

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Much has been accomplished – but there's plenty to do

The 1994 budget is now in place. The books were closed on the 1993 fiscal year with the adoption by the House and Senate of a deficiency budget, and the Legislature has moved to our summer schedule of informal sessions. Here is a mid-year assessment of our legislative accomplishments along with a preview of the unfinished that will be taken up in the autumn.

The year began in a rush of legislation with the passage in January of the economic development law, the jobs bill developed by the Weld administration and legislators. The House then tackled education reform, but when the Senate amended the bill by adding schools choice as a centerpiece, progress ground to a halt while conferees from the two bodies struggled to reach an acceptable compromise. We passed the bill in the midst of the budget debate, and now I am watching along with all of you to how the new laws impacts on our schools.

At our final session last week, the House an anti-privatization bill to limit the transfer of state services to private vendors. I will write more about that later. Several other pieces of legislation should be ready for debate, and I expect to see action on some of them in September.

One such bill deals with the hazard of lead paint in housing stock in Massachusetts. Existing legislation contains liability and de-leading provisions that have seriously limited the availability of rental housing, and legislators have been working to develop a new law that protects the health of children while preserving the ability of landlords to operate. A compromise bill passed the House last month, but it has not been taken up in the Senate. Representatives from the most liberal to the most conservative philosophies agreed on the bill, and I hope the Senate president plans to act with due haste on that legislation.

The last time I wrote about automobile insurance was in December, at which time I said "maybe next year." The issue is so complex that, although there are two proposals for changes to our state system, action has not yet been scheduled. I am still working to understand the fine points of the bills, and I welcome your comments.

Two new issues arrived suddenly on the scene last week when Gov. Weld filed legislation to build a Megaplex convention and sports center in Boston, funding the project with riverboat gambling receipts. Both ideas have been topics of corridor conversation, but the linkage and the specifics came as quite a surprise. I will write more about both issues, particularly about gambling, because the Connecticut River is a likely site for the enterprise.

We have had a busy year, and I think you will agree that more challenges await the Legislature this fall. In the meantime, I will be spending less time on the Turnpike and more time attending local meetings. Look for me around town.