

Politics-as-Usual on Beacon Hill Faces Energized Challenges –If not Challengers– from Within and Without in the Runup to the 2026 Midterm Elections

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Introduction

Establishment-friendly politics-as-usual at the Massachusetts statehouse is under continuous assault in the summer of 2026. The ideological activists on the right and left who have for decades railed against Beacon Hill's lack of responsiveness to their policy and process agendas believe they have a unique opportunity at present to weaken the power of the so-called "big three"—the Speaker of the House, Senate president, and governor—to control the policymaking agenda. Frustrated ideological activists in the Bay State now have a "man on the inside," so to speak, in first term state auditor Diana DiZoglio, whose four-year long crusade to weaken the influence of legislative leaders over rank-and-file members has effectively mobilized a strange bedfellows political coalition that unites progressive good government reformers and anti-tax and anti-regulation conservatives. Even the Bay State's small but loud contingent of MAGA culture warriors have enthusiastically embraced Democratic State Auditor Diana DiZoglio's crusade to undermine the state legislature's independence. Political media in the Bay State have also played a part. Notwithstanding the constitutional questions surrounding the 2024 legislative audit ballot initiative, the Commonwealth's flagship newspaper, the *Boston Globe*, endorsed Auditor DiZoglio's efforts. *Globe* editors have cheered on the auditor's attacks on Beacon Hill ever since. Journalists covering the audit fight have devoted far less attention to the constitutional arguments, tending to focus instead on the political battle between anti-establishment reformers and establishment-friendly Beacon Hill politicians. The conclusions of political scientists and constitutional scholars have been marginalized in favor of the view that the constitutional issues can only be authoritatively addressed by a court.

The political game changer in Massachusetts politics in 2025 and 2026 may be a shift in the perceived political utility of the state's ballot initiative process for anti-establishment activists in the state. For decades, Beacon Hill leaders have allowed policy conflicts that pit powerful political interests and constituencies against each other to be settled through the ballot initiative process. By shifting tough votes to the ballot box, incumbent state legislators avoid issues that potential electoral challengers might exploit. This dynamic has long insulated legislators from many politically dangerous issues and has contributed to the Commonwealth's consistent distinction as a state with among the least competitive state legislative elections in the country (Duquette & Cunningham 2022). The passage of the legislative audit ballot initiative in 2024 with 72% of the vote, and Auditor DiZoglio's ability to use the measure to draw the attention of the public and the media to her anti-Beacon Hill efforts, has emboldened anti-establishment activists from across the political spectrum whose resource limitations and focus on process issues had long limited their capacity to effectively exploit ballot initiatives as a weapon against

Beacon Hill intransigence and inaction. In 2026, ballot measures are the weapon of choice for political activists.

In 2024, legislative leaders were relying on an old playbook that had allowed them to kill reforms passed at the ballot box without having to invest much political capital. After term limits passed at the ballot box in 1994, the Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) struck that statute down (Rimer 1997). The passage by ballot initiative of public campaign financing in 1998 led to a constitutional crisis that pitted the legislature against both the Republican governor and the SJC, but the legislature was able to wait it out, without ever appropriating any funds, and repeal that law four years after it was enacted (New York Times 2003). Likely, the plan for the 2024 legislative audit ballot initiative was to allow it to pass and then either watch the SJC strike it down or let public enthusiasm for what is ultimately a process issue diminish enough to make legislative repeal a viable option. While both of these possibilities remain viable, it is clear now that Beacon Hill leaders dramatically underestimated the ability of Auditor DiZoglio to game the judicial review process and to keep this issue front and center in the court of public opinion (Duquette & Friedman 2026).

The decision of Beacon Hill leaders to stand down in 2024 and let the state auditor campaign for her legislative audit ballot initiative unopposed is a miscalculation that Beacon Hill leaders likely won't repeat in 2026. Without organized opposition during the 2024 ballot initiative campaign, the legislature lost the opportunity to establish a counter-narrative, and the state auditor has simply continued while in office to campaign vigorously against the legislature. With the time, resources and visibility of a sitting constitutional officer, DiZoglio has proven that even process issues can power a sustainable political campaign between elections. As of this writing, Auditor DiZoglio continues to exploit average voters' ignorance of basic American constitutional principles in order to effectively cultivate and preserve enough public anger to sustain her attacks on legislative preeminence at the state house.

