



Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Romney's good failure

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On stage in front of thousands of delighted delegates to the DNC in Charlotte, Governor Deval Patrick detailed the many ways in which his predecessor in the corner office on Beacon Hill failed the citizens of Massachusetts. And there was much to Governor Mitt Romney's record for Patrick to work with.

Never mind Mitt Romney's outrageous attempts to abuse the Commonwealth as the butt of his anti-liberal barbs, even while still holding the state's highest elective office, as he toured the country garnering momentum for his eventual run for the Presidency. According to Patrick, Mitt Romney left the Commonwealth in worse shape than when he assumed the leadership post four years earlier. Not only did Romney raise fees and cut education, but Massachusetts ranked 47th in job creation during his term as Governor.

There is, however, one failure to Romney's administration -- and a significant one according to his own assessment -- for which we in Massachusetts are fortunate, at least financially. And that is Romney's unsuccessful bid to restore capital punishment in Massachusetts.

I vividly recall Romney's December 2005 press conference in which he announced his intention not to seek re-election as Governor. Apparently, he had accomplished so many of his goals, including instituting universal health insurance. But his one big disappointment was not realizing his dream of bringing back the death penalty to liberal Massachusetts.

Romney's failure in this attempt was not for lack of effort on his part. Having commissioned a talented group of scientists and attorneys to develop best practices, Romney touted his proposal for a virtually fool-proof system for administering the death penalty as the Gold Standard, a model for the nation. With layer upon layer of procedural safeguards designed to eliminate the risk of error, it was a gold standard alright. But the gold was more reflective of the tremendous price tag for implementing the complex approach to punishing a small handful of criminals. Had Romney been successful in reinstating capital punishment along these lines, there's no telling how much worse off financially the state would be today.

Curiously, even while Romney endeavored to reinstitute the Massachusetts death penalty, several other states moved in the opposite direction, abolishing the barbaric and flawed practice partially, if not largely, because of the high cost. Apparently, this is just one more way in which Millionaire Mitt was out of touch

and out of step. Thank goodness that Romney failed in this one particular area of job creation -- and that is the position of state executioner.