

9-1-2023

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Recommended Citation

Duquette, Jerold J. (2023) "Massachusetts Politics in 2023: Democratic Trifectas Ain't All What They're Cracked Up to Be," *New England Journal of Political Science*: Vol. 14: No. 1, Article 7.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/nejps/vol14/iss1/7>

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MASSACHUSETTS POLITICS IN 2023: DEMOCRATIC TRIFECTAS AIN'T ALL WHAT THEY'RE CRACKED UP TO BE

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Politics-as-usual at the Massachusetts statehouse has long been an establishment-friendly, status-quo and incumbency-protective affair in which professional politicians balance the preferences of average voters and organized special interests in order to serve the public interest and to advance their political careers. This arrangement has endured thanks to the confluence of key cultural, institutional, and structural dynamics in the state. Bay State voters have proven pragmatic and receptive to the career-minded, transactional approach of legislators at a statehouse where the legislative supremacy prescribed by the state constitution and firm leadership control of the legislative process is sustained by the near total absence of party competition in both lawmaking and legislative elections. The enduring cleavage in Massachusetts politics, the contest that occupies attentive constituencies, pits progressive activists against professional politicians. Perennially sidelined culture war conservatives are the odd men out, relegated most of the time to making common cause with fiscal conservatives on policy and with progressive activists on campaigns for greater transparency and public accountability at the statehouse (Duquette 2024).

In 2023, after eight years with a popular Republican governor in the corner office, pent up progressive frustrations and institutional rivalries inside the statehouse quickly dispelled the notion that a Democratic trifecta (i.e. Democratic control of both legislative chambers and the governor's office) would usher in an era of progressive public policy consensus and policymaking reform on Beacon Hill. Instead, relations between the Speaker of the House and Senate President cooled; disputes over legislative committee rules and procedures brought out long-suppressed inter-chamber power struggles; pressing issues and events triggered policy disputes within Democratic legislative ranks and ground the notoriously slow state legislative process to a near halt.

While the late passage of the fiscal 2024 budget was business-as-usual on Beacon Hill, the failure to finish work on a popular gun control measure and a must-pass supplemental appropriations bill before the end of the 2023 formal legislative session signaled an unusually difficult legislative year. A special election in November to replace Democratic senator Ann Gobi, who was tapped by Governor Healy to serve as her Director of Rural Affairs, put a unexpected media spotlight on the legislature in a non-election year, exposing legislators to the kinds of political scrutiny usually reserved for re-election seasons. The victory of Republican Peter Durant in that special State Senate election provided the only hint of life for the MassGOP in 2023 and also served as a reminder that Bay State voters are not as progressive as progressive activists believe.

Amidst unusually visible internal discord, external critics of legislative politics-as-usual on Beacon Hill gained a new foothold in 2023 thanks to the newly elected state auditor, a former state representative, senator, and progressive activist, who's aggressive (and ongoing as I write this) efforts to conduct what she calls legislative audits amounts to a frontal assault on the legislature. Auditor Diana DiZoglio's efforts have given new life to longtime progressive critics and criticisms of the Commonwealth's infamously undemocratic and publicly unaccountable legislature.¹

For their part, Bay State voters continued to send mixed signals to pols and pollsters alike in 2023. Though Governor Healy isn't as popular as her GOP predecessor, now NCAA President Charlie Baker, she enjoys relatively high public approval ratings, as does the state legislature despite the fact that it's internal conflicts, glacial pace, and lack of transparency became more prominent and frequent fodder for critical media and activist scrutiny in 2023.

All in all, the first year of total Democratic control at the Massachusetts statehouse after eight years with a Republican governor exposed the political and philosophical diversity within the veto-proof Democratic legislative majority. Without a Republican governor to run interference between Democratic legislative leaders and progressive activists, keeping rank-in-file legislators in line, progressive special interests at bay, and maintaining firm top-down control over the legislative process and agenda proved unusually difficult in 2023.

