

MASS REVOLT

MITT ROMNEY WAS GOVERNOR OF MASSACHUSETTS JUST SIX YEARS AGO. **TODAY HE'S SO UNPOPULAR HERE** HE'S BARELY BOTHERING TO CAMPAIGN IN THE STATE. THERE ARE REASONS FOR THAT—AND THEY COULD SPELL DOOM FOR HIS PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN.



BY JASON SCHWARTZ

ILLUSTRATION BY LINCOLN AGNEW

HELLO, AMERICA.

Greetings from Massachusetts.

Or, for the moment, from New Hampshire.

It's a gorgeous late-summer day, and I've driven from Boston up to St. Anselm College in Manchester to watch Mitt Romney host the 100th town-hall meeting of his presidential campaign. Supporters young and (mostly) old are streaming into the campus quad, a delightfully discordant mixture of old-line New England Republicans dressed in their Sunday best and apparent Tea Partiers—like the woman wearing an American-flag polo that's emblazoned with the text of the constitution, or the walrus-mustachioed gentleman in a T-shirt declaring himself, "Pro-life to the Max." A smiling, white-haired usher in a blue Romney T is herding folks along: "You may vote right, but today you're going left. Go to the left!"

There on the left, a circle of bleachers has been erected, creating a sort of outdoor stadium. As patriotic country music blasts from the speakers ("It's a man on the moon and fireflies in June and kids sellin' lemonade / It's cities and farms, it's open arms, one nation under God / It's America"), staffers hand out small U.S. flags

to the 3,000 or so in attendance. Glistening on the side of an ivy-covered brick academic building is a three-story-high "America's Comeback Team" banner adorned with the Romney logo. The stagecraft—something Romney became famous for as governor of Massachusetts—is remarkable. The only thing missing is the fife-and-drum corps he used at the Faneuil Hall bill-signing ceremony for his healthcare law.

After a string of warmup speakers, Romney and the man he's recently picked as his running mate, Wisconsin Congressman Paul Ryan, enter the quad to massive cheers. "Gosh, I feel like I'm almost a New Hampshire resident," our former governor opens. "It would save me some tax dollars, I think." That, it seems, is a dig at Massachusetts. He continues on, now speaking about Ryan. "I appreciate the fact that he's learned how to work with people on the other side of the aisle. As you may appreciate, having served as governor of Massachusetts, you either did that or you perished, because my legislature was 87 percent Democrat." As the crowd boos the Massachusetts Democrats, Romney's response is

magnanimous. "Oh, they're okay, that's all right. Anybody here from Massachusetts?"

Now hearty cheers ring out. "Oh my goodness, wow, I always comment, there's a border security problem here, all right? Thanks for letting me across the border this morning."

The lame joke passes mostly unnoticed—there are polite chuckles from the crowd—but it's still odd to watch a major presidential candidate poke his home state. Barack Obama embraces his Chicago ties, George W. Bush is so Texan he clears brush for fun, and Bill Clinton was the Man from Hope. But Romney has, at best, an awkward relationship with our commonwealth. According to a MassInc poll from the summer, 52 percent of Massachusetts residents currently view him unfavorably, while just 35 percent see him in a positive light. By contrast, fellow Republican Scott Brown has the reverse numbers: 48 percent favorable, 30 percent unfavorable. Romney is expected to lose Massachusetts by 15 to 20 points in November.

When he does talk about his time here as governor, it's usually to pump up his bipartisan bonafides or brag about how he balanced the budget without raising taxes. (Strictly speaking, this is true, though helpfully devoid of context: All Massachusetts governors are constitutionally required to balance the budget, and while Romney technically may not have raised taxes, he did hike fees on a variety of government services.) What he does not discuss are the hugely successful bills he passed, like universal healthcare and an assault-weapons ban. Obviously, he also does not mention just how unpopular he was when he left office.

So please, America, pay attention. There's been too little talk about Romney's time as governor of Massachusetts, and now that

you're deciding whether to make him our next president, it's worth understanding just how and why he alienated the voters who know him best. Because the big problems that have been plaguing Romney on the campaign trail—that he's personally inaccessible, that he's had trouble unifying his party, that he's become known as a flip-flopper—all have their roots in Massachusetts.

