

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

January 7, 2007

### **First Week, 2007**

The legislature spent the last few weeks of December meeting informally, acting on bills of local interest and moving non-controversial issues to the governor's desk. Then came January, and a complete change of atmosphere. From Constitutional Convention to session's end to new legislature to Governor Patrick's inaugural. Here is a recap of last week's State House activity.

The State House was dark on Monday for New Year's Day.

On Tuesday we came to life with a blast. The important action of the day came from the Constitutional Convention, the joint meeting of House and Senate to deal with a citizens' petition for a constitutional amendment to define marriage. Everyone had expected us to adjourn without voting on the question until, just after Christmas, the Supreme Judicial Court gave its unanimous opinion that legislators are required by the state constitution to vote on such petitions.

Some legislators were willing to ignore that requirement, but most accepted the judgment of the high court, and we took a vote. A majority voted against the petition, but it received more than the 50 votes required to advance to the new legislative session. I voted with the 62 members to move the petition forward.

Legislators had many explanations for deciding how to cast their vote. Here is my reasoning. I believe our Massachusetts court overstepped its authority when it decreed that gay marriage is granted by our constitution. Other state high courts, including New York and California, have rejected their reasoning, but constitutional amendment is the only remedy for the Massachusetts decision. A popular vote on the question is the most effective way to settle the issue.

Wednesday welcomed an entirely new legislature on Beacon Hill. We ushered in the 185<sup>th</sup> biennial session of the legislature, a different entity from the one we left the night before. Veteran members disappeared, their seats now occupied by a new freshman class. Leftover bills expired, and we now prepare to present new ideas. In one of his last official functions, Governor Romney administered the oath of office to us. Sal DiMasi was again elected Speaker, and we began a new two-year adventure. Celebrations with friends and family filled out the happy, ceremonial day.

Thursday brought celebration to the highest level of all. Governor Patrick made history when he became the first African-American governor of Massachusetts. He took the oath of office, returning the governor's "corner office" to the Democratic Party for the first time since 1990. He broke with past practices and established a new tradition by holding the ceremony in front of the State House, where a balmy day made a perfect setting for the large crowd that gathered on Beacon Street to watch. The festivities continued in the State House throughout the day, and extended throughout the weekend as the new governor took the inaugural festivities throughout the state.

Last week marked change in both the legislative and executive departments of government. Now we begin again. New bills must be filed this week. They will be classified and categorized. New committee positions will be filled so those bills can be considered. Before long the governor will release a new budget. The legislature will respond with our own fiscal plan. And we will begin the march to July, the beginning of a new fiscal year for Massachusetts.

Note: In November I wrote about four bills listed below that seemed ready to become law. On January 3, 2007, each one was signed by the governor

Defibrillators required in Health Clubs  
Child labor reforms  
Junior Operators Bill.  
Spoleto liquor license