

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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A National Magazine Rates Massachusetts

My office receives many pounds of mail every week, mail that includes reports, invitations, newsletters and magazines. One of those magazines, *Governing* just arrived, and with it came an assessment of all 50 states. The states were assessed on their financial management, capital management, human resources, information technology and managing for results. And Massachusetts ranked well in their analysis.

This is my report to you of the ranking that Massachusetts earned.

First, the bottom line. The overall grade for Massachusetts is B- a grade matched among our neighboring states only by Vermont. New Hampshire earned a C+, Maine a C, Connecticut, New York and Rhode Island were judged to be performing at a C- level. As the magazine's editors show in reporting on the several categories, Massachusetts has come a long way since Governor Weld and Governor Cellucci have been at the helm.

Financial management earned a B, and the state was given credit for progress in money management. Realistic consensus estimates have replaced political maneuvers in estimating revenues, and the rainy day fund has been filled to equal 6.6 percent of the budget. The challenge of providing budgetary flexibility and the lowering the level of state debt may be the only factors that keep the grade from an A.

Capital management earned a B+, a grade that can be attributed to both executive and legislative decisions. Governor Weld introduced five year capital budgets which are now all accepted as standard operation procedure. The capital plan reined in overextended borrowing formerly authorized by the legislature by funding only projects within the plan's limit. For our part, the house of representatives has established a capital committee to restrain the legislature from authorizing the issuing of bonds that the state cannot afford. Improvements in the state's bond rating are a direct result of our capital management.

Human Resources is a little more difficult, judging from our C+. The state has 1,100 job titles, and takes recent reductions into account. *Governing* faults primitive computer systems and bureaucratic barriers barrier to merit pay, but it does grant credit for attempts to provide workforce training.

Information Technology earns a C, and the designation of "a mixed bag in Mass." From my personal experience with the house computers, I must agree with that assessment. Members have had desktop computers for only four years, and we have not yet adopted electronic bill filing that is standard in other states. The flaws in the Treasury's system are becoming an embarrassment to all of us with the news stories of financial misdeeds. We are, however, focusing on Y2K and technology upgrades.

The last category, "managing for results," earns another C. The goal is to measure results rather than output, and our legislature and bureaucracy are resistant to such a change. It looks like evolution in personnel – or a new management trend - will be required before we can improve on that ranking. Mayor Ed Koch of New York used to say, "How am I doing?" If we ask that question on behalf of Massachusetts, the answer is, "Better than most - and even better next year."