Both chambers of the legislature seemed to understand that Auditor DiZoglio's attacks would not subside anytime soon and began to take matters into their own hands in the summer of 2026. On May 28, the state Senate passed a resolution in which they agreed to give the state auditor certain of the documents she had been demanding. The documents were limited to financial matters and the resolution made clear that handing them over in no way indicated that the senate would not continue to oppose the constitutionality of the legislative audit (Lannan 2026a). The House of Representatives passed H. 5469, *An Act promoting transparency and public access in state government* on June 3. The House bill sought to limit the auditor's legislative audit authority to matters that would not encroach upon the constitutional independence of the legislature and to head off a pending DiZoglio-led public records reform ballot measure (Drysedale 2026a). At the time of this writing, the Senate had not yet taken up the House measure.

As of this writing, ten ballot initiatives and one voter-initiated referendum were on track to appear on the 2026 Massachusetts ballot, a record number of measures. Several are direct attacks on the state legislature.

At the same time as the political battle between Beacon Hill leaders and the forces on the left and right being rallied by Auditor DiZoglio is occurring, Massachusetts is also a prime target of opportunity for the Trump Administration's ongoing efforts to punish blue states in any way possible, forcing the state legislature, governor, and attorney general to vigorously engage with destabilizing threats on two fronts since Trump's second term began last year. The Trump administration's efforts have led to litigation in which Massachusetts has sought to protect its (primarily fiscal) interests, as well as presented opportunities for state politicians to continue to paint Trump as the real villain behind many of the issues currently facing the Commonwealth.

I. The Legislative Audit Fight Isn't Going Away

For the past two years, efforts by the state auditor to use the legislative audit authority given to her by 72% of the state's voters in 2024 have produced quite a bit of heated public conflict between the state auditor and the legislature and between the state auditor and the Attorney General. The path to judicial review of this legislative audit authority, ostensibly understood by all sides as the conventional route to authoritatively resolving the legal issues involved, has been slowed and muddled by political gamesmanship from both Auditor DiZoglio and state legislative leaders. State Attorney General Andrea Campbell, politically trapped between the two sides, has had the unenviable job of shepherding the legislative audit authority she likely suspects to be, at least in part, constitutionally defective through the judicial review process without alienating the progressive voter-base she shares with Auditor DiZoglio, or falling short of her own statutory responsibilities as the Commonwealth's chief legal officer.

In the first half of 2026, the legislative audit fight has featured the state auditor's publicity blitz wherein she claimed that the attorney general was in cahoots with legislative leaders to deny her "day in court" for her legislative audit authority. Without evidence, DiZoglio openly and unambiguously accused Attorney General Andrea Campbell of being corrupt and of intentionally preventing her from having the SJC weigh in on the constitutionality of the legislative audit (Adams 2026). In fact, Auditor DiZoglio was not cooperating with the attorney general, who had asked DiZoglio to clearly identify the scope of her intended audit before Campbell would allow her to proceed with her lawsuit against legislative leaders for failing to cooperate with her effort to audit the legislature (Friedman & Duquette 2026).

For more than a year, Auditor DiZoglio told the public and press at every opportunity that she had answered all of Campbell's questions and that the Attorney General was lying when she insisted otherwise. In the end, it was DiZoglio who had failed to provide the attorney general with the information she needed to litigate the constitutional limits of the legislative audit. Instead, DiZoglio simply repeated over and over the specific types of documents she would be seeking in her current audit attempt. The auditor could not admit to any constitutional limits to her legislative audit authority because for years she had overpromised voters about the scope and impact of the audit. Also, DiZoglio may not have had any real interest in a comprehensive constitutional test of her audit authority because of the strong arguments that the voter-passed legislative audit authority would be deemed unconstitutional. Her plan was—and as of this writing remains—to get as many small bites at the judicial review apple as possible in order to

preserve the political capital she has gained fighting for the 72% of voters who passed the legislative audit initiative in 2024 (Duquette & Friedman 2026).

