

JANET WU: Now I'm going to ask our last candidate to come out. Grace Ross is a candidate for governor from the Green Rainbow Party. [APPLAUSE] You have a minute for opening remarks.

GRACE ROSS: Great. I love being in this building. I don't know how other people feel about it, but it embodies to me the critically important struggle that this community has had in an ongoing victory in keeping education right here. And I always feel like it's an honor to be here, proud to be with all of you, and I thank SkillWorks for bringing us together.

I'm a community organizer by background, usually have spent my adult life backing campaigns for other people. And you may ask why have I stepped out now to run for governor? The answer is, in talking to people on the street and door knocking and seeing that folks are more hopeless and feel more disempowered now, and I was given a figure recently that told me why that probably was, and that's because the bottom 60 percent, which I think means all of us, are doing worse than we were five years ago.

So when we talk about job training, I want to put it in a context. A context of unemployment: the government figures are too low, because they measure who's collecting unemployment, not who's actually not working. Underemployment, where lots of us are working and not making enough money to live, and overemployment, with those of us who are making enough money but don't have time to live. So there are signs that something is wrong, and we've got to do something about it. What I know is that we must and we can.

JANET WU: The first question is, how will you make workforce development, including job training, adult basic education, ESOL, and other essential training, an integral part of your jobs and economic development strategy?

GRACE ROSS: Well, they have to be, obviously, because we have to have the skills to do the jobs that are out there. I wanted to step back for a second, though, and talk about the two assumptions in that question, economic development and the development of jobs. It's great to have the skills, but if the jobs that you need that pay enough to survive aren't there, then it's not really going to help us.

I'm offering something fundamentally different from what you're hearing from the other candidates in terms of economic development. We've had at least a couple of decades of the idea that the answer is to bring in a big company and give them a big tax break, and that's how we're going to get them and that's how we're going to get the jobs. What will happen to that is that those big companies aren't invested in our local communities. They'll move on, the money that they make goes out of our communities and suburbs; we're experiencing a starvation in our local communities for money. There's plenty of work to be done renovating houses, fixing up our communities, but the money's not there to pay for it. So I'm offering something different. We need to do something that's been proven in lots of studies to work. We need to do things like increasing the minimum

wage to a living wage. We need to provide universal health care. We need to make housing affordable.

And as we move the money into the hands of the regular people, they're not going to outsource themselves. I don't know about you, but I'm not putting my extra money in my offshore tax shelter. So we really need to look at the question, if we bring the money in that way, guess who it helps? It helps small businesses. Small businesses provide about half of our jobs. They tend to be local, they tend to be the kinds of jobs that we're looking for when we're looking for jobs and we don't have the ability to travel long distances. And it puts money back in our communities, both in our pockets as workers, but also in the pockets of small business owners who are also local investors in our communities.

It actually kind of balances out the playing field for small businesses, because when they're competing against the Wal-Marts, they tend to pay very close to minimum wage. They can't compete, but when the Wal-Marts have to pay for health care and provide the same kind of income levels, then small businesses do better, we get jobs, and we get the money to survive.

JANET WU: Thank you. And your second question. In your first budget as governor, will you provide a public match that will support a workforce competitiveness trust fund, available to all workers and job seekers, and that equals the \$21 million workforce training fund that employers now support through a surcharge on unemployment taxes? And I'll ask you what I asked all the previous candidates, your thoughts on Governor Romney's recent veto of this line item.

GRACE ROSS: I was there. I oppose the veto. We know that we need the money to do the skill development. It needs to happen in the context of having those jobs to fill. I certainly support the \$21 million, partly because I know that a lot of the experts in this field, those of you who are on the ground, have said, that's how much money you need, and I trust your leadership. One of the things I think about leadership, it comes from the communities and from the grassroots and from the people who actually are living the experience.

Obviously, we need to assess how it gets spent, and we've got to deal with these issues around coordination. I know a lot of folks, as a community organizer, who want ESL classes, want GED classes, and they're not in my region. I've worked in MetroWest, which is rural and small cities, and suburban, and people can't get to the training courses that are there. So we definitely need to get the coordination.

Then we need to look at the reason why—In the materials, the businesses have identified about a huge need for folks with Associate's degrees or better. If anybody's been watching all the press coverage about who's leaving the state, it's folks with Bachelor's degrees.

