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Mass. State Treasurer Deborah Goldberg: Fighting for Wage Equality

MARY MARKOS



Massachusetts State Treasurer Deborah Goldberg

Deborah Goldberg runs a mission driven state treasurer's office. Her vision is big and bold that government has the power to help people, so that's what it should be doing. While Goldberg is new to the state treasurer's office, having taken over from former treasurer Steve Grossman just a year-and-a-half ago, the idea of taking care of people is a lifelong mission for her.

Goldberg says what drives her political compassion has its root in history – the history of America, its immigrants, and family values that can be followed directly back to a store in the North End of Boston. When the family business that would eventually evolve into Stop & Shop opened its first store on the corner of Prince and Salem Streets in 1914, it wasn't just about meeting the needs of Goldberg's mother's great grandmother or her eleven kids, it also made jobs available to every friend or relative arriving from overseas who asked – many were even offered a place to live.

Stop & Shop emerged from this little store that started as Greenie's, for 'greenbacks,' referring to immigrants that became the foundation of Stop & Shop, explained Goldberg. "I have this unique family that has been a fixture in Boston, where these values have had enormous continuity through multiple generations," she added. When her side of the family sold out of the grocery business, Goldberg says she didn't lose her family-instilled desire to help others, and she looked for career choices that would continue to allow her to help people. "When I looked at the treasurer's office I could not believe the vast array of opportunity," said Goldberg.

As treasurer, Goldberg is in charge of the state's debt, cash, unclaimed property, the authority that helps communities pay for school construction, veterans' benefits, the alcoholic beverage commission, and the lottery. Goldberg eagerly brought in HR policies and HR departments that reflect her values, such as the 12-week parental leave she instituted.

Goldberg also established the office of economic empowerment, the first of its kind in the country. Led by a deputy treasurer, Goldberg says the office focuses tracking wage inequality and to shift the trends in a different direction. According to Goldberg, when 51% of the population is not being paid what they are entitled to be paid for the same work that a man gets, the economic stability and economy of the state is being harmed. "And you are harming these people's families," she added.

Back in April, Goldberg launched a new website, EqualPayMA.com, to assist employers in ensuring that there is pay equality at their business. According to Goldberg, the website is effectively a toolkit for businesses to determine if there is in fact a pay gap in the workplace. “There are a lot of good people out there that have no idea because this is so culturally engrained,” said Goldberg.

The site offers education and a wage calculator so that women can calculate their wages and see how much less they may theoretically be earning than their male counterparts. They have also created an anonymous email that women can send to their employers saying, “I’m sure that you did not realize all of the following and I encourage you to download the toolkit,” said Goldberg. The toolkit has had hits from every state in the nation. Goldberg doesn’t see this as an attack on employers, but instead she says it offers them guidance on how to retain workers. “Do you know how much difference there is in having a satisfied work force, a happy workforce, and one that does not have continuing turnover?” asked Goldberg.

Goldberg has also been working on two women’s empowerment series. She is involved in this because it is yet another piece of economic empowerment. Goldberg had a task force that was told they had 5 months to do their work and get back to her with identifying the best practices around financial literacy for children, school age, college students, seniors, veterans, and an action plan on how to put it into effect. “I’m becoming a national figure on those issues,” added Goldberg.

She has taken positions on proxy voting guidelines about not voting for any one of the 9,000 companies they invest in that does not have 25% women and minorities because now all the data shows that companies that are doing that are more innovative and more profitable.

Goldberg is passionate about her work. “I’m never not working. And I would never have run for this if I didn’t know I was going to love the job,” said Goldberg. Which is what she credits for having the energy to work long but “exciting” days. “My mission in life is making sure that people get economic opportunity, that we can empower people across the state and that we also impact economic stability around our entire state,” said Goldberg.

About ten years after starting Greenie’s, Goldberg’s mother’s great-grandmother would help organize the ladies in the neighborhood and create what is now known as Hebrew Senior Life. “From the very beginning, our family felt the deep connection about economic opportunity and economic stability, which is the basic framework of a life of self-satisfaction and attainment, being part of their DNA,” said Goldberg. “And somehow that has translated all the way down to me.”