Robert DeLeo grew up in an Italian-American family in East Boston. He earned degrees from Northeastern University and Suffolk University Law School. DeLeo became involved in public service at an early age, serving as a town selectman before being elected to the Massachusetts House in 1990. He was chair of the Ways and Means Committee before becoming speaker in 2009.

How has the legislature changed over the years? It’s become a more professional place, a more serious place. With all the various updates in communication, the way we interact with the public has changed. One thing that I am proud of is that we have the largest number of women in leadership in the history of our state.

What does it take to be an effective leader? A good leader needs to be a good listener. As an example, in 2014, when we decided to take up gun legislation—to strengthen what we already had and close some of the loopholes—I had discussions with House members, experts, advocacy groups who wanted stronger laws, and opponents, gun owners and those who felt the laws were strong enough but that certain changes could be made. Not everybody was completely happy, but ultimately we had a piece of legislation which was hailed as the strongest in the nation.

What is your proudest accomplishment? The gun legislation. I'll never forget the day the news came on about the massacre of school children in Newtown, Connecticut. I can remember pounding the console of my car saying that we had to do something about these massive killings throughout the country. I was proud that we took up gun legislation and passed it. Another proud moment was when a young mom with two children with autism stopped by my office and talked about the problems she and her husband were having making ends meet because of the medical bills. I didn't know her, she wasn’t even from my district, but she convinced me that we had to do something. And we did. We required insurance to cover the costs of caring for children with autism. That same woman came back to see me after the bill was signed to profusely thank me. Stories like that—when you make a difference in a person’s life—give me the greatest sense of accomplishment.

What do you do for fun? I’m sort of a workaholic, to be very honest. I look at this as a seven-day-a-week job. But there are a couple of things I do love. I love spending time with my first grandchild. And I’m a huge sports fan, especially a Red Sox fan.

What final words would you like to share? We want to welcome everyone to Massachusetts and especially to Boston. We look at Massachusetts as a great place to work, visit and do business. Massachusetts offers so many things—the beach, our beautiful Berkshires, our culture, our great educational institutions, the finest medical facilities in the world and the best sports teams. Make sure to take a nice walk through the North End, see a little bit of history and enjoy a good Italian dinner.
Stanley Rosenberg was first elected to the Massachusetts House in 1986 and the Senate in 1990. He served as chairman of the Senate Ways and Means committee and majority leader before being elected Senate president in January 2015, becoming the first openly gay leader of the 40-member body. Rosenberg was raised in foster care and graduated from Revere High School and the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

**What does it take to be an effective leader?** It starts with listening, and having some vision. But it’s also being open to the vision that others bring to the table and creating an inclusive and transparent process, so that even when you can’t go in the direction that a member or a group wishes to go in, they at least know they had a meaningful opportunity and know why you’re moving in a different direction.

**How has the legislature changed over the years?** The members are increasingly college-educated. They serve an average of 10 years and then move on, either up or out. The problems they’re dealing with are more and more complicated. More and more millennials are being elected, bringing with them changed expectations about the speed with which the legislature operates and the means of communication, most noticeably emphasizing new and social media.

**What is your proudest accomplishment?** There are so many touch points because I’ve been around for a lot of years. Most days you help one person or one business or one community. And then after years of work, you finally get a piece of legislation through which will affect the whole state, and may or may not be permanent. And some go beyond the state. Whether it’s a cultural facilities bill, the same-sex marriage battle in Massachusetts or higher education capital investments to modernize our teaching facilities—those come along after many, many years of work. Those are the most rewarding times, when you know you’re going to have the ability to affect a very large group of people, potentially for a long period of time. In the meantime, every day you take some pride in helping one person, one group or one business at a time.

**What advice do you give to new legislators?** Basically, you’re here to serve, and when you finish your service you will have done a lot for a lot of people. But if you come in the door thinking people are going to reward you by naming a bridge for you, you probably are going to be disappointed.

Thank you for hosting the Legislative Summit. **Why is it important for state lawmakers to gather each year?** It’s an opportunity to hear how different regions of the country are dealing with the same problems you’re dealing with. It’s networking, it’s informing yourself, and it’s also an opportunity to have some input into the national policies or directions that NCSL may be moving in as they interact with the federal government on behalf of the states.

**When did you first become interested in public service and why?** I was doing community work, both professionally and avocationally. I was working in the arts and in training programs for people to get involved in affecting public policy, both in the local community and statewide arenas. Of course, that meant I was touching both local government and state government. I was encouraged by others, because of the work I was doing and how they observed the work I was doing, to consider running for public office someday. I talked with some of the local elected officials and got some advice, which included, “Get a job at the Statehouse and within six months you’ll know if you want to be an elected official.” I was able to get a job, and I knew within six months that if I had the opportunity, I would run. That was 30 years ago.

**What do you do for fun, to destress from the pressures of the legislature?** (chuckles) This is not a job, it’s a lifestyle. I used to love to cook. I’m sure I will someday again, but there’s no time to cook. I used to love to garden, but I haven’t been able to garden for three years. I do still get to travel some, happily, and I do enjoy that, but it’s mostly travel for work. I try to tack on a day or two here and there when I travel for work.

**What final words would you like to share?** Serving in the legislature is an honor and a privilege. The seat you occupy you do so two or four years at a time. You are the steward of that seat—you don’t own it.

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Jane Carroll Andrade, a contributing editor to the magazine, conducted these interviews, which have been edited for length.