

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

May 4, 2008

## **The House Budget Debate: Part 2**

Next year's state budget is now set, according to the house of representatives. The house was in session for 10 to 12 hour days last week producing that document. Presented with spending of \$27.99 billion dollars at the beginning of last week, members added \$210 million by Friday at midnight, sending to the senate a \$28.2 billion package. And I voted No on the whole bill.

Many of us Republicans felt like wallflowers at the ball as we watched other members approve earmarked amendments to expand programs. Item after item came to the floor for approval. In an attempt to explain my negative vote of one such item, I made these remarks to other members of the house.

"There's nothing in this amendment as presented that doesn't deserve the wholehearted support of each one of us. I want to explain why I'll be voting against this one as I did the previous ones. We all met recently with Treasurer Cahill, who warned us about the danger of more spending. Yet we've added \$9 million to the budget in this one amendment. The budget is now \$65 million higher than when we began. Yet we funded local aid for the communities we represent without any increase at all, claiming that the state could not afford an increase in that critical account.

"In 1990, before I came to the legislature, the state had dealt for years with increasing budgets, even as revenues lagged, requiring increased taxes every year. We paid a high price for those excesses for several years after that. More recently the downturn of the early years of this century necessitated 9C cuts, mid-year reductions the governor must impose if the budget is in deficit. Such reductions are particularly damaging because they come in the middle of the year.

"Economic warning signs should caution us to tighten our belts in the spending we authorize. Preparing for declining revenue will serve Massachusetts well if those warnings become reality. These are the reasons I am voting against this amendment."

That particular amendment was adopted, along with many others, so I guess my words were not very persuasive.

This is the last budget that will have my input, and I wish I could feel better about it. It authorizes and funds many important programs. But it also includes parochial earmarks for pet projects –maybe \$250,000 here and \$100,000 there. And it is built on money the state does not have.

Minority Leader Brad Jones summed up my feelings when he compared our budget process to a trip to the supermarket. We loaded up the imaginary shopping cart with items we want, food we need and things we like. And when we got to the checkout line, we couldn't pay the bill. Our proposed budget carries a bill that requires the state to take \$183 million out of the state's rainy day fund beyond the \$229 million that we were already accessing.

I hope time will show me to be mistaken about the year ahead. I want Massachusetts to benefit from a boom in capital gains, tourism and thousands of new jobs. If that happens, we will have a very good year.