

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Hail and Farewell

Taking a look back at the year gone by seems to be a practice of newspaper columnist everywhere, and predictions for the year ahead are another custom. This week I am combining the two traditions, reviewing 1998 while previewing 1999.

Looking first at the state as a whole, November's elections have given a four year administration to Governor Paul Cellucci and removed the "acting" designation that has been attached to his title in the months he previously served as governor. I look forward to working with him and the cabinet officials of the administration.

Another effect of the elections is the impact of Western Massachusetts on our officeholders. For the first time women hold two of the six constitutional offices, and both women are natives of our region. North Adams resident Jane Swift will serve as Lieutenant Governor, and Easthampton's Shannon O'Brien as Treasurer. Springfield native Tom Reilly is our new Attorney General, and the trio should combine to strengthen the voice of Western Massachusetts on Beacon Hill.

Predicting legislative success would require a better crystal ball than I possess, but I anticipate that we will continue to cut taxes. When I entered the legislature, tax debates argued about how much to raise taxes. Since then, we have established long record of tax cuts. In 1998 we continued that progress, doubling personal exemptions to provide savings to every taxpayer. In the years to come, investment income will be taxed at the same rate as wage income. You can expect renewed efforts to reduce the income tax rate to 5%.

Legislation dealing with HMOs and other health insurance plans will be another priority. Last year's bill died at the end of the session, so we can start the process building on our existing work. I will work for changes to individual health insurance policies because recent legislation has had the unintended consequence of pricing many consumers out of the market.