



The 38 valedictorians of the Boston Public Schools' high school class of 2007 were honored at a recent luncheon at the Boston Harbor Hotel. Eighteen of the 38 have been enrolled in the Boston Public Schools since kindergarten, while others came to the U.S. from around the world, hailing from countries as diverse as Haiti, Cape Verde and Albania. All 38 of the valedictorians have been accepted into colleges and universities, including Boston College, Brown University and Harvard University. (Photo courtesy of Boston Public Schools)

# Gov. Patrick unveils plan to revamp public education

Glen Johnson

Gov. Deval Patrick has unveiled an eight-year plan to overhaul public education in Massachusetts, covering everything from preschool to college.

In the most ambitious plan since education reforms enacted in 1993, the Democratic governor will seek to lengthen the school day by at least two hours, create a universal pre-kindergarten program, strengthen curriculum requirements in math and English and launch new teacher training programs.

He said he also wants the state to offer high school graduates free tuition to the state's two-year community colleges by the year 2015.

But the top Republican in the state's House of

Representatives said last Friday that Gov. Deval Patrick's dramatic education overhaul, which includes a free community college education for all high school graduates, "fails to make the grade" because it does not include a way to pay for it.

"State government too often overpromises and underdelivers," said Rep. Bradley H. Jones Jr., R-North Reading. "Unfortunately, the governor's education proposal appears to fit right in with that record."

Jones added: "Without a funding mechanism or even an estimated price tag for implementation, the governor's proposal fails to make the grade."

The state's 15 community colleges are among the costliest in the nation, but are considered critical to the economy because at least 20,000 unfilled jobs in the state require a two-year degree, according to the plan.

"It is clear that Gov. Patrick gets it," said John J. Sbrega, president of Bristol Community College in Fall River. "From the very start, he has recognized the role of public education, and particularly the community colleges, in making

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*"In an age when most new jobs will require post-secondary education, this is a proposal that is bold and visionary."*

— John J. Sbrega

# Religion and politics go hand-in-hand in 2008

Joan Lowy

WASHINGTON — Lately it seems all the leading presidential candidates are discussing their religious and moral beliefs — even when they'd rather not.

Indeed, seven years after George W. Bush won the presidency in part with a direct appeal to conservative religious voters — even saying during a debate that Jesus Christ was his favorite philosopher — the personal faith of candidates has become a very public part of the presidential campaign.

Democratic Sens. Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama have hired strategists to focus on reaching religious voters. Obama's campaign

holds a weekly conference call with key supporters in early primary and caucus states whose role is to spread the candidate's message to religious leaders and opinion-makers and report their concerns to the campaign.

Democrats in general are targeting moderate Roman Catholics, mainline Protestants and even evangelicals, hoping to enlist enough voters for whom religious and moral issues are a priority to put together a winning coalition.

Clinton, Obama and former North Carolina Sen. John Edwards addressed liberal evangelicals on Monday at a forum on "faith, values and poverty." While Obama's comments focused more on policy than personal revelations, Edwards admit-

ted that he sins and prays every day, and Clinton acknowledged she probably could not have gotten through her well-publicized marital troubles with husband and former President Bill Clinton without relying on her faith in God.

Some top-tier Republican candidates, the natural heirs to conservative religious support, are finding the issue awkward to handle.

Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney has been questioned so much about his Mormon faith — 46 percent of those polled by Gallup in March had a negative opinion of the religion — that he has taken to emphasizing that he is running for a secular office.

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# Liberians divided over warlord Taylor's legacy

Rukmini Callimachi

MONROVIA, Liberia — Former President Charles Taylor's men were known for eating the hearts of their slain enemies. They decorated checkpoints with human entrails. They sliced open the stomachs of pregnant women, taking bets on the sex of the unborn child.

But as the toppled Liberian ruler headed to an international war crimes court in The Hague, Netherlands, on Monday, his supporters were erecting billboards in the capital showing him waving triumphantly next to the words: "God willing, I shall return."

The long-awaited trial of the man accused of orchestrating many acts

of horror would seem to be a time of celebration in the country that witnessed many of his alleged crimes.

Instead, the mood is one of outrage on the part of his former associates, who have launched a pro-Taylor Web site and have arranged for the shiny billboards to be shipped from Europe. They proudly display Taylor's portrait in their homes. Taylor's family is also renovating his war-scarred residence, as if in anticipation of his swift return.

Although plenty of Liberians say they are relieved to see the 59-year-old Taylor face justice, many say they just want to move on. Their ambivalence underlines the country's complicated relationship to Taylor,

as well as the nation's history of violence that has left few untouched.

"If you start prosecuting war crimes in Liberia, you'll prosecute every Liberian," said ex-child soldier Paul Tolbert, 28.

From 1989 to 1997, Taylor led the rebel National Patriotic Front of Liberia, whose aim was to unseat then-President Samuel K. Doe. Taylor is believed to be one of the first warlords to recruit children, who were organized into a Small Boys Unit and christened with names like "Babykiller."

Tens of thousands of people were killed in the first eight years of the 14-year war, but one of Liberia's great paradoxes is that Taylor won a landslide victory in a 1997 election that international observers deemed free and fair. One of the slogans chanted by voters was: "He killed my ma. He killed my pa. I'll vote for him anyway!"

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Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., left, shares a laugh with Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-NY prior to the start of the Democratic presidential primary debate of the 2008 election hosted by the South Carolina State University in Orangeburg, SC., Thursday, April 26, 2007. (AP photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

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