

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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New to the Hill

Resolution for 1992: I will work as a legislator to benefit the voters of East Longmeadow, Hampden, Longmeadow, and Springfield, and I will keep the people of our district informed about the Statehouse activities as they affect us all.

The Longmeadow News has helped me carry out this New Year's resolution with an invitation to write a regular column about happenings in the State House. I have spent two of the busiest months of my life asking questions, voting on bills, answering questions, and becoming an experienced veteran as quickly as possible. Now I can begin both the New Year and the new column by sharing the experiences of those months. This is about what I have learned about lawmaking.

It's not over till its over. Many of you have called with questions about a bill prompted either by a news article or a particular legislative interest. The bills undergo continuing changes up to the last minute, and your objections are noted and changes made before the law is passed. Continue to call and write with your concerns.

Everything is over Dec. 31. It is a quirk of Massachusetts rules that all bills must be passed by the end of the year or they die, only to begin the entire legislative process all over again in January. I have joined the efforts of the House Republicans to allow bills to survive through the two-year legislative session as they do in Congress.

Teamwork between the Republican Governor and the Democratically controlled legislature benefits everybody. It has been a real education to watch the give and take between Gov. Weld and the Legislature. Cooperation was the most notable in developing a balanced budget and it continues in everyday activities. Of course, there is still an occasional roll call when we all vote the party line!

The representatives are dedicated professionals. The legislature worked hard last year to establish a list of solid achievements. Police consolidation, workers compensation reform and hospital finance legislation were all enacted in 1991. An early retirement option for state employees, came very close to becoming law in the final hours of the session, but points of difference with Gov. Weld could not be ironed out by end of year. The Governor has stated his intention to introduce an early retirement proposal next week, and lawmakers will work for early passage.

Other legislators have been generous in sharing both their time and their experiences with me. Your support has been another important ingredient as I learn the ropes. Answering your questions has taught me many of the non-legislative aspects of a state representative's job, and in the next column I will discuss some of those administrative functions.