Of course, Romney was once well liked here. He took office in January 2003 as the savior of the Salt Lake Olympic Games and a business wiz who'd built Bain Capital into one of the most successful and influential private-equity firms in history.

Frederick Kalisz, the Democratic mayor of New Bedford at the time, recalls that Romney's talents could be dazzling. New Bedford wanted to open a new aquarium on its waterfront, so to help secure state funding and tax credits, Kalisz requested a meeting with the governor. Romney—traveling without staffers to handle the mundane details for him—made the 60-mile trip to New Bedford, and soon scheduled a follow-up. "He came the second time and the man had done his homework," Kalisz says. Romney had drilled down on the topic—aquarium construction, of all things—and returned to New Bedford for a third meeting, too. The project never got off the ground, but Kalisz says it wasn't for the governor's lack of interest.

When Kalisz relayed the story



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ROMNEY AS GOVERNOR

From top, taking the oath of office; signing his landmark universal healthcare law at a Faneuil Hall ceremony in April 2006; and surveying damage caused by a 2006 explosion in Danvers.

to his fellow mayors, though, a funny thing happened: Nobody believed him. “They thought I was joking when I said he was physically in my office,” Kalisz says.

For all of Romney’s intelligence, dealing with people has never been his strong suit. That was apparent to no group more than the mayors of Massachusetts. “Every other governor has been somebody you could talk to,” says William Scanlon, the longtime mayor of Beverly and an independent. While former Republican Governors Bill Weld and Paul Cellucci were known to show up in town and shoot the breeze, Romney was a different story. “There’s just nothing there,” Scanlon says, “no relationship with the man. He totally ignored the mayors.”

John Barrett, then the Democratic mayor of North Adams, was particularly critical of the way Romney handled cuts to local aid while he was trying to balance the budget. “What bothered us more than anything else is that he never talked to us prior to making the cuts,” Barrett says. Things got so heated that, when Barrett appeared on New England Cable News with Eric Fehrstrom, the governor’s communications chief—who remains his top adviser—the two began shouting at each other in the station lobby. “It all started when I said to him on the way out, ‘Eric, why won’t the governor meet with us?’ And Fehrstrom just went ballistic,” Barrett recalls. The specifics of who shoved whom first are in dispute, but before Barrett knew it, they were tussling with each other.

Romney was equally closed off on Beacon Hill. He rankled his fellow State House politicians by designating the elevator near his office as exclusively for his use. “We couldn’t even walk near the governor’s office—we were stopped,” says Jason Aluia, then a top aide to former Speaker of the House Sal DiMasi, a Democrat.

“He came in with a lot of red carpets. He didn’t have relationships in the building whatsoever. I just don’t think he tried to build them.” Though Romney maintained cordial and productive relationships with former Senate President Robert Travaglini and former Speakers of the House Thomas Finneran and DiMasi, other legislators complained that Romney was aloof—that he didn’t know their names or seem to care to.

Nor did Romney appear to connect any better with voters, despite what seemed like an auspicious start to his term: In his first six months, he crisscrossed Massachusetts, making 55 official visits to different cities and towns—from Pittsfield to Worcester to Quincy—according to his daily schedules kept in the state archives. But even as he did, his events tended to be highly orchestrated. Romney typically parachuted into town and then zipped right out. Democratic political consultant David Guarino, who covered Romney as the *Herald’s* former State House bureau chief, says the trips were more about attracting cameras so he could publicly push his agenda. “I didn’t at all get the sense that these were about building a sustained long-term network for governing or for reelection,” Guarino says. “It was much more about, Let’s continue to put pressure on the legislature.” Developing relationships with only the House speaker and Senate president may have been a solid strategy—the Massachusetts legislature almost always falls in lockstep behind its leaders—but a pattern was emerging: If Romney didn’t see a political advantage in building a relationship, more often than not, he wouldn’t.