Legislative leaders, however, have other ideas. In late May, the state senate voted to give the auditor a limited set of the documents that she sought in her ongoing effort to audit the legislature. The senate resolution made clear that the legislature was volunteering the documents and not conceding the constitutionality of the legislative audit. In early June, the House of Representatives went a step further, passing legislation explicitly narrowing the scope of the legislative audit statute by allowing only “administrative activity” and not “constitutional activity” to be audited by the state auditor’s office. Essentially, the House Bill 5469 codified what some experts have claimed to be the line between the activities performed by employees of the legislature that a state auditor can and cannot audit. In other words, they called DiZoglio’s bluff by granting her access to the type of administrative records she was seeking in her effort to take her first small bite of judicial review—while at the same time limiting the possibility of any judicial review.

As we write this, the auditor and progressive and conservative audit advocates are attacking the House bill as an effort to deny the SJC its rightful function as the final arbiter of constitutionality (Stergios & Connaughton 2026). There is danger, however, in assuming that constitutional arguments remain open to flexible interpretation until finally settled by the judiciary. Not only does each governmental department have the authority to make its own constitutional determinations, it is not uncommon for legislative and executive actions to continue for years before a case arises in which a constitutional issue is properly raised. In the context of the audit, this means that the views of the House and Senate that the auditor’s authority to audit the legislature is constitutionally questionable is entitled to no less deference than the opposing view of the auditor herself. Relatedly, some advocates argue not only that the legislature cannot channel judicial review, but that the legislature cannot change or repeal a voter-passed law because of the voters’ “co-equal” lawmaking power (Drysdale 2026a). Of course, neither the SJC nor the voters have a right to prevent the legislature from amending or repealing any statute, even laws enacted by voters at the polls.

II. Ballot Measures Promise to be Hotly Contested in 2026

Because the General Court took no action on any of the pending ballot measures by the May 5 deadline, the Massachusetts 2026 state ballot will likely include a record number of measures for Bay State voters’ consideration (Cullen 2026). At the same time, despite a steady anti-Beacon Hill drumbeat in the political media’s coverage of state house politics so far this year, the vast majority of incumbent state legislators will, as *CommonWealth Beacon* reporter Chris Lisinski wryly put it, “amble into another two-year term without needing to expend any energy on campaigning or explain their positions on issues facing the state” (Ibid.).

Former progressive state legislator Jay Kaufman’s analysis of the state of Massachusetts politics heading onto the 2026 elections was more damning. Kaufman believes the record number of ballot measures reflects “democracy in decline” in the Bay State, where “desperate voters” have been forced to “take matters into their own hands” (Kaufman 2026). We too see the glut of ballot measures as a threat to effective democracy, but not because average voters are

desperate. More likely, organized special interests are exploiting an opportunity made clear by Auditor DiZoglio's continued success in keeping the public's attention on the legislature's perceived lack of transparency.

Despite the steady bad press for the legislature engineered by DiZoglio's audit campaign, re-election is a virtual certainty for all but a handful of statehouse incumbents. The legislature will, nonetheless, be a high profile rhetorical target in the Fall 2026 elections thanks to several ballot initiatives seeking to directly or indirectly upset the political status quo on Beacon Hill, not to mention every Republican candidate's aggressive rhetorical embrace of DiZoglio and her legislative audit crusade as a way to both mobilize their base without having to mention President Trump and to attack one-party rule at the state house. Measures to subject the state legislature and the governor's office to the state's public records law, a measure to collapse party primary elections into a single "all-party" primary election, and a measure that would create same day voter registration are all designed to encourage increased electoral competitiveness in state and federal elections in the Commonwealth. Another initiative petition, if enacted, would most directly change the way the state legislature operates by changing the way legislators are financially compensated for taking on party and committee leadership roles. Dubbed "legislative stipend reform" by its sponsors, the attorney general withdrew the initiative petition from the process after the SJC issued a non-binding advisory opinion indicating that the measure would violate the state constitution's guarantee that each legislative chamber has the authority to determine its own rules and procedures (Drysdale 2026).

