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# THE SUN

Thursday, January 22, 2026 \$2.50 FACEBOOK.COM/LOWELLSUN X.COM/LOWELLSUN

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**CITY COUNCIL**

## No end in sight for Lowell High rebuild costs

\$36M loan order increase OK'd; 'I'm afraid we'll be taxed out of our homes,' resident says

By **Melanie Gilbert**  
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**LOWELL** » Structural steel issues identified in the 1892 Coburn Hall building, the Phase 4 part of the Lowell High School rebuild and renovation, may cost the city even more money in order to complete the almost decadelong project. Despite repeated questions

from city councilors, the project team of Suffolk Construction, the architect firm of Perkins Eastman and the owner's project manager Skanska USA could not provide hard details or projected costs to the newly discovered structural issues that may raise the price of the already \$418 million school. "We're going to get some information Thursday or Friday of this

week," Skanska Project Director Kevin Kane said during the Tuesday night meeting at City Hall. "We have Perkins Eastman and the structural engineer reviewing the condition that we found that didn't meet what we understood to meet the contract documents from the 1990s renovations."

Councilor Rita Mercier provided some context from a tour the councilors took of the facility Jan. 17.



Lowell High School looking north from Kirk Street Dec. 8, 2025. The Phase 4 renovation of the south portion of the 1922 building, back right, and adjacent 1892 building, seen in the foreground at left, commenced in January 2026.

MELANIE GILBERT — LOWELL SUN

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**1ST MIDDLESEX SENATE FORUM**

## 'EVERYBODY DESERVES A SECOND CHANCE'



PETER CURRIER — LOWELL SUN

From left, UTEC young adults Adolfo de la Cruz and Aidan Breen conduct an interview of state Rep. Rodney Elliott on Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2026 as Elliott seeks the 1st Middlesex District seat in the state Senate special election. Elliott's Democratic primary opponent, state Rep. Vanna Howard, is set to visit UTEC on Thursday.

### Elliott visits UTEC as special election primary approaches

By **Peter Currier**  
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**LOWELL** » The Feb. 3 primary is approaching for the special election for the 1st Middlesex District state Senate seat, and both Democratic candidates are visiting UTEC to field questions from some of the organization's young adults.

Candidate Rodney Elliott, who currently holds the 16th Middlesex District seat in the state House of Representatives, visited the Lowell-based nonprofit Wednesday afternoon, where he first sat down with

UTEC staff to hear the latest efforts and programs the organization has been running recently. In that sit-down, staff members sitting in a circle led Elliott in a "mood check," a tradition at UTEC where young adults and staff note their mood on a scale of 10, and something they are looking forward to.

After, Elliott sat down with UTEC young adults Aidan Breen, 22, and Adolfo de la Cruz, 21, who asked him a number of questions related to issues UTEC often cares about, like housing, policies surround-

ing incarceration and criminal records, and state support for UTEC programs.

To kick things off, the two young adults asked Elliott about his motivation for seeking out the state Senate seat. Elliott first cited his background as a former member of the Lowell City Council, as well as a stint as mayor, and his time as a city planner and with the Environmental Protection Agency.

"I run because I want to make the city a better place to live," said Elliott, noting his own belief that the city is doing better than it was when he first joined

the City Council in 1997. "It has changed, and it has changed for the better, but we still have a lot of work to do."

The conversation then moved to housing, how Elliott views the current housing landscape and what he thinks can be done to address the housing crisis.

"We see rents skyrocketing," said Elliott, who also serves as the chair of the Lowell Housing Authority board.

Elliott said he wants to look for more opportunities to create new housing because "the more housing you create, rents may come down." He also pointed to a potential ballot question

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**IMMIGRATION**

## Bill filed to ban ICE at state courts

Legislation filed by state Sen. Lydia Edwards amid rumors of fed surge

By **Tim Dunn**  
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Emergency legislation has been filed at the State House that would prohibit Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other federal agents from detaining or arresting illegal immigrants in Massachusetts court-houses.

