

Transcript: Rep Tami Gouveia. Knock on doors, knock on doors, knock on doors.

Hi, this is Anna Callahan and you're listening to Incorruptible Massachusetts. Our goal is to help people understand state politics: we're investigating why it's so broken, imagining what we could have here in MA if we fixed it, and reporting on how you can get involved.

Today I'm interviewing Representative Tami Gouveia.

Tami Gouveia is the State Representative of Acton, Concord, Carlisle and Chelmsford and was first elected in November of 2018. She is most active in addressing the opioid epidemic, our failing transit system, and our climate crisis. Rep. Gouveia filed five pieces of legislative this session to ensure access to treatment and humane, evidence-based support for individuals suffering from substance use disorder. A public health social worker, Tami is committed to enacting policies that support the health and well-being of all Massachusetts residents and our future generations.

Tami Gouveia recognizes the need to increase state revenue if we're going to improve people's lives in areas like housing, transportation, and climate change. You'll hear her talk about how inequality is not just a moral question about making sure people have the basic necessities of life, but that it's also a question of the long-term sustainability of our economy.

Rep Gouveia also has some great examples of finding constituents where they are — including waiting on a train platform to talk to people about the commuter rail. To jump on my soapbox about this issue again, we should demand of every politician that they spend time and energy talking to their constituents who don't show up at activist meetings, and who may not even be voting. Listening to, educating, and mobilizing the 99%.

Without further ado, here is my interview with Rep Tami Gouveia.

Anna Callahan: [\(00:01\)](#)

So I have the great pleasure of being here with representative Tammy Gouveia, from the Acton, Concord area of Massachusetts. Thank you so much for being on.

Tami Gouveia: [\(00:12\)](#)

It's great to be here. I appreciate it.

Anna Callahan: [\(00:14\)](#)

Absolutely. So we're here to talk about state politics and my first question is like, why, why state politics? Everybody's working on national politics and then a lot of people I know are going to local politics. What, what is interesting about state politics?

Tami Gouveia: [\(00:29\)](#)

That's a really great and fair question. Some of your listeners may know this, but most probably don't -- I grew up in Lowell and I saw a lot of need and a lot of human suffering around me while growing up. And I also saw the role that government could play in making people's lives better and addressing the problems that families face.

Tami Gouveia: [\(00:47\)](#)

So I knew from a very young age that I wanted to be involved in some way professionally contributing to making people's lives better and always in the back of my mind was the thinking that I would run for office, particularly at the state level. So I'm 45 now. It's been going on for, this thinking has been going on for a very long time. And so that's why state politics for me. I do pay attention to what's happening both locally and at the federal level. But I think there's a lot of hope for a lot of people about what's happening at the state level that they see opportunities to try to pass innovative policies and create some change at the state level that then can eventually bubble up to the federal level. So I think that's the why of state politics.

Tami Gouveia: [\(01:31\)](#)

And then one other thing I will say is, politics that more local or even the state level are feeders for what happens at the national level. And the Republican Party has done a really phenomenal job of paying attention to some of the down-ballot positions, including even treasurer's offices and secretary of state and some of those other elected positions that people don't necessarily think about all the time as being really important to the functioning of how the state passes policies and implements policies, but they are really critically important. And they're also feeders for some of the larger, bigger positions at the federal level that have huge implications for where we're moving, where we're not moving as a society and as a country.

Anna Callahan: [\(02:18\)](#)

Wow. Yeah. Really important. What do you think are the biggest problems facing the people of Massachusetts that could be changed at the state level?

Tami Gouveia: [\(02:27\)](#)

I think there are, what oftentimes are called kitchen table issues, right? Things that worrying about paying bills, worrying about how are you going to afford your healthcare premium, send your child off to college, age in place. The housing crisis, transportation, the fact that we have among the, we have the worst congestion in the, in the country, and we're facing a climate crisis. So all of these issues that impact our health and wellbeing, I think are the biggest issues. And it's really everything, which is really hard to sort of just pick the one thing. But a lot of it comes down to the fact that we haven't been raising the revenue that we need in this state to pay for those things that matter to people's everyday lives. The kind of education that they

receive in pre k through 12, whether or not they're stuck on the roadway or stuck on a broken down train.

