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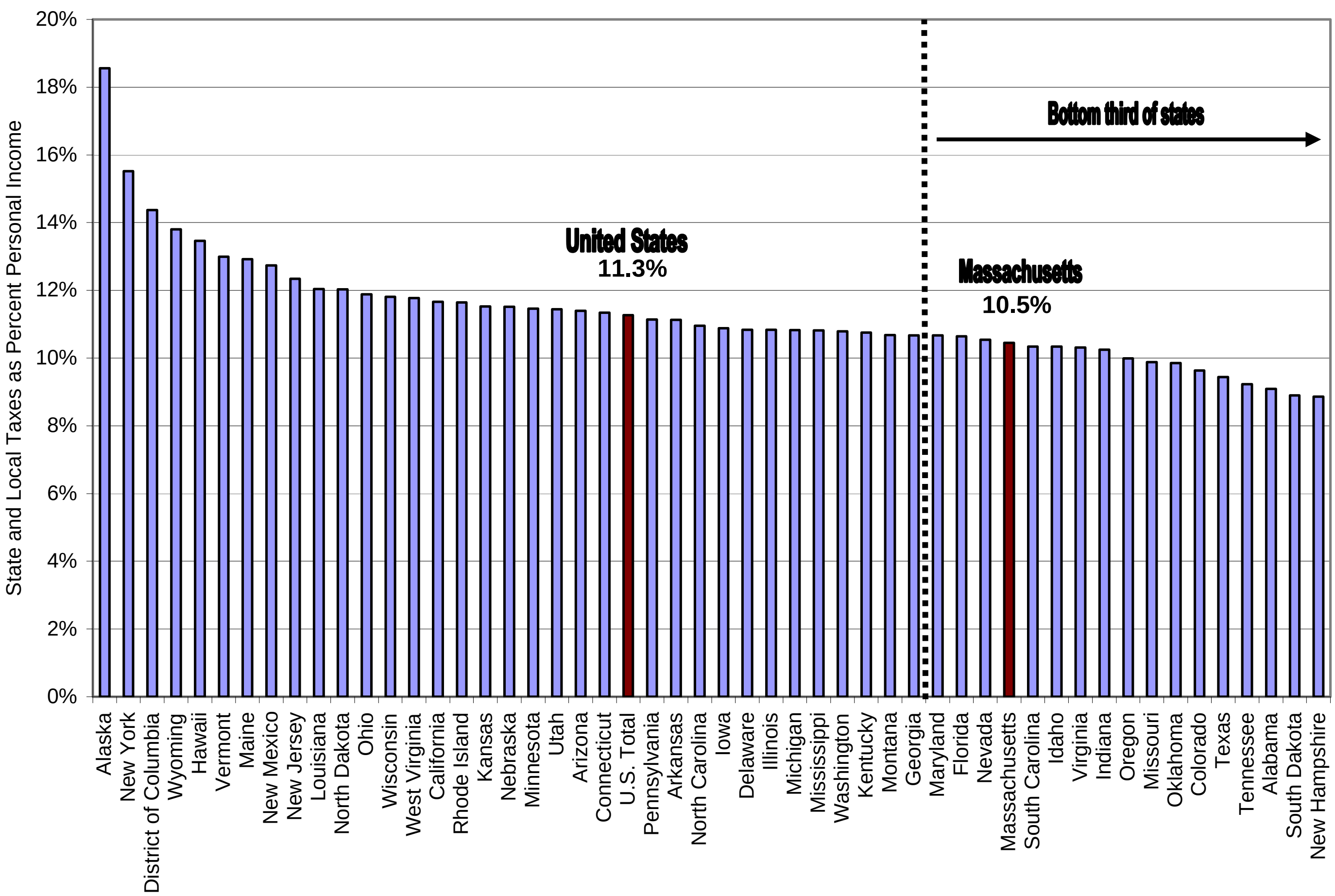
FACTS AT A GLANCE September 30, 2009

Taxes as a share of personal income fell in Mass. in FY 2007

Today the U.S. Census Bureau released its annual update of State and Local Government Finances, providing national data for Fiscal Year 2007. The amount of state and local taxes paid in Massachusetts as a share of state personal income fell from 10.6 percent in 2006 to 10.5 percent in 2007. Massachusetts dropped in rank from 35th among all states in 2006 to 38th in 2007 (including the District of Columbia).[1] Measuring taxes as a share of total personal income allows for a meaningful comparison among states. (See "Technical Notes," below.)