In late 2025, with her legislative audit authority bottled up by legislative inaction, Auditor DiZoglio took the helm of the ongoing effort to pass a ballot initiative in 2026 that would apply the state's public records law to both the legislature and governor's office. She called it her "plan B" in the fight to bring legislative transparency to Beacon Hill (Heinonen 2026). This public records reform ballot initiative also has constitutional defects. Like the 2024 legislative audit initiative, the pending 2026 public records reform initiative would give executive branch officials oversight authority over the legislature, a potential violation of the constitution's separation of powers principle (Duquette 2025). The House transparency reform bill passed in early June and discussed above also sought to head off the need for DiZoglio's "plan B" public records initiative. Although the House bill did subject the governor's office to the state public records law, it created a legislatively managed process for requesting public documents from the legislature. Much to Auditor DiZoglio's chagrin, this public records compromise in the House bill won the endorsements of three powerful progressive and pro-transparency groups, the state chapters of the ACLU and Common Cause, and the Massachusetts Newspaper Publishers Association. As of this writing, the senate has not yet taken up the House bill (Lisinski 2026b).

The "all party" primary ballot initiative is a project of the *Coalition for Healthy Democracy*. The convening chair of this group is Harvard professor Danielle Allen, a longtime champion of expanding democratic participation in Massachusetts government and politics. The measure would replace party primaries with preliminary elections in which all candidates, regardless of party affiliation, would appear on the same ballot. The top two finishers then advance to the general election contest. The practical impact of this initiative is hard to predict. Research suggests that all-party preliminary elections increase voter turnout and benefit more

moderate candidates for office (Donovan, Micatka & Tolbert 2025, Henrickson & Johnson 2024). Interestingly, in Massachusetts these goals might not be what all the sponsors of the 2026 all-party primary ballot initiative bargained for. The *Coalition for Healthy Democracy* is driven by leaders with progressive policy agendas. The participation in the coalition by Bay State Republicans and political conservatives is motivated by the prospect of weakening Democratic control on Beacon Hill. It would seem that both sides of this anti-politics as usual coalition are aiming for more competitive elections with very different assumptions about the long-term policy consequences of increased competition.

The same day voter registration ballot initiative is being championed by Bill Galvin, who has been the Secretary of the Commonwealth for more than three decades. Incumbent legislators have long resisted same-day voter registration because knowing exactly who can and cannot vote as early as possible is useful to campaigns and candidates worried about potential “October surprises.” With the enactment of early voting and other voter access reforms in recent years, however, it is likely that this measure will face little, if any, organized opposition in the fall (O’Brien 2022).

Indirect challenges to the statehouse status quo that will activate constituencies focused on the impact of government spending and regulation on the state’s economic health will also appear as ballot measures on the 2026 ballot. One would amend a law passed by ballot initiative in 1986 that requires the state to issue mandatory tax rebates when state revenue exceeds a statutory limit.¹ Beacon Hill leaders strongly oppose this proposed amendment to Chapter 62F because it would reduce the legislature’s fiscal flexibility and potentially reduce state revenue without sufficient consideration of the fiscal and programmatic consequences. The SJC in June struck a proposed ballot question that, if approved, would have reduced the state income tax rate from 5% to 4% (Lisinski & Smith 2026). The impact of the elimination of the income tax reduction measure on the tenor of the fall campaigns is impossible gauge at this writing. It is hard to imagine, however, that the coalition of conservative political advocacy groups backing the income tax rate cut will be able to generate as much voter enthusiasm for the more complicated Chapter 62F reform described above.

