

QUESTIONS FOR MARTHA COAKLEY
HAND-DELIVERED MONDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2009
TO MS. COAKLEY AT THE CUP & SAUCER CAFÉ
NORTH ADAMS, MASS.

Dear Ms. Coakley:

I was invited by a friend to a meeting with U.S. Senate candidate Martha Coakley in North Adams on Monday, Nov. 22. To inform myself on the issues, I read candidate weblogs, and sent this query by email to about 70 friends around the state: "I've been invited to an appearance by Martha Coakley in North Adams tomorrow -- her home town. Assume I get a chance to ask her some questions, what would you have me ask? I'd like ideas for questions about issues, not politics, substance not the horse race. Since #hcr and her abortion stance are well covered, I'm looking for other issues." Some 16 people responded with questions. I also solicited questions at our daughter's end-of-soccer-season family banquet. Here are the questions which resulted. I will post all these questions on the blog site: <http://www.greylocknews.com> and will post your answers, when they are received. I hope you appreciate this effort to supply you with a cross-section of what's on the minds of your prospective constituents.

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1. **WHAT IS YOUR DEBATE STRATEGY?** -- Hyde Park resident Michael Ball of the political blog www.massmarrier.blogspot.com says you have failed to respond to requests for interviews and participation in podcasts with progressive bloggers. On Saturday, you reportedly accepted and then at the last minute withdrew from a four-way debate in Lincoln, Mass. Said Michael Capuano in Lincoln: "Someone who wants to be a United States senator is repeatedly unwilling to put themselves out in front to answer tough questions, to have a debate with their colleagues, how can they possibly think they are going to be a successful United States senator?" On the other hand, one of your supports wrote that as a woman you come across as cautious and measured, and as a woman are labeled as boring and uncharismatic, where as if you were more fiery, like two of your opponents, you would be labeled as high-strung and unstable. All that aside, if not in debate, what is your plan for being routinely accountable to voters now and if elected? Will you pledge to make yourself available for at least two more televised debates before the Dec. 8 primary? If not, why not? Why do you think some campaign observers have formed the impression that you are ducking debates? Do you ever think a public servant would be justified in avoiding a neutral venue to be accountable with other candidates? If so, when, and do you see yourself in that position now? -- from Bill Densmore, Williamstown, Mass., 413-458-8001, bdensmore@newshare.com
2. **STRUCTURAL UNEMPLOYMENT** – While some economic numbers are looking better, the nation has millions of people unemployed, and millions more under-employed, including hundreds of dollars who are unemployed and beyond expiration of unemployment benefits. Do you think it is the role of government or private enterprise to give able workers a job? And if it is private enterprise, what will you do to provide the certainty in costs of health care, social security and other taxes that will help make businesses confident to hire?

3. **FEDERAL SHIELD LAW** – Holding government accountable requires that whistleblowers may take their case to the public and media without fear of being identified except when there is an extreme, countervailing public purpose (such as national security). In June of 2008 you were one of only nine state attorneys general NOT to sign a bipartisan letter urging U.S. senators to pass a federal shield law. The bill was signed by 41 attorneys general, including those of Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire and Connecticut. As you know, federal shield legislation has been passed by the House and is currently awaiting a vote from the Senate Judiciary Committee. Why did you not join the other AGS supporting the federal shield bill; what is your position on the current bill; and will you vote for it if you are elected to the Senate and are called upon to vote on it? – from Robert Bertsche, Boston, Mass. (counsel to New England Newspaper & Press Assn.)

4. **YOUR USE OF STATE CAMPAIGN FUNDS** -- On Nov. 17, NECN ran a clip showing you being asked by a reporter: “Can you explain why as a senate candidate you are not speaking to your campaign records?” You replied: “No, thank you.” The reporter asked: “Why can’t you explain that.” You replied: “I’m not going to talk to you about it.” Given that, according to the NECN report, the FEC is investigating a charge by the state Republican Party that you might have illegally spent money for the Senate race from your state campaign coffers, could you please explain what it is that this is a subject you’re not going to talk about? In Oct. 5 interview with Channel 5, you said you “were not going to say” that you weren’t running for the Senate in June. Surely this is a hyper-technical issue and we can assume not intentional problems, but assuming that to be the case, why not say so? --- From Bill Densmore, Williamstown, Mass., 413-458-8001 bdensmore@newshare.com

5. **FUNDING EDUCATION/LIBRARIES** -- Since 2002, Massachusetts schools have been progressively starved of funds by a series of state aid cuts and town-budget reductions. In Amherst, for example, the cumulative cut since 2002 is close to \$20 million, on an inflation-adjusted basis. Property taxes are a terrible way to fund schools. How about fact that regional Bookmobiles in Western Mass. are being cancelled and small communities have no library funding? What is the answer for the nation’s schools and libraries and what role should the federal government play? In a more general sense: What will you do as a senator to support the Massachusetts economy, especially in Western Massachusetts, where high-tech and health-tech have largely not replaced manufacturing decline? Or, in other words, why did you and your siblings leave North Adams and does that matter? – From Richard Hood, Amherst, Mass. – rick@flowmediadesign.com / and Art Clifford, Amherst, Mass. / Clifford@journ.umass.edu / and Bill Densmore (last part).

6. **FARM / SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES** – The average American farmer is now about 59 years old. As farms grow more corporate, and larger, most food is grown far from markets and cities. This makes our food system vulnerable to increased transportation costs and rolling crop failures. What will you do in the U.S. senate to create incentives for smaller, “locally-grown” initiatives that have the potential to create more sustainable communities?

