
The Rosenberg Report

Vol. V
June 6, 2002

Hello!

The Senate Ways and Means Committee budget for fiscal year 2003 was unveiled June 5th, so there's a lot to report. But before we get started, welcome aboard those of you who are receiving this newsletter for the first time. I hope you find it useful. For those of you who have received several newsletters already, thanks for staying with us. If anyone wants to be removed from our list, just click here tumitch@sprynet.com and let us know. If you know someone who might like to be added to our list, please forward the following link to our on-line registration form.

<http://www.stanrosenberg.com/issues/rosenreportreg.html>

Thanks also to everybody who used our on-line feedback form -- <http://www.stanrosenberg.com/form.html> -- to share their thoughts on the fiscal crisis. I hope the information I've offered these past few months has helped you better understand the situation we're in and the proposals that have been offered to get us out of it. The state budget is the most important thing the Legislature does and it's vital that all of us remember that the budget is about values and people, not just dollars and cents. Almost all the comments I have received from constituents over the past few weeks -- whether in person, over the phone or via e-mail -- have sounded a common theme: preserve the gains we've made over the last decade.

That has been the Senate's focus, but make no mistake, this is a tough budget. It asks for more than a billion dollars in new taxes and makes \$900 million in cuts. I've listed some of the highlights below, but if you want to examine the full text of the Senate Ways and Means budget, click here:

<http://www.state.ma.us/legis/03budget/senate/swm.htm>

The text of the House version of the budget is available here:

<http://www.state.ma.us/legis/03budget/hwm.htm> (budget recommendations)

<http://www.state.ma.us/legis/03budget/house/action.htm> (text of amendments)

Debate on the Senate budget will begin June 10th. After that, a conference committee of House and Senate members will convene to work out the differences between the two versions before sending a final budget to the governor. Fiscal year '03 begins July 1st, so the next few weeks promise to be extremely busy. I'll do my best to keep you posted!

Yours,



June Focus

Senate Ways and Means FY '03 Budget

Education and health care are the top priorities of this budget proposal. Even in these tight fiscal times, the Senate is maintaining its long-standing commitment to these government services. By raising \$1.2 billion in new revenues and by dipping into reserves and the tobacco settlement fund, the Senate Ways and Means budget is proposing to make a modest increase in K-12 funding, restore funding to several health care programs and level fund the University of Massachusetts. Click here for highlights of the Senate Ways and Means budget:

<http://www.state.ma.us/legis/03budget/senate/highlights.htm>

K-12

The Senate Ways and Means budget calls for a \$61.5 million increase in Chapter 70 funding, \$50 million for MCAS remediation grants, and \$18 million for the small class-size initiative, which seeks to reduce the number of students in K-3 classrooms in communities where more than 22 percent of children live in poverty.

This increase in Chapter 70 funding is sufficient to keep all school districts at foundation level and to provide some “peer” aid for municipalities that have not fared as well as similar communities over the course of Education Reform. Click here for more information:

<http://www.state.ma.us/legis/03budget/senate/fy03localaid.htm>

Also, this budget appropriates \$48.4 million for charter school reimbursements. This amount is \$20 million more than the House of Representatives' fiscal '03 budget and \$15.7 million more than the final fiscal '02 appropriation.

University of Massachusetts

During the last fiscal crisis a decade ago, the University of Massachusetts budget was decimated. This year, thanks in large part to an outstanding lobbying effort, the University's budget for fiscal '03 is funded by Senate Ways and Means at the fiscal '02 level -- approximately \$461 million -- with roughly half of that going to the Amherst campus. This amount is approximately \$9 million more than the House of Representatives is proposing. In

a time when most programs are being cut, receiving level funding is a recognition of just how important the University is to the economy and quality of life of the state in general and western Massachusetts in particular.

Health care

The Senate Ways and Means budget restores full funding for the MassHealth Basic program, which was eliminated in the House budget. This program provides health coverage for approximately 35,000 chronically unemployed residents and finances the state's methadone clinics -- including the clinics in Northampton and Greenfield -- which serve about 18,000 residents statewide.

Also, the Prescription Advantage program for senior citizens is fully funded at \$104 million, \$10 million more than the House budget provided.

Also, the Senate budget fully funds the Children and Seniors Health Fund, a program for low-income children and seniors, by using a one-time \$110 million transfer from the state's tobacco settlement account and devoting all of the proposed 75-cent per pack cigarette tax to health care programs.

Local aid

The Senate Ways and Means budget appropriates \$778 million for lottery distributions to municipalities, also known as local aid. For information on specific communities click here:

<http://www.state.ma.us/legis/03budget/senate/fy03localaid.htm>

This budget also appropriates \$15 million for the Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program, which provides reimbursements to cities and towns hosting state-owned, tax-exempt property.

