
The Rosenberg Report

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Hello!

Overriding a governor's vetoes is the last step in the process of preparing a state budget. Late last night, the Legislature finished, for the summer anyway, restoring approximately \$150 million of the \$201 million Governor Romney vetoed from the fiscal '04 budget. Those overrides include: \$23 million for local aid, \$10 million for kindergarten grants, \$7.5 million for Mass. Legal Assistance Corp., which includes Western Mass. Legal Services, \$2.1 million for early literacy programs, \$1.9 million for Reading Recovery, \$1.7 million for UMass' Commonwealth College, \$1.2 million for regional emergency medical services, \$1 million for regional library assistance, \$451,000 for Chapter 70 school aid, \$342,000 for technology and resources sharing for regional libraries, \$200,000 for Berkshire County Area Health Education Centers, including Community Partners in Amherst, \$40,000 earmark for the Pioneer Valley Visitors Center in Greenfield, \$14,800 for Franklin Regional public health agent and restored funding to Riverways Protection, Watershed Management, Home Health Care and the Western Mass. Enterprise Fund. The Legislature also restored an early retirement incentive package that will allow eligible state employees to add five years to their age or five years to their length of service. Here are some links that might help you follow the process.

Governor's vetoes

http://www.mass.gov/portal/index.jsp?pageID=agcc&agid=gov&agca=veto&agcc=veto_docs

Veto Overrides

<http://www.state.ma.us/legis/04budget/fy04overrides.htm>

Conference Committee Report

<http://www.state.ma.us/legis/04budget/conference.htm>

Although the final fiscal '04 budget is not quite complete, many of us on Beacon Hill are already looking toward fiscal '05. The Romney administration announced last week that the state ended fiscal '03 with a surplus of approximately \$133 million. That's certainly better than a deficit, but it hardly signals an economic recovery. What's more, the administration is projecting that even with modest economic growth in the coming year, the fiscal '05 budget will face a structural deficit in the range of \$1-\$2 billion, due largely to ever-increasing health care costs. That means that many of the tough choices we -- legislators and citizens alike -- made during these last few months may well be staring us in the face again next year. It might be instructive to remember how we feel today, and how very few of us are entirely happy with many of the choices we made for the fiscal '04 budget.

To be sure, there are some isolated things to be happy about. Some will be glad that we resisted broad-based tax increases, though not many in my district. Others will be pleased that the Prescription Advantage program for senior citizens and disabled residents was restored. And others will take heart that the Legislature advanced a number of reforms designed to streamline services and save tax dollars. But the harsh reality of this budget is that core governmental services are being affected. Forget all last year's rhetoric about excising \$3 billion of waste, fraud and abuse and protecting core services. In the coming year, essential state and municipal employees, including teachers, police officers and firefighters, will lose their jobs, K-12 students will face larger classes, UMass students will face higher costs (more on UMass later), environmental concerns have been shunted aside, and people who depend on the state will find that their lives have become more difficult. I started this newsletter a year and a half ago primarily to keep you informed about the state budget. I am anxiously awaiting the day that I can deliver some positive budget news.

Until then, here's something that you might find interesting. The link below will take you to a game that was developed by students at Worcester Polytechnic Institute at the suggestion of my colleague, State Senator Richard Moore (D-Uxbridge). The game, called Ma\$\$Balance, is designed to give players an idea of what it's like to balance the state's budget, complete with a \$3 billion deficit. If you play, you'll face the same kinds of competing interests that we legislators face. I hope you'll find the simulation instructive, and more fun than preparing the real budget has been.

Ma\$\$Balance

<http://www.playmassbalance.com/>

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stan". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "S" and a trailing flourish.

July Focus

UMass budget

I am currently working to rally Senate support for my effort to secure a \$20.6 million supplemental appropriation for UMass. I am fully aware that worthy programs in my district will be struggling with massive cuts this year, but the blow that was delivered to the University in the '04 budget -- 18.3 percent was cut from UMass while the state's community and state colleges were cut 13.6 percent -- was unfair, unjustified and ultimately unwise. UMass, besides being the economic engine for western Massachusetts, will help speed our economic recovery by providing a quality higher education for students who will stay in Massachusetts, work here and pay taxes here. To continue to decimate it is incredibly shortsighted. The \$20.6 million I am seeking represents the difference between the University's cut and the cuts made to the community and state colleges.

I am working with senators who are UMass alumni, and those who represent communities that host UMass campuses, and with members of the University community, to call on Senate President Robert Travaglini (D-East Boston) and Senate Ways and Means Chairwoman Therese Murray (D-Plymouth) to earmark that amount for the University in any future supplemental budget.

