

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

March 25, 1999

What do voters want?

You may have seen a notice in the newspaper last week that announced my scheduled office hours on March 17th. The constituent meetings were scheduled on St. Patrick's, Day because it is the one day that I can be sure that I will not have to travel to Boston. Suffolk County calls it "Evacuation Day" - and a holiday - so it's a good day to get some work done at home.

I spent the day dining and visiting with the senior citizens of Monson, and meeting with constituents in Longmeadow. Without divulging any confidences from these meetings, this column summarizes the issues that people brought to me at the Monson Senior Center and the Storrs Library.

The first visitor was newly retired, a gentleman who responded to my offer of the state's "Guide for Elders". He was the only person during the entire day to take advantage of the booklet, and since I have a supply on hand for distribution, I will invite any other interested persons to call me at 567-1661 to receive a copy.

One lady wanted a listing of Department of Mental Health job openings for her granddaughter, and a man reminded me that I had helped him several years ago with a problem with a man-made lake. The problem is not yet resolved, so I'll have to contact the Department of Environmental Management for him.

After lunch and the conversations were over, it was time to travel to Longmeadow. Chief Marcotte was there to greet me, waiting to discuss my concerns about oil storage tank removal. I wanted to find out about the fire department's experiences as a first responder to pollution problems; he wanted to know how my bill would help.

Next came a group of education advocates. Two teachers stopped in, one to discuss his retirement and the other to discuss her classroom work. She was concerned about the governor's teacher testing bill and legislative proposals to remove some of the conditions of her employment from the collective bargaining agreement. An old friend and University of Massachusetts Ambassador wanted to be sure that I was aware of all of the accomplishments of the university and the need for continuing support in the state budget (I am). The East Longmeadow librarian stopped by to ask about the progress of a bond bill that will provide partial funding for a new library in that town. I assured her that her project is well positioned on the funding list. Together, the state's capital plan and a new bond authorization will dictate the timing of funding availability.

The last three constituents to arrive came as a delegation to solicit my support for funding the ballot initiative to provide public funding for statewide and legislative elections. The issue is difficult to deal with. It filled half of the time allocated for office hours, and it needs more than a paragraph at the end of the column to explain. Next time, I will cover the issue in the Byline. Then I will layout for you some of the state programs that need funding and ask you to measure their merits against a new multi-million dollar electoral line item that pays to elect politicians to office.