Tami Gouveia: [\(03:21\)](#)

The fact that we haven't addressed enough in our climate crisis and the housing crisis that we're facing. So the need for revenue I think is a real foundational issue that the state hasn't picked up for a while. There are signals from the speaker of the House and also from the Senate president that we will be taking up some revenue this year. I'm looking towards, or looking forward to that debate and that discussion so that we can get real, true progressive revenue that's more fair tax policies in place for our families, to make sure that we're able to make those investments in the things that matter to people's everyday lives.

Anna Callahan: [\(04:00\)](#)

Yeah. And you, you just mentioned some things coming from the, the leadership. Are there any things you see bubbling up from the grassroots in terms of revenue that you think are interesting?

Tami Gouveia: [\(04:08\)](#)

Yeah, there there's a real interest in addressing, changing capital gains right now in the state. We don't tax income that people work hard for to earn that paycheck every single day in the same way that we tax capital gains, which are just earnings on investments. So really taking a look at how do we make that tax structure more fair for people, is one that has come up a couple of different times. Looking at whether it's CEO pay or, really finding ways to address income inequality in our state. Not only because it's a moral imperative to make sure that people have the basic necessities of life to get by, and that they don't have to work two and three jobs to make ends meet. So it's not just the moral side, but it's even the longterm economic sustainability of our economy relies on us finding ways to address income inequality that is just so stark in our state.

Tami Gouveia: [\(05:05\)](#)

The inability of people to be able to move up the, the, the ladder to the, if they're not middle-class to get to the middle class or to stay in the middle class. I know so many people, friends, family constituents who just are really hanging on by a thread every single day just to get by to maintain a basic standard of living.

Anna Callahan: [\(05:28\)](#)

Yeah. Is there, is there any policy that maybe you're working on right now that you think is an important one and that people could actually take action on?

Tami Gouveia: [\(05:37\)](#)

Yeah, I filed 19 pieces of legislation that cut across variety of issues. So I think it depends on what people are particularly interested in. Some legislation is to really start to get the

conversation going. So one of them that I filed and Andrew Yang who's running for president also is talking about this, the universal basic income.

Tami Gouveia: ([05:58](#))

So really taking a look at how can we make sure that as the nature of work continues to change, as we move towards greater automation, as just the ways that we work and get around in the state change, what are ways that we can make sure that people can meet their basic needs in a way that's sustainable and also not add more layers of bureaucracy. I firmly believe that as I said, government has a really critical role in addressing issues and helping to solve people's problems. But at the same time it should work smarter and having conversations about universal basic income and some sort of jobs guarantee I think is a conversation that's really important for us to start to have. So I encourage people in this, with this particular policy just to learn more and have an open mind to what, uh, this, this could mean for people's everyday, everyday lives.

Tami Gouveia: ([06:55](#))

Some of the other policies I filed are around addressing the climate crisis. Stretch energy code bill, so that we're moving in the direction of, if a building is getting built or renovated, that it's meeting renewable energy standards and is net zero. And then I filed the number of pieces of legislation around the opioid crisis, to increase access to naran and also to make sure that people have a way to identify if fentanyl is present in, in their drugs. So that then, it's like a harm reduction kind of approach. So I encourage folks to get involved in thinking about harm reduction and how we can really be moving towards a society that's embracing humane and effective treatment and not the ways that, for the last 200 years, our country has used more law enforcement, punitive and criminalized approaches to addressing addiction and opioid use.

Anna Callahan: ([07:54](#))

Yeah. Yeah. A lot of people around the country think of Massachusetts as a very progressive or liberal state. Do you think that we're like one of the most liberal states in the country? Are we Taxachusetts? And, and are there other states that you look to, to look for progressive policy ideas?

Tami Gouveia: ([08:17](#))

Yeah, so I think that in some ways we are more progressive, but in many other ways we are not. I think what I've observed is that we have a tendency in Massachusetts to avoid change and sustain the status quo. And to me that's not being progressive, that's not moving things forward in a way that's really transformational for people's lives. I think about it in the ways that we approach transportation and transportation funding specifically. So, with, with transportation, we seem to have this mindset that roads and bridges we'll pay for them out of tax dollars. And we are woefully behind on keeping up with the, the maintenance of our roads and bridges, don't get me wrong, but we seem to have it in our heads that public transit is not really a public good in a way that education is, and we need to be funding it, right?