Since 2001, the state has cut the University's budget by almost 30 percent. This incessant cutting has simply got to stop. The University belongs to everyone in this state, and everyone should either be willing to fight for it or explain their reluctance. It's unconscionable that the state is already renegeing on fairly negotiated contracts. To turn our backs on the institution is nothing short of shameful. I am determined to work with all those committed to the future of our University to help restore hope, and funding, at the earliest opportunity.

Municipal relief bill

Last week, the Legislature adopted the conference report on the Municipal Relief Bill, designed to give cities and towns some tools for dealing the local aid cuts necessitated by the state's economic crisis. I served as Senate chair of the committee, along with Senators Steven Tolman (D-Brighton) and Michael Knapik (R-Westfield) and House chair Peter Larkin (D-Pittsfield) and Representatives Patricia Walrath (D-Stow) and Bradford Hill (R-Ipswich). Although I am disappointed that the governor's repeated veto threats prevented us from including a local options meals tax, a proposal several communities I represent said they supported, I am pleased that we have put together a package that is varied enough to offer something to almost every municipality in the state. The bill is now before the governor, who must accept or reject it as a whole, or send it back to the Legislature with amendments. The governor does not have line-item veto power over this bill. Here're a few highlights:

MUNICIPAL RELIEFBILL

HIGHLIGHTS

FINANCE ANDRESTRUCTURING

- Local option early retirement plan
- Eliminate the Finance Review Board
- Transferability of limited amount of funds between municipal accounts in the final months of the fiscal year
- Delay of unfunded pension liabilities allowed for 2004 and/or 2005. Does not extend the deadline for fully funding unfunded pension liabilities.
- Improves collection of auto excise taxes from non-residents who garage their cars instate for long periods of time.
- Creates incentives for enforcement of auto excise tax payments.
- Extends local option tax amnesty programs.
- Adjusts license fees and fines which have not been adjusted for sometime:

Auto sales	Fire department inspections
Victuallers	Towing fees
Salvage Yards	Parking fines
Auto lease surcharge	Blocking intersections (blocking the box)

- Authorization for retention of certain increased civil process revenues by municipalities.
- Authorizes conservation commissions to assess the cost of consultants required to review and act on proposals presented to the body.
- Authorizes southeastern Massachusetts with harbors to establish by local option and local referendum an embarkation fee to assist with costs associated with ferry traffic.
- Allow communities to establish additional stabilization funds and earmark a specific and limited amount of revenue for said fund.
- Allows communities to establish alternative financing mechanisms to provide municipal services without seeking legislative authorization. For example, solid waste districts, fire districts, etc.
- Changes procedures for handling uncashed checks to appropriately recapture funds.
- Amends general laws to clarify that regional school districts may refinance debt under the same conditions and terms as cities and towns.
- Changes the distribution of Medicaid reimbursement for medical services delivered under special education
- Authorizes K-6 transportation fees for 2004 only, with exemption for low-income students.
- Allows communities to bid on contracts to provide snow removal services to the Commonwealth.
- Allows Department of the Auditor to audit municipal finance at the request of the municipality.
- Authorizes the extended use of revenues from the sale of municipal assets during 2004 and 2005.
- Shortening the timeline for jet fuel excise payments to municipalities.

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- District Improvement Financing assists communities by creating a new tool to help cities and towns pay for the development of public infrastructure by designating development "districts". The infrastructure for these "districts" will be financed through bonds funded directly from the incremental increase in the property value of the property being developed.
- Urban Center Housing Increment Financing authorizing municipalities to grant real estate tax exemptions to help develop or redevelop mixed-use housing and commercial properties within designated "urban center housing zones". As part of the development of residential housing, 25 percent of such housing must be

- affordable to those occupants at or below 80 percent of the area median income, or such percentage of units in order to make the development financially feasible.
- Creation of mixed-use property tax abatement program directs the DHCD, in consultation with the DOR to establish a pilot mixed-use building rehabilitation program for the purpose of stimulating the development of affordable housing in mixed-use structures. DHCD may approve applications from cities and towns for the creation of not more than 300 units of housing in each of the 3 fiscal years beginning in FY04.

NEXTSTEPS—TASK FORCES

- A Special Commission will review and make recommendations by September 30, 2003, for changes in the laws and regulations governing public construction.
- A Special Commission will review and make recommendations by October 1, 2003, for changes in laws and regulations governing the thresholds for procurement and other provisions which can assist municipalities.
- The Commissioner and the Chancellor of Board of Higher Education and others shall review and make recommendations by December 31, 2003, with regard to post secondary programs in public schools.
- The Department of Revenue shall study and make recommendations by December 31, 2003, on the impact of property tax exemptions for non-profit organizations on the cities and towns.
- The Joint Committee on taxation shall study and make recommendations with regard to motor vehicle excise taxes, the alternative tax factor and the residential factor.

