

# Opinion

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## EDITORIAL

### A path forward for the state Senate

Senate Democrats on Wednesday made the best of a difficult situation, deciding to keep acting president Harriette Chandler in that post as full president until next year, at which point the newly elected Senate will select a new leader. Chandler has pledged she won't be a contestant.

With that decision behind them, over the next 11 months senators should elevate the leadership-selection process to ensure they get the best person for the job. The Senate presidency, after all, is a powerful post, one that in many ways carries the prominence and prestige of a state-wide office. That being the case, the leadership contest shouldn't be just another behind-the-scenes campaign of promises, deals, handshakes, and winks, but rather one that asks the various aspirants to outline their priorities and describe the leadership style they would pursue if elected Senate president.

In the early jockeying, no candidate has seemed particularly prepossessing. A longer gestation period, with more scrutiny and a detailed explanation of how each prospective president would run the Senate, makes it more likely a thoughtful, high-minded consensus leader will emerge. Af-

ter all, one of former president Stan Rosenberg's most appreciated accomplishments has been the "shared leadership" process that has pushed considerable policy-making authority down to the committees, empowering individual members. That's a stark change from the way the Senate has traditionally operated, with the president and his or her leadership team — and particularly the Ways and Means Committee chairman — determining not just the policy direction, but most of the specifics. Although it's now unlikely that the embattled Rosenberg will return to the presidency, his democratizing changes should endure.

The change in Chandler's status and tenure came as a result of heightened concern about the situation with Rosenberg, who in December took a leadership leave while the Senate Ethics Committee investigated whether he had violated any Senate rules in connection with the controversies that surround his husband, Bryon Hefner.

That investigation came after the Globe's Yvonne Abraham reported that several men have accused Hefner of sexual assault and harassment. Hefner had reportedly boasted of his political clout with Rosenberg and made it seem as though he was very involved with Senate deci-

sions, leaving his victims fearful of retaliation if they reported Hefner's sexual misconduct. Rosenberg, who before taking office had promised his colleagues he would institute a "firewall" to keep his troubled partner out of Senate business, has insisted Hefner had no influence over his Senate actions. On Sunday, however, Abraham reported that Hefner had full access to Rosenberg's Senate e-mails, that he instructed and scolded Rosenberg's staff via text, and that he lobbied other senate offices on a budget amendment.

Although Rosenberg claims the story "contains a number of significant factual inaccuracies," he has notably failed to specify any. A spokesman says that's because he wants to respect the Ethics Committee investigation. That's his prerogative, certainly, though he is not constrained from speaking publicly if he chose. That investigation should go forward in a thorough and methodical way.

The last two months have been difficult for senators. But if they move forward in a thoughtful and deliberative way, with a leadership-selection process focused on what's best for the body as a whole, the Senate can emerge from this period in a better place.

SCOT LEHIGH

## Let's praise our fiscal leaders

Just when it seemed like Washington was hopelessly mired in budgetary brinkmanship, the same leaders who have saved us before stepped forward again to make possible a budget deal!

The military will get more money — and so will domestic programs. (Who says you can't have both guns and butter?) The win-win agreement will extend for two years. If it takes effect, we'll have a respite from the month-by-month or even week-by-week funding battles that have so embarrassed this once great nation.

Why, Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell and Senate minority leader Charles Schumer were so awash in the spirit of bipartisanship that they came close to saying nice things about each other.

We honestly should celebrate the incredible leaders who made it all possible. No, no, no, I don't mean those two. I mean the folks who will really put their shoulders to the wheel to get this done: The nation's youngsters. How so, you ask, since they weren't involved?

Well, how did the new budget deal get done? By lifting budget caps and agreeing to spend tens of billions more on programs favored by Republicans in exchange for adding tens of billions more for programs dear to Democrats.

The military gets another \$165 billion over two years, domestic programs another \$131 billion.

Net out the one-time spending for things like disaster relief, and we're talking roughly another \$300 billion over two years. Details of the plans are still murky, but if this deal establishes the new spending expectations — and

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there's little reason to believe it won't — the cost quickly snowballs. The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a well-known fiscal watchdog, estimates the budget deal will add about \$1.5 trillion to the national debt over a decade.

Hmmm. Now, why does that figure seem familiar? Oh yes, it's also the rough cost of the big tax cut, targeted disproportionately at businesses and upper earners, that Republican lawmakers passed and the president signed just before Christmas. Like this deal, that wasn't offset or paid for either.

