

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Legislative Summary, 1996 session

Charles Dickens opened *A Tale of Two Cities* saying, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." The same could be said of the latest session of the legislature in Boston. For those of who were counting on funding for the Basketball Hall of Fame, it was a disastrous culmination to a hyperactive year. At the same time, we produced important legislation, some of which had been anticipated for years.

This week I will focus on our new schedule and why it left us with unfinished business. Next time I will write about our successes.

First let me recap the session. We have improved both efficiency and output as a result of operating rules that were adopted last year. Bills now have the full two years of the session to traverse the path of becoming law. That saves hundreds of hours and thousands of pages. To date, 6,000 bills have been filed since January, 1995. Before this session, those bills would have been filed, sorted and printed each year. We are still implementing a computer network throughout the State House to further reduce our reliance on paper and copiers.

Now a brief explanation of our schedule for the rest of the year. The House will remain in session throughout the balance of the year, and new laws will be enacted each month. We simply cannot pass bond bills or any controversial bills because of another rules change. We will not have any more "formal" sessions, meetings of the legislature that contain recorded votes on issues.

State funding for the Hall of Fame is vital to Springfield as it works to retain that establishment as the anchor to riverfront development. Governor Weld and the members of both houses in the legislature support the effort, which we continue to pursue. People in the House, the Senate and the Governor's office are at work on a series of approaches to solutions. In the interim, Mayor Albano, backed by the City Council, has promised the city's support until the state keeps its promise.

We will have to break the new rule in order to help Springfield this year. Worcester and Fall River are two other cities that have been harmed by the failed bond bill, but we would be more likely to reconvene if metropolitan Boston had an important unresolved issue. It has been frustrating to read in the Boston newspapers how well we addressed all outstanding issues.

We have addressed many outstanding issues, and I will write about those accomplishments next time. It seemed disingenuous to talk about the high points without acknowledging the prominent, if temporary, defeat.