Democratic infighting on Beacon Hill gives critics right and left plenty to talk about and Republicans a brief reprieve from irrelevance

In February, the Massachusetts Republican Party replaced its hopelessly incompetent chairman Jim Lyons with lobbyist and MassGOP committeewoman Amy Carnevale charging her with cleaning up an awful mess that included “hundreds of thousands of dollars of debt, ... four lawsuits, ...[a] tangle of campaign finance probes, ...[a] record of electoral failure, and ...[a] reputation for dysfunction” (Platoff and Gross 2023). Instead of doubling down on Trumpian culture war madness Carnevale tried a sort of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” approach by joining progressive critics of Beacon Hill politics-as-usual in condemning the lack of transparency in and top-down control of the state legislature. In a July 31st *Boston Globe* op-ed Carnevale staked out a position that allowed her to criticize Democrats in many of the same terms as progressive activists in the state and to exploit Democratic infighting on Beacon Hill that had recently spilled into public view. She wrote:

Democrats not only hold supermajorities in the Legislature, they also hold every other statewide office. On Beacon Hill, this has predictably resulted in the concentration of power in the hands of a few. Increasingly, decisions are being made behind closed doors, not only to the exclusion of Republicans but also leaving out rank-and-file Democrats, the public, and the media who communicate to the public... The dysfunction on Beacon Hill has reached all-time dismal levels of inaction and discord. The state budget was a month late, joint committees can't agree on rules for making decisions, and the center left is fighting with the far left. The result is that citizens and communities are being left behind. Likewise, transparency has become an afterthought, with many committee votes not available to the public and conference committee negotiations closed to all but a few power brokers. (Carnevale 2023)

Fresh off an increasingly public disagreement that scuttled efforts to produce a large economic development and tax cutting package before the clock ran out on the 2022 legislative session, the relationship between Speaker of the House, Ron Mariano, and Senate President, Karen Spilka was strained even before life at the statehouse with a Democratic trifecta commenced. The disagreement involved the legislature's reaction to the embarrassing revelation in late July, 2022, by Governor Charlie Baker that a "1986 voter-passed law that requires surplus tax revenues in excess of a statutorily defined cap to be returned to taxpayers in the form of tax rebates" would significantly impact the revenue estimates being relied upon by legislators in their then ongoing efforts to pass a comprehensive economic development bill. (Duquette 2023) This remarkable failure of memory, ostensibly by the entire state legislature (to say nothing of the political media and public policy activist communities), provided a high profile example of the dangers of uncompromising top-down legislative leadership control. If rank-in-file legislators had meaningful roles in the development and consideration of major public policy measures, someone would surely have included the implications of the 1986 law in the development of a major economic development and tax cutting package.

The two legislative leaders dealt differently with the embarrassment of having not even remembered the decades-old statute. Senate President Spilka "said publicly the fact that the state's tax revenue would trigger the 1986 law was an opportunity to make a compromise on legislation that would still get money in taxpayers' pockets" while the Speaker "saw Baker's announcement as a "bomb" that called into question the financial decisions the Legislature had already made" (Gross 2023, August 22). According to the *Boston Globe*, "Warm phone exchanges [between the Mariano and Spilka] gave way to infrequent calls, lawmakers said, and celebrations of collaborative efforts to return \$1 billion to taxpayers in various forms of relief turned into a standoff that has played out in the press" (Gross 2023, August 22). Needless to say, the highly anticipated economic development and tax reduction legislation being considered was not passed when the clock ran out on 2022.

The tension between the Speaker and Senate President undoubtedly contributed to the increasingly public disagreements between Democratic House and Senate committee chairs that surfaced in the spring of 2023. Massachusetts is one of only two states in which the legislative committees are joint committees that include legislators from both the House and Senate.² Each committee has co-chairs, a representative and a senator. Conflicts over the rules governing this ostensibly time and money saving arrangement were not new in 2023, but they had rarely played out so publicly in the past. *CommonWealth Beacon's* Bruce Mohl concisely chronicled a surprisingly petty feud between the House and Senate chairs of the Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities, and Energy, which exposed deeper conflicts of the type usually kept out of the press by pressure from legislative leaders.

