

Beacon Hill Byline

November 27, 1997

Taking Stock at Thanksgiving

The snow that fell right after Veterans Day brought a sudden end to our warm lingering New England autumn. The heavens seemed to announce that Thanksgiving Day is coming. It is time to pause to take stock of the blessings of home and family and remember those who are less fortunate. As a State Representative, I have looked back on the year's legislative activities for ways that we have helped improve the lives of the families of my district.

One law that stands out is the brand new expansion of health care coverage for both children and seniors. It follows last year's law that provided new coverage's for those two groups. When fully implemented in 1998, every child in Massachusetts will be eligible for health coverage.

The bill, "An Act Expanding Access to Quality Health Care for Working Families, Children and Senior Citizens in the Commonwealth," will expand the Commonwealth's Medicaid program Mass Health to cover some 35,000 additional children in low and moderate income families. The bill also increases benefits for up to 40,000 seniors eligible for prescription drug assistance through the Senior Pharmacy Program, and improves benefits provided by the Children's Medical Security Plan.

The bill builds on last year's health care law, but unlike that law, it will not incur state costs. That law required a substantial increase in tobacco taxes for funding. Up to \$45 million in new federal revenue will be made available as a result of the bill's enactment.

Our improved senior prescription program will keep thousands of vulnerable seniors from having to make the choice between health and the rent. And the coverage for youngsters with family incomes up to 400 percent of poverty will provide important security to families. The passage of this bill again puts Massachusetts in the lead nationally by providing access to quality, affordable coverage to every child in the Commonwealth.

We spend much of our time at the State House focusing on the broad picture, worrying about taxes, businesses and the general economy. It was rewarding today to take a step back and think about the disadvantaged people among us –to provide some help for the most vulnerable of our citizens.

My family joins in wishing a Happy Thanksgiving to all.