Tami Gouveia: ([09:12](#))

So I think there is room for us to do more and we can learn from other states like California and New York that have passed some pretty bold progressive policies around the environment around climate change that I think are really important for us to take a look at. Oregon has done some interesting things around the income inequality. So taking a look at what they do and I like to nerd out once in a while and, and watch, literally sit down and watch the sessions of other states to learn how they even engage in their debate, in their dialogue and what the quality of that engagement and that debate really looks like and how that compares to some of the things that happen in the chamber here in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. So I do look to other states.

Anna Callahan: ([10:02](#))

Any comments on that?

Tami Gouveia: ([10:02](#))

Yeah, I mean, it's really interesting to, I believe it was Colorado I looked at very early after I was sworn in, around sexual harassment. So that was an interesting thing to watch. And then as the debates, and I'm trying to remember which state it was...I can't remember which state it was, around reproductive justice and, some of the, the bad bills, the laws that got passed around access to reproductive rights. And just, there's a lot more engaging in debate than we do here and the Massachusetts legislature. And we'd like to see that change over time. And that's what I mean a little bit about the status quo. I think it's, there's been over the last several decades a move to be much more efficient in the ways that the legislature operates and the ways that government operates, which I don't think is necessarily a bad thing, except for if it's done in a way where it stymies access to really being able to engage in debate and be part of and be at the negotiating table, I think that's what is problematic. And it seems like, in my observations of other states in their sessions, that you see senators and state representatives standing up and engaging in a back and forth more than we do here.

Anna Callahan: ([11:35](#))

Hmm. And I was, in the interview with Jordan Berg powers from Mass Alliance, he was talking about how a lot of stuff happens in committee and, and a lot of those are not public, so it's hard to know. And so I guess what I'm curious about is do you think that these conversations are happening in, in these smaller groups or, or even in those committees? Or are the debates just not happening?

Tami Gouveia: ([11:59](#))

The debate, the debates are just not happening, at least in my experience. So I, I think that Jordan is accurate in his description that things are not getting done. The dialogue is not happening out in the public purview. So we have committee hearings. Those are all public. Anybody -- and that's one of the things that I think is so phenomenal about our democracy, I have to say, you can walk in as a, as a citizen, as a resident of the state of Massachusetts or even from outside of the state and come in and have your, give your opinion on a particular

piece of legislation. I do think that's a phenomenal aspect. I think what gets done with that information is not, it's not that all committee members sit down and weigh in on each bill. Well, I thought this person had this good testimony that's more done with the chairs and the vice chairs. And then the committee members are polled on whether or not we want to report a bill out, we want to send a bill to study, that kind of thing. And so in that sense it's the discussion about the merits of a bill are not done out in the public. Those discussions are happening in various offices and behind closed doors kind of thing.

Anna Callahan: ([13:17](#))

Yep. Yep. So that, that's interesting. And it makes me really wonder, for the things that you want to pass, for the stuff that you mentioned earlier, about education and transportation and all those things. What, what, how do these things happen, right? I mean, we know that big changes sometimes happen, the civil rights movement, it happened, right? And people thought maybe it wasn't gonna happen, but it did. And a lot of those, there are a lot of examples like that, including recently. And so my question is, what's your theory of how things actually change? And how would you apply that to today and the State House and the state legislature?

Tami Gouveia: ([14:04](#))

Yeah, I mean, so much of what it comes down to is relationships and having conversations with folks regularly. So, there have been, with the Foundation Budget Review Commission report that came out a number of years ago, there has been a real push in the legislature to address the funding formula for Education for chapter 70. And I have sent letters, I have sat down to the chair. I have sat down with the speaker of the House to explain what my position was on particular aspects of that bill as it's getting put together. So I think the theory of change there is, and the theory of how things happen is for each legislator take what their position is and represent their district in all dialogues and conversations that they have with leaders of committees and the leadership of the house or if they're on the Senate side of the Senate.

