
The Rosenberg Report

Vol. XIX
August 11, 2003

Hello!

The Dog Days. Hot, humid and notoriously slow. The weather hasn't been especially hot lately, but the rain and humidity certainly have slowed things down a bit. The activity on Beacon Hill has also slowed somewhat, but there are still a few things going on. For example, there are several commissions meeting throughout the summer that I'll tell more about, the Senate, as you may have read, is grappling with it's own internal budget deficit (more on that later, too), and the Legislature continues to work on the final deficiency budget for fiscal '03. I'm not sure when this will be ready, but I can tell you that a couple of my top priorities for supplemental funding are UMass and rape crisis centers. As you know, UMass suffered a disproportionate cut in the fiscal '04 budget and I am seeking to restore about \$20 million to five-campus system, and the Legislature did restore some funding for rape crisis centers, but it wasn't enough. Maybe the final deficiency budget will be ready in time for the September edition, but if it's ready earlier, I'll let you know.

I know a lot of folks vacation during the Dog Days, so here's a fun link that explains how that name came about.

<http://curious.astro.cornell.edu/question.php?number=178>

Until next time, have a great rest of the summer!

Yours,



August Focus

Legislative commissions

As part of Chapter 46 of the Acts of 2003, An Act Providing Relief and Flexibility to Municipal Officials, several legislative study commissions were created:

- Special Commission to Study the Sale of Tax Receivables -- This commission will examine the existing procedures for the sale of tax receivables and make recommendations on potential improvements. The commission will consist of the commissioner of the Department of Revenue or designee; the commissioner of the

Department of Housing and Community Development or designee; the chairpersons of the House and Senate Committees on Taxation who shall serve as co-chairs; two members of the House of Representatives, one of whom shall be appointed by the House minority leader; and two members of the Senate, one of whom shall be appointed by the Senate minority leader; one member appointed by the Massachusetts Municipal Association; one member of the Citizen's Housing and Planning Association; and one member appointed by the Massachusetts Treasurers and Collectors Association.

- Residential Tax Factor and Alternative Tax Factor -- The Joint Committee on Taxation shall study the residential tax factor and the alternative tax factor of Chapter 58 of the General Laws and all proposed changes to the motor vehicle excise of chapter 60A of the General Laws. The committee shall file a report of its findings and any proposed legislation to the clerks of the House and the Senate not later than December 1, 2004.
- Procurement -- The Committee on State Administration shall study and make recommendations for changes to the procurement thresholds as defined in chapter 30B of the General Laws and any other aspects of existing laws and regulations to assist municipalities. The committee shall file recommendations for changes, if any, with the house and senate clerks by October 1, 2003.
- Municipal Census -- There shall be a special commission to investigate, study, and make a report on the annual municipal census conducted under section 4 of chapter 51 of the General Laws. The report shall assess the necessity of continuing an annual municipal census and include recommendations to the Legislature on alternative methods for achieving the results currently derived from the "municipal census". The commission shall consist of 13 members; the House and Senate chairs of the Joint Committee on Election Laws who shall serve as co-chairpersons; the Secretary of the Commonwealth or designee; the jury commissioner or designee; two representatives of the Massachusetts Town Clerks Association, one of whom shall be from a rural community; a representative of the Massachusetts City Clerks Association; a representative of the Massachusetts Municipal Association; the director of the Massachusetts Institute of Social and Economic Research or designee; one member of the House of Representatives to be appointed by the Speaker and one member of the House of Representatives to be appointed by the minority leader; one member of the Senate to be appointed by the Senate President and one member of the Senate to be appointed by the minority leader. The commission shall file its report, including its recommendations and a draft of any legislation necessary to carry out its recommendations, not later than December 1, 2003.
- Public Construction Projects -- There shall be established a special commission to investigate, study, and make legislative recommendations on the adequacy and efficiency of laws and regulations governing public construction projects. The commission shall consist of 19 members and shall file a report on the results of its study, together with its recommendations, if any, and any legislation necessary to

carry such recommendations into effect, with the clerks of the House of Representatives and the Senate not later than September 30, 2003.

For the complete text of the law, click here:

<http://www.state.ma.us/legis/laws/seslaw03/sl030046.htm>

Municipal relief bill

On July 31st, Lt. Governor Kerry Healy, serving as Acting Governor while Governor Romney was on vacation, signed into law the Municipal Relief Bill. The new law went into effect immediately and gives cities and towns a variety of tools to address local aid cuts, including the ability to raise fees and offer early retirement incentives for municipal employees. Here are a few highlights:

- 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.