The tax rebate and tax cut ballot initiatives were the work of a “a coalition of business groups” attempting to exploit the anti-Beacon Hill sentiment being generated by the legislative audit fight as well as economic anxiety, especially regarding the high cost of living in the Bay State (Van Buskirk 2025). Polling in June 2026 illustrates why tax cut and tax rebate ballot initiative backers were feeling bullish about their chances of winning significant policy changes. Pluralities of respondents indicated that they are worse off today than they were four years ago, and tax burden ranked third on the list of concerns, with 15.8% of respondents citing it (Prignano 2026).

¹ For a discussion of how the 1986 voter-passed tax rebate law upended Beacon Hill in 2023, see Duquette, Jerold (2026). “Massachusetts Politics in 2024-25: Irrelevant Republicans, Pragmatic Voters, and Constitutional Vandalism from the State House and the White House” in *The New England Journal of Political Science*, Vol.15, No.1 (Fall 2025).

An initiative seeking to replace the 2016 voter-enacted statute that legalized recreational marijuana and a voter-initiated referendum asking voters if they wish to preserve or repeal a comprehensive gun control statute passed by the state legislature in 2024 will, no doubt, produce high profile and divisive media campaigns this fall as well. Both measures will likely activate culture war themes and constituencies that activists left and right can appeal to in their campaigns against Beacon Hill leaders.

Ballot initiatives seeking to allow the state's public defenders to bargain collectively, to create a dedicated fund for land and water conservation, and an initiative on "starter home zoning" that would eliminate local zoning rules requiring minimum lot sizes for single family homes are less likely to make the front pages very often this fall, though each will generate intense interest from impacted constituencies.

Finally, a measure that would establish rent control in the state, overturning a ban on rent control laws passed at the ballot box in 1994, is also on track to appear on the 2026 ballot at the time of this writing. With regard to this measure, there has been media reporting on a possible deal between the legislature and proponents of the rent control initiative that could keep this measure off the ballot (Young 2026).

III. Easy Re-Election for Democratic Incumbents State and Federal

The paradox of high public dissatisfaction, according to public opinion polls, and low electoral competition in Massachusetts remains strong in 2026. A Suffolk University/Boston Globe poll released on June 16, 2026, found that "[m]ore than half of Massachusetts voters said they can't point to a signature accomplishment Governor Maura Healey has made during her first term. Yet, the Democrat still appears poised to win reelection easily" (Gross 2026).

The same poll illustrates why some ballot initiative backers, nonetheless, feel good about their chances of winning significant policy changes. As noted above, pluralities of respondents indicated that they are worse off today than they were four years ago. More than 40% of respondents said that the high cost of living had made them consider moving out of Massachusetts in the past year. Tax burden ranked third, while the top cost concern, according to 33% of respondents, was food and grocery costs (Prignano 2026).

While this is all good news for the backers of the tax rebate ballot initiative (and the income tax cut measure that the SJC struck down), it is no real comfort to Republican candidates up and down the ballot hoping to knock off a Democratic incumbent. It will fuel GOP candidate rhetoric, no doubt, but it won't be enough to separate them from the Trump Administration, especially when voters have begun to link the persistently high cost of consumer goods to Trump Administration economic and foreign policy mistakes.

IV. The Trump Administration's Continued Assault on the Commonwealth

As has been noted, since taking office following former Attorney General Maura Healey's election to the governorship, current Massachusetts Attorney General Andrea Campbell has had a busy time of it vis-à-vis the Trump Administration (Duquette 2025). Indeed, the

administration in the past year continued its relentless efforts to diminish the federal government's traditional regulatory footprint and influence in areas of particular concern to the states, including education and the effects of global climate change, and Campbell's office continued in turn to take the lead and join in lawsuits aimed at Trump administration initiatives in these and other areas. Several of these lawsuits have, in the past year, yielded victories for Campbell and for Massachusetts—victories which will tangibly affect the Commonwealth's fortunes in multiple ways, including literally. Not all the Commonwealth's pushback has been in the federal courts: the General Court too has responded to federal immigration enforcement efforts by attempting legislation that seeks to formalize legal and policy priorities for Massachusetts in respect to the Trump administration's vigorous immigration policy enforcement. In fact, Bay State elected officials—both on and off Beacon Hill—at both the state and federal levels have made their opposition to the Trump administration's attacks on Massachusetts a central theme of their public activity and commentary whether or not they are on the ballot in 2026. Republican challengers angling for the 2026 ballot in the state are talking about Trump, too, though with far less relish.