Filed by state Sen. Lydia Edwards (D-Third Suffolk) on Tuesday, An Act Protecting Access to Justice (SD. 3607) would ban ICE from detaining or placing illegal immigrants under civil arrest while inside and on the way to and from a Massachusetts courthouse. ICE agents make civil arrests for immigration violations and detaining individuals pending removal proceedings, according to the agency's website.

"A person who is duly attending a court proceeding in which such person is a party or potential witness, or a family or household member is a party or potential witness, shall not be subject to civil arrest while present at the courthouse or courthouse grounds in connection with a court proceeding or while traveling to and returning from, the location of such court proceedings, unless such civil arrest is supported by a judicial warrant or judicial order authorizing such civil arrest," the legislation reads.

Edwards announced the emergency legislation on social media Tuesday, saying in a Facebook post that increased ICE activity has "created fear around court-houses."

"Today, I filed legislation reaffirming a fundamental promise of our democracy: that everyone has fair and safe access to the courts. At a time when increased immigration enforcement activity has created fear around courthouses,

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# Elliott

FROM PAGE 1

voters will weigh in on in November regarding rent control, which would establish a limit on annual rent increases.

“Controlling rents won’t affect the individuals who have one or two homes ... this is about the big corporations with massive units across the commonwealth, and they just keep raising rents,” said Elliott. “I will vote for that question, because we have to do something.”

“Lowell does a good job, but for the rest of the communities around the commonwealth, we need their participation, and that is the direction I feel we have to head to,” Elliott said later.

Breen and de la Cruz also asked about state support and funding for UTEC programs, namely the mattress recycling program they noted the late state Sen. Ed Kennedy, who held the 1st Middlesex seat until his death on Oct. 1, had supported. Elliott said he would “absolutely” continue that support if elected.

“I think that is a program that is recognized across the commonwealth, and credit to you for having the vision to create such a program. It is about jobs, it is about protecting the environment, recycling — you have my full commitment that I will support that line item,” said Elliott.

Elliott was then asked about what he thinks UTEC can do to best prioritize its own budget. Over the years, Elliott has made many visits to the nonprofit, which he said always leaves him impressed with how UTEC continues to evolve.

“I hear now you provide a housing service, that is an important element for people who are seeking re-entry. It is unfortunate the government decided to cut your budget by \$2 million. I think that is money well spent, in my opinion,” said Elliott. “We have a federal government that is trillions of dollars, and to cut funding for this particular program was wrong.”

He said he would commit to continuing to fight for resources to go to UTEC.

“This is an important program, I think you do great work with the funding you have, and then some. I think we need to continue to provide more resources, not less,” said Elliott.

Another example of civic engagement led by UTEC young adults has been the organization’s advocacy for “raise the age” legislation that would raise the maximum age to 21 for those convicted of crimes to be sentenced to juvenile facilities rather than a typical prison for adults. The intent of the concept is in line with one of UTEC’s main objectives: to reduce criminal recidivism among young adults. Elliott said he supports that legislation.



PETER CURRIER — LOWELL SUN  
From left: UTEC young adults Yandel Miranda and Adolfo de la Cruz, state Rep. Rodney Elliott and young adults Aidan Breen, Camerin Debrosky and Mikayla Sayasane Jan. 21, 2026. Elliott visited UTEC to hear from staff and be interviewed by the nonprofit’s young adults amid his special election campaign for the 1st Middlesex District state Senate seat.

“Everybody deserves a second chance,” said Elliott.

In the same vein, Elliott was asked about barriers young adults with criminal histories can face when it comes to getting a job after they are released from incarceration, and how he would be able to help remove those barriers in the state Senate. Elliott pointed to another piece of legislation, “An Act requiring clean slate automated

record sealing,” which would automatically start the record-sealing process for those convicted of crimes as soon as they are eligible for their criminal records to be sealed.