Rep. Jeffrey Roy of Franklin, the House chair of the committee, sent out an email to the panel's members last Thursday seeking "an agreement of the majority" for a hearing schedule for the legislative session... Twenty-one minutes later Sen. Michael Barrett of Lexington, the Senate chair of the committee, responded with an email of his own, accusing Roy of violating the Legislature's joint rules by unilaterally attempting to schedule committee hearings. Barrett said

the Legislature's joint rules require both chairs to agree on a timetable for committee hearings. He urged his colleagues not to support Roy's motion until rules governing committee deliberations are negotiated... Barrett also took aim at Roy himself, sharing the gist of an earlier email exchange with the House leader. "The rules you inexplicably no longer like ensure equality between the branches," Barrett wrote. "This discussion is ultimately about substance, not procedure. If the very idea of rules for our committee is suddenly out of fashion and the Senate loses its equal voice, I fear that the committee's substantive results may be considerably less bold. I worry that good climate policy would be at risk." (Mohl 2023, May 15)

The joint committee structure includes the potential for conflict in part because the 160-member House of Representatives has more members on each committee than the 40-member Senate, giving the House the upper hand on committee matters decided by majority vote. Periodically, senators complain about this imbalance, but rarely do they do so as publicly as they have recently. The Boston Globe's Samantha Gross described well the resulting threat to legislative productivity writing that the "small-scale procedural squabble over internal committee rules" between House and Senate committee co-chairs "injected a highly unusual level of drama into the typically drab legislative process and pulls the curtain back on long-simmering tensions between the Legislature's two chambers that threatens to further slow an already glacial policymaking process" (Gross 2023, May 21).

Beacon Hill's entirely unsurprising failure to pass the annual state budget on time generated the usual criticisms from the usual suspects, as did the legislature's inability to pass the massive tax reduction and economic development package that had stalled in 2022 (described above) until October of 2023. Both efforts were heavily criticized for having been undertaken largely behind closed doors and for having taken far too long. Critics of Beacon Hill's lack of transparency and lack of productivity in 2023 had plenty of material for their continued attacks on the way the state legislature does its job, but the legislature's failure to pass a surprisingly controversial gun control measure as well as an urgent supplemental budget appropriations bill before the end of the 2023 formal legislative session provided a rare window into both the policy disagreements among Bay State Democrats and the potential for effective culture war partisanship even in bright blue Massachusetts, Democratic trifecta and all (Lannan 2023).

Gun Control

Policy disagreements between Democratic legislators are not unusual. The public airing of those disagreements, however, is unusual. Efforts to pass a gun control bill in 2023 met opposition in the House where a dozen Democrats voted with House Republicans against final passage of the measure (Lisinski 2023). Guns are an issue that gives culture war conservatives an opening in Massachusetts politics. One of the ways many Democratic legislators discourage electoral competition from Republican challengers is by avoiding issues that activate conservative cultural prejudices.

In his successful campaign to flip a central Massachusetts Democratic state senate seat in a 2023 special election Republican Peter Durant used the effort to pass sweeping gun control legislation over the summer to paint the Democratically controlled state legislature as extreme. This put his opponent, Democrat Jonathan Zlotnik, who couldn't afford to discourage progressive turnout in a low-turnout special election contest, in a difficult position. Zlotnik did

not have the flexibility of the other 11 House Democrats who joined him in voting against the final House version of the gun bill. In the absence of the special election spotlight that limited Zlotnik's flexibility, other Democrats from moderate House districts had the luxury of enduring progressive criticism of their votes against the gun bill in order to insulate themselves from attacks by notoriously dogged, well-organized, and well-financed gun rights advocates. Because their votes would not hold up the legislation, progressive critics' ire would subside and gun rights advocates would concentrate their fire elsewhere. This type of legislative gamesmanship, which is standard operating procedure for professional pols, is the bane of progressive good government activists' existence.

Immigration Policy

Another issue that brought out policy disagreements among Bay State Democrats and that complicated Democrat Jonathan Zlotnik's special election campaign for the State Senate in 2023 was immigration policy, particularly the Bay State's commitment to provide shelter for migrants. In September, Governor Healy filed a supplemental budget that included \$200 million in must-pass funding of public employee collective bargaining agreements as well as \$250 million for the state's emergency shelter system, which had been stretched to the breaking point by a massive influx of migrants into the Commonwealth in 2022 and 2023. Stirred by southern red state governors shipping undocumented immigrants to Massachusetts in late 2022, the Bay State's small but obnoxious contingent of MAGA activists made the burden on the state's taxpayers of housing undocumented migrants one of their high profile causes in 2023. Though their efforts brought out the worst of their brethren at times, the accompanying fiscally conservative message delivered by Republican senate candidate Peter Durant clearly resonated with some voters, thanks in part to the assistance of well-financed anti-tax special interest groups (Becker 2023).

