
The Rosenberg Report

Vol. III
April 4, 2002

Hello!

Politics in Massachusetts is like the weather – wait a minute and it will change.

Since our last edition, the governor's race has changed dramatically, the budget crisis continues to haunt us and the proposals for dealing with it are rapidly coming together on Beacon Hill. There's a lot to talk about, so let's get started.

If you are receiving this newsletter for the first time, welcome aboard! I hope you find it useful. If you are a veteran, I hope you still find it useful. But if anyone wants to be removed from our list, just click here tumitch@sprynet.com and tell us.

Yours,



April Focus

UMass

The budget crisis is affecting all our public institutions and agencies, and I am working with my colleagues to find a way to preserve the gains we have made during the last decade. This month I wanted to focus on the situation at the University of Massachusetts because it is, without question, the engine that drives the western Mass. economy.

Below you will find a link that will take you to a column I have prepared for the *Campus Chronicle*, the weekly publication at the UMass-Amherst campus. The column is co-signed by me (UMass Class of '77), State Senators Andrea Nuciforo (D-Pittsfield, UMass Class of '86) and Stephen Brewer (D-Barre, UMass Class of '71) and State Representatives Nancy Flavin (D-Easthampton, UMass Class of '86), John Merrigan (D-Greenfield), Steve Kulik (D-Worthington), Ellen Story (D-Amherst, Honorary Alumna '98).

I want you to know that my colleagues and I are fighting hard for the University.

Budget snapshot

As you know, Acting Governor Jane Swift is no longer a candidate for governor. Since she made that announcement, she has reached out to House and Senate leaders saying, in effect, that the budget crisis is too serious to politicize and has proposed conducting open meetings around the state with House Speaker Tom Finneran and Senate President Tom Birmingham. The purpose of these meetings would be to discuss the options for dealing with the crisis and to hear from residents about what they think should be done. As of Monday, April 1, no such meetings have been set. One reason is because Speaker Finneran has made no public comment about Acting Governor Swift's offer. The other reason is because the Acting Governor, neither publicly nor privately, has indicated that she will back off her no-new-tax pledge. Senate President Birmingham has signaled that he is open to her idea of conducting meetings, but only if all options, from raising revenues to making cuts, are on the table for discussion.

The Legislature, in the meantime, is actively putting together revenue packages to address the crisis.

Here are some facts to keep in mind:

The projected deficit for the remainder of fiscal year 2002 (that's from today, April 1, 2002, to July 1, 2002) is \$700-\$900 million.

The projected deficit for the entire fiscal year 2003 budget (July 1, 2002, to July 1, 2003) is \$2.5- 3 billion.

Now, here's what's under consideration in both branches of the Legislature:

Freezing the next phase of the income tax rollback and setting the income tax rate at 5.6 percent.

Increasing the cigarette tax

Restoring a portion of the capital gains tax.

In addition, some Senators are urging that we reconsider some of the corporate tax cuts that were approved in recent years. And in the House, some Representatives are suggesting that we reconsider certain targeted tax cuts for low- and moderate-income residents and retirees.

The bottom line is that there is an effort underway to put together a revenue package that would raise \$700 million to \$1 billion. This will not be easy, given that the Governor has promised to veto any new taxes and that overrides require a two-thirds majority in both the House and Senate. That is a tall order.

But even if we are successful with a revenue package, and tap \$500 million from the rainy day fund, as the Legislature has agreed to do, the fiscal year 2003 budget may still require cuts approaching \$1 billion, which will be extremely hard to bear.

As I've said before, this situation is serious and to tell you otherwise would be dishonest. Please feel free to drop me a note at Sen.StanRosenberg@senate.state.ma.us anytime if you have any thoughts to share. I always enjoy hearing from you, especially on matters like this.

