



In the News: A Focus on Healthcare

Denterlein's In the News, an event series focused on critical issues shaping the Commonwealth, recently featured Chairman Jeffrey Sanchez, a long-time state representative and current chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee.



Jeffrey Sánchez
Chairman
House Ways and Means

With 14 years in the state House of Representatives and just four months into the most powerful--but demanding--job on Beacon Hill, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Jeffrey Sanchez faces dozens of competing interests and unprecedented federal funding uncertainty. From the cost pressures that threaten MassHealth to his support of the so-called millionaire's tax 2018 ballot question and the implications of a sales tax reduction also headed to the ballot, Sanchez shared insight into the Legislature's biggest hurdles in ensuring Massachusetts moves forward and for the benefit of all its citizens.



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The relentless growth in the cost of healthcare remains top of mind for the chairman, as it absorbs 40 percent of the state's budget, \$16 billion a year in all. Sanchez has been a long-time supporter of healthcare for the underserved. And while the chairman says that while state leaders managed to make the numbers work for state-funded healthcare in Massachusetts this year, the challenge of balancing the budget and covering MassHealth starts all over again in January, with the future anything but clear.

"It's not sustainable if we take into consideration everything that's going on in that big cloud that is Washington, D.C., at the same time, we have all committed to making sure that it's a right to have an insurance card in your pocket."

-Chairman Sanchez

Sanchez represents parts of Jamaica Plain, Roslindale and Brookline. He also serves Mission Hill, the neighborhood where he grew up after moving from Puerto Rico as a young boy with his mother, who was hoping for better medical care for his sister. Looking out the 32nd floor window of the UMass Club, Sanchez pointed to the gulf between the financial district and the residential areas that sprawl out to the west.

"Thinking back to 1983, this part of the city didn't seem to care about the part of the city where I grew up. The streets were dirty, windows were broken, there was crime everywhere. Now, the city is vibrant and booming. But still, the divide remains. There have been gunshots every night for the past few weeks in my old neighborhood. Crossing this divide, caring for the people there, that's why I'm here now. It's about the people."

-Chairman Sanchez

He says it's these experiences that led to his support of the proposed Millionaires Tax, a 4 percent surcharge on incomes over \$1 million that, barring a successful legal challenge, would go before voters in November 2018. "There are a lot of people making a lot of money in Massachusetts," Sanchez said, and proceeds from the tax would be earmarked for public education and transportation. At the same time, Sanchez is alarmed by the prospect of a separate ballot question that could cut the state's 6.25 percent sales tax to 5 percent or even 4.5 percent. "We have to educate people about what that would mean, about what would be cut" if the tax reduction goes through.

In the nearer term, all the uncertainty about future federal Medicaid reimbursements is placing several state priorities in jeopardy, Sanchez said, including the insurer subsidies that reduce premiums and out-of-pocket costs for subscribers, the children's health insurance program (CHIP) and the Medicaid waiver that's pushing the industry toward value and capitated payment.

But despite all these challenges, Sanchez remains bullish about the Commonwealth as an economic engine and as a place to live. "If states were stocks, Massachusetts is the blue chip stock. There's no state that's got everything we have going for us, the growth, the investment, the universities, like Massachusetts has."



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