

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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The Governor's Budget

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” That is the famous opening sentence from Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*. They can describe many happenings in our lives. One example is the state budget proposed last month by Governor Patrick.

The budget spends \$26.7 billion dollars, 4% more than last year’s appropriation. That seems like it should be enough to take care of everyone. And it does treat many programs generously. Still, it is human nature to look at such a document with the question, “What’s in it for me?” Here are some of the people who see the budget as the best or the worst, according to its funding of specific line items.

If you are a public health advocate, you are pleased with the new program to promote inoculation for children. It includes the new vaccine to protect against the human papilloma virus, to be given to young teenage girls. The program has strong advocates because of its effectiveness in preventing cervical cancer.

If you live in a high crime area, you are pleased with the proposal to train and pay salaries for 250 new police officers. A cautionary note comes with the warning that salary costs in the future will be a municipal responsibility. The funding of this particular initiative makes it seem like a bad idea to towns like Longmeadow. The new officers are funded by re-allocating a line item that traditionally funds community policing projects throughout the state.

If property taxes are your priority, it is close to the absolutely worst of times. Local aid is projected to increase by about 2% statewide, which breaks out to just under \$35,000 for Longmeadow. Springfield receives the same percentage, though of course the dollar amount is greater because it builds on a higher base.

If schools are your high priority, the budget is great or terrible, depending on where you live. A complex formula has awarded Longmeadow \$152,550 in new state aid for our schools, a drop in the bucket as the system struggles to fund the district. Monson receives even less new money, while East Longmeadow and Hampden-Wilbraham receive \$2.6 million and \$1.3 million respectively. The governor’s budget does not keep a commitment made by the legislature last year to add \$55 million to the funding formula to augment aid to towns like Longmeadow.

If you are a user of Medicaid, you are happy. However, if you are a provider of services, your fees are not guaranteed. Hospitals and nursing homes are concerned about how much state funding they are faced with losing.

If you depend on mental health or mental retardation services, you face serious cuts to programs. Funds for “Turning 22” and many community services have been seriously reduced from last year’s level.

Advocates for each reduced program are now busy writing to legislators. Recipients of the many earmarks that were removed by Governor Patrick are all seeking their restoration.

That completes my summary of Governor Patrick’s budget. It appears that more people and programs are under funded than enhanced, partly because of expenses that increase automatically from year to year.

Step one of the budget marathon is over. The next step is the house budget, due to be released in April. Along with other state representatives, I will work to make it do a better job taking care of Massachusetts, bearing in mind the limited revenues at hand.