Noteworthy

Equality for Women's Health Care

On March 7, 2002, a bill was signed into law that requires health insurance plans to cover prescription contraceptives and hormone replacement therapy to the same extent other prescription drugs and devices are covered. This was a major victory for women's health care advocates who, rightly, maintained that failing to provide this type of coverage was unfair and inequitable. I was pleased to do my part for this bill on the Senate side with lead Senate sponsor Senator Dianne Wilkerson (D-Boston). But I also want to congratulate Representative Ellen Story (D-Amherst) for her efforts as one of the lead House sponsors. Great work!

Click here for the full text: <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/laws/seslaw02/sl020049.htm>

Energy Efficiency and Conservation

On March 2, 2002, a bill was signed into law that continues the energy efficiency program the Legislature authorized in the 1997 utility deregulation act. I am especially pleased with this law because it extends the efficiency program to 2007 and will allow the state to make our electric system more reliable. Also, the law will help energy efficiency businesses continue to develop, thereby creating more jobs. It is estimated that 15,000-20,000 people work in companies that promote energy efficiency and conservation.

The law will also help reduce costs by curbing demand. Studies have shown that for every \$1 spent for an efficiency program, costs are reduced \$2-\$4. This is especially important for low-income families, who can use the estimated \$62 a year they save on electricity for other necessities.

It was great working with Senator Susan Fargo (D-Lincoln), the lead Senate sponsor, to get this done. I'm proud of the work we've accomplished with this program and I hope it will help Massachusetts remain a leader in energy policy and conservation.

Click here for the full text: <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/laws/seslaw02/sl020045.htm>

Roundup

Conference for Municipal Officials

There's still time to sign up for my municipal conference! If you want to check out the line up of this year's conference and register on-line, click here:

<http://www.stanrosenberg.com/info/muncon2002.html>

Once again, the conference will be Saturday, April 13th at The Clarion Hotel and Conference Center (formerly The Inn at Northampton).

For more information, contact Tom in my district office at 413-587-6289, or by e-mail at tumitch@sprynet.com.

State Grant Awards

Here are some of the grants that have been awarded recently:

Congratulations to the Great Falls Middle School/Turners Falls High School for winning a \$130,000 "Green Schools Program" award from the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MTC). The grant program helps school districts develop more efficient schools that use clean renewable resources and conserve energy.

Congratulations also to the city of Northampton and the town of South Hadley for receiving Municipal Recycling Technical Assistance Grants from the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA). These communities were selected because their proposals met the objectives outlined in the EOEA's Solid Waste Master Plan.

Still more congratulations to the city of Northampton, and the town of Amherst, for winning Self-Help grants from the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs. Northampton's award of approximately \$32,000 will help the city acquire 55 acres to add to the 330+ acre Saw Mill Hills Conservation Area, an area that contains vernal pools, one of the eight most endangered ecosystems in the state, according to the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program. Amherst's award of approximately \$130,000 will help the town add the Station Road scenic horse farm to its FY2000 Self-Help project. The land, which abuts the Norwottuck Rail Trail, lies completely within the Lawrence Swamp aquifer recharge area and has been identified by the Endangered Species Program as a high priority rare species protection project.

The town of Amherst also received a \$46,260 Acquifer Land Protection grant from the EOEA to help the community acquire 50 acres of the Van Pelt parcel; and the town of Leverett received the same type of grant, for \$56,700, to acquire 53 acres of the Spence parcel. Congratulations to those towns for putting together winning applications.

Trivia

Here's the answer to last month's question -- Name the last vice president of the United States who held elective office in Massachusetts?

Calvin Coolidge, who was vice president in President Warren G. Harding's administration from 1920-23. George Bush Sr. was the last vice president to claim Massachusetts residency, but he never held elective office here.

If you're interested in finding out more about "Silent Cal", follow these links:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/cc30.html>

<http://www.calvin-coolidge.org/>

<http://www.geocities.com/coolidgeworld/>

Now, here's this month's question: In keeping with our UMass theme, name the highest ranking elected official in the state's history who was also a UMass graduate.

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

Links

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

UMass column – <http://www.stanrosenberg.com/issues/umassxroads.html>

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 (March, 2002 edition) –
<http://www.stanrosenberg.com/issues/march2002.html>