

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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### **To Spend or Share**

Should politicians in Boston spend the healthy budget revenues projected for the coming year, or should the state share the wealth with cities and towns? That is an argument raised by the governor's budget for 2007 and joined by Democratic legislative leaders.

Governor Romney proposed to increase local aid by 17%. Chairman DeLeo of the house ways and means committee then cautioned municipalities not to plan on the full amount of that additional funding.

Taking a first step in promoting that restoration of funds, I have joined with other Republican representatives in proposing a Local Aid Resolution promising localities \$158 million in new lottery aid and \$236 million of new school aid.

Here are the reasons I support sharing the wealth of Massachusetts with the 351 cities and towns of our state. One only has to look around our region to find multiple government needs that cry out for monetary relief, relief that cannot be granted locally.

When the state economy has a good year, it reaps a bonus in tax dollars. More jobs mean more taxes. Corporate profits mean more taxes. Even more shopping means more taxes paid to the state. On a local level, property taxes can grow by 2½ %, however strong the economy. New construction and override votes are the only ways to grow beyond that restriction.

State aid for local school and general government purposes dropped during the recent downturn, and our towns budgeted carefully in those reduced circumstances. It's time to restore those aid dollars.

The lottery was created to supply local aid, but its distribution was capped when the dollars were claimed several years ago for state government use. Restoring 100% of proceeds to local aid keeps the traditional pledge.

Concerning school aid, our resolution adopts the governor's budget proposal for many school districts, but corrects inequities that affect towns like Longmeadow. Our town suffered a 20% reduction in school aid in 2002, and this year's proposal fell hundreds of thousands of dollars below the 2002 amount. Our resolution restores Longmeadow and other similar towns to that level.

Local aid resolutions were a standard feature in the legislature during the 1990s, but the resolutions disappeared when state revenues dried up. They assisted town budget writers by giving them a benchmark for state aid as they work in tandem with the state to develop budgets for the July 1 start of a fiscal year.

It is time to bring back the resolution. The restoration of a healthy state economy, coupled with the revenue generating limitations of localities validates the need for a stronger partnership between Massachusetts and her component parts.