Tami Gouveia: ([15:08](#))

So I think it really comes down to those relationships and building a broad coalition of people to support a particular piece of legislation. Nothing gets done up here -- it's not a solo act ever. I've known that since before I was elected and I feel it every day when I'm up here in the State House, just how important it is to have those allies in the broad coalition to try to get legislation passed. And people may or may not know this. There are over 6,000 bills that get filed every single year in the Massachusetts legislature. Only about two to 3% get passed in any given session. And it takes an average of about six years for a bill to pass if it is going to pass. So things are very slow. It goes back to what I was saying earlier, it's really hard to change and get bold transformative change here in Massachusetts and it does work against being able to pass progressive policies that, like I said, would really move a lot of things forward. So it, it's about the relationships and the broad coalition of folks to get things done.

Anna Callahan: ([16:20](#))

Is there anything about the state house or the state legislature that you didn't know before you got here or you think maybe your constituents don't know, listeners might not know, that you think people should know?

Tami Gouveia: ([16:32](#))

There's a lot of unwritten rules and as a new legislator you are going to break those unwritten rules and you find out the hard way. And it's, as someone who has worked in many different management positions throughout my career, it's, it's, it was disorienting in the beginning, to realize that. Because, you know, usually when you get onboarded, you get a nice manual that tells you the do's and don'ts of here's how our office operates. Here is the culture. It's much more organic in that way.

Tami Gouveia: ([17:08](#))

I think too, with all of these unwritten rules, because with every cycle, every session, there's a number of new people who come in and add their own flavor to how we'll operate the building and how the rules that get passed at the beginning of session and how we're supposed to be operating as a body. And so I think that's the, the most surprising is, just the number of unwritten rules and, I think a lot of people would be surprised at the number of those.

Anna Callahan: ([17:45](#))

So maybe, maybe some compassion for the first year people.

Tami Gouveia: ([17:47](#))

You know, compassionate policy making is something I would love to see all across the board, both in how we operate and interact with each other in this building and the kinds of policies that get passed.

Tami Gouveia: ([18:00](#))

And we've done some of that. We passed some really great important policies at the beginning of this session that I'm really proud of. Banning conversion therapy and lifting the cap on kids and some of those policies that are just in and making sure that title, title nine? Title 10 was fully funded. So those are really, really important. Things that we've passed, we have, we have a lot of compassion in Massachusetts and that's one of the things that I hear from constituents all the time is that they are very proud to live in this state. That we do make investments and that we do see our successes wrapped up in our neighbors and our neighbors kids and people who don't even live near us. But there's so much more that we could do.

Tami Gouveia: ([18:46](#))

And I think there's more compassion that we could have in the ways that we approach the problems that we face and finding those solutions. Sitting down and really having the conversation, which is not super efficient. It takes time. Democracy should be something that takes time. So you can't always have everything be super easy and quick and efficient. But I think we can find a better balance.

Anna Callahan: (19:13)

Yeah. It's no good being efficient if we get to the wrong answer. Right?

Tami Gouveia: (19:16)

Right. Well, exactly, exactly. And if people don't feel like they had their voice heard as part of that process there, there's a lot of people whose voices are not heard in the ways that we pass policy up here. And I think that's, that's really unfortunate. And I don't think it's really great for our democracy.

Anna Callahan: (19:35)

Do you have ideas of how to incorporate those folks?

Tami Gouveia: (19:37)

Yeah. I mean, I think, we, I, I do it by going out to the district often. So around this issue with transportation, and the ongoing news reports of the T breaking down, the commuter rail being late, the commuter rail not being reliable or the lack of, train frequency, in late morning and early afternoon. That leaves people kind of stuck and stranded. So I went out to the platforms of the trains in the morning, three different mornings, talked to folks to find out, well, what are your pain points? What are the issues that you experience? And there were things that I, I've taken the commuter rail off and on over the last 20 years, so I know what some of the issues are. But hearing it directly from constituents who take it every single day who have different routes to get to their work or to school or to pick their kids up in the evening, it was really important.

Tami Gouveia: (20:27)

And then I also tied to that, I did a transportation town hall. Pulled together 50 people who came middle of July. People took off part of their summer evening to come and talk about what are they experiencing and seeing are the issues. But also we spent most of the time on solutions and what could I then bring up to the speaker of the House and folks up here in the building as we take up a transportation bond bill later this session to make sure that we're addressing those issues because it's a real quality of life issue. It's a, it's an issue around wellness and equity. If people are stuck on the roads or stuck on a broken down train, they're not at home cooking a healthy meal for their kids. They're not exercising, they're not volunteering in their community. And it's incredibly stressful and inefficient and really bad for our environment as well. So, I think for elected officials to go out and really be present and engaged with their constituents is, is an important piece.

