
The Rosenberg Report

Vol. XXII
January 27, 2004

Hello!

It's hard to describe the prevailing mood on Beacon Hill these days. One day we are filled with optimism, like the day the Department of Revenue (<http://www.dor.state.ma.us/pressreleases/2004/december03revenues.htm>) announced that halfway through this fiscal year state revenue collections are beating benchmarks by \$356 million. It's been a long time since we've seen any growth, much less sustained growth, albeit small, and many took this news as a sign that maybe, just maybe, the worst of the fiscal crisis has ended and better days lay ahead. But then late last week the Department of Employment and Training (<http://www.detma.org/releases/detnew193.htm>) announced that 7,100 jobs were lost in Massachusetts in December 2003 -- that's on top of the 42,600 lost since December 2002 -- and that for the first time since 1995 the state's unemployment rate of 5.7 percent has matched the national rate.

Better days. For far too many, better days remain out of reach.

But it's a new year, and a new legislative session, and the debate over the fiscal '05 state budget has already begun with a renewed commitment in the Senate to continue working with the House of Representatives and the governor in a spirit of cooperation. Make no mistake, we -- lawmakers and citizens alike -- will face difficult choices this year. An estimated \$1.4 billion deficit dogs our every move and the no-tax climate limits our options. It is in this context that I and my Senate leadership colleagues have committed the Senate to the following budget priorities:

- Level funding local aid;
- Supporting education at all levels, including Chapter 70 school aid and public higher education;
- Preserving the Prescription Advantage program for seniors, and preserving access to other health care programs to the greatest extent possible; and
- Continuing working with the House and administration to reform state government with an eye toward saving money and improving services.

These commitments reflect the Senate's historic support for these areas of state government, especially education. For more than a decade, the Senate has been the leader on education policy and funding issues. From early childhood education, to Education Reform, to higher education, the Senate has been steadfast in the belief that education lights the way to a more prosperous future.

If there is a prevailing mood on Beacon Hill these days, at least in the Senate anyway, it's that education equals hope.

Yours,



January Focus

Join TeamRosenberg!

This year promises to be one of the most exciting election seasons in recent memory and I'm looking for folks to join my team to help with my re-election effort. If you'd like to participate, please click here to find out how. Thanks!

<http://www.stanrosenberg.com/teamrosenberg.php>

Overrides -- UMass

By overwhelming margins, the House and Senate overrode many of the governor's vetoes of the supplemental budget, which included \$34 million for the long-awaited higher education contracts and an unprecedented \$10 million for the UMass operating budget, a provision that I initiated and worked for several months to secure. About half of that \$10 million will go to the Amherst campus and will help cushion the blow of the cuts the campus endured in the current state budget.

Getting these two items, totaling slightly less than half the supplemental budget, took a lot of patient, deliberate and unflagging effort from a lot of people. I appreciate the sacrifices higher education employees have made and I appreciate the willingness of my House and Senate colleagues to see the necessity of meeting our contractual obligations and the wisdom of investing in the university. I've said it before and I'll say it again: Thoughtful lobbying often works. Everybody who understands and appreciates the value of public higher education should remember that as we head into the fiscal 2005 budget debates.

Overrides -- Economic stimulus package

Also by overwhelming margins, the House and Senate overrode the governor's vetoes of the \$100 million economic stimulus package, a proposal designed to encourage growth in emerging technologies, such as biotechnology, defense and homeland security, advanced materials, plastics and polymers, information technology, medical device, environment-through capital formation, regional development, and stability in regulation and taxation. These funds, especially the \$62.5 million for science and technology projects at UMass, have the potential to greatly enhance the University's status as a leading research institution. The following vetoes were overridden on January 13, 2004 for a total of \$32.45 million:

- Re-capitalization of the Emerging Technology Fund (\$25M, Gov. reduced to \$12.5M):

Administered by MassDevelopment, the majority of this \$25 million will be used for "bricks and mortar" investments specifically targeted toward technology-based physical infrastructure, assuring a permanent development and manufacturing presence in the Commonwealth. Funds may also be used for bridge loans. Last year alone, MassDevelopment assisted in the creation of 5,300 new jobs, retention of 26,000 jobs and the initiation of 4,000 new housing starts. The infusion of new monies will be used for regional development.

