

Loophole loosens cap on lobbyist donations

Spouses allowed to give freely, and some are spreading money all over Beacon Hill

By **Matt Stout**
and **Samantha J. Gross**
GLOBE STAFF

Once viewed as a Massachusetts House speaker in waiting, Brian Dempsey joined Beacon Hill's ranks of lobbyists in 2017, ultimately creating one of the state's busiest firms. In short order, his wife, Julie Dempsey, em-

braced a new role, too: prolific political donor.

After giving sparingly during her husband's final 15 years as a lawmaker, Julie Dempsey has made more than \$200,000 in political donations since Brian Dempsey began lobbying his former colleagues, regularly showering Beacon Hill leaders with maximum contributions, according to state campaign finance

data.

The largesse spotlights what experts call a gaping but entirely legal loophole in a 30-year-old campaign finance law. While lobbyists are capped at giving just \$200 to candidates annually, other members of the public — their spouses included — can give up to five times that.

And they often do. In fact, lobbyists' spouses are among the most

generous donors to the most powerful lawmakers on Beacon Hill, a Globe analysis found.

Over the 19 months covering the Legislature's most recent formal legislative session, three of the top four contributors to the Legislature's Democratic leaders — and five of the top 15 — are all married to a registered lobbyist.

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Economy on a roll a gift for Trump

He's likely to get credit as things improve, even though upswing predated election

By **Jim Puzzanghera**
GLOBE STAFF

WASHINGTON — With a campaign mantra of "it's the economy, stupid," Bill Clinton won the White House in 1992 as voters struggled with the lingering effects of a recession that technically had ended more than a year and a half earlier.

Although the economic data was pointing in the right direction on Election Day, average Americans had yet to feel it. President George H.W. Bush got the blame and was voted out of office. Then, as the economic improvements continued to kick in, Clinton got the credit.

More than three decades later, we could be headed for *deja vu* in Washington.

Donald Trump, who made criticizing high prices a campaign mantra as voters struggle with the lingering effects of 2022's post-pandemic inflation spike, is set to take office with an economy that experts agree is healthy. All the key data points — notably inflation, which is nearly back down to normal — are trending in the right direction.

But many Americans have yet to feel the improvements in their own finances. Although wages have grown faster than inflation since early 2023, economists said it's going to take more time for that extra pay to offset those higher

ECONOMY, Page A6



BASHAR TALEB/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

BARRAGES CONTINUE IN MIDEAST

Palestinians prayed Tuesday near the bodies of 11 victims of overnight Israeli airstrikes on a makeshift cafeteria in what had been called a humanitarian zone. At right, rescue teams worked at the scene of an Israeli strike that targeted a house where displaced people lived in the Lebanese mountains, east of Beirut. The Israeli military said it targeted Hezbollah infrastructure. The United States said Tuesday that it won't cut arms shipments to Israel because the country has made progress on increasing humanitarian aid. **A3.**



FADEL ITANI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Gun proponents challenge tighter Mass. laws

By **Anjali Huynh**
GLOBE STAFF

When Massachusetts leaders overhauled the state's gun laws in July, state Representative Michael Day issued a challenge to pro-gun groups threatening opposition: "Bring it on."

And so they have.

The new gun law already faces two legal challenges, with promises of more to come. One lawsuit pushed lawmakers to delay a new

license requirement from going into effect after it caused confusion. And more than 90,000 people signed petitions for a 2026 ballot question to repeal it, per the group organizing the efforts, far exceeding the roughly 39,000 needed.

"I thought it was rushed through and there were mistakes made. . . . They tried to put too many things together," said Bob Antia, 64, a gun owner from Lincoln who signed a petition in sup-

port of the 2026 ballot challenge.

Governor Maura Healey and other Democrats championed aspects of the new law that they say will reduce gun violence, including a ban on ghost guns and updated so-called red flag laws. Pro-gun groups and residents, however, raised concerns about elements that redefined "assault-style" firearms, expanding what is banned in the state, as well as new licensing and training requirements for as-

piring gun owners.

Lawmakers had passed the measure to bolster the state's already strict gun control regime after a Supreme Court decision curtailed the government's power to regulate guns. Second Amendment defenders contend the new law unfairly penalizes lawful gun carriers.

It is too soon to say if Healey and other Democrats who support the law will face electoral conse-

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Getting Senate to cede its say on nominees is test of his power

By **Charlie Savage**
NEW YORK TIMES

President-elect Donald Trump's demand that Senate Republicans surrender their role in vetting his nominees poses an early test of whether his second term will be more radical than his first.

NEWS ANALYSIS Over the weekend, Trump insisted on social media that Republicans select a new Senate majority leader willing to call recesses during which he could appoint personnel, a process that would allow him to unilaterally sidestep the confirmation process. His allies immediately applauded the idea, intensifying pressure on GOP lawmakers to acquiesce.

The demand to weaken checks and balances and take for himself some of the legislative branch's usual power underscored Trump's authoritarian impulses. While there is no obvious legal obstacle to Trump's request, it would be an extraordinary violation of constitutional norms. There is no historical precedent for a deliberate and wholesale abandonment by the Senate of its function of deciding whether to confirm or reject

TRUMP, Page A7

► **With a role heading a new government agency, Elon Musk looks like a winner now, but Trump often drops onetime allies. B5.**

The coats are coming

Wednesday: Sunny, a bit cool. High 44-49. Low 32-37.

Thursday: About the same. High 42-47. Low 30-35.

High tide: 8:19 a.m., 8:49 p.m.
Sunrise: 6:33 Sunset: 4:24

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Massachusetts Air National Guardsman Jack D. Teixeira got 15 years in prison for leaking classified information. **B1.**

Lawmakers are finishing off a sweeping economic development plan that would pave the way for a Revs stadium on the Everett waterfront. **B1.**

Stop & Shop said it was affected by a cybersecurity issue, and customers may see fewer products on the shelves. **B5.**

A federal judge in Louisiana blocked a state law requiring the display of the Ten Commandments in every public school classroom. **A2.**

Food poisoning is not exactly a picnic. But it does give you time to wonder how safe food is. Just ask Devra First. **G1.**

As Maine waters keep warming, a cry for kelp

Collapse of seaweed forests poses a huge threat to marine food chain

By **David Abel**
GLOBE STAFF

In the first comprehensive study of Maine's kelp in two decades, scientists have found a "widespread collapse" of the submerged forests along the state's southern coast, confirming fears about the impact of warming ocean temperatures on the seaweed that is vital to the region's fisheries.

Researchers found temperatures have become too warm, especially in the spring and summer, in the southern parts of the Gulf of Maine, where kelp forests have disappeared and been replaced by red algae

that have formed what looks like a thick carpet along the sea floor. The warming waters have been driven, in large part, by climate change.

"I was floored by how dramatically the seaweed communities had changed, and how much warmer coastal waters had become," said Thew Suskiewicz, one of the study's authors and a former postdoctoral researcher at Bigelow Laboratory in East Boothbay, Maine. "The more we sampled for this project, the more apparent those changes were and, sadly, I anticipate this is only the beginning."



BRIAN SKERRY/CONSERVATION LAW FOUNDATION

A kelp forest at Cashes Ledge, 70 miles off the Maine coast.

Kelp — a large, brown seaweed that grows in shallow ocean waters — provides the foundation for marine life, including Maine's lobster population, and its half-billion-dollar lobster fishery. The dense

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