Anna Callahan: (21:27)

And I have to say, I love that you went to the train platforms. That's where the people are who are taking the train, you know what I mean? The town halls are really great, but people have to then know about it. They have to take their time off and go to a place that's not, not, whatever. But you actually went to them.

Tami Gouveia: [\(21:43\)](#)

I did. There were some amazing things that I learned just by physically being there. I was physically on the platform in Concord, West Concord when the express train from Acton goes by. And if you're sitting there and the express train goes by, you really feel it. And I wouldn't have had that experience had I not been sitting there because I usually take the train from Acton or a later train from Concord that I wouldn't experience the express train because I'm not usually sitting there. So there were some really important things and that's really important to learn. And I think we can embrace and respect people's lived experience more. And that goes back to the compassionate kinds of policy making approach. Really valuing that people have different experiences and it's important for us to just hear those out as we're making decisions up here.

Tami Gouveia: [\(22:35\)](#)

Um, so that's just one example. The, I think the other ways that legislators could, do things differently is, even though we don't have built into our rules as a body, where all committee votes are public or all votes that we take are public, I do the best I can to post what my votes are. Both within the chamber when we are roll called or even just within committees, I'm going to start posting those as well. So people have a sense of what my position is. So I think there are ways that we can take on, what ways to just make it more clear and obvious for everyday folks throughout the state.

Anna Callahan: [\(23:20\)](#)

Great, I only have two other questions and they're, they're really related to trying to get more people to run for office. So one of the representatives laid on me the idea that apparently Massachusetts has the, it's the least challenged. What's the wording?

Tami Gouveia: [\(23:41\)](#)

We have the lowest rate of people who challenge an incumbent.

Anna Callahan: [\(23:43\)](#)

That's right. Yeah. I did not know that.

Tami Gouveia: [\(23:45\)](#)

So people don't get primaried, is how you would word it. Yeah.

Anna Callahan: [\(23:48\)](#)

People don't get priority. So yeah. And that leads to, I imagine, a more static culture, with all these unwritten rules you're talking about to some, a little bit of inertia in terms of change. And so getting more progressive to run I think as part of having this podcast in the first place. So a couple of questions. One, what is it like to be a state representative?

Tami Gouveia: [\(24:13\)](#)

Oh, it is the biggest honor. It really is, and I'm in awe that I get to work in this building because as I said, this is something that I've thought about doing for a very, very long time. It's, it can be

frustrating at times. I'll be honest, to try to get more progressive policies passed, and to get enough support for some of the bold, transformative change that we really want to see. So getting more progressives elected would help us be able to achieve some of those goals. And honestly, I think a lot of the legislature is a little bit to the right of the rest of the state.

Tami Gouveia: ([24:56](#))

And do you mean to the right of the voters?

Tami Gouveia: ([24:58](#))

To the right of the voters. Yeah. And it would be really, I think it's important to see greater alignment between elected representatives and the voter, the voting population, or even just constituents. But back to the point that you made about incumbency, it, it, it is a barrier to running for office in a multiple, in terms of getting real true representation in the legislature. There have been 10,000 men who have served, there's only been 200 [women] in the House of Representatives in Massachusetts. 10,000 to 200. So the incumbency issue not only contributes to the static of, the status quo of the kinds of thinking and change that gets made up here, but also the kinds of people who are elected and representing their constituents. So I think that's really important. And when you look at communities of color or representatives of color, we have three women of color. That's it. And we are a very, very diverse state. So I think that it's really important to get new, new folks to bring new ideas. We are, we like to pride ourselves on being a state that's really innovative and really smart. I would love to see more innovation and more of an evidence base and some of the policy making that gets made up here. And I think that comes with new ideas and new approaches and different kinds of backgrounds that people can bring

Anna Callahan: ([26:38](#))

You are not the first person, the first representative to say that they want to more of, I think what they were saying is that we are known as being a state filled with researchers and yet our government is not relying on research.

