

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Lessons I've learned in two years

This week marks the second anniversary for the Beacon Hill Byline. In December of 1991, as a fledgling lawmaker, I accepted the invitation of this newspaper to keep the readers informed about events at the Statehouse. I would like to use this anniversary as an opportunity to thank the Longmeadow News for the opportunity to write this column and to thank all of you who have told me you like what you read.

During these two years I have progressed from being the newest member to become the senior Republican on two committees, Commerce and Post Audit. My seniority is 120th in the body of 160 members. Unlike our nation's House of Representatives in Washington the State Legislature has a rapid turnover in membership. Here are some of my lessons from those years.

I have learned the importance of working with diverse members, from liberal Democrats to conservative Republicans. Coalitions enable all of us to provide better government. I have also learned the importance of legislative strategy. One specific ploy is the Speaker's legendary "fast gavel," the technique of moving on to new business after a sudden, unrecorded voice vote on a controversial issue. The technique enacts law without the roll call that holds members accountable for their votes.

In learning to feel relatively comfortable addressing the House membership from the podium, I have learned that persuasion is more effective than emotion in winning votes. I have also gained a measure of distinction as one of the legislators in the daily cameos that introduce the televised sessions, seen in Longmeadow on Channel 19.

In reviewing our accomplishments, I have hopes that the new education reform will improve the opportunities for the children of Massachusetts. In its first months of application, cities and towns are just beginning to implement the law, and we are all watching to see results from the standards it imposes and changes in governance that it mandates.

I am disappointed at the legislature's recent override of Gov. Weld's anti-privatization bill. The bill, now law, will cause increased state spending by banning initiatives to open some governmental service to competitive bids. The philosophy that competition can improve efficiency, generally accepted by leaders as diverse as Clinton, Giuliani and Weld, has now effectively been barred from Massachusetts government.

We are heading into the last days of the session with some unfinished business. As midnight of Jan. 4. approaches, watch to see if the seat belt law, recently vetoed by the governor, will be overridden. Look to see if bills such as campaign finance reform and river protection acts, passed by only one house of the I Legislature, complete the legislative process.

After the clock strikes 12, all pending legislation dies. The Legislature then begins all over again the next day as the second session of the 176th meeting of the Great and General Court.