Democratic disagreements, not GOP opposition, over how exactly to deal with the strain on the state's emergency shelter system caused by the massive influx of migrants led to conflicting House and Senate bills that could not be reconciled before the expiration of the 2023 formal legislative session (Stout 2023, November 16). This embarrassing failure, no doubt due in some part to the ongoing antagonism between House and Senate leaders and committee co-chairs, made it necessary to pass the supplemental budget in informal session at the end of 2023. Thanks to the rules of informal sessions, Republican legislators used to being completely irrelevant had a brief moment in the spotlight. During always sparsely attended informal sessions, any legislator can kill a bill by suggesting the absence of a quorum. Republicans used this tactic to prevent passage of the supplemental budget and to embarrass Beacon Hill Democrats for several days, forcing many Democratic legislators back to the statehouse to produce the quorum needed to pass the bill. Though the Speaker tried to characterize the delay as an example of right-wing obstructionism fueled by MAGA-friendly Bay State Republicans, the reality that Democratic legislative leaders had failed to take care of their business effectively was inescapable (Van Buskirk 2023). Progressive critics did not miss the opportunity of this latest high-profile embarrassment to point out that it reflected Beacon Hill's lack of internal democracy. *CommonWealth Beacon*'s Bruce Mohl illustrated this line of criticism in his description of the supplemental budget's progress in the weeks before the end of the year's formal legislative session as follows:

From late on November 14, when the Senate passed its version of the bill, until November 30, when a compromise blended version of the bills approved by the House and Senate was unveiled, Rep. Aaron Michlewitz of Boston and Sen. Michael Rodrigues of Westport were the only ones wrangling over the final shape of the \$3.1 billion spending plan... This concentration of power in the hands of a few people is commonplace in the Legislature, so much so that it is largely taken for granted. Indeed, the closeout budget garnered attention mainly for how long it took to pass and the extraordinary steps Democrats took to win passage. Largely overlooked was how Michlewitz and Rodrigues, the top budget officials in the two chambers, cast aside a conference committee set up by the Legislature to handle the negotiations and made all of the major decisions themselves on the final makeup of the bill (Mohl 2023, December 17).

State Auditor DiZoglio attacks the legislature “from inside the building.”

Progressive activists have for decades been highly critical of the state legislatures lack of external accountability and internal democracy. The top-down control of both chambers by leadership and the abuse of legislative procedures that blur or obscure the kind of legislative accountability that would empower electoral challengers to legislative incumbents has frustrated progressive reformers and policy activists for decades. In 2022, Democrat Diana DiZoglio defeated her Democratic primary opponent by promising to make the state auditor’s office a powerful beachhead in the battle to make Beacon Hill more responsive to a progressive agenda. Without a viable Republican challenger in the general election, DiZoglio was able to double down on her promise to undertake regular “legislative audits” that would include “wide-ranging review[s] of the House and Senate’s budget, hiring, and spending practices, plus information about active and pending bills, the processes for appointing members to committees, and how the rules, policies, and procedures get made” (Gross 2023, October 5). The goal of these audits is to shine a bright light (presumably on an annual basis) on what progressives see as the undemocratic tactics by which legislative leaders protect the status quo and marginalize progressive legislators and voters.

Upon taking office in 2023, DiZoglio assumed her office had the authority to force legislative leaders to fully cooperate in the conduct of these so-called legislative audits. When legislative leaders informed her that her authority to audit state government departments does not include the legislative department, DiZoglio sought permission from the state attorney-general to sue the legislature into compliance with her demands. The auditor wanted authority to demand the production of any documents from legislators that she deemed necessary to conduct legislative audits, which would themselves be public records that include her office’s official recommendations for corrections and reforms to be considered by the legislature. DiZoglio’s arguments for this authority were not recognized by any of her predecessors. Outgoing state auditor, Suzanne Bump unambiguously rejected the legality of legislative audits (Mohl 2022).

