

Beacon Hill Roll Call

By Bob Katzen

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THE HOUSE AND SENATE. Beacon Hill Roll Call records the votes of local senators on one roll call from the week of February 8-12. There were no roll calls in the House last week.

FREEZE UNEMPLOYMENT TAX (H 4470)

The Senate, 35-0, approved a House-approved bill freezing the unemployment insurance tax paid by employers at the current 2009 level through 2010 instead of allowing an automatic scheduled increase to take effect. The payments go into a fund that provides benefits to laid-off workers.

The contribution that employers pay into the fund is rising dramatically because of the increasing number of laid-off workers collecting benefits. The fund is now depleted and the state is funding unemployment benefits through a no-interest loan from a federal loan pool that is funded by federal unemployment taxes paid by employers.

Supporters said that without the freeze, the average employer contribution to the fund would jump \$300 — from \$584 to \$884 per employee. They noted that contributions are based on a formula and that even with this freeze, the contribution unfortunately will increase by an estimated \$120 per employee.

They argued that the freeze would save businesses \$300 million during this economic downturn and is an appropriate balance between helping the jobless and the employers struggling to keep workers employed.

Only final approval in each branch is needed before the measure would go to Governor Deval Patrick.

(A “Yes” vote is for the bill.)

Senator Scott Brown

Yes

ALSO UP ON BEACON HILL

\$35 MILLION LOAN FOR THE CITY OF LAWRENCE (H 4421) — The House and Senate Ways and Means Committees held a hearing on the controversial bill that would allow Lawrence to sell \$35 million in bonds to close its budget deficit.

The measure would increase state oversight of the city’s finances through the use of a state designated fiscal overseer to work with the mayor and city council. It also would allow the state to appoint a finance control board with extensive powers over the city’s finances if it does not balance its budget by January 2011.

Supporters said that this is the best way to bail out Lawrence and help it return to fiscal solvency.

Opponents said that Lawrence has mismanaged its finances and that the tougher finance control board with extensive powers over the city’s finances should be set up immediately.

EXPAND ELIGIBILITY FOR RESTRAINING ORDERS (H 4443)

— Governor Patrick signed into law legislation allowing victims to take out restraining orders against abusers and stalkers with whom they have had no prior relationship. Current law allows these victims to petition for protection orders only if the perpetrator of the abuse is a family or household member or someone with whom the victim had a substantial dating relationship.



Supporters call the new law long overdue and say it will save countless lives and reduce injuries suffered by innocent women. The governor said, “This new law closes a glaring loophole by ensuring the full extent of the justice system is available to protect sexual assault victims.”

NOMINATION PAPERS AVAILABLE — Nominations papers are now available in the Massachusetts Secretary of State’s office for anyone who is thinking about running for United States Congress, the Massachusetts Legislature, or statewide office in 2010. The party primaries are September 14 and the general election is November 2.

ALLOW DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS TO BREAK THEIR APARTMENT LEASES (S 627)

The Housing Committee approved a bill allowing victims of domestic violence to break their apartment lease, without a penalty, if they notify the owner in writing that they or a member of their household are a victim of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, or stalking. Supporters say that the measure is designed to help victims move if their assailant knows where they are living. The measure also requires owners to change the tenant’s exterior locks if the tenant or occupants reasonably believe that they are in danger.

ASSAULT ON MEDICAL PERSONNEL (H 1696)

— The House gave initial approval to a bill expanding the law that makes it a separate crime to assault an emergency medical technician, an ambulance operator, or an ambulance attendant. The law would provide jail sentences of 90 days to 2 1/2 years and/or fines of \$500 to \$5,000. The bill would expand the law to cover registered nurses, registered nurse psychologists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

“We said it was gonna cost the state 16,000 jobs during the debate on the sales tax increase. But it didn’t seem to matter to a lot of people here because you were so hungry for new revenue you didn’t care what you did to the economy.”

— Senate Minority Leader and GOP lieutenant governor candidate Richard Tisei (Republican from Wakefield) commenting on last year’s hike in the sales tax from 5 percent to 6.25 percent.

“At the end of the day, we as state government do not create private sector jobs. But what we can create is a fertile environment for the creation of those private sector jobs.”