- Capitalization of the John Adams Innovation Institute (\$15M, Gov. reduced to \$7.5M): Administered by the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, this \$15 million Institute will leverage long-term, public and private sector investment in innovation technologies to provide dedicated infrastructure support for emerging technology and regional industry clusters in the Commonwealth. This new fund is designed to meet the specific needs of each region of the Commonwealth to help stimulate local economies.
- Capitalization of the Matching Fund for Collaborative Academic Research Centers (\$20M, Gov. reduced to \$10M): Administered through the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, this \$20 million fund will attract federal research support and private sector investment for industry-university academic research centers. The Matching Fund will improve the competitiveness of our academic community in the pursuit of federal research support and private sector investment. Recent investments made by other states, including New York and California, threaten our share of federal research dollars.
- Capitalization of the Massachusetts, Mathematics, Science, Technology & Engineering Grant Fund (\$2.5M, Gov. reduced to \$1.25M): This \$2.5 million fund, also known as the pipeline fund, will increase the number of Massachusetts students who participate in educational programs that support careers in fields related to math, science, technology, and engineering. A new study commissioned by MassINC and the Donahue Institute show that Massachusetts is losing highly educated professionals.
- Creation of the Massachusetts Technology Transfer Center (\$2.4M, Gov. reduced to \$1.2M): Administered by the University of Massachusetts, the expanded center will accelerate and improve the efficiency of technology transfer from research institution to industry. The transfer center will facilitate the introduction of new products or services, which will spur new economic activity. In 2002, the existing program raised \$20M through the sale of inventions, some of which is filtered back to the program making it almost completely self-sustaining. The expanded center will assist both public and private research institutions in commercializing technology and creating new businesses.

Both branches of the Legislature invested a significant amount of effort in putting this proposal together. You can read the full Senate proposal by clicking here.

Economic Stimulus

<http://www.stanrosenberg.com/EconomicStimulusBill.pdf>

Chapter 70 report/comment

A couple of weeks ago, the Legislative Working Group on Chapter 70 issued its report on the future of Chapter 70, the state's funding formula for K-12 education. If you want to read the full report you can click here <http://www.stanrosenberg.com/>

I have followed this group closely and submitted extensive comments on their report. Below are the highlights of my comments to the committee.

- I encouraged the group to address updating wealth measurements, which haven't been adjusted since 1988, as soon as possible.
- I reminded the committee that the extraordinary expansion of property wealth has not been uniform across the state. This has dramatically changed the relative wealth of communities.
- I encouraged the group to pay close attention to the unique challenges facing regional schools, particularly the problems of higher average costs associated with running rural schools and the inadequate funding of the regional school transportation account.
- I expressed a concern that the committee address the calculations that form the underpinnings of the foundation budget.
- I urged the committee to move toward using median income as opposed to average income in its wealth calculations.

The Working Group's report will be the basis for future discussions of education funding in Massachusetts. I will continue to attempt to influence this process in the direction I have indicated through my comments as this discussion moves forward.

Noteworthy

Senate reforms/legislation

The 2003 session was one of the most productive in recent years. In addition to the economic stimulus package and supplemental budget, the Senate approved a number of reforms and initiated dozens of new laws. You can take a look at the Senate reforms by clicking here and some of the Senate-initiated laws are listed below.

Senate Reforms

<http://www.stanrosenberg.com/SenateReforms2003.pdf>

Major 2003 Legislation Highlights

Ch. 1 Allow Governor to reduce most state spending, including local aid and higher education, if revenues are insufficient in fiscal year 2003 (H. 2010)

Ch. 4 Fiscal year 2003 supplemental budget to transfer funds; increase real estate fees; close tax loopholes for REITs, out-of-state subsidiaries, and "Q subs"; join multistate simplified sales tax agreement; extend Big Dig statute of limitations by 10 years, to allow more time for lawsuits for fraud; allow certain new school building assistance projects; and restore Healthy Families home-visits cut (S.1949)