Robert Dolan, the mayor of Melrose and a moderate Democrat (he’s endorsed a Republican

for Congress in his district), says Romney often came to town for fundraisers and would work the hall just fine. But when it came to engaging with everyday people, he displayed little enthusiasm. “What he never did,” Dolan says, “which is what Governor Patrick did and Governors Weld and Cellucci—Governor Weld was famous for it—is walk downtown and enter nonscripted, politically unsafe environments.”

Effectively, Romney created a bubble for himself, very similar to the one he’s employed while running for president. Out on the trail, he often seems robotic when trying to relate to people, and almost never answers impromptu questions from the press. When he does go off-script, the results are often poor. Romney has a strange habit, for instance, of trying to guess people’s ages and ethnicities. And then there was the time last spring he told a woman that her cookies—purchased from a popular local bakery—looked like they came from 7-Eleven. Or when, just prior to the Olympics, he was asked in a TV interview about London’s readiness for the Games—not the kind of question he keeps a prepared answer for—and managed to offend half of Great Britain by calling the preparations “disconcerting.” Given Romney’s obvious national aspirations while governor, it’s somewhat curious that he didn’t practice off-the-cuff exchanges more often. Apparently he believed that life outside the bubble was just as perilous for him then as it’s proving to be now.

Iwant to meet some local Romney supporters, so I call up the Massachusetts Republican Party and ask if Romney has any campaign activities scheduled for the state. I’m not expecting any door-to-door canvassing, but maybe there’ll be some phone-banking.

There is not, they report, though I’m told that some local Romney supporters are known to go up to New Hampshire, a genuine swing state, and volunteer there.

So one morning in August, I drive north to the Romney “Victory Office” in Nashua, wedged into the middle of a strip of offices and restaurants. It’s a single room, outfitted with folding tables and chairs and political signs plastered on the walls. I get to chatting with four women who’ve come up from Massachusetts to volunteer. One works as a child-protection advocate, and says she’s there because she appreciated Romney’s efforts on the issue as governor. Two others say they think Romney is the man to get the economy back on track. The fourth woman won’t stop talking about how Obama is going to turn America into a third-world country. She also declares his universal healthcare law racist on these grounds: “They’re going to tax tanning booths. Do black people tan?” They put her to work making calls.

The divisive politics of tanning aside, it’s worth repeating that I had to come to New Hampshire to find these people. Romney made such a mess of things in Massachusetts that he’s not even trying to campaign in the state where he was chief executive just six years ago. Actually, it’s fitting that he isn’t sending volunteers fanning out across Massachusetts, since, as governor, he lost interest in traveling around the state as well. According to his daily schedules, Romney’s number of official visits

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY AP IMAGES



ROMNEY AS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE
From top, charming voters in Bethel Park, Pennsylvania; at the Republican National Convention with wife Ann and Condoleezza Rice; shaking hands with VP pick Paul Ryan at an August rally at St. Anselm College.

MASS REVOLT

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to cities and towns steadily declined over his first two years in office, dropping from 55 the first six months of 2003 to 40 in the six months after that, and from 38 to 28 in the first and second halves of 2004. By contrast, according to numbers provided by his office, Governor Patrick made more than 400 trips to cities and towns outside Boston in his first two years in office, more than twice as many as Romney. Perhaps the two administrations tallied their events differently, but there's little doubt that Patrick has been far more active in engaging communities across the state.

After those first two years, Romney basically checked out of Massachusetts. He planned 78 town visits in 2005, and just 25 in the first 10 months of 2006 (the final two months of his 2006 schedules were missing from the records in the state archives). That year he spent all or part of 219 days outside the state, building his national profile.

A failure to connect in local communities seems to be characterizing Romney's current run for president as well. During the primaries, he managed to dispatch his weak opposition mainly by carpet-bombing them with negative ads. The plan worked well enough for clearing out the likes of Herman Cain and Michele Bachmann, but it may have left Romney somewhat challenged in the much tougher general election. In the crucial swing states of Colorado, Florida, Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, Ohio, Virginia, and Wisconsin, Obama has a total of 404 field offices listed on his website. Romney, who's been effectively running for president since 2004, lists 176.