The one curious exception is the state auditor, Diana DiZoglio, whose fire is trained squarely and exclusively on Establishment-friendly politicians at the state house.

We begin with a review of some of the litigation that Campbell has led or joined in which courts have sided with the states over the administration. There is much from which to choose: in the first year of Trump's second term, Massachusetts sued the administration 47 times (Lannan 2026). In the area of education, for instance, Campbell led coalitions of like-minded attorneys general to wins in federal district court in cases worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Last summer, a coalition led by Campbell scored a victory over the U.S. Department of Education regarding the department's decision to withhold billions of dollars in education grants to the state (Adams 2026a). Initially, the department stated that the grants were under review to ensure that they aligned with the president's "priorities." The department ultimately agreed to release the funds, with \$107 million expected to go to Massachusetts school districts for behavioral and mental health programs, summer and after-school programs, classroom materials, and bullying prevention and intervention. Campbell later lamented the "chaos and confusion" created when the department refused to release funds that Congress had previously allocated; the disruption, she stated, "cannot be undone." (Ibid.)

Relatedly, Campbell had Massachusetts join another suit against the department, this one aimed at the department's decision to withhold funding for certain mental health services for elementary and secondary schools aimed at creating "learning environments where students feel safe, supported, and ready to learn" (*Washington v. U.S. Dep't of Education* 2025). The department discontinued this Congressionally-authorized funding because, among other reasons, it concluded that these grants conflicted with the policies and priorities of the administration, violated federal civil rights law, undermined the well-being of students, and constituted the inappropriate use of federal funds. The states prevailed in federal court. The court concluded that the department had reneged on commitments it had previously made; failed to consider the states' reliance interests; and left states guessing as to why, specifically, the grant funding had been discontinued. The court admonished the administration, noting that nothing in the existing regulatory scheme "comports with the Department's view that multi-year grants may be discontinued whenever the political will to do so arises." (Ibid.)

The department's attempts to discontinue the flow of education grants to the states in each of these instances is of a piece not just with the administration's larger deregulatory efforts, but initiatives aimed in particular at blue states, like Massachusetts. Campbell, for her part, is not just fighting the good fight for basic principles of constitutional governance, but for the fiscal benefits that Massachusetts political leaders had already built into their budget calculations and allocations. In other words, even setting aside the illegality of the Trump administration's attempts to hobble the kinds of education programs that Massachusetts has embraced, the damage that Campbell sought to mitigate can be quantified in terms of dollars—indeed, millions of them.

So too with a Trump *bête noire*, the specter of global climate change and the policy preference of certain states for green energy solutions, which the Commonwealth has in recent years embraced to varying degrees through both legislation and executive action. Regardless of the origins of the administration's skepticism about global climate change and its consequences, its approach to clean energy production has been uniformly dismissive. Thus, Massachusetts unsurprisingly joined 16 other states and the District of Columbia (and the Alliance for Clean Energy New York) in opposing the administration's directive that all federal agencies pause wind energy authorizations (*New York v. Trump* 2025). The court found that the federal agencies that had implemented the presidential directive failed reasonably to consider the relevant issues and failed to explain their decision to implement the so-called "Wind Order"—other than stating that the president had essentially told them to stop current and future wind power projects. The court concluded that the agencies' actions were arbitrary and capricious, and contrary to law. Given the temporal timelines of wind energy projects, the suit succeeded to the extent the judicial decision allowed these projects to continue, including projects off the Commonwealth's shores. (Ibid.)