DiZoglio argued that her office’s statutory authority to audit state government entities extends to all state government entities referred to as “departments” and that since there are many instances when the legislature is referred to as the legislative “department” it too was within her purview. DiZoglio also tried to argue that the auditing of legislative policymaking processes simply reflects the evolution of auditing “best practices” and that as such it was not inconsistent with constitutional separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches. She even suggested that her audits of the legislature constituted proper “checks and balances” in same way as the legislature’s oversight of executive branch agencies, an

argument that flies in the face of American constitutional practice and the Framers' well-understood preference for legislative supremacy (DiZoglio 2023). All of these arguments are very weak, if not flatly wrong, and doubtlessly reflect political frustration in the face of decades of failed progressive efforts to enlist Bay State voters to the cause of democratic reforms on Beacon Hill.³

Not content to rely on the attorney-general's view of the matter, DiZoglio simultaneously signaled her strong support for a ballot initiative proposal to be placed on the 2024 state ballot explicitly including the state legislature among the government departments subject to audit by the state auditor. The choice to use a ballot initiative to secure the desired authority, rather than a constitutional amendment, was undoubtedly dictated by the longer time frame required for the latter and the greater ease with which the legislature can prevent constitutional amendments from making it to the ballot. Amending Mass General Law via a ballot initiative, on the other hand, allows DiZoglio to make her efforts an election year issue in 2024.

The news from Attorney-General Campbell, herself a frequent progressive critic of politics-as-usual on Beacon Hill, was mixed at best for DiZoglio's effort to establish the state auditor's office as an inside the statehouse, taxpayer-funded, legislative transparency cop (Duquette 2023, October 28). In a very thoughtful and carefully argued letter to Auditor DiZoglio, the attorney-general explained that the state auditor does not have the legal authority to conduct audits of the state legislature without the legislature's consent (Duquette 2023, November 6). Though the attorney general explicitly indicated that her finding applies only to the question of whether the state auditor presently has the legal authority being asserted, not the policy question of whether the auditor ought to have such authority, an issue that would be addressed by the proposed ballot initiative, DiZoglio and many of the progressive activists supporting her efforts publicly criticized Attorney General Campbell implying even that the first woman of color to serve as Massachusetts state attorney general had been unduly influenced in her judgement of the matter by support of her campaign for office from legislative leaders (Duquette 2023, November 6).

Attorney General Campbell did not deny the legislative audit ballot initiative proposal access to the 2024 state ballot. She allowed the ballot initiative to proceed because - strictly speaking - the language of the proposed measure does not trigger any of the issues that would have required the attorney general to reject it. Campbell allowed the petition to go forward while recognizing that it would likely face judicial review by the Supreme Judicial Court for potential violation of the separation of powers required by the state constitution, a constitutional matter the framers of Article 48 of the state constitution (i.e. the initiative and referendum process) did not empower the attorney general to consider when reviewing ballot measure language. While individual constitutional rights questions do trigger rejection by the attorney general, this more institutionally significant constitutional question is the kind of issue intended by the framers of the Commonwealth's initiative and referendum process to be settled by judges, not policy makers or voters (Duquette and Cunningham 2022). Campbell's position on the matter balanced well the virtues of public deliberation and constitutional integrity.

At year's end, the DiZoglio-backed ballot initiative petition had reportedly succeeded in collecting sufficient voter signatures to advance further toward the 2024 state ballot (Stout 2023, November 21). Though there is virtual expert consensus that the measure is unconstitutional on its face and will (or at least should) be struck down by the Supreme Judicial Court if enacted at

the ballot box, the opportunity for public debate on an issue that speaks so directly to the Bay State's most enduring political dynamic (i.e. institutionally insulated transactional politics versus a more robust and directly democratic politics) could hardly be unwelcome for students of government and politics. For their part, progressive activists and the state auditor seem to be "all in" on the ballot initiative, despite its substantive flaws. DiZoglio even donated more than \$100,000 to the signature gathering effort, \$50,000 of which required her to take out a personal loan (Mohl and Smith 2023).

Unfortunately, it is clear that the auditor has no intention of engaging in serious debate regarding the constitutionality of legislative audits, an authority she continues to claim already exists. In a hearing before the Special Joint Committee on Initiative Petitions on March 26, 2024, Auditor DiZoglio made clear that she had no interest in rebutting the substance of any arguments against the present legality, constitutionality, or even ethical appropriateness of her office conducting comprehensive performance audits of the state legislature. Expert testimony at the hearing that made clear both the constitutional and ethical flaws of her position were waved off by DiZoglio, who accused the committee of inviting "cherry-picked experts", a charge made absurd by the fact that no experts have come forward to defend the constitutionality of legislative audits conducted without the legislature's consent. The auditor thundered away at the committee as if all the clear arguments and evidence against her position were just dishonest efforts to protect the status quo, insisting at one point that "the people are the experts." She even paraded a hand cart full of old volumes she claims contain dozens of past audits of the legislature no different than that which she seeks to conduct. The fact that this claim had already been definitively debunked by both the state attorney general and several scholars, had no impact on Auditor DiZoglio's demonstration or presentation (Special Joint Committee 2024).

