

Veto overrides

Exciting news for Massachusetts last month arrived with the enactment of a budget before the fiscal year began on July 1. Unsettling news followed when Governor Romney, believing the budget to be \$200 million higher than projected revenues, vetoed programs worth that amount of money. The timely budget for the first time in years allowed state business to proceed seamlessly into the new year, but the vetoes meant the legislature spent the past two weeks debating and restoring many of the vetoed items. Here is a recap of that legislative action.

Our state constitution allows the governor to reduce or eliminate individual expenditures from the budget and submit amending language to other provisions. Vetoes can be overridden by a 2/3 vote in both the house and senate. More than 350 individual items were vetoed, and those items were overridden almost at will until the house adjourned at 11:45 Thursday night. Three vetoes were sustained, but two of the three were overridden after the leadership asked for reconsideration.

The vetoes can be separated into three categories.

The first group restores the voter-enacted bilingual education law. Passed by a strong majority in a November referendum vote, the English immersion program was weakened by the legislature even before it had a chance to work. Governor Romney vetoed the changes, but the vetoes were overridden.

The second group contains painful reductions to programs that everyone agrees are helpful to individuals or beneficial to the state. The governor vetoed them because he considered them to be pork barrel items, unnecessary state expenditures or more often, simply because of a lack of resources. I supported the governor on most such issues, but disagreed with him when restoration would provide substantial benefits. It was disheartening to watch members vote to restore millions of dollars, often voting without even knowing whether the funds would go. They know that Governor Romney may be forced to reduce expenditures unilaterally if revenues cannot cover budgeted expenditures.

The third group of vetoes represents the governor's proposed reforms that were rejected by the legislature. The budget he presented to the legislature merged the Boston Municipal Court (BMC) into the district court system. It moved Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission (ABCC) functions into Public Safety and merged Massachusetts Turnpike Authority (MTA) with the Massachusetts Highway Department. Each of the proposals provided immediate and ongoing savings to the state.

The legislature responded by sending him a budget that expanded the jurisdiction of BMC. It protected ABCC jobs by restoring them and moving them from the governor's office to that of the state treasurer. It expanded turnpike oversight to include some state highways. Governor Romney could and did reject those organization ideas. After lively debate the first two items were overridden, while the Turnpike structure remains unchanged because the issue did not come up.

The legislature has completed this first round of veto overrides, though other vetoes can still be addressed before the end of December. Revenues are trending upward, so I share the hope that they will be sufficient to sustain expenditures at budgeted levels. Whatever happens, I will continue working for the changes to state government that will make those state dollars provide the most benefit to the people of the Pioneer Valley.