

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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### **Out with the old, In with the new**

This week's column is truly a transitional message. Deadlines mean that it is written at the end of 1996 and printed in 1997. The legislative session also changed after deadline. Our state constitution sets the first Wednesday of the year as the first day of our session, a day which coincides this year with New Year's Day. That means that instead of watching the Rose Bowl, I will be taking a new oath of office at the State House. In deference to the calendar, this week I will review the past year and then look to the year ahead.

The legislature entered 1996 with the expectation that we would not be making many headlines. We had already enacted education and welfare reforms and needed to watch the results. Tax cuts were in place and bearing positive results for the state economy. Then outside events made 1996 a year of institutional change in both houses of the legislature.

The senate elected Senator Birmingham to the position of president, and the house selected Representative Tom Finneran as speaker. The ensuing changes of leadership positions affected operations in both bodies, as did the new calendar schedule that required both houses to end formal voting sessions at the end of July.

The most noticeable result for many of us in the Springfield area was the inability of the house and senate delegations to agree on a capital bond bill. That caused a certain amount of anxiety in our region because it left trustees of the Basketball Hall of Fame without a promised \$25 million in state money for expansion. A combination of city council and state actions averted the crisis, and the full legislature can now provide the money in the new session. Notable achievements of the session included passage of laws to allow our businesses to compete more effectively with other cities. An interstate banking bill will strengthen state banks trying to compete in the new global banking markets. A law creating new corporate tax structures will improve the competitive position of such defense contractors as Raytheon. And a financial services tax law will strengthen the presence of such corporations as Fidelity, a longtime corporate citizen of Massachusetts.

These accomplishments are all the more remarkable in that they were achieved in a heavily Democrat controlled legislature working with a Republican administration. It remains to be seen how the new session will fare with its lawmaking. The administration remains in Republican hands, but the legislature is more heavily Democratic. Massachusetts has been a pioneer nationally in enacting workers compensation reforms, and we have led other states with our innovative welfare reform law. We need to protect those laws, to lower auto insurance rates, to reduce the cost of doing business in the state. Starting with the gavel that announces the new session on New Year's Day, I will be working to keep Massachusetts in the forefront of states as we approach the twenty-first century.