— Senate Ways and Means chairman Steven Panagiotakos (Democrat from Lowell)

“Barney Frank: The Story of America’s Only Left-Handed, Gay, Jewish Congressman”

— The title of a new biography of United States Representative Barney Frank written by author Stuart Weisberg

“Snow Fakes”

— Last Thursday’s front page headline in *The Boston Herald* following last week’s “major snowstorm”

“In anticipation of the Wednesday, February 10th snowstorm and the issues it will present to the afternoon commute, Governor Deval Patrick has announced that non-emergency Executive Branch employees, working or residing in Bristol, Norfolk, Plymouth, Barnstable, Dukes, or Nantucket Counties should not report to their workplace today. Remaining non-emergency personnel will be released at noon.”

— Statement last Wednesday by the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency

HOW LONG WAS LAST WEEK’S SESSION? Beacon Hill Roll Call tracks the length of time that the House and Senate were in session each week.

Many legislators say that legislative sessions are only one aspect of the Legislature’s job and that a lot of important work is done outside of the House and Senate chambers. They note that their jobs also involve committee work, research, constituent work, and other matters that are important to their districts.

Critics say that the Legislature does not meet regularly or long enough to debate and vote in public view on the thousands of pieces of legislation that have been filed. They contend that the infrequency and brief length of sessions are misguided and lead to irresponsible late-night sessions and a mad rush to act on dozens of bills in the days immediately preceding the end of an annual session.

During the week of February 8-12, the House met for a total of three hours and 42 minutes while the Senate met for a total of three hours and 49 minutes.

Monday, February 8

House 11:03 a.m. to 1:53 p.m.
 Senate 11:07 a.m. to 1:50 p.m.

Tuesday, February 9

No House session
 No Senate session

Wednesday, February 10

House 11:04 a.m. to 11:11 a.m.
 Senate 11:04 a.m. to 11:09 a.m.

Thursday, February 11

House 11:02 a.m. to 11:47 a.m.
 Senate 1:00 p.m. to 2:01 p.m.

Friday, February 12

No House session
 No Senate session

Meetings

The following are some meetings that were posted or announced recently. Boards and committees can schedule meetings, cancel meetings, or alter the starting times of meetings on relatively short notice. Norfolk Town Hall is at One Liberty Lane in Norfolk Center.

Saturday, February 20

8 a.m. King Philip School Committee’s Policy Subcommittee
 King Philip Middle School
 Superintendent’s Office
 18 King Street, Norfolk

Monday, February 22

5:15 p.m. King Philip School Committee’s Audit & Budget Subcommittee
 King Philip Regional High School
 Principal’s Conference Room
 201 Franklin Street, Wrentham

7 p.m. Board of Selectmen
 Town Hall, Room 124

7 p.m. King Philip School Committee
 King Philip Regional High School library, 201 Franklin Street, Wrentham

7 p.m. Zoning Bylaw Study Committee
 Town Hall, Building Department conference room, first floor

7:30 p.m.
 Community Preservation Committee
 Town Hall, Room 214

Tuesday, February 23

5 p.m.
 Tri-County School Committee’s Negotiations Subcommittee
 Tri-County Regional Vocational Technical School
 School District Office
 147 Pond Street, Franklin

6:30 to 9:30 p.m. Norfolk Public Schools’ Strategic Planning Committee
 Norfolk Public Library,
 139 Main Street

6:30 p.m.
 Tri-County School Committee
 Tri-County Regional Vocational Technical School, School District Office
 147 Pond Street, Franklin

Wednesday, February 24

7 p.m. Historical Commission
 Town Hall, Room 214

7 p.m.
 Norfolk School Building Committee
 Town Hall, Room 124

7:30 p.m. Conservation Commission
 Town Hall, Room 105-C

Thursday, February 25

7:30 p.m. Advisory Board
 Town Hall, Room 25

7:30 p.m. Planning Board
 Town Hall, Room 124

7:30 p.m.
 Zoning Board of Appeals
 Town Hall, Room 105-C

7:30 p.m.
 Medical Reserve Corps
 Town Hall, Room 214

Friday, February 26

7:45 a.m.
 Foxborough Regional Charter School
 Board of Trustees
 Foxborough Regional Charter School
 conference room
 131 Central Street, Foxborough

1 to 4 p.m. Norfolk Public Schools’ Strategic Planning Committee
 Norfolk Public Library
 139 Main Street

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