Noteworthy

Big Dig cost recovery bill

Late last month I joined more than two dozen of my legislative colleagues and signed onto to a bill that would create a special, high-powered commission to oversee Big Dig cost recovery. The bill, authored by State Senator Marc Pacheco (D-Taunton), would strip oversight of Big Dig cost recovery from the Turnpike Authority and give it to a seven-member panel, which would include the state inspector general, the state auditor, a federal transportation official and a Massachusetts law school dean. This commission will be charged with examining an estimated \$2 billion in design and construction cost overruns, looking for avoidable mistakes and pursuing refunds, civil litigation or criminal prosecution.

When Senator Pacheco announced the bill, he said that the taxpayers of this state should have complete confidence that any and all moneys recoverable for Big Dig mismanagement are aggressively pursued. I couldn't agree more.

Environmental news

I know many of you probably think that all the horrible budget news means that environmental concerns are taking a backseat at best, and a brutal beating at worst. But

here's a piece of pretty good news. Last month, the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) gave Massachusetts a "B+/B" for our efforts to generate new clean electricity from renewable resources. Only California and Nevada scored better with "A-" grades. Minnesota and New Mexico also received "B+/B" grades, but 34 states received failing grades of "D" or "F" and six states qualified for what the UCS is calling the "Hall of Shame."

Roundup

Help America Vote Act public hearings in West Springfield

As I reported in May, I have been appointed by Senate President Travaglini to serve on the State Steering Committee of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). The HAVA was signed by President Bush in October '02 in an effort to improve voting across the country, and in response to the problems that arose in '00 presidential election. The HAVA makes available up to \$3.9 billion in federal funding to improve voting equipment, voter registration and voter turnout, and Massachusetts is eligible for funding. In order to receive funding, Massachusetts must submit a plan detailing how it would spend the money to improve elections.

Several public hearings will be held on Thursday, July 24th, 2003 at the Municipal Office Building, 26 Central St., West Springfield, to help the Steering Committee file its report. Here is a schedule of the day's hearings:

- 11 a.m. -- The Provisional Voting and Voter Identification Sub-committee will hear and receive public comment on the HAVA requirements of the availability of provisional ballots and presentation of identification by voters.
- Noon -- The Training and Education Sub-committee will hear and receive public comment on the HAVA requirements of poll worker training and voter education.
- 1 p.m. -- The Voting Equipment and Accessibility Sub-Committee will hear and receive public comment on the HAVA requirements that each polling place be accessible, and that by 2006, each location have at least one accessible voting machine.
- 2 p.m. -- Demonstration of voting equipment.

Please feel free to attend the above listed hearings and demonstration or provide written comments. For those who require accommodations, please request such accommodations no later than 5 business days before the hearing.

Written comments or requests for accommodations should be addressed to Michelle K. Tassinari, Legal Counsel, Elections Division, 1 Ashburton Place, Room 1705, Boston, MA 02108. For more information, please call 617-727-2828 or 1-800-462-8683.

State grants

Here are a few grants that were announced late last month. They were awarded under the Volunteer Fire Assistance Program, funded through the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs' Cooperative Forestry Program and the National Fire Plan.

Colrain	--	\$1,000
Gill	--	\$1,908.80
Hatfield	--	\$1,234.18
Leyden	--	\$2,000
Turners Falls	--	\$1,561
Sunderland	--	\$899

Trivia

A bit of a controversy emerged over last month's question -- Name the Massachusetts city where the Duryea brothers developed their first gasoline powered automobile. According to the "Massachusetts Facts" booklet, the answer is Springfield. But one alert reader sent us a link to The Henry Ford Museum that says the city was Chicopee.

The Henry Ford Museum

<http://www.hfmgv.org/exhibits/showroom/1896d/duryea.html>

So, we accepted both answers, and our winner is Wendy F. (who answered Springfield, by the way) from somewhere in cyberspace. We'll send Wendy information on who to contact in my Boston office and we'll look forward to seeing her at the State House. Congratulations Wendy! And thanks to everybody who played along!

Now to this month's question and another chance to win lunch and a State House tour. Name the four U.S. Presidents who were born in Massachusetts.

Submit your answer to tumitch@sprynet.com and watch this space for the correct answer and the prize winner.

Links

Here are a few links. Until next time, happy surfing!

Click here tumitch@sprynet.com if you want to be removed from our list.

Click here for our on-line feedback form www.stanrosenberg.com/form.html

Forward this link to a friend www.stanrosenberg.com/issues/rosenreportreg.html

Guide to Lawmaking -- <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/lawmkng.htm>

Massachusetts State Government Home Page -- <http://mass.gov/>

The Legislature's web page -- <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/>

Senate's Bill Text System – <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/billsrch.htm>

Legislative Tracking System – <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/ltsform.htm>

My personal website – <http://www.stanrosenberg.com/>

The Rosenberg Report (June, 2003, edition) --
<http://www.stanrosenberg.com/issues/jun2003.html>