With an eye toward ensuring that the energy needs of the Commonwealth could be met at least in part through green initiatives, Campbell's office more recently joined attorneys general from six other states in seeking to overturn a settlement agreement the Trump administration reached with private wind power concerns in New York (DiGangi 2026). The state plaintiffs alleged in a complaint filed in June 2026 that the administration's agreement to pay a private company millions of dollars to cancel offshore wind projects in New York was illegal, because the settlement was a sham. The Massachusetts hook was the energy supply chain: Campbell's office noted that the Commonwealth "routinely" imported energy from New York, which supplied the New England region, from January to April 2026 with about 7% of its energy load (Norton 2026).

Finally, Massachusetts could not in the past year escape the turmoil caused by the Trump administration's aggressive immigration enforcement policies. In this area, though, the most significant response has been developing in the legislature as it seeks to clarify governing law. As noted by one commentator, the efforts by the governor to regulate civil immigration law enforcement in Massachusetts by executive order were important but would not be as effective in the long term as the codification of a durable statutory framework (Gearty 2026). Recognizing that the circumstances demand a statutory response, each house came forward in early 2026 with a proposal. The house bill, known as the PROTECT Act, would limit when state and local law

enforcement could inquire into immigration status and when nonpublic personal information could be shared with federal immigration agents; it would also prohibit state and local agencies from entering into agreements to deputize local officers to conduct immigration enforcement in various situations. The senate bill, rather than regulating state and local relationships with federal authorities, would create a state civil cause of action for individuals whose rights were violated in the immigration enforcement contexts. As Gearty notes, “[t]hese developments reflect a broader reality: immigration enforcement may be federal in theory, but it increasingly intersects with state institutions — local policing, courts, detention facilities, and public services.” (Ibid.) That the General Court seeks to codify some aspects of the Commonwealth’s response to federal immigration enforcement is a recognition of this broader reality, though as of this writing the joint committee on the judiciary has yet to commit to one of the proposals or a timeline for the enactment of any bill.

Not even halfway through Trump’s second term in the White House, the president has shown no sign of letting up on his pet causes: diminishing the federal administrative state, compelling compliance with his policy preferences notwithstanding their unpopularity, and continuing attempts to punish the states who he believes may have wronged him—sometimes, it seems, merely by their efforts to enforce respect for federal law and the basic principles that underlie the U.S. Constitution. In light of these considerations, Massachusetts would appear to be an ideal target, and no doubt the attorney general will litigate many more fights with the administration in the coming year—to protect the rule of law, yes, but also to protect the Commonwealth’s security, financial and otherwise.

Another consequence of the Trump administration’s various deregulatory efforts has been the provision of ample rhetorical fodder to Massachusetts politicians serving at both the federal and state levels. In respect to the former, one need look no further than the Commonwealth’s junior senator, Democrat Ed Markey. The 79-year old Markey, seeking reelection in November 2026 for the seat he has held since 2013 (after serving as a representative in the House for 37 years), has, in response to a primary challenge from six-term U.S. Representative Seth Moulton, made challenging the Trump administration a centerpiece of his campaign. For example, the senator, who chairs the Senate Health Committee’s primary health and retirement security subcommittee, has emphasized that he and his fellow Democrats are “ready for ... battle” and that the battle “has to be the agenda for the Democratic Party in [the November] election, and then it has to be what we do next year” (Hooper 2026).

The Commonwealth’s senior senator, Elizabeth Warren, not facing the electorate in November, has railed against Trump and his administration’s policies in more practical contexts—namely, actual committee hearings. For example, at a Senate Finance Committee hearing in June 2026, Warren turned Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent’s testimony about the need to end congressional stock trading as an opportunity to question the secretary, on the record, about the president’s ethically conflicted stock trades. “So, Secretary Bessent,” she stated, “you and I agree that it is a conflict of interest for members of Congress to trade stocks. Do you also agree that it’s a conflict of interest for President Trump to trade stocks?” Perhaps needless to say, Bessent offered little of substance in response (Olmstead 2026).

