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John L. Micek - Political columnist

Right goals, wrong argument? The real stakes in the fight over a 1% income tax cut

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A Massachusetts ballot question that, if approved, would cut the current 5% personal income tax by 1%. Progressive groups argue the tax cut will not solve sky-high rents, unaffordable child care and unequal schools that are driving people to flee the state (Photo by Matt Smith)



By [John L. Micek](#) | [jmicek@comcast.net](#)

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If you ask the folks behind this year's ballot push to shave a percentage point off the state's income tax, they'll tell you it's all about preserving the commonwealth's competitive advantage.

Approving that 1% cut to the Bay State's 5% personal income tax levy, they argue, will encourage businesses to stay, hire and expand their footprint in Massachusetts.

It'll also keep homeowners, who have been battered by the commonwealth's admittedly high cost of living, from fleeing to more tax-friendly climes.

The way Max Page sees it, those are the right goals. It's just the wrong conversation.

Page, the president of the hugely influential Massachusetts Teachers Association, the state's largest teachers union, is all in on competition.

Pitching Massachusetts as an educational and technological leader that boasts great schools and is a great place to raise a family is exactly the right argument to make.

But he's absolutely not a fan of the roughly \$5 billion hole the tax cut, if approved, will punch in the state's bottom line.

And he definitely doesn't relish the cuts in programs, including education, that top lawmakers have said will be necessary to offset the revenue loss.

"From our perspective, in the education and union world, there's this disjuncture. It's a wealthier state than it's ever been," Page said during a wide-ranging interview.

“So it’s not just that we’re slowly wealthier over the years, we’ve gotten remarkably wealthier, but it’s been continued,” he continued.



“So you have this sense of like, this is one of the wealthiest states. If we were a nation, we’d be one of the wealthiest nations in the world, per capita,” he said. “And yet, why are we having all these troubles where poor and wealthier communities are desperately trying to figure out how to pay for municipal services and public schools?”

Page, joined by progressive allies, including the Boston-based **Massachusetts Budget & Policy Center** and the advocacy group **Raise Up Massachusetts**, wants to sell voters on that argument.

Right now, they have their work cut out for them.

Nearly 6 in 10 respondents (59%) **to a University of New Hampshire poll** released Thursday said they “strongly” or “somewhat” supported the tax cut ballot question, backed by the Massachusetts Opportunity Alliance, which represents a constellation of business interests.

There’s a stark partisan divide in those numbers. Nearly all of the poll’s Republican respondents backed trimming the tax to 4%. That’s compared to about half of all self-identified independents and just about a third of Democrats.

The key to neutralizing those numbers is selling voters on the notion that, while the tax cut might sound good, a 1% reduction isn’t an economic silver bullet, Andrew Farnitano, a spokesperson for Raise Up Massachusetts, said.

“What we’ve been discussing is that there’s a lot more that goes into competitiveness beyond taxes. Taxes are a small percentage of a household’s expenses,” he said.

Taxes are “a small percentage of expenses at the state level. There’s not a ton of evidence that they’re having anything with the migration or competitiveness issues that individuals or businesses are facing,” he said.

“And the things that we can use tax revenue for, like education, transportation (and) affordability, have much more to do with our economic competitiveness than the tax rate that businesses or individuals are paying,” Farnitano argued.

There’s some indication that voters already know what they’re being asked, and they’re just fine with it.

Just about three-quarters (75%) of respondents to the UNH poll said they understood the tax question “very well” or “somewhat well” compared to 22% who said they didn’t understand it “very well” or “not well at all.”

The UNH poll, conducted from April 16-20, surveyed 721 Massachusetts residents, with a margin of error of 3.6%.

The poll also included a smaller sample of 606 likely voters in the 2026 general election, with a margin of error of 4%.

Meanwhile, research by the [Center for State Policy Analysis](#) at Tufts University concluded that the tax bill for the average middle-class household would shrink by around \$1,250 a year.

And while that’s a savings, it’s not make or break for younger families who might look to a host of other factors to leave the state, Phineas Baxandall, the policy director at the Massachusetts Budget & Policy Center, said.

“What makes ... people leave is, they maybe want a family, they maybe need some kind of affordable child care and they find that’s just really hard to do here,” he said. “We have some of the highest rents outside of California anywhere in the U.S.”

“We still have inequality in how school systems are,” he continued. “So if you want to move to one of the best school systems, often the housing prices are really high. I think, for a young family, it often makes sense for reasons that have nothing to do with taxes,” Baxandall said.

In a statement, Massachusetts Opportunity Alliance spokesperson Colin Reed argued that the “public data is crystal clear: High taxes are driving people out of Massachusetts, and tax relief is a key priority for remaining residents.

“That’s why **75% of people** in the commonwealth, including **78% of teachers**, support lowering the income tax rate from 5% to 4%,” he said, pointing to recent polling by his organization.

“But this is about more than personal . It’s about kickstarting our economy’s long-term growth and making the commonwealth a more attractive place to live and work,” he said.

Time will tell if voters finally agree.

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John L. Micek

John L. Micek is MassLive's politics editor. An award-winning journalist, he has covered politics in state capitols and city halls across the country and in Washington, D.C.



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