
The Rosenberg Report

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Hello!

Health care has emerged as a major issue in this political campaign season, and rightly so. Maintaining access to quality, affordable health care, or the lack of it, and controlling the ever-spiraling costs of insurance and prescriptions, are issues that will, sooner or later, affect everyone. Even state senators.

Recently, I faced my own health care situation, one that required a brief hospital stay followed by a strict medication regimen. I'm grateful for the excellent care I received. But what about the thousands of Massachusetts residents, and millions of Americans, who lack access to even the most basic health care? Without treatment, even minor ailments can become chronic, debilitating conditions that can lead to any number of unfortunate and unnecessary outcomes – job loss, personal bankruptcy, premature death.

In the wealthiest nation on earth, in a state internationally renowned for the highest quality health care, this is unacceptable. More than that, it's shameful.

During the previous legislative session, the state Senate made health care one of its top priorities. Working with our colleagues in the House of Representatives, we were able to achieve the following successes in the current state budget:

- Increased funding for the Children's Medical Security Plan to cover the 15,000 children currently on the waiting list;
- Full funding for Healthy Start, providing prenatal care to more pregnant women;
- Increased funding for the Prescription Advantage Program, eliminating the co-pays that low-income seniors and disabled people have to pay;
- Increased funding for the Uncompensated Care Pool, which reimburses hospitals that treat the uninsured;
- Full funding for MassHealth Essential, which will allow 12,000 more low-income adults to enter the program.

According to the advocacy group Health Care For All, these, and other, commitments we made in the fiscal '05 state budget will help more than 430,000 Massachusetts residents receive or maintain health services.

That's good, but it's not good enough. There's much more work to do.

There's no doubt that the rising cost of health care threatens individuals, but it also threatens governments. Massachusetts ended the last fiscal year with \$724 million more than we spent. This so-called "surplus" prompted many, most notably the governor, to say that it's time for a tax cut. But further draining state coffers would have a devastating effect on

our ability to maintain the level of services we have now, much less pay for the projected \$800 million increase in health care costs next year alone. The plain fact is this: despite the recent, and welcomed, upturn in the economy, the state budget continues to face a structural deficit of about \$700 million brought on largely by the astronomical expense of health care, an expense that is predominantly fueled by the runaway costs of prescription medication.

Any attempt to control pharmaceutical costs must recognize the role played by drug manufacturers in determining the price. Any policy that ignores this will have limited benefits, at best. It's no secret that most drug companies spend more on marketing and advertising than they do on research and development. But Massachusetts cannot stand up to pharmaceutical companies alone. There's strength in numbers. We need allies, like the federal government and the governments of our neighboring states to help us leverage lower prices from pharmaceutical companies. Greater use of bulk purchasing and regional cooperation in bulk purchasing are good examples of how such leverage could be achieved and the Commonwealth should begin utilizing this approach as soon as possible, to the maximum extent possible. Unfortunately, the last four Republican administrations in Massachusetts, including the Romney administration, have ignored the Legislature's repeated directives to pursue this course.

Everybody gets sick at some point or other, so everybody should have the opportunity to get well again – that part of the equation is easy. What's more difficult is finding a balanced approach that gives everybody – citizens, pharmaceutical companies, retailers, health care providers, insurers – at least a little of what they need. What we deserve, and what every industrialized nation on the planet already has, is universal health care. In most countries this is financed through a single-payer system. Instead, what we have is inertia, most tragically at the federal government level, where reasonable, common sense policies could most effectively be used to negotiate fair prices from pharmaceutical companies. The physical and financial health of our citizens and our government institutions cannot be left to chance. I continue to stand ready to work with all interested parties to find solutions to these important issues.

Yours,



September Focus

Supplemental budget

Last week, the Legislature sent to the governor a \$649 million supplemental budget to close the books on fiscal '04. This was possible because of the “surplus” I mentioned above. Of that amount, a little more than half, or \$336 million, was deposited into the state's Stabilization Fund, bringing the total of that account to \$850 million. (You might recall that before the fiscal crisis hit we had \$2.3 billion in reserve, one of the largest reserves in the

country.) That left \$313 million for outstanding bills and new investments, including \$75 million for a one-time local aid payment and \$32 million toward our contractual obligations to higher education employees.

We are headed in the right direction, financially speaking. Any “surplus,” even one with quotation marks around it, is better than what we've had the last few years. We still face the aforementioned structural deficit, and will likely be dogged by it for the next three budget cycles.

We don't know what the governor will do with this budget. He still has a few days yet to hand down his vetoes.

For the complete text of the supplemental budget, click here
<http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/house/ht05076.htm>

Supplemental budget -- Higher education retirees

The supplemental budget does include \$32 million for the higher education employee contracts. It also includes an amendment I offered to address the situation with retirees and their pensions.

The commitment had been made to fund the contracts for current employees, and, as the economy improved, to pay the raises retroactively. Retirees were included in the commitment, with each retiree receiving retroactive pay for the period when the contract was enforced, but not funded, on the same schedule as current employees -- one to three installments, depending on when they retired. My amendment requires that the Pension Board recalculate pensions based on the full salary adjustment the retiree would have received if the contract had been funded before they retired. This, for many retirees, will be a significantly larger economic benefit because it's a permanent adjustment to their pension. And the sooner we get it passed, the sooner they'll see it in their checks.

Supplemental budget -- Higher education endowment incentive program

State Representative Ellen Story (D-Amherst) and I were successful in our effort to include, in the supplemental budget, our proposal to expand the state's endowment incentive program for higher education institutions to encompass donations for academic facilities construction projects

The endowment incentive program provides a 50-cents on the dollar match for money raised privately by the state's colleges, community colleges and the University. Currently, the matching program is limited to money raised for academic purposes -- scholarships and endowed chairs, for example. Rosenberg and Story are seeking to amend the program to also provide matching state funds for private donations made for academic facilities construction projects approved by the appropriate board of trustees.

