and voice their concerns," encourages McGee.

McGee is optimistic about the future of Massachusetts and looks forward to continuing to advocate for the people.

To contact Sen. Thomas McGee, call him at 617-722-1350.

Debbie Swanson is a freelance writer based in Westford.



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