

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Helping the Second Hampden District

This January every legislator received an increase in salary, a raise that came at a time legislators were coming to grips with massive shortfalls in tax revenues to the state. Circumstances were so dire that the governor requested unprecedented authority to trim municipal budgets just so the state would have the assets to finish the fiscal year, a request granted by the legislature.

It seemed like the wrong time to accept the added income, though the automatic adjustment had been authorized several years ago by a voter-approved constitutional amendment. I considered several methods of redirecting the dollars into the public domain. I might have refused to accept the money, or I could have donated it to some the many non-profit organizations whose level of government funding is at risk. Those options were taken by some of my colleagues.

Neither choice seemed quite right. Last year I joined with many other Representatives in taking an eight-day furlough, and that money was swallowed up among the thousands of line items in the budget. And although donations to non-profits would aid causes that are important to me, they might not help the people I represent.

I made a third choice. The budget crisis was hitting municipalities particularly hard in January, as they faced mid-year reductions in state aid. In recognition of the budget crisis and the resulting reductions to local aid that impacted all of the communities I represent, I decided to make direct donations to each community.

I checked with Longmeadow selectmen about how to proceed, and they informed me that a check made out to the town would be deposited into the general fund. So I made a tour of the towns, presenting checks for \$600 to Longmeadow, East Longmeadow, Hampden and Monson. Springfield was entitled to its own donation, but the city required that a special order be adopted to allow the donation. After Councilor Domenic Sarno presented the order, Springfield accepted my \$600, and the tour was completed.

I do not expect my small donations to solve the problems that face our towns in the year ahead, but they are real dollars that will do more good here than they would if they were left in Boston. I hope they will help in some way to ease the budgeting process in the months ahead.

In presenting the donation to Longmeadow's selectmen, I said, "I wish you the strength to guide the town through this difficult time, and I thank you for your commitment to serving Longmeadow." I hope you join me in supporting the board in this difficult time.