

Beacon Hill Byline – By Rep. Mary Rogeness

April 16, 2001

A New Governor Takes Over

When would Lieutenant Governor Jane Swift become governor? The past two weeks were a time of uncertainty for Massachusetts officials. On Wednesday, Governor Cellucci had an uneventful hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee but, Washington being the capital of political intrigue, his nomination as Ambassador to Canada seemed suddenly to hit a roadblock. The roadblock was then cleared as suddenly as it had arrived and on Thursday evening, the Senate approved the new Ambassador by acclamation.

All of that activity set in motion last week's Boston ceremony, the transfer of the governor's duties to Lieutenant Governor Jane Swift. I was privileged to be among the spectators at the historic transfer of power to the commonwealth's first woman governor. All of the ceremonial traditions that have grown up around gubernatorial succession in our state's long history were in play last Tuesday. Honor guards, a fife and drum corps, kilted bagpipers of the Massachusetts State Police, all played a part in the ritual.

In his last official act, Governor Cellucci took a long walk along a red carpet through the State House and up the Grand Staircase. On the landing, he was met by the lieutenant governor. He presented her with traditional symbols of authority: a gavel made of wood from the USS Constitution, a 19th century volume of Massachusetts laws and a Bible inscribed to "Her Excellency." The Bible has similar inscriptions to governors from Civil War days, but this is the first time for the salutation, Her Excellency.

After the brief ceremony Paul Cellucci was our former governor. Governor Jane Swift became the chief executive of Massachusetts, though she was not sworn in as governor because of the dictates of the state constitution and bears the official designation of acting governor.

I can only imagine her emotional roller coaster of the past week. She was filling her constitutional role of acting governor while the governor was out of state, and she was preparing to assume the position permanently after his confirmation, all without knowing when that transfer would take place. All of the time, of course, she was approaching nearer to the June date when she expects her twin babies to be born.

One of Governor Swift's first official appearances was an address to members of the Springfield Chamber of Commerce participating in Operation Boston, an annual trip to the State House. They came away from the event impressed with both the depth of her knowledge and style of the presentation of her remarks.

Governor Swift knows she faces a difficult mission. She is the chief executive of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. She is the first woman to govern our state, and she is making history as the nation's first governor to give birth while in office. The eyes of the nation will be on our governor/mother, assessing her handling of two challenging tasks.

Her job would be easier if Massachusetts provided housing for our governor, but since we do not, Governor Swift faces a daunting six hour commute time each day. Many legislators agree with me that we should provide a home near the capitol for the governor, but for now the governor has upgraded the communications capacity of her home office in Williamstown and announced that she will work from that site during most of the summer.

I have known Governor Swift since she was the youngest woman to be elected to the state senate. She was quite impressive in that role. She was equally remarkable as a young lieutenant governor. And I believe she will be an outstanding trailblazer as Governor of Massachusetts.