

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

December 6, 1994

### **Back at the office**

You may have noticed the absence of Beacon Hill Byline this autumn. Thanks to the “equal time” provisions of election law, the column has been on hiatus. Now that the election is over and thanks to your support at the polls, I am back with another edition. Let me take this week to bring you up to date on the business of the past month.

Last week’s Longmeadow News covered my first post-election activity, a trip to Japan representing Mayor Markel at an Asia-Pacific conference. I returned from that trip late last Wednesday to discover that the House would be in session Friday. We would be cleaning up a few of the loose ends that come at the close of the legislative year and we would vote on a pay raise bill proposed by Governor Weld. The loose ends have received less coverage than the pay raise, but today I will address both issues.

First, we tackled the Massachusetts universal health care mandate for employers scheduled for implementation on January 1, 1995. A law passed in 1988 required employers of more than 5 workers to provide health insurance for all employees or contribute \$1680 for each employee to a state fund. It is generally understood that the costs would be extremely damaging to the state’s recovering economy. Throughout the fall, business owners have occasionally asked me, “What about the health care mandate?” I have always responded that it would most likely be deferred to a later time, a statement that understandably left my listeners a little uneasy. Now I can say without qualification that the deferral has been passed. The implementation was delayed for a year, so we may have the same task in 12 months, but it has been accomplished for now.

That settled, Governor Weld’s pay raise bill was introduced, fresh from a public hearing in Gardner auditorium. It proposed increases in executive and legislative salaries of \$15,000 and \$16,000 and, as you might imagine, it brought on a lively debate. There are good reasons to vote on either side of the issue. On the pro side, the \$30,000 pay scale is twelve years old, and good legislators are leaving the House and Senate because they cannot support their families. Arguing against the raise is the fact that it was brought forward with unusual speed. There is also the perception among some of the public that we are all part-time workers. A deciding fact for me is that I have reluctantly voted against substantial raises for other state workers. Granting that record, I felt that I should also oppose one for myself. I voted against the raise.

I expect to vote against another proposal this week, Senate President Bulger’s constitutional amendment to authorize public aid for private schools.

We are back in session this week, continuing with the legislative wrap-up and continuing to take action that helps the state’s economy. We expect a bill to reduce Unemployment Insurance rates any day now. Insurers have already requested a 10% reduction in Workers Comp rates. Added to the deferral of the health care mandate, we have three helping hands for Massachusetts.

It is good to be back at the office!