The amended program, to be known as the Higher Education Endowment and Academic Facilities Incentive Program, calls for the state to contribute an amount equal to an average of one dollar for every two dollars raised privately up to a maximum of \$50

million for the University, \$5 million for each of the state's colleges and \$2 million for each community college.

This program helped UMass raise more than \$130 million during its last capital campaign, so it's a proven success. Representative Story and I are hoping to build on that momentum as the University gears up for what we hope will be another successful fundraising drive.

Representative Story agreed, calling this "a win-win program that makes sense from every angle."

Noteworthy

Municipal census

My 10-year campaign to eliminate a state mandate by turning the municipal census into a local option received another boost by making it into the supplemental budget. The provisions in the budget will start us on the path to modernize the jury pool system, maintain our central voter registry file and save up to \$5.5 million in local property taxes currently spent on the only state mandated annual municipal census in the country.

Massachusetts can legitimately make a claim for being at the cutting edge in many fields, like education, medical and computer technology. But when it comes to something as fundamental to our democracy as compiling jury lists, it's almost like we haven't even discovered fire yet.

The problem, as I see it, is the annual municipal census, which costs cities and towns about \$5.5 million a year, based on research conducted earlier this year. Massachusetts is the only state that requires an annual municipal census, which is used as the source material for compiling jury lists. It's bad enough that this is an unfunded state mandate. But another consequence of using a municipal census for jury lists is that in communities where census participation rates are low, the diversity of juries can be compromised.

I have been working to eliminate the municipal census as an unfunded state mandate, leaving it to each community to decide whether they wish to continue the practice. The state currently compels communities to do the census as part of compiling jury lists and purging the voter lists. Massachusetts stands alone in its use of a census inquiry as the means to placing a voter on the inactive list. HAVA (Help America Vote Act) recommends methods for purging the voter list, none of which include a municipal census. A decade ago, in response to the Federal Motor Voter Act, Massachusetts dramatically improved its voter registration system for the purpose of encouraging and making it easier for persons to register to vote. We moved from being one of the most restrictive states in the country to one of the easiest states in the country, with regard to registration opportunities. HAVA is intended to continue that progress by insuring that those who register to vote are not

disenfranchised at the polling place. By continuing to mandate the use of the municipal census as the first step in decertifying a voter, we work against the spirit of HAVA.

I want Massachusetts to adopt what's called the "merge and purge" system for assembling jury lists, a system used by every other state. This system employs a series of data bases -- voter registration, vehicle registration, employment insurance -- merges them and eliminates duplication to provide the basis for jury lists. This system is significantly less expensive than the municipal census technique, and whatever costs are associated with it are borne by the state, not local governments, which, as you know, are financed by property taxes, the most regressive tax on the books.

I have been working on this with experts from Connecticut, which purportedly has one of the best "merge and purge" systems, and officials from the Massachusetts court system. I also had several meetings earlier this year with Lt. Governor Kerry Healey, who expressed an interest in this project. One of her assigned duties is to work on municipal relief, with a special eye toward unfunded state mandates. My view is this: If a city or town wants to conduct a municipal census, that option should be available. But there's no longer any excuse for the state to require it for the purpose of compiling jury lists, then not paying for it, when a cheaper option is available to create a jury list that is as good or better than the current one.

Based on my research no other state uses the annual municipal census process as part of purging their voter lists because as far as we've been able to determine from our research thus far, no other state has a state mandated annual census for all communities.

Roundup

Overrides

Here's a rundown of some of the vetoes the Legislature overrode at the end of the session.

- Regional Transportation -- Legislature restored governor's \$1 million cut;
- Western Mass. Enterprise Fund -- Legislature restored governor's \$200,000 cut;
- Pioneer Valley Visitor's Center -- Legislature restored governor's \$40,000 cut;
- US Women's Open (South Hadley) -- Legislature restored governor's \$100,000 cut;
- Franklin County Sheriff (Operating Budget) -- Legislature restored governor's \$90,681 cut;
- Hampshire County Sheriff (Operating Budget) -- Legislature restored governor's \$250,222 cut;

Local road projects

Here's a rundown of \$8.7 million worth of local road projects that are going out for bid on Sept. 18th:

- In Erving, the Rt. 2 bridge over Rt. 63 and the Rt. 2 bridge over the railroad -- estimated cost, \$4.3 million;
- In Erving-Montague, the Bridge Street bridge over the Millers River -- estimated cost, \$3.6 million;
- In Montague, the Millers Falls Streetscape Project -- estimated cost, \$800,000.

The project to widen Rt. 9 through Hadley is scheduled to go out for bid on Sept. 28th.

Local bills

Here are a few local bills that have been signed into law:

- A bill authorizing the city of Northampton to convey the intersection of Bridge Road and North Maple Street to the state for the installation of highways.
- A bill designating a parcel of land on Olympia Drive in Amherst to be used for affordable housing or general municipal purposes.
- A bill allowing the University of Massachusetts-Amherst to negotiate mutual aid agreements with municipal police departments.

TeamRosenberg

Your support is greatly appreciated! We're especially looking for lawn sign locations. Thanks!

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

Trivia

Now for the answer to last month's question -- Name the former presidents who are buried in Massachusetts.

The answer is: John Adams and John Quincy Adams

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

Now to this month's question, supplied by our trivia master and former district office aide Barry Federman, and another chance to win lunch and a State House tour.

Name the last two Speakers of the House of Representatives (federal government) from 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!

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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, 2004, edition) --
<http://www.stanrosenberg.com/issues/june2004.html>