

Beacon Hill Byline: Mary Rogeness

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Back to School--Back to Work

It is always a little sad to see the summer vacation days replaced with the school routine and bustle of new activities in our offices. The change is especially jarring when September days have the sunny warmth of August as they have lately. The inescapable reality, however, is that the season is changing.

The increase in rush hour traffic in Longmeadow is an indicator that tells me every morning that a new school year has begun. Signs cropping up on the highways announce the approach of the Big E. At the other end of the state, the excitement in the halls of State House gives evidence of the coming activities of formal legislative sessions after the slower August pace that handled only routine issues. These are some of the issues the legislature will face in the coming months.

An early task is the approval of new schedules for employers' Unemployment Insurance premiums. An issue that has lingered all year was settled last month after Governor Cellucci intervened in a house-senate stalemate. The legislature is sure to approve rates for next year that will save employers \$90 per employee, a substantial boon for the economy.

The Springfield Civic Center and Basketball Hall of Fame renovations, along with Boston's Convention Center will also be taken up soon. The projects will provide construction jobs throughout the state and are important assets as Massachusetts looks to tourism for economic development, but the two legislative bodies have passed bills that differ in many areas. We will need a substantial amount of work to combine the bills into one document.

One exciting issue to face legislators is the fact that Massachusetts ended the last fiscal year with a surplus of more than \$500 million. We will be charged with the dual task of handling the surplus and reducing taxes for next year. Governor Cellucci has proposed reducing the income tax rate from 5.95% to 5%. The legislature expects to enact a bill that will eliminate income taxes for military pensions. We are also looking at several other targeted tax cuts.

Another piece of unfinished business that will face the legislature is the possible changes to Chapter 766, the state's special education law. The law was enacted in the early '70s, and pressure has been building to change some provisions. This year a study committee with representatives from school personnel, school committees, parents, service providers and legislators has proposed some modifications to the law. Parent representatives and school personnel have shared their concerns with me, and I am hopeful that an acceptable amendment can move forward. The legislature will top off a productive year by completing action on the above issues. Other issues may be left unresolved, but the session can address them in the second year of our session.

My last trip to Boston, I noticed that even though the weather is still warm the leaves are beginning to turn colors. That signal as well as the approaching calendar date of September 15, tells me it is time to get back to business.