

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

May 9, 1996

### **Iris Holland's Amendment has merit**

Everyone in Longmeadow knows Iris Holland as our favorite State Representative. She is the woman who helped you with a bureaucratic problem in 1985, the lady you met on a Peter Pan bus to Boston or the candidate who gave you a potholder during her first campaign in 1972. She is also known in Boston as the author of the Holland Amendment. The amendment is introduced in each budget debate. Its name is shorthand for fiscally responsible budgeting. This year for the first time it was adopted by the House of Representatives. This is what the amendment means.

Our budget debate always begins with a rush from all of the Representatives to add items that the printed budget failed to consider. This year a total of 976 amendments were on hand as the session opened. Most of the amendments add to the bottom line. Adopting them over many years has contributed to the state's fiscal problems in the past.

Iris saw the problem in 1980 when most of her colleagues were still willing to spend our money with abandon. Having identified the difficulty, she addressed it by offering an amendment of her own. She moved that "When the General Appropriation Bill for the fiscal year is being considered by the House of Representatives any amendment which increased the total appropriation shall not be in order unless said amendment includes a provision which reduces other appropriations by an equal or greater amount, or provides for a source of revenue equal to or greater than the amount of said increase."

In those years, it is unlikely that her fellow members even thought she had a good idea. Since then we have come to understand the necessity for restraint, and we have paid lip service to the Holland amendment. It still seemed to extreme to adopt, however, until this year.

Our budget week marked a turning point for the legislature in 1996. We opened the week with Speaker Flaherty's resignation and progressed to an intense struggle for the succession. When Tom Finneran won that race, he proceeded immediately to consider the budget, chairing debate on the document his Ways and Means Committee had developed.

The first amendment to come before the House was the Holland amendment. As I have every year since my election, I went to the podium to make the case for the amendment. This year for the first time I sensed a response of "maybe," so I offered to soften the language. Instead of a mandate, we would ask for a good faith effort to retain the budget's bottom line. With that change, the amendment had the approval of the new speaker and the assent of the House.

Debate on the budget continued for four days. At the end of that time we had added only one half of one percent to the bottom line. As a body we had shown our belief in the merit of an idea introduced so long ago by the Lady from Longmeadow. We had won one for Iris.