

Beacon Hill Byline – By Rep. Mary Rogeness

March 26, 2001

A Day in the District

If you have ever wondered whether a state representative works in Boston or Western Massachusetts, the answer is: she works both places. But if you are talking about any Friday, you will generally find all of us at home in our districts.

Legislative sessions, committee hearings and other meetings take place at the State House, requiring us to be in Boston several days a week. But there is an unwritten rule stating that the legislature will not be in session on Fridays. Friday is therefore a good day for organizations to plan meetings for local lawmakers. And they indeed plan those meetings. Here is a summary of my activities on a recent Friday.

A breakfast with area librarians started our day at 7:30. Libraries from the four western counties hosted a breakfast at Holyoke Community College to brief lawmakers on plans, their financing and the budgetary needs of their institutions in the coming year. The House of Representatives will debate the budget next month, so this is the season for agencies to seek to influence their state funding.

I spent so much time talking with the librarians that I missed the second breakfast, a Northampton gathering of emergency medical services. I will ask colleagues who attended that breakfast about the issues they were seeking to address.

A message on my car phone prompted a follow-up phone call to the governor's Executive Office of Transportation and Construction. From that call came the good news that the office has approved a project for the town of Wales that I've been working on for more than a year. The small town at the eastern end of my legislative district has an unsound dam in need of extensive repairs that the town cannot afford. The town can now access a state program designed to fund such needs. I was tempted to drive right out to Wales to spread the news, but had to notify the town with a phone call. It was time for another meeting.

I was unable to greet Treasurer Shannon O'Brien at a Springfield appearance because it came at the same time as the Home Builders Association meeting. That group invited legislators to a luncheon for the dual purpose of previewing their Home Show and informing us about the services they can provide to our constituent-homeowners.

My noontime planning was better than breakfast, so I was able to attend a second lunch in Springfield. That meeting, called by a district court, laid out the needs of that court system in the coming fiscal year.

After lunch came an open house by Springfield's WIC (Women Infants and Children) provider to showcase the nutritional services provided by that program. A theme in the meetings I have mentioned. They all involve food. Just as the sponsors have determined that Friday is a good day to find the lawmakers in the region, do you think they also discovered that it is easier to hold our attention if they offer us a meal?

After the WIC presentation, the work day wound down after a telephone conference with Dave Buckley, my State House aide.

Without spending the hours to commute to Boston I was able to learn of the business, the activities and the needs of many people in our own neighborhoods.

Friday was a good day.