

FORUM  
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# DEBATE: Will Barack Obama's administration be able to reverse the nation's economic downturn?

## YES: Obama and Congress must act quickly

**B. Thomas Cooper**

Somewhere in the halls of Washington, the powers that be are feeling the heat. It's only the second week of January, and already I sense it's going to be a long, hard summer.

Suffice to say we have begun the new year with a bang, and not a whimper. For what it's worth, however, that bang we just collectively heard was not the sound of the U.S. economy hitting rock bottom. Expect that sound to be deafening. I suspect what we might have just heard was, in fact, the sound of George W. Bush slamming the door on his way out. It would, after all, be the only noise we have heard from him in quite some time.

Perhaps, during these times of great hardship, the 43rd president of the United States finds it increasing difficult to face an ever skeptical public. Perhaps George W. Bush has grown weary of Washington, and the public perception of him as a hapless rodeo clown. After all, isn't this the part of the story where Bush envisioned himself riding off into the Texas sunset?

But I will not pine for the glory days of George W. Bush and his companions. Certainly not whilst confronting the dog days of summer which surely lie before us. I cannot but fear, and I mean truly fear, for the future welfare of this once great nation of ours. The outlook is grim.

President-elect Barack

Obama is facing an uphill battle, probably for many years to come. By the time he takes the oath of office, the nation will be \$3 trillion in debt, in most part, due to the irresponsible actions of his predecessor. He and the Democratic-controlled Congress must act quickly to stem this current of financial blood-letting. Even then, we have no guarantees as to how this crisis will play out.

During the crush of the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt reminded Americans "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself, nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts." These words set the tone for the U.S. recovery. Can Barack Obama demonstrate the same level of confidence and leadership as FDR? Let's certainly hope so.

I suppose I risk comparisons to the fool who shouts fire in a crowded theater. Nonetheless, somewhere off in the distance, I smell smoke. Perhaps it remains too early to panic, but rest assured, it's much too late to do nothing. The heat is on, America. Unfortunately, I'm afraid it is us, the average Joe and Jane, who will ultimately get burned.

Now might be a good time to catch up on some reading. "The Grapes of Wrath," perhaps.

♦ ♦ ♦  
*B. Thomas Cooper of Phoenix, Ariz., is a freelance journalist, photographer, blogger and historian.*



President-elect Barack Obama speaks about the economy recently at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va. ASSOCIATED PRESS

## NO: Obama must deal with a gridlocked Congress

**Albert Hale**

As we the people enter January, yes, all eyes are on the White House, as they should be, after an historic election. I for one, and perhaps the only one, wonder though if that is where we should look.

It is indeed true that President-elect Barack Obama is a very dedicated and focused man, a man who has accomplished much, by whomever and however he is backed, who got the first job done. He is ready to occupy the White House. Kudos! Now, not on the campaign trail, but now; the real task is at hand. The president of the United States, no matter who that is, must deal effectively with the Congress of the United States. I submit that is a greater task than even he has ever achieved.

So if you choose to take the "Yes" view that under a new president all shall be righted, I ask this question: "How many years of entrenchment, how many hard-fought battles won, how many influential senators have to be won over from their positions on their most significant achievements, and how?"

I submit that winning the White House, although a great trial and a challenge to strength and determination as well as vigor and charisma, is yet but a single step in a dream come true. Even President-elect Obama must now come to grips with members of his party who may not favor all, or many of

his ideas, campaign slogans, or clever orations but who will weigh and contrast any, and perhaps every suggestion, invitation, legislation, and idea brought forth into this administration. Not, of course, to forget those of the opposition party; because that is the system we the people have come to recognize and to support.

Unfortunately for every American, in my view, what is the only recourse at this juncture is to solidify behind the White House and the Congress as a whole. No more handouts to buy "friends" around the world; no more junkets to see what is going on in the impoverished real estate markets and communities worldwide. There are as many here as anywhere!

Be as focused as the new president, realize that as the slogan goes, "Charity begins at home." Make that charity a return to the people of all the taxes it does not take to fuel the government, make a real and meaningful contribution to the infrastructure of the 50 United States and its territories.

Then and only then will the president and the people of this republic be able to reverse the nation's economic downturn, and build a country as useful to each citizen as it is beautiful to the eyes of many of us.

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*Albert Hale writes from North Andover. His essay has been edited for length. Read the full version on the Web at www.helium.com.*

## BEHIND THE DEBATE

This is the first entry in our new debate feature. Local readers at eagletribune.com and others around the nation at our partner helium.com responded to our debate question. The best responses, in our judgment, on each side are reprinted here.

The debate feature offers readers the opportunity to write reasoned essays on national and local topics of interest. The best responses will be published in the newspaper.

Find the next debate topic on our Web site — www.eagletribune.com — at the top of the Opinion page.

Topics will be added once a week at first, more frequently as reader interest grows.

Your essays, along with those of other readers, will appear on the Web site. We'll print the best essays on each side of the debate on the Forum page in the Sunday Eagle-Tribune.

We encourage you to "join the debate" and let your voice be heard.

## HOT TOPIC Readers weigh in on one of the most talked-about issues of the week

### LAST WEEK'S QUESTION

# Should Massachusetts legislators accept a 5.5 percent pay raise in a recession year?

### ONLINE POLL RESULTS

From www.eagletribune.com

Should Massachusetts legislators accept a 5.5 percent pay raise in a recession year?