As for state officials, Governor Healey and Attorney General Campbell unsurprisingly have spared no opportunity to make clear that the current administration is no friend to Massachusetts and the Commonwealth's policy priorities. In her 2025 State of the Commonwealth address, for example, Healey barely mentioned Trump; a year later, it was a different story (Lisinski 2026). That address illustrates the extent to which Healey seeks to use Trump and his administration's policies as political foils. She blamed him for exacerbating the affordability crisis and for "throw[ing] tantrums like a two-year old" (Ibid.). More pointedly, she expressly saw her goal as providing what the federal government could not: "stability, security, and ... a little common sense" (Ibid.). Campbell, too, has fashioned the president into an object against which she can define her role as the Commonwealth's chief law enforcement officer, often speaking about the cost of Trump policies in the context of the litigation against the administration, discussed above. For example, after a federal court of appeals affirmed a permanent injunction against Trump administration efforts to discontinue funding for medical and public health research, she stated that the "victory sends a clear message that the Trump Administration cannot sacrifice the health of our residents for its own political agenda," and she pledged to "keep standing up for our residents when the federal government threatens their wellbeing" (Press Release 2026).

Interestingly, notwithstanding that she has become a fixture in local media outlets, Auditor DiZoglio has focused in her many media appearances on what she sees as the state legislature's attacks on democracy and not the arguably more consequential attacks on democracy by the Trump administration and the Republican Party, or even the discontinuance of federal funding that is affecting the work of many of the agencies and departments her office is charged with auditing. Indeed, perhaps more than any other statewide official, she is positioned to appreciate the fiscal and resource consequences of the Trump administration's war on programs whose policy preferences he opposes, and it is curious that DiZoglio rarely makes this substantial externality a feature of her rhetorical tirades, which, as indicated, are typically and almost exclusively aimed at fellow Massachusetts elected officials, including the members and leaders of the General Court, the attorney general, and the governor.

Republican contenders for the governor's office are talking about Trump slightly more than DiZoglio—but not by much, and not necessarily in a positive light. John Deaton, for example, the Republican cryptocurrency lawyer and U.S. Senate contender, has not been coy about his dislike of Trump on the campaign trail, instead emphasizing a need for unity in the Commonwealth (Micek 2026). For their part, other Republicans aspirants also tend to focus on the need to address local issues, rather than edicts from the White House (Ibid.). As mentioned above, GOP campaigners in the Bay State have made an ally out of Auditor DiZoglio. Her attacks on Beacon Hill have made her the most popular politician among the voters Republican candidates need most.

Conclusion

This past year and at this moment, though state house leaders remain in full charge of conventional policymaking and November's legislative, congressional, and statewide election contests promise no significant surprises, politics could be seen as anything but usual in the

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. At the same time Massachusetts faces external threats to its policy preferences and sources of programmatic funding from the Trump administration—and its state and federal contingents speak with virtually one voice in opposition to the administration’s actions—the state legislative establishment is being challenged by a coalition of right and left-leaning advocates who have found a champion in the state auditor. A force behind the voter-enacted law granting the office of the state auditor the power to audit the legislature, she has emboldened critics of the legislature in politics and in the media to rally around the cause of legislative transparency. The members of this incongruous coalition likely see different ends resulting from a legislative audit and the weakening of legislative leadership to which the audit might lead: the left seeks more action on its progressive policies and the right lower taxes and less governmental regulation.

The different perspectives—the Commonwealth united against an overbearing federal executive branch but divided as to how state government should function—illustrate the different features of the governmental systems outlined in the U.S. and Massachusetts constitutions, respectively. At the federal level, a supine Congress has allowed the president to exercise authority that both the text of the constitution and its framers surely thought would lie within congressional control. The President, for his part, wields the power he has claimed not with regard to constituent needs but through a retributive lens. Meanwhile, under the Massachusetts Constitution, with its plural executive and direct democratic lawmaking option, the struggle is not between the legislature and the governor; it is between the state auditor and the state attorney general, between the state auditor and the legislature, and, not least, between the people and the legislature via the initiative process—all thanks in no small part to the efforts of the state auditor herself, as she relentlessly promotes the view that she can represent the people’s interests better than the members of the House and senators they elected to represent them. Laboratory of democracy indeed.

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