7. **WHICH COMMITTEE?** – What committee(s) of the Senate will you ask to join if elected and why?

8. **WHAT WILL YOU ACCOMPLISH?** – Imagine you are elected and you are at the end of your first term in the senate. By what criteria would you expect voters to judge your performance? What specific, tangible things do you hope to achieve? How will Massachusetts, America and the world be different, and better, because of your service in Washington?

9. **IMMIGRATION POLICY** – The Great Barrington Courier reports this week that a few weeks ago, a 20-year resident of Great Barrington, a respected business person, was taken from his home at 11 p.m. by immigration authorities, imprisoned and deported to Mexico because he was undocumented. What reports to you support in current immigration policy? Would you support any form of amnesty for the 22 million undocumented workers currently in the United States, whereby they can continue living here while earning citizenship? Should they be eligible for government health-insurance benefits? -- from David Scribner, Pittsfield, Mass. and Martha Byington, Boston, Mass.
10. **CIVIL LIBERTIES** – President Obama has been clear that he would prefer to look forward than to rehash legally the alleged civil-liberties transgressions of the Bush administration. As a prosecutor, have you ever thought there was a time when credible allegations of violations of civil rights and First Amendment freedoms should be overlooked? How would you react, as a U.S. senator? Should constitutional freedoms be preserved, even in time of crisis? -- From David Scribner, Pittsfield, Mass. – dscrib@verizon.net
11. **COLLEGE FINANCIAL AID** – As attorney general, what have you done about enforcing financial-aid fair-disclosure regulations on private colleges? What about online colleges? Why does it appear prosecutions in other states are way ahead of Massachusetts? -- from Joe Beckmann, Somerville, Mass., 617-625-9369, joe.beckmann@gmail.com
12. **INTERNET CENSORSHIP** – Many schools and libraries in Massachusetts apply “filters” to their Internet connections. Lost in the filters is access to many legitimate web services increasingly vital to political discourse, including YouTube and Facebook. As a senator, would you act to get government out of the business of censorship, or at least out of the business of such broad-stroke censorship? Does government have a role to play in shielding minors from every corner of the web, or is that up to parents? -- from Bill Densmore, Williamstown, Mass., 413-458-8001, bdensmore@newshare.com
13. **INFORMATION DEMOCRACY** – In October, the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy released a 100-page report which, among other things, recommended a national commitment to network neutrality, high standards for universal broadband access, digital and media literacy education as critical components of classroom curricula, curricula, and increased support for public media that meets community needs. Are you familiar with the report, and what do you think the Senate can do about those priorities? -- from Bill Densmore, Williamstown, Mass., 413-458-8001 / bdensmore@newshare.com / (<http://www.knightcomm.org/>)
14. **WORLD COMPETITION** -- What does America need to do to ready ourselves for increasing economic competition from China, India and Brazil; what, specifically, is the responsibility of the senator from Massachusetts, and what, specifically is beyond the scope of those senatorial responsibilities. Give examples of each. – From Samantha Clemens, Somerville, Mass., 617-642-0088 / sam@causeandeffectworld.com / www.samanthaclemens.com
15. **PERSONAL WEALTH** – Based on your own statements, as reported by questioner Martha Byington, of Boston, you have pegged your personal family wealth at somewhere between \$1,000 and \$250,000 – not including the substantial sums you have raised for political campaigns. Is that your total personal wealth? If so, that would make you one of the most middle-class of U.S. senators. Asked one questioner: “How can we expect her to represent us when she can't even manage her own finances and put money in the bank?” What do you see as the pros and cons of going to Washington as an inexperienced (in Washington) person of modest means as compared with at least two of your opponents. Does that make you vulnerable to special interests, or immune to them them? -- Inspired by questions from Martha Byington, Boston, Mass., mebyington@comcast.net and Steve Garfield, of Boston, Mass. <http://www.stevegarfield.com>

16. **PRISON REFORM** --- As a prosecutor, you are familiar with prisons, the fact that three out of 10 American black males has been in prison, that the incarceration rate per capital in America is among the highest in the world. Most people are in prisons for drug offenses. The trends are not good and warehousing people in prisons is an increasingly expensive proposition for society. What will you do in the senate to spotlight America's prison-industrial complex and figure out how to shrink it, perhaps by treating drug use as a medical not criminal problem, and youth offenders as candidates for reform not recidivism?
17. **HEALTH-CARE REFORM** – A couple of people support in principal your stand in favor of covering the costs of abortion in any federal health-care reform legislation. But they ask if you would vote against an otherwise acceptable bill solely because it contained abortion-funding restrictions? Their view is that to do so might be reflective of an ability to see the need for compromise and consensus in a legislative situation. One person asked detailed questions about coverage, appended at the bottom.
18. **CONGRESSIONAL ETHICS/FINANCE/SPEECH** -- You have occasionally been criticized as being soft on political corruption, preferring to let the U.S. attorney's office investigate allegations rather than get involved yourself. Would you care to defend your record? And can you identify one concrete step you would support to ensure the integrity of members of Congress? For example, how would you strike the balance between curbing the influence of campaign contributions on Washington and the right of citizens to “speak politically” through their pocketbook support of public officials? A related question: Why should a legal corporation have First Amendment rights? Do you think the Founding Fathers intended that? Would you support overturning legal precedent on that point? -- Bill Densmore, with help from Dan Kennedy, Northeastern University / da.kennedy@neu.edu / www.dankennedy.net

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