

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

December 2, 1992

The clock just keeps on ticking

December is here already, and another year is almost gone. On a personal level, it means it is time to prepare for Christmas and choose a new wall calendar for the kitchen. For the state Legislature, that means that we must wrap up a lot of unfinished business.

The U.S. Congress allows proposed legislation to be considered for the two years of a session, but our state requires bills to be disposed of in a single year. This causes much inefficiency when each pending bill must be refiled, renumbered and reprinted. It also causes an end-of-year rush as legislators work to gain passage of our own bills. Here are some of the unfinished issues from Beacon Hill:

The leading issue in an attempt to beat the session-ending clock is the Anti-Privatization bill, an effort to halt Gov. Weld's initiatives that allow private companies to provide services now performed by state workers. This bill has been shuttling between the House, the Senate and a conference committee for most of the year. It will soon be headed to Gov. Weld's desk, where the timing of a veto message will become another factor in passage of the contentious measure.

On a less controversial note, the House recently passed a supplemental budget that combines appropriations requests from the governor and the Legislature to pay for state programs that were under-funded in the annual budget. One highlight of the bills funds payment of a court settlement awarded to women who teach in our community colleges. The teachers won a sex-equity lawsuit some time ago, and I felt that it was important to fund its payment without further delay.

The budget debate provided the opportunity for Republican members to present Gov. Weld's tax reductions, \$200 million in tax cuts to offset the increases in the federal taxes passed this year in Washington. These cuts are targeted to areas in which federal taxes have increased; the gas tax and income taxes on low-income taxpayers and senior citizens. The House accepted a move to raise the limit for "no tax" status from \$8000 to \$9000, but it rejected other cuts. In an ingenious move to allow members to avoid actually voting against cutting the gasoline tax, the House voted to send the proposal to a committee for an environmental impact study. The supplemental budget is now awaiting action by the Senate.

Other pending measures before the Legislature include bond proposals to save open spaces and fund transportation needs. Neither bond is controversial, but each requires a hearing before the legislators. Emotional issues of legalized gambling, crime control initiatives and the perennial question of auto insurance may also come before us. The speaker has the authority to expedite these and a host of other bills at any session.

As the days grow shorter and the sessions grow longer, I am reminded of the advice I received from a veteran legislator one of my first days in office. "Do your Christmas shopping early!" she said.