



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
House of Representatives
State House, Boston 02133-1008

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Legislative Response to Governor Romney's Address

January 29, 2003

Speaker Thomas M. Finneran

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 7:15 PM
ON JANUARY 29, 2003.**

GOOD EVENING.

A FEW MOMENTS AGO, I LISTENED TO GOVERNOR ROMNEY'S REMARKS OUTLINING THE ECONOMIC AND FISCAL CHALLENGES WHICH WE FACE.

THE RARITY OF SUCH A GUBERNATORIAL ADDRESS AND THE EVEN GREATER RARITY OF A LEGISLATIVE RESPONSE SHOULD EMPHASIZE THE EXTRAORDINARY CRISIS WHICH WE NOW CONFRONT. WE LIVE IN A VERY SOMBER TIME FOR OUR NATION AND OUR STATE.

I WILL NOT SUGARCOAT THE HARD ECONOMIC FACTS. NO PUBLIC OFFICIAL WORTHY OF OATH AND OFFICE SHOULD INDULGE SOOTHING ILLUSIONS. RECENT PUBLIC REFERENCES TO THE FISCAL CRISIS OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION ARE, UNFORTUNATELY, ABSOLUTELY ACCURATE. THE GOVERNOR IS PERFORMING A VALUABLE PUBLIC SERVICE IN HIS REFERENCES TO THE DEPRESSION OF THE 1930s AND IN THE SENSE OF FOREBODING WHICH IS GENERATED BY SUCH COMPARISONS.

THE GOVERNOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE BREADTH AND DEPTH OF HARD FACTS AND DIFFICULT CHOICES IS MOST WELCOME. MANY OF US IN THE LEGISLATURE HAVE BEEN DECISIVELY ENGAGED IN SPEAKING ABOUT AND ACTING UPON THIS CHALLENGE FOR THE PAST 18 MONTHS.

- WE HAVE CUT STATE SERVICES BY OVER 2 BILLION DOLLARS AND WE HAVE LAID OFF THOUSANDS OF STATE EMPLOYEES.
- WE HAVE USED, PERHAPS TOO RAPIDLY, THE MASSIVE RESERVES WHICH WE HAD PAINSTAKINGLY BUILT UP DURING THE 1990'S.
- WE UNDERTOOK AND ACHIEVED VARIOUS REFORMS OF A WIDE RANGE OF BUDGET BUSTERS.
- WE STABILIZED OUR PLUNGING REVENUES BY TEMPORARILY FREEZING ADDITIONAL TAX CUTS WHICH WERE SCHEDULED TO OCCUR IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS ECONOMIC TURMOIL.

HIGHLY RESPECTED BUSINESS LEADERS, FEDERAL RESERVE OFFICIALS, AND WALL STREET CREDIT RATING AGENCIES APPLAUDED THESE PROMPT ACTIONS. THE SEVERITY AND THE NATURE OF THE CUTS WHICH THE GOVERNOR WILL PROPOSE TOMORROW INDICATE AN UNDERSTANDING, IF NOT AN ACCEPTANCE, OF THE WISDOM OF EACH OF THESE ACTIONS.

GOVERNOR ROMNEY'S ELECTION IS NOT TO BE TRIVIALIZED. THE PEOPLE OF MASSACHUSETTS HAVE INDICATED THEIR PREFERENCE FOR A NEW APPROACH TO GOVERNMENT AND THEIR WISH MUST BE RESPECTED. WE IN THE LEGISLATURE PLEDGE TO WORK WITH GOVERNOR ROMNEY TO CONTINUE TO

RESTRUCTURE, REORGANIZE, AND REFORM STATE GOVERNMENT IN ORDER TO INSURE THAT THE INTERESTS AND CONCERNS OF TAXPAYERS ARE BEST SERVED.

MY LEGISLATIVE COLLEAGUES HAVE RECOGNIZED THE SEVERITY OF OUR CIRCUMSTANCES FOR MANY MONTHS NOW, AND I HAVE ALREADY SPOKEN OF THEIR WISE ACTIONS. MORE RECENTLY, THEY HAVE GIVEN THE GOVERNOR UNUSUAL EMERGENCY POWERS TO DEAL WITH AN IMMEDIATE BUDGET SHORTFALL OF 650 MILLION DOLLARS. THE SHORTFALL MAY EVEN BE HIGHER. OUR COOPERATION CARRIES AN EXPECTATION THAT THE GOVERNOR WILL NOW MAKE SUFFICIENT REDUCTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE NECESSARY BUDGET BALANCE.

SUCH COOPERATION WILL CONTINUE. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE GOVERNOR TO SUCCEED IN HIS STATED MISSION AND WE WILL NOT OBSTRUCT HIM. THE GOVERNOR'S MISSION OF

- BALANCING THE BUDGET,
- WITHOUT RAISING TAXES, AND
- WITHOUT CUTTING ESSENTIAL SERVICES

MUST BE GIVEN A FULL AND FAIR CHANCE. THE GOVERNOR HAS SET A HIGH STANDARD AND HE WILL RECEIVE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT IN HIS EFFORTS.

HOW THE GOVERNOR DEFINES “ESSENTIAL SERVICES” WILL LIKELY RECEIVE MUCH SCRUTINY IN THE WEEKS AND MONTHS AHEAD. THE GOVERNOR’S FIRST BUDGET, WHICH WILL BE FILED AT THE END OF FEBRUARY, WILL BE INSTRUCTIVE IN THAT REGARD.

I WILL SHARE MY VIEW OF WHAT OUR STATE GOVERNMENT SHOULD STRIVE TO PROVIDE:

FIRST, WE SHOULD, TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITY, PROTECT EDUCATION AND LITERACY. LITERACY PROVIDES AN ECONOMIC AND CIVIC HORSEPOWER WHICH IS CRUCIAL TO OUR SURVIVAL.

SECOND, WE SHOULD PROTECT THE ABILITY OF OUR PARTNERS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SAFETY FOR OUR CITIZENS. POLICE AND FIRE PROTECTION AND AMBULANCE SERVICES SHOULD NOT BE COMPROMISED OR TAKEN FOR GRANTED.

THIRD, WE MUST BECOME BETTER PARTNERS WITH OUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS. HOSPITALS, DOCTORS, NURSES, NURSING HOMES, AND COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS CANNOT SURVIVE IF WE TREAT THEM UNFAIRLY. MASSACHUSETTS CANNOT AFFORD TO RISK ITS POSITION OF

PREEMINENCE IN HEALTH CARE NOR CAN IT AFFORD TO LOSE THE VALUABLE BOOST THAT OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEM GIVES TO OUR ECONOMY.

WHILE IN THE MIDST OF THIS CRISIS, I ASK FOR YOUR PRAYERS. OUR PRESIDENT, OUR GOVERNOR, AND ALL OF OUR LEGISLATORS WILL NEED YOUR PRAYERS, YOUR PATIENCE, AND YOUR UNDERSTANDING.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING AND GOOD NIGHT.