

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

July 21, 2004

Springfield's SOS part 2: The End of the Beginning

The city of Springfield is now the designated recipient of a state line of credit, a no-interest loan of \$52 million. That statement, however, tells only a small part of the story. The rest of the story tells of the strict limitations and harsh provisions that accompany that state money.

Last week the legislature overrode Governor Romney's veto that would have limited the line of credit to \$22 million, and the rest of the bill stands as enacted. And the harsh reality is that no state money can be spent until the newly appointed control board asks for it. It is the responsibility of the control board to restore solvency to the city budget.

Who is the control board? It contains five members: Mayor Ryan, City Council President Domenic Sarno, and three appointees of the governor. After the bill was finally enacted, the first action of the governor's office was to appoint of the state members of the control board. They are Alan LeBovidge, Commissioner of the Department of Revenue, Jake Jacobson, a private sector turnaround specialist, and Tom Trimarco, a lawyer with specialization in finance matters.

What is the job of the control board? It runs the city. Period. All elected or appointed officials operate subject to decisions of the board.

With the awesome power granted to an appointed board, some elected officials have objected to its makeup. "It's too Boston oriented." "It lacks diversity." Those are two of the complaints I have heard. I take a different approach. I have looked at the qualifications and the experience of the appointed members. The DOR commissioner has obvious expertise in fiscal affairs. Mr. Jacobson has led workouts of at least one large corporation and has the additional exposure to Springfield's problems through his work on the recent audit of the city. Mr. Trimarco worked for the state treasurer's office and has years of legal experience.

Those men have my full support and gratitude as they tackle the operation of a city that has a deficit of at least \$20 million and a junk bond credit rating, coupled with a growing public safety crisis that is sadly demonstrated by the many fatal shootings on the streets of the city.