- Ch. 6 \$62.3 million supplemental appropriations for state highway snow and ice costs (H. 3719)
- Ch. 9 Tax law administrative changes, including compliance with federal child support enforcement law (H. 3718)
- Ch. 12\$2 million supplemental appropriation for family shelters (H.3833)
- Ch. 26 \$22.3 billion general appropriation act for fiscal year 2004, including reinstating MassHealth Basic, retaining Prescription Advantage program, capitalizing \$70 million 5-year Affordable Housing Trust Fund, and reorganizing environmental, economic, and health and human services agencies (H. 4004) (overriding numerous vetoes and reductions)
- Ch. 28 “Per se” 0.08 percent blood alcohol violates drunk driving law (H. 3929)
- Ch. 40 Authorize \$1.08 billion transportation bonds (H. 3914)
- Ch. 42 Nursing home Medicaid rate procedures (H. 3952)
- Ch. 46 Municipal relief, including relaxing some local mandates, authorizing various municipal fees and fines, municipal early retirement option (H. 3944)
- Ch. 101 Re-establish Inland Fisheries and Game Fund (H. 4248)
- Ch. 107 Require all felons to give DNA sample (S. 187)
- Ch. 137 Full salary for public employees in military service after September 11, 2001 (S.1985)
- Ch. 138 Establish study commission on property tax classification, and allow preliminary third-quarter bills (H. 4329)
- Ch. 140 \$81.1 million supplemental appropriations, including partial higher-ed collective bargaining, DSS, DYS, EAEDC and other deficiencies; also including MCAS appeals for special-education students, and sex-offender pre-release registration and Internet photo posting (H. 4330) (\$30m vetoed or reduced)
- Ch. 141 \$50+ million “economic stimulus” appropriations, including business funds and tax benefits, sales tax holiday, Sunday alcohol sales, HMO solvency provisions, permanent investment tax credit (H. 4328) (\$50m+ vetoed or reduced)
- Ch. 142 Unemployment insurance reform, including new rate schedule, increasing taxable wage base to \$14,000, 30-week trigger (unsigned) (S.2150)
- Ch. 143 Technical changes in tax laws (S. 2149)

Other major bills engrossed by Senate but not yet law:

- S. 113 Prohibit negative option mailings
- S. 1005 Expand coverage of civil commitment of sexually dangerous persons
- S. 1254 Establish policies restricting government disposition of land dedicated to environmental purposes
- S. 1281 Punish failure to report a fire under certain conditions
- S. 1372 Require principals to report fires on school grounds
- S. 1671 Allow response before OCPF audit letters become public
- S. 2019 Regulate “spam” e-mail
- H. 4256 Prohibit smoking in workplaces, including restaurants (S. 2130, amended)

Gill home rule petition

Senate bill, No.2104, an act relative to the unemployment compensation fund in the town of Gill, has passed the Senate and now awaits action in the House.

The goal of this bill is to transfer \$20,000 from the unemployment compensation fund in that town to pay for salary of one police officer who would otherwise have to be laid off due to state cuts in local aid. Essentially, it is the goal of the town to use this money to pay for this officer as an active policeman and ensure the current level of police protection than use it to pay for unemployment compensation which he would receive if he were laid off.

This is a one-time measure to ensure the public safety of those in the town. Last year, the town reached their maximum levy limit allowable under proposition 2 ½ and subsequently the Select Board voted to go over that limit. Because of that vote, which increased the base from which an additional 2.5% can be levied, the town will be able to pay for this police officer in future years even with a fifteen percent drop in local aid received from the state next year. According to their FY05 forecast, the town would be \$10,000 under the levy limit even with that drop in local aid.

This is an innovative solution that the town has come up with to ensure an adequate police force. Instead of using this money to pay for unemployment expenses, they have chosen to use this money for a more resourceful purpose. Following an active floor debate and a 32-5 roll call vote, I am pleased that the Senate approved the bill and hope the House will follow suit.