Taxes are both amounts that each resident pays, as well as the primary source of funding for everything the people of a state pay for together, such as: public education; police and fire protection; roads, bridges and other infrastructure; environmental protection, parks, playgrounds, libraries; and a safety net to protect access to health care and other supports families depend on – particularly when they are faced with acute challenges.

In 2007, Massachusetts ranked in the bottom third of all states for taxes as a percent of State Personal Income



Since 2007, Massachusetts has increased several types of state taxes. For example, *MassBudget* estimates that the increases enacted in 2009 as part of the FY 2010 budget will raise an additional $884 million annually.[2] Looking at today's Census data, we can see that Massachusetts' level of taxation (10.45 percent) was well below the national average (11.27 percent) in 2007. Had Massachusetts taxed its residents at the national average, the state would have raised an additional $2.5 billion in that fiscal year.[3] Therefore, while nationwide data more current than 2007 are not available, it is likely that Massachusetts' ranking still remains well below the U.S. average, even given Massachusetts' recent tax increases. This is especially likely given that 10 other states enacted their own tax increases in 2007 and 2008 in response to widespread budget gaps.[4] With ongoing revenue shortfalls, 30 states have enacted tax increases in 2009.[5]

Technical Notes

The comparisons in this fact sheet present taxes as a share of income. This measure is used - rather than *per capita* taxes - because the per capita measure conflates two separate elements: tax rates and incomes. This issue is most easily understood in the context of the income tax. If one state has an income tax rate of 5 percent and an average (taxable) income of $50,000, then the per capita tax is $2,500. If a state where the average (taxable) income is lower - for example, $30,000 - has a tax rate of 6 percent, than the per capita tax in that state is $1,800. Thus, even though tax *rates* are higher in the low income state (6 percent rather than 5 percent), a *per capita* ranking would show the state with the *higher* tax rate as having "lower taxes." Using taxes as a share of income avoids this problem.

The Census data and the analysis we present in this fact sheet differ somewhat from that presented by a commonly cited source, the Tax Foundation. The Tax Foundation, like *MassBudget*, uses the basic structure of comparing taxes as a share of income. The Tax Foundation, however, makes a number of adjustments to the data. Two of these adjustments are particularly important. First, the Tax Foundation attempts to *project* current year taxes as a percent of current year income (which we don't do because we choose to report actual data – which lags by several years - rather than provide projections). Second, it seeks to estimate the taxes paid by residents of a state rather than taxes collected in the state. The second adjustment means that property taxes paid by a Massachusetts resident on a vacation home in Maine would count as Massachusetts taxes. While there are contexts in which such an adjustment may be helpful, for comparing tax policies of state and local government, it makes the most sense to look at the taxes collected by those governments.

Finally, one important shortcoming in the state personal income data (compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis) that is used for calculations in this fact sheet is that these data omit income derived from capital gains. The tax data (compiled by the U.S. Census), by contrast, include *all* taxes, *including* the taxes paid on capital gains income. As a result, the measures presented in this fact sheet overstate the share of economic resources paid in taxes, making public services appear more costly to state residents than they in fact are.

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[1] Revisions to data from fiscal 2006 have changed Massachusetts' ranking from 36th (as was reported last year) to 35th.

[2] Budget Monitor, July 9, 2009: http://www.massbudget.org/documentsearch/findDocument?doc_id=681&dse_id=928

[3] In fiscal year 2007, BEA state personal income in MA was $307.3 billion. If the MA tax rate had been the national average of 11.27 percent (0.82 percent higher than it was), MA would have taken in an additional $2.5 billion (0.82 x $307.3 = $2.52).

[4] Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Update on State Budget Cuts", Sept. 3, 2009: http://www.cbpp.org/files/3-13-08sfp.pdf

[5] Ibid