Tami Gouveia: ([26:52](#))

We don't, we don't call in academic or other experts who could really help us solve some of the problems that we face. There is, I mean, the universities we have right around in this two mile radius that we could really be drawing from. I would love to see us do, do more of that. But in terms of what's it like to be a state representative, I'll give you just a little bit of like what the day to day looks like. For the most part, I am split between the district and being in the State House. I try to be in the district more so I'm really hearing from constituents, I attend a lot of events and meetings, and celebrations and again, trying to reach out to understand what the issues are.

Tami Gouveia: ([27:36](#))

I have office hours very regularly in the four towns that I represent just to make sure that I'm present and available. I'm always available by phone and email and that kind of thing as well. Can set up separate meetings if people can't come to my open office hours. So that, that's one

thing. The other thing is, being up in the State House, it's about, again, building those relationships with my colleagues and trying to figure out how do we strategize to get particular pieces of legislation passed. So it's a nice mix of the people piece and the thinking piece, which really suits my, my personality in a lot of ways. And then it's a place where I get to live out my values every day, whether I'm in the district or up in the state house and just really focus on making sure that I'm doing all that I can to represent the people of the 14th Middlesex that the best that I can, but also paying attention to the state at the same time.

Tami Gouveia: [\(28:33\)](#)

I think that's the other thing that, sometimes we can be pretty parochial in Massachusetts. So I think sometimes people get very, very focused on what their district needs. And that's really critically important. And I think it's as critically important to simultaneously hold what's really good for the whole of Massachusetts. We are a commonwealth, we have a charter that really lays out how interrelated and interdependent we really are. And so it's, sometimes we shoot ourselves in the foot if we're only focused on, well, what does my particular district need and not take account of what, what are the unintended consequences of that? And so I would love for us to see more people who get elected who think that way, who can hold both simultaneously, which is the challenge.

Anna Callahan: [\(29:22\)](#)

Of course, everything you vote for, if it passes, it's going to affect the whole state.

Tami Gouveia: [\(29:25\)](#)

It does. Exactly. And so, that's a little bit of what I'm paying attention to as I'm legislating up here.

Anna Callahan: [\(29:34\)](#)

Great. Yeah. And finally, what did you learn from running for office? I don't know if you ran before or if this is your first time, but what sort of advice would you give to someone who hasn't run for office before?

Tami Gouveia: [\(29:45\)](#)

So I'll say, I'll give sort of the, the values a little bit and then, I'll give a, a little bit of nuts and bolts. So the thing that I learned was I had, I got a lot more hope running for office. People were so generous, when I knocked on their door to give me their time and we knocked on like 20,000 doors. So that's what I would say is knock on doors, knock on doors, knock on doors.

Tami Gouveia: [\(30:11\)](#)

But the thing that I learned is how much people do care about this state and do see them, their success wrapped up in a lot of the success of their neighbor, as I said before. And I just, the generosity of people wanting to see this state succeed and be part of that is, gave me a lot of hope and gave some of my volunteers who had never gone door knocking before and came out with me, they were like, oh, okay, I guess I'll go with you. And they said, oh my goodness, that

was so much fun! Oh my gosh, I learned so much. Oh my gosh, this gives me so much hope that where we are now with the national tenor and all the divisiveness that people really do care. And we just got to figure out how to tap into that more.

Tami Gouveia: ([30:52](#))

So that's the good side. I love door-knocking, thankfully, I love canvassing. I love talking to people right at their door and hear what their issues are and their ideas and their stories. So the advice I would give is just to, to figure out how, how you can door knock as much as possible when running for office. And have a really good plan, a really good campaign campaign plan and stick to it. Use data. There's tons of research on what works when campaigning, campaigning is a science. It's not, there's a little bit of an artistry to it, but it's mostly science. So just stick to the science and you will be, you will have a greater chance of succeeding than if you just kinda get all cutesy and stuff. That'd be my advice.

Tami Gouveia: ([31:43](#))

Great. Well, thank you so much.

Tami Gouveia: ([31:44](#))

Thank you.

Tami Gouveia: ([31:45](#))

This is great work that you're doing. We really appreciate everything you're doing here as well as for taking the time to talk to us.

Tami Gouveia: ([31:50](#))

Well, thank you for doing this podcast. Really appreciate it.

Anna Callahan: ([31:52](#))

Absolutely.

Tami Gouveia: ([31:53](#))

Good. Thank you.