Roundup

2004 Municipal Conference

This year's conference is in great shape, thanks to the help of the Franklin and Hampshire Councils of Governments. It will be held Saturday, March 27th, 2004, at The Clarion Hotel and Conference Center in Northampton, and will feature more than 30 key leaders from the Legislature, the administration and state government agencies. We'll also have a keynote address from Senate President Robert Travaglini. The invitations are in the mail, but if you're a municipal official and want to check out the program and register on-line, click here:

<http://www.stanrosenberg.com/info/muncon2004.html>

If you have any questions or comments, contact Tom in my district office at 413-587-6289 or at tumitch@sprynet.com.

State grants

On January 7th, the state Department of Education announced statewide grants from the Foundation Reserve Fund. Communities and regional schools in my district will share \$848,000 in grants from that fund, also known as "pothole" money.

The Foundation Reserve Fund was established by the Legislature in fiscal '96 to supplement the Chapter 70 program and to help school districts meet unanticipated or extraordinary expenses. The appropriation for this fiscal year, fiscal '04, was \$7 million. According to the Department of Education, 47 of the 88 total applications were approved for funding.

These schools have worked hard to provide the best educational opportunities possible. The grants will make it just a little easier to continue pursuing that goal. I am pleased to see this money coming back to our schools, especially given the competitive nature of the program. Our communities did very well.

- * **Northampton:** \$174,000
- * **South Hadley:** \$78,000
- * **Belchertown:** \$80,000
- * **Smith Vocational:** \$173,000
- * **Mohawk Trail Regional School:** \$200,000
- * **Sunderland:** \$143,000

On January 15th, the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners awarded \$38.2 million in construction grants to 21 public libraries across the state. Three libraries in my district will share a little more than \$3.2 million.

- * **Montague Public Libraries/Carnegie Public Library:** \$1,810,018

*** Lilly Library in Northampton: \$1,104,000**

*** New Salem Public Library: \$286,530**

Increasingly, libraries are one of the most important focal points of community life and grants like these are the state's investment in the expanded role libraries are now playing in our daily lives. I congratulate the people in these communities for supporting their library and I'm pleased the Board of Library Commissioners has recognized the value of these projects.

Office hours

Here is my schedule for office hours for the next few weeks. I hope you'll be able to stop by sometime. No appointments are necessary, but if you need more information, contact Tom in my district office, 587-6289.

Friday, Jan. 30th -- Greenfield, Meeting Room, Town Hall, 2-3 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 27th -- Northampton, Hearing Room, 2nd Floor, City Hall, 11 a.m.-
Noon.

Martin Luther King Jr. "Living the Dream" award

I had the great honor of being an honorary recipient of Greenfield Community College's Martin Luther King Jr. "Living the Dream" award for my work for civil rights, my role in creating the state's racial and gender profiling law and for my work in the Legislature to provide equal protection and opportunity to all Massachusetts citizens. I deeply appreciate GCC President Robert Pura thinking of me for this award, and thoroughly enjoyed the Jan. 19th ceremony during which we honored Dr. King's life and work and paid special tribute to Dwayne Brewington and LaWanza Lett-Brewington, the Greenfield residents who have worked tirelessly for civil rights in western Massachusetts and who richly deserve this first-ever "Living the Dream" award.

Congratulations Dwayne and LaWanza and thank you GCC!

Pillar of Justice Award

On Jan. 23rd, Western Massachusetts Legal Services and the Franklin County Bar Association presented me with their "Pillar of Justice Award" for my role in preserving legal aid for low-income residents in the fiscal '04 budget. Thank you! I really appreciate it and hope we can do as well in fiscal '05.

Trivia

Now for the answer to last month's question -- The last time the Red Sox won the World Series was in 1918. Who did they beat? The answer is: The Chicago Cubs.

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

Now to this month's question and another chance to win lunch and a State House tour.

The Patriots are playing in the Super Bowl this Sunday. Counting this game, how many times have the Patriots appeared in the Super Bowl?

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!

Join TeamRosenberg! <http://www.stanrosenberg.com/teamrosenberg.php>

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 (November, 2003, edition) --
<http://www.stanrosenberg.com/issues/nov2003.html>