Romney's inability to grasp the nuances of local politics and the power of more than surface-level connections was also behind perhaps his biggest failure in Massachusetts: the botched state legislature elections of 2004.

Eager that year to prove himself the kind of leader capable of uniting reasonable people of all political stripes, Romney and the Massachusetts GOP set about building a massive slate of 131 Republican candidates for the State House, pushing some \$3 million behind them. The plan was to get enough of them elected to inject a good dose of red into this bluest of states, loosening the Democratic vise grip on the House and Senate, and in the process establishing Romney **CONTINUED ON PAGE 186**

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MASS REVOLT

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as a worthy presidential candidate. Building his case, Romney attended 66 events for 42 legislative candidates in the months leading up to election day. It didn't work. Nearly all of his candidates went down to defeat. The Republicans actually lost three seats in the legislature, leaving them with their fewest since 1867.

The *Globe* was blunt in its assessment: "Legislative Losses Are Also a Major Blow to Romney's Prestige," blared one headline. It's true that Romney's plan was hampered by Massachusetts Senator John Kerry being on the presidential ballot that year, but the real problem was that Romney didn't seem to grasp that legislative races are, above all, local. For years, Republicans in Massachusetts had focused on electing headliners like Romney, Weld, and Cellucci at the expense of developing "bench depth" with bottom-of-the-ticket candidates—selectmen, sheriffs, and the like. So while Romney and the Massachusetts GOP found plenty of people with impressive private-sector backgrounds to run for office, few of them were familiar to voters. Asking them to begin their political careers with a run for state legislature was too big a leap. "It's hard to start from doing nothing and then run for Senate," just-re-elected state Senator Scott Brown—one of the few Republicans who did win that year—told the *Globe* at the time.

Someone truly interested in bringing more balance to Massachusetts' political landscape would have been better off developing a smaller, more-seasoned slate, one that might have resulted in enough new Republican lawmakers to prevent the House and Senate from overriding all of a Republican governor's vetoes. It would have been slow, unglamorous work—and you don't get much national publicity for slow, unglamorous work.

Late in the morning of July 19, word comes out that Romney, in Boston for meetings at his North End campaign headquarters, will be doing an early-afternoon event at Middlesex Truck & Coach, a small business in Roxbury. It's been six days since Obama spoke his now-infamous "You didn't build that" line. The president said, "If you were successful, somebody along the line gave you some

help. There was a great teacher somewhere in your life. Somebody helped to create this unbelievable American system that we have that allowed you to thrive. Somebody invested in roads and bridges. If you've got a business—you didn't build that. Somebody else made that happen." While it's obvious that Obama was referring to the roads and bridges, Romney has spent the last week portraying the quote as an all-out attack on entrepreneurs. The point of the Roxbury event is to highlight Obama's flub by appearing with someone who did, in fact, build a business.

I arrive at Middlesex Truck & Coach about an hour before Romney's visit to find 150 or so chanting protestors. Keri Lorenzo, an organizer for the local 1199 Service Employees International Union branch—affiliated with workers at the nearby Boston Medical Center—says she had to scramble to get them out. "We found out at, what, 11:15, 11:30—we had about a half an hour or so," she says. She's happy with the number of demonstrators here, but adds that if she had a day to plan, "you could multiply that by 10, easily."

There are no Romney supporters in sight, at least outside the building, and the Democratic officials working the crowd are borderline giddy. Boston City Councilor Felix Arroyo is making sport of how few times Romney found his way to the neighborhood as governor, despite working less than three miles away in the State House. "There was definitely GPS in the car to get here," Arroyo shouts, laughing. "Take a right at the Roundhouse!"

By springing the event late, it feels like Romney is sneaking around in his own hometown. And the consensus in the crowd is that this is pretty much his first time ever in Roxbury. In fairness, it's not. According to his daily schedules from the time, Romney planned a total of eight events in Roxbury over his four years as governor. Six of those events, though, were in 2003 and 2004, meaning that, over the last two years of his term, he managed only two official visits to one of the state's neediest neighborhoods.