In a fascinating twist, supporters of the legislative audit ballot initiative who testified at the March 26th hearing focused on the politics, not the legality or ethical propriety of the measure. They explicitly suggested that a deal might be struck between the supporters of the initiative and the legislature to avoid a ballot initiative fight that they believed supporters of the measure were certain to win. In other words, they publicly suggested a so-called "grand bargain" could be struck on the issue, a gambit that reflects both a misinterpretation of polling data on the issue and a refusal to confront the clear constitutional and ethical defects of the measure.⁴

Where did Bay State Voters Stand in 2023?

As 2023 came to a close, the progressive activists leading the campaign for the ballot initiative that would change Mass General Law to explicitly authorize the state auditor to conduct audits of the legislature were confident that public opinion was on their side. The support, financial and rhetorical, received for their efforts from the MassGOP and right-wing special interest groups like the *Massachusetts Fiscal Alliance* was being touted as evidence that democratic reform of politics-as-usual on Beacon Hill was strongly favored by Bay State voters (Jacoby 2023). In reality, partisan and ideologically conservative organizations like the *MassGOP* and *MassFiscal* are merely trying to weaken Beacon Hill Democrats, not strengthen democracy. Their support ought to be a bright red flag for progressives. Instead, it is being brandished by progressive activists as proof of concept. Tellingly, in the only state legislative contest of 2023, central Massachusetts voters replaced a Democratic state senator with a Republican whose campaign featured his very unprogressive positions on gun control and immigration policy.

Progressive activists pointed to a *UMass Amherst poll* conducted in October 2023 in which 67% of respondents indicated they would vote yes to a ballot question seeking to “allow the state auditor to assess the performance of the state Legislature and recommend ways to improve the state Legislature.” However, this “only reinforces the fact that the boundaries of the authority being sought are conspicuously unclear”. Respondents did not consider the non-financial aspects of DiZoglio’s proposed audits or the serious constitutional objections to her proposed authority. The same UMass poll also indicated that a majority of Bay Staters continue to approve of the performance of the state legislature. A Commonwealth Beacon poll in March 2024, showed support of only 53% of respondents (Lannan and Dumcius 2024). In other words, mixed signals at best from voters means that Bay State voters’ long documented preference for “political moderation and interest-based compromise” over “the more ideologically motivated and confrontational politics often practiced by progressive good-government reformers on the left and conservative anti-tax activists and culture warriors on the right” was not clearly weakened in 2023 (Duquette 2023).

In 2024, with national Democrats working overtime to characterize Republicans as dangerous extremists hellbent on destroying American democracy and President Biden as a pragmatic defender of democracy who delivers results for the American people, it may be particularly difficult for a coalition of activists, political outsiders, and insurgents-right and left-to convince Bay State voters that, despite their continued satisfaction with state government, major reforms to politics-as-usual at the statehouse are urgently needed.

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¹ For an example of thoughtful and comprehensive progressive criticism of politics-as-usual on Beacon Hill in 2023, see Kuttner, Robert. “Massachusetts Blues: It’s not just the far-right republicans who undermine democracy. A majority of voters in the Bay State favor progressive policies, but don’t get them. Why not?” *The American Prospect* (December 4, 2023) <https://prospect.org/politics/2023-12-04-massachusetts-blues-progressive-policies/>

² The other state that uses joint legislative committees is Connecticut.

³ For a more thorough critique of the legislative audit, see Duquette, Jerold J. “DiZoglio’s legislative audit is a well-intentioned bad idea.” *CommonWealth Beacon* (October 28, 2023)

<https://commonwealthbeacon.org/politics/dizoglios-legislative-audit-is-well-intentioned-bad-idea/>

⁴ The panelists invited to testify in support of the legislative audit ballot initiative were Paul Craney, spokesperson for the right wing interest group *Massachusetts Fiscal Alliance*, Former Republican state representative and failed GOP candidate for governor, Dan Winslow, and Mary Connaughton, director of government transparency at the conservative think tank, *Pioneer Institute* and a failed GOP candidate for state auditor.