Elliott said he was interested in the bill, but expressed some concern over the automatic aspect of it.

“I would look at that bill. The bill states there is an automatic clean slate after a certain number of years. I think everyone deserves the opportunity for a clean slate after a certain amount of time,” said Elliott. “The automatic part makes me a little concerned, but that doesn’t mean I can’t support the theory behind it, that this should not be affecting people who are getting back on track, want to get a job and get into housing.”

On mental health care, Elliott said there has been an increase in demand for all kinds of mental health services since 2019, though organizations like Vinfen have been stepping up.

“I think we need to continue that path. Vinfen themselves are opening another office for individuals with mental health and substance abuse (issues). If they commit a petty crime, rather than bringing them to (the House of Correction) they bring them to a place they can get services ... I think that makes sense,” said Elliott.

Breen and de la Cruz also asked about the difficulty of navigating other more mundane state ser-



PETER CURRIER — LOWELL SUN  
State Rep. Rodney Elliott, left, hears from UTEC Circling Home Fellow Hamza Berrios, center, during a candidate visit Jan. 21, 2026. Elliott is running in the special election for the 1st Middlesex District state Senate seat left vacant by the death of state Sen. Edward Kennedy last year.

vices, like the Registry of Motor Vehicles, and how Elliott would propose making things like that easier to access. Elliott noted constituent issues with the RMV and Department of Unemployment Assistance tend to generate a large amount of communications to his office.

“I wish I had an easy answer to that. I know the governor has gone through both departments to get better online services,” said Elliott. “It is government, and I believe that is why you have elected officials ... When somebody won’t pick up the phone at the state ... then you call me, and I can go to the managers or the supervisors and say, ‘Why isn’t this claim being processed?’”

“That is the way the system works. It is unfortunate, but I think that is a constituent service that is important ... That is a critical element of this job, in my opinion,” said Elliott.

After the interview with Elliott, Breen told The Sun he sought out the opportunity to be one of the young adults conducting the candidate interviews.

“I wanted to get out of my comfort zone a little bit, it was a good opportunity for me,” said Breen. “Honestly I could do it again tomorrow.”

De la Cruz said when it comes to his community, he loves to “put on a show.”

“Putting on an effort for change. A change in my community is needed,” said de la Cruz. “I’ve seen a lot, I want a change when it comes to youth, when it comes to our growing expansion into our community ... I want to see change when it comes to jobs, housing, and services. Even when it comes to our youth serving in the military, I want to see change for that.”

Elliott’s primary opponent, state Rep. Vanna Howard, will visit UTEC Thursday afternoon.

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MICHAEL M. SANTIAGO — GETTY IMAGES  
Federal agents detain a man after exiting a court hearing in immigration court at the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building in September in New York City.

## ICE

FROM PAGE 1

the legislation ensures that all residents can participate in legal proceedings, assert their rights, and seek justice without intimidation or obstruction,” Edwards said. “Courthouses exist so people can seek justice — not to be places of fear or enforcement ambush.”

The bill also would require federal officers, as well as state and local law enforcement, to present identification to court personnel along with the specific law enforcement purpose they intend to carry out. That information, including an arrest warrant, would then be reviewed and decided upon by court staff or the judge presiding over the case involving the person law enforcement is seeking.

“Except in extraordinary circumstances, no arrest may be made by a representative of a law enforcement agency in a courtroom during procedures, absent leave of the court,” the bill says.

Edward’s bill would also ban local, state and federal law enforcement from wearing masks or other face coverings inside a Massachusetts courthouse unless required for medical reasons.

The legislation comes amid swirling rumors of a large ICE operation coming to the Bay State after a shipment of 24 SUVs was delivered to the ICE facility in Burlington last week. It also comes as President Donald Trump continues his crackdown on illegal immigration, particularly in Minneapolis where he has threatened to send in military forces under the Insurrection Act.