When Romney arrives at the garage—apparently entering via a side or back door—he begins hammering Obama and praising Middlesex Truck & Coach's founder, Brian Maloney. "This is not the result of government," Romney says of the company. "This is the result of people who take risk, who have dreams, who build for themselves and for their families."

Afterward, though, Maloney tells WBZ's Jon Keller that he started his

business with the help of a government loan, making his success quite literally the result, at least in part, of government. Internet commentators delight in Romney's gaffe, but it's hardly enough to keep him from continuing to make "You didn't build that" the centerpiece of his campaign.

That's not the only distortion Romney's latched onto in his campaign—he's sounded alarms at fact-checking operations everywhere with his claims that Obama is "robbing" Medicare of \$716 billion and that the president simply followed his blueprint for saving the auto industry.

Of course, none of that should take anyone by surprise. As governor, Romney showed Massachusetts that—pragmatic to the core—he was willing to say whatever was needed to advance his political career. Facing an emboldened Democratic majority in the legislature after his 2004 election debacle, Romney began to turn his attention away from Beacon Hill and toward Washington, DC. In the process, the former self-described "progressive" shifted his views on gay rights, abortion, and stem cell research to appeal to a more conservative audience.

In 2005 Romney vetoed a bill that would have expanded embryonic stem cell research even though his wife, Ann, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, had recently said she hoped that same research could help cure MS. The legislature ultimately overrode the veto. Romney would later veto an emergency contraception bill as well, only to see that one overridden, too. The growing sense that Romney viewed Massachusetts as merely a steppingstone did not go over well. By November 2005, a Suffolk University/7 News poll found that his favorability rating—47 percent a year earlier—had plummeted to 33 percent, while his unfavorability rating had rocketed up to 49 percent.

When he finally left office, even the conservative *Herald* editorial page was happy to see him go. "We can only imagine how much more he might have managed if he held the day job in higher esteem than as a convenient springboard for a presidential campaign," the tabloid editorialized. Tellingly, when Romney ran for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination, several prominent local Republicans, including three of the five GOP state senators, endorsed other candidates.

To explain his sudden conservative turn as governor, **CONTINUED ON PAGE 188**

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Romney tells a story of meeting with Douglas Melton, a Harvard stem cell researcher, and becoming sickened when he learned of the casual way human embryos are killed for science. Melton has refuted Romney's story, saying the conversation didn't happen at all like that—that the killing of anything never even came up. While it's impossible to know who's telling the truth in this instance, bending reality to fit his narrative is something Romney's made a habit of while running for president. Just as it's difficult to recall another governor who shifted his views so much to appeal to a bloc of voters, it's difficult to recall a presidential candidate who has relied so much on falsehoods and out-of-context quotes.

The first sign of trouble came in an ad Romney's campaign ran last fall, quoting Obama saying, "If we keep talking about the economy, we're going to lose." In reality, the clip came from the 2008 election, and Obama was actually referring to something said by a John McCain aide. A small controversy over the ad erupted, after which Fehrnstrom, Romney's top adviser, affirmed to the press that the outright distortion was part of a calculated strategy.

Lately, Romney has taken to launching misleading attacks that tread on highly charged racial ground. Playing to a Michigan crowd in August, he said, "No one's ever asked to see my birth certificate. They know that this is the place that we were born and raised." Aside from dog-whistling to birthers, he's been hitting Obama on welfare, launching ad campaigns falsely alleging that the president is trying to make it easier for recipients to collect free money without having to work. In reality, the Obama administration told state governments that if they wanted to experiment with new ways to fulfill the welfare system's work requirements—ones that increased the number of people actually working—the administration would consider the requests. Both the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* now flatly refer to Romney's allegations as false. Other independent fact-checkers have also discredited the attacks. But that hasn't stopped Romney's campaign from continuing to hit Obama on the racially fraught issue, ever-so-subtly suggesting that Obama, a black president, is trying

to make it easier to give handouts to poor (read: black) people.

At the Republican National Convention in August, Ashley O'Connor, a top Romney strategist, told reporters, "Our most effective ad is our welfare ad." Romney pollster Neil Newhouse added, "Fact-checkers come to this with their own sets of thoughts and beliefs, and we're not going to let our campaign be dictated by fact-checkers."

