
The Rosenberg Report

Vol. XLI
May 18, 2006

Hello!

When I started this newsletter four years ago, we were in the midst of one of the worst fiscal crises since the Great Depression. During that time virtually every account was cut, some were devastated, while others were completely eliminated. About once a month, through this newsletter, I shared the horrible news.

But this time is different. Yesterday, the Senate Ways and Means Committee released its version of the \$24 billion fiscal '07 budget and it reflects what I think government should be about. This budget is about building, the responsible building of programs and services that citizens repeatedly say they want and need. For example, we are increasing Chapter 70 school aid by \$210 million, increasing local aid by \$158 million, increasing higher education by \$58 million, increasing funding for the payment in lieu of taxes program by \$9 million, making significant commitments to regional transportation reform, health care reform and MassHealth, to name a few.

Any legislator who has experienced the cutting is grateful for a day like today. But the fact that this budget is better than the past few doesn't mean that legislators are celebrating. Preparing a state budget is serious, sober business and we are mindful of what has been lost and how much more there is to gain.

Fiscal '07 is a good start, and with a little luck, a little skill, and a whole lot of vigilance, maybe we can keep building.

Yours,



May Focus

Senate Ways and Means '07 Budget

There are more than 1,000 line items in the budget, so it's not possible to highlight them all. But, here are a few that I think are of special interest to western Mass.

Budget debate will begin next Wednesday (May 24th) and will likely conclude Friday (May 26th). After that, a conference committee will be assembled to work out the differences between the Senate and House versions and a compromise budget will be voted on and sent to the governor sometime in June. Our fiscal year begins July 1st.

The full Senate Ways and Means budget is available here.

<http://www.mass.gov/legis/07budget/senate/index.htm>

Higher Education

The Senate Ways and Means budget proposes \$969 million in direct appropriations for public higher education, an increase of about \$58 million. For state and community colleges, that means an increase of about \$31 million over last year. For the UMass system, the increase is roughly \$27 million.

But the Senate budget also allows all campuses to retain tuition and fees, revenues that previously were paid into the state's general fund. So, with a \$58 million increase plus tuition retention, public higher education is looking at a roughly \$86 million increase for fiscal '07.

I am especially pleased about this appropriation because it marks the first installment of my seven-year plan, as outlined in my Higher Education Task Force report, to close the higher education funding gap. The funding level for fiscal '07 will million increase will close that gap by about 14 percent.

Regional Transportation Reform

The good news is that the Senate budget supports my regional transportation reform package and now, for the first time, places regional transportation authorities on a "forward funding" system. All this might be a bit confusing, but if you'll stay with me I'll try to explain why I think this is a very good thing.

The Senate budget funds RTAs for fiscal '07 at \$51.5 million. Because of forward funding, the RTAs will save an estimated \$2-\$3 million in interest payments, giving them close to \$54 million for fiscal '07.

In addition to forward funding, my proposal also sets the stage for an estimated \$90 million increase in RTA funding over the next 5-7 years by targeting Registry of Motor Vehicle fees that are currently committed to the Central Artery Tunnel project. Those commitments will end in fiscal '07 and will then be channeled to RTAs.

This means that regional transportation services are poised to be better financed and more efficiently run than before the fiscal crisis.

Chapter 70

The Senate increases the Chapter 70 account by \$210 million, which is about \$37 million more than the House. The distribution formula has undergone some major revisions. Please see the attachment for an explanation of those revisions.

CHAPTER 70: Franklin County

Deerfield	\$919,657
Erving	\$288,648
Greenfield	\$9,002,002
Leverett	\$235,520
Shutesbury	\$524,713
Sunderland	\$853,199
Whately	\$167,006

CHAPTER 70: Hampshire County

Amherst	\$5,940,831
Belchertown	\$10,459,857
Hadley	\$689,986
Hatfield	\$680,586
Northampton	\$6,878,748
Pelham	\$5,762,688
South Hadley	\$5,762,688

CHAPTER 70: Regional Schools

Amherst-Pelham	\$9,653,686
Franklin County	\$3,096,637
Frontier	\$2,734,996
Gill-Montague	\$6,209,052
Ralph C. Mahar	\$4,747,191
Mohawk Trail	\$6,034,784
New Salem-Wendell	\$629,758
Northampton-Smith	\$855,835
Pioneer	\$4,016,083

Local Aid

The local aid account is increased by \$158 million.

Lottery (Local Aid): Franklin County

Bernardston	\$345,852
Buckland	\$338,556
Colrain	\$310,583
Deerfield	\$588,227
Erving	\$69,372
Gill	\$259,945
Greenfield	\$3,883,946
Leverett	\$218,817
Leyden	\$98,930
Montague	\$1,544,040
New Salem	\$125,117
Northfield	\$386,063
Shelburne	\$317,279
Shutesbury	\$206,641
Sunderland	\$617,563
Wendell	\$179,008
Whately	\$163,294

Lottery (Local Aid): Hampshire County

Amherst	\$9,665,752
Belchertown	\$2,075,915
Hadley	\$419,142

Hatfield \$381,771
Northampton \$4,814,888
Pelham \$194,362
South Hadley \$3,173,547

PILOT (Payment in lieu of taxes)

The PILOT account is increased by \$9.2 million to \$25.3 million, which is about \$3 million more than the House.

PILOT: Franklin County

Barnardston \$11,764
Buckland \$1,867
Colrain \$38,521
Deerfield \$61,156

Erving \$33,439
Gill \$12,967
Greenfield \$14,321

Leverett \$6,556
Leyden \$5,661

Montague \$98,493
New Salem \$5,870
Northfield \$26,612
Shelburne \$3,371

Shutesbury \$10,710
Sunderland \$90,594

Wendell \$64,482
Whately \$19,549

PILOT: Hampshire County

Amherst \$143,410
Belchertown \$82,116
Hadley \$95,661

Hatfield \$1,202
Northampton \$104,436

Pelham\$15,837
SouthHadley\$21,800

Regional School Transportation

The Senate increases regional school transportation by \$5 million over fiscal '06, but unfortunately the Senate number is lower than the House. I will be co-sponsoring an amendment to get this account to full funding.

Salary Reserves

The Senate Ways and Means budget sets the human services salary reserve at \$28 million, the same as the House number, and the childcare workers salary reserve at \$12.5 million, this is \$2.5 million more than the House number.

Trivia

Now for the answer to our previous question:

Who is the state's official blues artist?

The answer is: Springfield native Henry St. Clair Fredericks, better known as Taj Mahal.

And our winner is Lawrence T. from somewhere in cyberspace. We'll send Lawrence 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 and another chance to win lunch and a State House tour:

What is the state's official vessel?

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 . . .

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 (April, 2006, edition) --
<http://www.stanrosenberg.com/issues/april2006.html>