

Beacon Hill Byline, by Mary Rogeness

August 14, 1997

The Changing of the Guard

I did not plan to drive to Boston that day. The legislature was not in session; the colleagues who share my car pool were out of town; I had things to do in Springfield. But the more I thought about it, the more important it seemed to witness a little bit of history. So I got into the car and once again headed down the turnpike to the State Hous. I wanted to watch the ceremonial transfer of power to a new governor.

The event was the culmination of months of speculation, beginning with the rumors of an ambassadorial appointment for Governor Weld. As that appointment became a reality, the disapproval of Senator Helms brought on new speculation. Would our governor remove his name from consideration? Would President Clinton stand by the appointment? When would the state again have the full attention of a chief executive?

The answer to the last question came suddenly over the weekend last month. Governor Weld announced that he would resign as governor and go to Washington to lobby for the post of Ambassador to Mexico. And state house officials then had 24 hours to prepare for a new governor.

In some states that preparation might simply require the governor to empty out his desk, but Massachusetts has developed an extensive set of traditions. A red carpet is rolled out on the steps that lead to the capitol building. The outgoing governor descends that long stairway alone, then hands a book and gavel to his successor. And the retiring governor then drives away as a private citizen.

These events all occurred as planned, witnessed by thousands of supporters, statehouse workers and passersby who filled the Beacon Street intersection. Topping it all off, two cannons roared out a nineteen-gun salute that was surely heard throughout the city. And the new governor climbed the steps to assume his new office.

An ending and a beginning:

The former governor retained his reputation as a showman to the end of his tenure in office. As he drove away with his wife Susan, we could see on his car the bumper sticker "Privatize Weld," an old labor union attack on the governor. I wish him well in his quest to become ambassador.

As of 5 p.m., July 29, 1997, Argeo Paul Cellucci is the Governor of Massachusetts, although his official title is "acting governor" in accordance with our constitution. Paul Cellucci has worked as a co-governor since 1991, supplying the expertise he developed while serving in the legislature. Now he has achieved the goal he first sought in 1989 before relinquishing his own campaign to form a partnership with Bill Weld. Today he is at the top of that long staircase at the State House. He has my best wishes for this term, and the next.

I am glad I saw the Changing of the Guard.