Back at his town-hall rally at St. Anselm in Manchester, Romney is now addressing the claims that he's been taking Obama out of context with the "You didn't build that" attacks. "So by the way," Romney says, "go on YouTube and look at the context, all right, the context is worse than the quote. Because he says if you're successful you think it's because you're smart, but there are a lot of smart people. And if you're successful you may think it's because you work hard, but there are a lot of people who work hard. And I wondered, where's he going with this? Is there something wrong with being smart and working hard?" Obama certainly left himself exposed with his clumsy choice of words, but Romney is again skirting the president's actual point, somehow managing to take him further out of context in his effort to explain how he's not taking him out of context.

Continuing on the theme, Romney says, "The other day I thought about a kid who works hard to get the honor roll. And she works real hard. I know that to get the honor roll she had to go on a school bus to get to school. But when she makes the honor roll, I credit the kid, not the bus driver." Less than a minute after that, Romney lists education as one of his top priorities. "I'm going to make sure that our schools are second to none. We need our kids to have the skills to succeed," he says. Presumably, he's going to use honor-roll pixie dust to make that happen, since he declined to acknowledge the publicly funded aspects of a child's education besides the school-bus driver: the teachers and the schools.

It's another in a long line of Mitt Romney contortions. For you fine people in the rest of the country, it's a newer phenomenon. But the majority of voters in our state grew weary of all the shifting, flipping, and word-mincing a long time ago. That is why this rally for the former governor of Massachusetts is happening here in New Hampshire, safely across the border. **B**

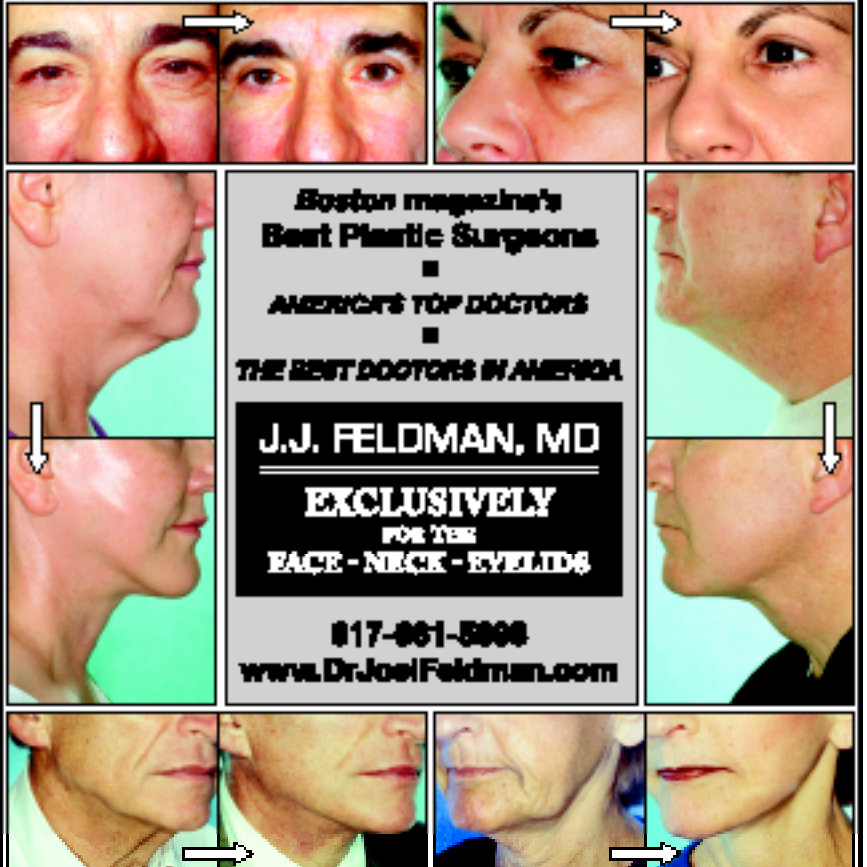
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