No, the budget deal isn't yet done. But if it does become the template, that will mean that in less than two months, this nation will have made unfunded fiscal commitments that could incur \$3 trillion in additional debt over 10 years.

And who will bear that debt? The younger generation. And future generations.

"This is called a breakthrough because they didn't shut the government down, but it blows through any pretense of fiscal responsibility," says Bob Bixby, executive director of the Concord Coalition, another nonpartisan fiscal watchdog.

Republicans no doubt sincerely believe the military needs this new money. And the Democrats no doubt honestly think domestic programs need the extra dollars. But that being the case, they should find a way to pay for the new spending now, not pass the expense on to the future. That's not a way out of our problems.

After all, Congress is not doing this during a recession, when you could justify deficit spending as a way to prime the pump, but rather at a time when the economy is healthy.

This should be a period when we get our fiscal house in order, not mortgage the future. Instead, they're adding stimulus to an already strong economy, thereby stoking worries about inflation and rising interest rates, and sending waves of volatility through the stock market.

It's a sad day when putative leaders pat each other on the back for a pact like this.

It raises this question: Who in today's Washington speaks up for future generations?

And answers it too:  
No one.

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## The new tax law cuts a hole in charitable giving

By Lisa Alberghini and Karen LaFrazia

History came full circle recently as construction began at the former Boston Young Men's Christian Union on Boylston Street to convert it into 46 units of permanent affordable housing for men and women experiencing homelessness, and for people with very modest incomes.

This new use continues the legacy of the BYMCU's 150-year old mission of service to others. When it opened its doors in 1852, the BYMCU's goal was to welcome young men who, because of their backgrounds or religion, had been unwelcome in other community clubs. When the doors reopen next year, the building will provide homes for those in need who have not always been welcome in their communities. It will provide jobs for people experiencing homelessness, through a new ground-floor business venture. And it will become home to the administrative offices of St. Francis House, allowing an increase in needed program space across the street.

But this almost didn't happen, and replicating its success will be increasingly difficult because of changes in the federal tax bill passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump.

We closed on our financing on the very last business day of December. Had we been one day later, with the new tax law in effect, we might be telling a very different story — about a great project that almost happened.

St. Francis House and the Planning Office for Urban Affairs of the Archdiocese began working four years ago to redevelop the building for those who cannot afford the high rents in this growing downtown neighborhood. We knew it was an ambitious goal, but we also knew the needs of so many men and women experiencing homelessness or threatened by displacement.

This effort succeeded because the church, the government, and the private sector supported the project and worked for the common good. Governor Charlie Baker, Mayor Marty Walsh, Secretary William Galvin, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and our private banking partners were all key to this success. Too often, elected officials work at odds; here in Massachusetts — and on Boylston Street — they linked arms in mutual support along with our private sector partners. Equally important, the Chinatown community and our neighbors in luxury developments supported the project.

Financing a project like this is complex. Multiple sources of public and private funding had to be secured: Massachusetts housing bond bill funds; City of Boston housing resources; a loan and significant equity from Bank of America; support from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston and Eastern Bank.

But the new federal tax law will severely challenge similar developments in the future.

The law reduces the corporate income tax rate from 35 percent to 21



JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

percent, so corporations have less incentive to purchase housing and historic tax credits and passive losses, and it also limited the value of the historic credits. The equity raised through the sale of those tax benefits were a critical part of our financing — as they are for many affordable developments. These changes have already translated into lower prices paid by investors and, therefore, less private sector equity. Additionally, we worry that cuts will be made to federal programs that benefit the poor, to help offset the \$1.5 trillion in lost revenue from the new tax law.

By coming together with our partners to create this critically needed affordable housing, we honor the building's rich history with the promise of a bright future for many in need. Given the federal government's retrenchment, we must now work to bring this opportunity to others by countering the impact of the tax law changes. Continuing public support through the housing bond bill currently before the Legislature will help. At the same time, we are hopeful that corporations, which benefit most from the new tax law, will resist the temptation to reduce their financial investment, by holding prices firm and focusing, rather, on the underlying social investment and good that they continue to accomplish.

Lisa Alberghini is president of the Planning Office for Urban Affairs Inc., Archdiocese of Boston. Karen LaFrazia is president and CEO of St. Francis House.

The Boston Young Men's Christian Union building on Boylston Street in 1993.

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