Yes - 7.91%

No - 92.09%

759 votes counted.

donations is time consuming and should be rewarded by the grateful citizens of this commonwealth. It's only right and proper.

**STANLEY A. HOFF, Lawrence**

### Help the poor

The legislators should take the pay raise and then turn around and spend it in their own districts. Help somebody who needs oil to heat their house or put food on the table for a poor family. It is endless how the money could be used.

**VIOLA HAYNES, Methuen**

### Morally irresponsible

In 1998, when the economy was on a roll, Massachusetts legislators voted a pay raise for themselves every two years. A 5.5-percent raise is due 2009. Unemployment is at 7.5 percent and rising daily, with cuts and more cuts in schools, state colleges, highways, mental health workers, police and firemen — the list is long. Even if legislators are personally feeling a pinch, they should give this money to public area of their choice, but not to the

state to spend freely. Legislators should rethink this pay raise. It is unconscionable, sinful, morally irresponsible to accept it. "As Rome burns Nero plays the fiddle" says it all.

**JUDY LEE, North Andover**

### Appreciate service

One reason we pay our legislators is to keep them honest. Just like the cops, legislators are human and need to be appreciated as such. We, as citizens, do that by paying them adequately. Let's not forget, they are the ones who make and enforce the laws. Let's, then, not return to "Jungle Law", where every man and woman is in it for themselves. We've been there and done that only to discover it just doesn't work. What does work is courage to say, even in a recession year, we, as citizens, appreciate your service, and do so by endorsing your pay raise. Please take it; it is due you. See the raise as a measure of our appreciation for your service to our community. Cheers.

**WARREN F. KELLEY, North Andover**

### THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

# Should local communities enact their own, tougher, marijuana use laws?

Massachusetts citizens in November voted to decriminalize possession of less than an ounce of marijuana. Those caught with a small amount of pot now face a \$100 fine.

### SEND COMMENTS TO:

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One local community, Methuen, is considering enacting a bylaw that would set a \$300 fine for public usage of marijuana. Mayor William Manzi says he wants to emphasize that

using the drug remains illegal. Is this a good idea? Should other communities follow Methuen's lead and enact their own, tougher fines? Tell us what you think.

COMMENTS WILL APPEAR IN NEXT WEEK'S SUNDAY EAGLE-TRIBUNE. NO MORE THAN 100 WORDS. Please send us your reply by Wednesday. Include your name and town.

### Government we deserve

Absolutely! We get the government that we deserve. This is not surprising and nothing new for the politicians up on Beacon Hill. The people of Massachusetts keep voting in the same politicians from the same party year after year. Which is why I finally I gave up and left the state like so many others. Instead of the state slogan being "Massachusetts, it's all here" it should be changed to "Thank you sir, may I have another!"

**NANCY ARTZ, Derry, N.H.**

### Donate to elder

Massachusetts legislators should not accept a pay raise during this difficult economic time when their constituents are struggling. They should donate it to the Elder Care Fund or return it to the general fund for vital services for elderly and disabled people, or cities and towns. If Massachusetts legislators accept this increase in their pay, then they can expect an increase in their negative image as fat cats who get fatter while the slim cats get slimmer.

**LINDY GALLAND, Lawrence**

### Spending our money

The Massachusetts legislators definitely deserve the scheduled increase in their pay. After all, they work very hard spending your money and devising ways to extract even more money from us. In addition, their efforts to hire more and more useless politically connected people on to the state payroll is a daunting task and should be rewarded. Their craven sucking up to special interest lobbies and vested interests for bribes and

who tried to rob the guards had weapons of any kind nor was it clarified if they were in the car and driving away. The way the story reads one would assume that they were in the car and driving away. The guard fired his weapon at a fleeing suspect which is illegal for an officer to do.

**dan051967**

NEXT UP: Yesterday's hero pilot, sued for getting the luggage wet.

**boxofkrayonz**

Police say teen brought marijuana to court - Friday, Jan. 16

Police: Brinks guard may face charges for shooting at car - Friday, Jan. 16

I knew this would end up happening to this guy. Those of you who think he did the wrong thing, please tell me how you would have handled the situation. What would you do if someone was trying to rob your house, and you did have a gun? It's always easy to judge, when you haven't been in someone else's shoes.

**FEDUPAGAIN**

It was never established in the story that the scumbags

## TALKING BACK THIS WEEK'S BEST READER COMMENTS FROM EAGLETRIBUNE.COM

What I hear, the police don't have any tickets to give to anyone. There are still a lot of holes in the law that need to be addressed. Don't blame the police officer, blame the system.

What's the officer supposed to do, because of the wisdom of the good citizens of Massachusetts, he can't arrest for that small amount and can't write a citation because they don't have any yet.

These guys haven't even been trained on what to do for the new law in place. The citizens of Massachusetts have spoken, now reap what you have sowed.

**swanson33**

The law did not take effect for two months. The police waited until just before the effective date to even discuss the issue. Other surrounding towns know what to do and have ticket books made up. This is not an excuse but a "cop-out" (no pun intended). The state has issued rules and the police should have been informed.

Selective enforcement and

lack of training should not be tolerated.

**Jack\_Burke**

It was kind of obvious that for a while the less astute members of the public would be under the impression that decriminalization = legalization.

**Commentard**

Police union says town played Scrooge - Friday, Jan. 16

There's what, a few thousand on the Civil Service list looking for a post office job? There's the door.

**LoLattheUS**