Does anybody see that there's kind of a mismatch here? If the jobs are here, why are folks leaving? I think we need to look at the larger issues that the state is responsible for, like living wages that are on a scale that people can afford. Housing, we need to deal with affordable housing. We need to deal with universal health care. And we need to create jobs where they can be. And it's interesting that Deval Patrick has picked up on one of my favorite topics, finally, which is that global warming's coming down on us very hard and fast, and it's a huge growth industry. If we find a way to save our communities, we're also going to save ourselves. And there's a lot of jobs to be made retooling our energy dependence and where we're getting energy from. And a lot of those will be union jobs and will provide good technology and skills for all of us. So, let's make it happen.

JANET WU: Finally, the last question. Will you propose at least an \$8 million increase in adult basic education in your first budget as governor, and support increasing it further in subsequent years, based on the availability of state revenues?

GRACE ROSS: Based on the availability of state revenues, yes, but I think we also need to look at the need, and I think the need is way beyond \$8 million. Yes, we can do \$8 million in the first year, I'm sure, but I think we're going to find that if we really meet the needs and if we create a workforce and a living force of people who can speak to each other and who have the skills necessary to move our economy forward, we're going to find it's worth a much bigger investment than \$8 million.

I also wanted to say that, you know, we're talking about funding adult education and ESL, but part of the reason we're needing to do that is because we have a huge dropout rate at this point. We are not providing the funding that public education needs to provide smaller classrooms, which is how a lot of us got through school, and we need to deal with the MCAS requirement that's making particularly lower-income and students of color drop out of school faster. So we need that money, but we need it not just in those programs, we need it in education in general. We've got to cut the fee structure for our higher education institutions as well, so that we continue to serve the folks that are now being priced out again, the low-income students and students of color.

And then we need to make programs ESL and adult education available in our local schools and in those institutions of higher education, and moving backwards, fund them in the workplace. A lot of the unions have fought for basic education and ESL classes through the union structure as a way of reaching workers who otherwise might not have the time available, either during their work schedule or their day schedule to go to such classes. So we've got to find places for them, but we've also got to prepare our younger students so that they're not dropping out, and the rest of us who might want to go back for further degrees will be able to afford that and not endanger our future economic survival or indenture us to a job that we don't want, because we've got student loans we can't afford.

JANET WU: Very quickly, where would you get this extra cash for these programs? Would you take it out of the stabilization or rainy day fund, or would you cut other programs,

and what other programs would you cut? You've only got a few seconds, if you could answer that very quickly.

GRACE ROSS: I believe in raising revenues. We've also got a billion dollars in sweetheart breaks for corporations. We've lost about \$3 billion because people at the bottom are paying a higher percentage in total taxes and fees than the folks at the top, and if we just even out the percentage we're all paying, we get \$3 billion more a year, and there's more like that. The money's there. We live in one of the richest states in the richest country in the world, and we've got the resources. We've just got to decide to put them toward what we all need.

JANET WU: And you have two minutes for your closing remarks.

GRACE ROSS: Well, I guess I've said it. I think that what's really important here is that we start to understand that education and job training fits in with a life cycle that we're all trying to live and that training needs to happen where we can afford it and where we can fit it into our schedules. Right now, most of us are working longer hours for less money. Many of us don't get to see our friends or our family or our kids, and I think our whole society is suffering from that.

I've talked about the concept of a beloved community, whether it's the state level, our beloved Commonwealth. I grew up in New York State, and when I came here, I was very excited about the concept of being in a commonwealth. I thought, what a cool idea. The wealth being used for the common good. Wow. [LAUGHTER] And I still think that's a good idea.

So I think that there's a fundamental values question here, you know. Deval Patrick referred to something that a number of us have talked about. Reilly has too, about neighborhoods where, when you did something wrong and your parents weren't around, you knew it would get back to them anyway because someone else's parents were around. Our kids don't have those kinds of communities, and the issue of the amount we get paid at our jobs, the number of hours we have to put in, the availability of jobs, and then the job training necessary to get us the jobs we need, are all part of that overall picture, but we need to make the decision, are our lives going to become about our communities and our children and our future and beginning to care about each other? Not like, in New Orleans, where folks got left behind because nobody could figure out how to evacuate them. Or is it going to be about the way it is now, where we're putting all of our resources in our communities into trying to entice some more big businesses in to come save us.

I think we can save ourselves. We always have. We are the people who got the 40-hour work week. We ended slavery. We got the vote. We built the battered women's shelters that were a means of escape. So let's reclaim our job training program, but let's do it in the context of reclaiming the economy, which really belongs to us. [APPLAUSE]