Higher education raises

On July 31st, I signed on to a letter that State Representative Ellen Story (D-Amherst) and I co-wrote to Governor Romney requesting that he submit a supplemental budget that includes the cost of collective bargaining agreements for higher education employees, many of whom are now in their third year of an unfunded contract. Our request came on the heels of the governor's decision to grant 2 percent raises to more than 2,000 managers in the executive branch, raises that could cause layoffs in many agencies. This 2 percent raise was on top of the 2.7 percent cost of living raises granted July 1st. The governor has said these raises are necessary to improve morale.

I don't begrudge anybody a cost of living adjustment. But I find it absolutely incredible that the governor could understand the connection between morale and salaries when it comes to managers, but not for rank and file employees. Fair is fair, and, as I have said many, many times, the state's continued failure to finance the higher education collective bargaining agreements is grossly unfair.

As always, we will keep at it, trying to get the contracts funded!

Senate's budget

You've probably heard that the Senate is currently dealing with its own internal deficit of about \$2 million. I still don't know exactly how this is going to be resolved, but already I have been forced to layoff one part-time member of my staff, who had been with me almost six years. This is a trying time for everyone who is employed by the state or relies on state agencies for essential services. I am working to preserve, as best I can, the quality of service that my district and Boston offices provide.

Noteworthy

July revenues

According to the Department of Revenue, revenue collections in July increased by \$35 million, or 3.5 percent from July, 2002. This exceeded the benchmark used for calculating the fiscal '04 budget by \$15 million. Anytime the state collects more than it anticipates is a good thing, but these margins are excruciatingly thin. The numbers are headed in the right direction, but glaciers move a whole lot faster.

Outstanding legislator award

Late last month I was notified by the members of the Massachusetts Collectors and Treasurers Association (MCTA) that they have named me an "Outstanding Legislator" because of my efforts during the fiscal '04 budget preparation and my work on the Municipal Relief Bill. I will collect my award at the MCTA's meeting in Holyoke on Aug. 19th. Thank you, MCTA!

Roundup

State grants

Here are a few state grants that were reported recently:

- \$5,916 Workforce Training Grant to the Derrick V. Mason company of Hadley
- \$105,102 Workforce Training Grant to FiberMark, Inc. of South Hadley
- \$6,900 Massachusetts Historical Records Advisory Board grant to the Hadley Historical Commission

Stan's favorites

It's been a few months since I shared a recipe, so here's one that takes advantage of all the fresh vegetables that are available now. And feel free to experiment. This is only one possible combination of ingredients. Other vegetables will work just as well. Plus, it's a cold soup, so it's great during the Dog Days. It's called Asian Gazpacho and this particular recipe serves about eight people.

1 cup chopped cucumber, peeled and seeded
1 chopped red pepper (or any other color you want)
½ cup sliced green onion (the white and green part)
½ cup chopped celery
½ cup chopped carrots
½ cup of daikon (Chinese radish) or any other radish you might like
4 oz. of bitter melon chopped (optional, this is an Asian vegetable)
¼ cup chopped Cilantro
8 cups chicken broth (or vegetable broth for vegetarians)
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 ½ teaspoon sesame oil
One-third cup rice vinegar
Tabasco sauce, or hot oil to taste (optional)

Combine all ingredients and chill. If you like, you can serve this soup with rice crackers, or shrimp crackers, or other such delicacies from the Asian market. Enjoy!

Watch this space next month for a dill pickle recipe.

Trivia

Now for the answer to last month's question -- Name the four U.S. Presidents who were born in Massachusetts -- is: John Adams, John Quincy Adams, John Kennedy and George Bush (the elder), who was born in Milton. Several people got three right, but answered Calvin Coolidge instead of Bush. Coolidge, who lived much of his life in Massachusetts, was actually born in Plymouth, Vermont.

So, our winner is W.J. from somewhere in cyberspace. We'll send W.J. information on who to contact in my Boston office and we'll look forward to seeing W.J. at the State House. Congratulations W.J.! And thanks to everybody who played along!

Now to this month's question and another chance to win lunch and a State House tour. What Hadley resident is honored with a statue outside the State House?

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 (July, 2003, edition) --
<http://www.stanrosenberg.com/issues/jul2003.html>