Tax package

The tax package proposed in this budget is essentially the same as the one approved by the House of Representatives a few weeks ago. There are a few technical differences that will have to be worked out in the conference committee, but these are the main points of agreement:

- Freeze the state income tax at 5.3 percent;
- Increase tax on cigarettes by 75-cents a pack;
- Eliminate the state tax deduction for charitable contributions;
- Tax long-term capital gains like regular income; and,
- Reduce the amount of income not subject to taxes by 25 percent, to \$3,300 per taxpayer.

Clarke School reimbursement

The Senate budget also includes a \$535,000 reimbursement to the city of Northampton for costs associated with the Clarke School for the Deaf. I'm looking forward to teaming up with Representative Peter Kocot to make sure this is signed by the governor.

Noteworthy

Home rule petitions

A few local home rule petitions were signed into law last month, including one for Amherst -- which allows the town to acquire temporary and permanent easements on the land of Arthur W. Dahowski to construct a sewerage pumping station -- and two for Huntington, one concerning nomination papers for local elections and the other establishing the rules for local recall elections. The text for these laws are available at the links below

Amherst <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/laws/seslaw02/sl020120.htm>

Huntington <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/laws/seslaw02/sl020119.htm> (nomination papers)

Huntington <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/laws/seslaw02/sl020113.htm> (recall elections)

Roundup

Upcoming meetings

Later this month I will be hosting two "Living with Bears" seminars with the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The dates are:

Thursday, June 27th -- 7-9 p.m., at the JFK Middle School in Northampton.

Saturday, June 29th -- 10 a.m.-Noon, at the Notch Visitor's Center, Rt. 116, South Amherst.

For more information contact my district office at 413-587-6259.

State grant awards

- On June 4th, the town of Hatfield received a \$1.2 million grant from the Department of Housing and Community Development for a sewer project along the Rt. 5 corridor. This project will help the town maintain the viability of existing businesses in this part of town, an area that is extremely important to residents and the local economy. Congratulations to the town officials who worked so hard to make it happen.

- Congratulations to the Valley CDC and HAP Inc. for securing \$533,314 from the state's Affordable Housing Trust Fund. The Department of Housing and Community Development made the award on May 23rd. The money will be used to create affordable housing units at Millbank Place II.
- Congratulations to the Greenfield Public School Department for being named a 2002 Vanguard Model by Mass Insight Education, a Boston-based non-profit organization. The Vanguard Models are part of Mass Insight's "Building Blocks Initiative," a program that recognizes public schools for their efforts to raise academic standards and student achievement. This is the second year of this program, and last year Sunderland Public Schools received this award.

Greenfield will be formally recognized at Mass Insight's "Building on Success" conference in Boston on June 7th. The school department will receive a \$1,000 prize, a giant banner for display at schools and a chance to consult and share successful practices with other school departments in the state. Greenfield is one of only eight school districts to win a 2002 Vanguard Model award.

- Also, congratulations are in order for Northampton for being re-certified by the Anti-Defamation League as a No Place for Hate community. The No Place for Hate campaign was created in 1999 by the ADL and the Massachusetts Municipal Association to help communities fight all forms of hatred and bigotry. The goal of the campaign is to empower Massachusetts communities to create local programs that promote respect for individual and group differences while encouraging residents to speak out against hatred and intolerance. Northampton was formally recognized at a reception in Boston on May 30th.
- And congratulations to South Hadley for receiving a \$5,000 Municipal Recycling Grant from the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA). According to the EOEA, South Hadley was recognized for its on-going commitment to recycling and environmental protection.

Road projects

On June 5th, MassHighway announced that the contract for an intersection improvement project at the intersection of Route 9 and Route 116 in Amherst had been awarded to R.J. Fijol, Inc. of West Warren, Mass., which submitted the low bid of \$429,463.

The project consists of improvements at the intersection of Route 9 and route 116 in Amherst and includes widening of the roadways, resurfacing, dedicated turning lanes and installation of a new traffic signal. Work is expected to begin this summer and be completed in the summer of 2003, according to MassHighway.

Trivia

The answer to last month's question -- What is the official breed of dog for the state of Massachusetts? -- is, of course, the Boston Terrier, *Canis familiaris bostenensis*, the first purebred dog developed in America. It was recognized by the Legislature in 1979. Here's a link to the Animal Planet website that gives a little history on this breed's connection to Massachusetts and some information on the characteristics of the breed.

<http://animal.discovery.com/guides/dogs/selector/profile.jsp?id=1450>

Thanks to everybody who played along. And now the winner of the lunch and State House tour, chosen at random from the thousands (just kidding!) of correct answers is Kim F. from somewhere in cyberspace. We'll send her information on who to contact in my Boston office and we'll look forward to seeing her at the State House. Congratulations Kim!

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

What is the official state beverage?

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!

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 (May, 2002, edition) --
<http://www.stanrosenberg.com/issues/may2002.html>