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## ***From the Desk of Senator Benjamin B. Downing***

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April 12, 2007

Dear Friend:

Today marks my 100<sup>th</sup> day in office as your elected representative to the Massachusetts Senate. It has been an eventful three months, and everyday I am reminded of how great a privilege it is to be here on Beacon Hill working on behalf of the residents of the 48 western Massachusetts cities and towns which make up the Berkshire, Hampshire and Franklin Senate District.

To commemorate this 100<sup>th</sup> day of my term in the Senate, I have put together some thoughts on the highlights of my tenure, to date.

### **[Convened a Strategy Session with Policymakers on the Expansion of Broadband Services to Un-served and Under-served Western Massachusetts Communities](#)**

A cornerstone of my campaign was the promise to make expansion of broadband into western Massachusetts a reality. Over 1/3 of western Massachusetts has no broadband connectivity and the rest of the region has sub-par service. This digital divide slows or deters economic development, threatens public safety & health, and restricts creativity in the classroom. As promised, I am working to expand and improve our telecomm infrastructure to meet our communities' needs and help our entire region move forward together.

To this end on March 7<sup>th</sup> I hosted a meeting of Executive Branch and legislative officials to discuss the expansion of broadband services. Joined by the Governor's point person for broadband services, representatives of the office of the Secretary of Housing and Economic Development, the Mass. Technology Collaborative, and 6 of my legislative colleagues, including Senator Rosenberg, Representatives Guyer, Pignatelli, Kulik, and staff from the offices of Senator Knapik and Representative Bosley, an important dialogue began. I am confident we will continue to work together as a coalition to achieve our goal. Our collaboration will lay the groundwork for a working and adaptable network.

### **[Developed a Legislative Agenda](#)**

I have drafted and filed three bills to date, focusing on taxpayer protection, civil service examination regulations for hopeful municipal police officers, and to investigate and plan for the recruitment and retention of college graduates and skilled workers for the Massachusetts workforce. Further, I have co-sponsored an additional 42 legislative proposals with my colleagues, an impressive slate of

initiatives focusing on strengthening economic development across Massachusetts, promoting excellence in all levels of education, the protection of our precious environmental resources, improving access to health care for all residents, revitalizing our communities through homeownership, promoting smart municipal zoning and land use, mandating that the Commonwealth financially divest from all financial interests in Sudan, as well as various improvements and initiatives dealing with consumer and worker protection, public safety and transportation.

As the public hearing season gets underway, I will be tracking these bills and actively advocating for their passage. If you would like more information on my legislative agenda or if you wish to share an idea regarding legislation that you would like to see filed, please contact my State House office.

### **Garnered Key Leadership Appointments**

Former President Travaglini honored me with three key leadership appointments during my first weeks as Senator. These appointments allow me to participate in policy-making decisions with local, state and national impacts:

- **Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Public Service.** This Committee has jurisdiction over all matters concerning salaries, civil service and retirement of public employees (including the retirement of judges, court personnel and county employees but excluding the salaries of said judges, court personnel and county employees), collective bargaining for state employees and other public employees.
- **Governor's Local Government Advisory Commission.** As one of three Senators on the Commission, I serve a one-year term, during which I will meet monthly with the Governor and Lt. Governor and consider and make recommendations on policy germane to municipal government.
- **National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) Agriculture, Environment and Energy Committee.** My role on this Committee during 2007-2008 is to provide the unique perspective of the Massachusetts Senate to this national body. The committee addresses issues and educates Congress and federal agencies on concerns regarding legislation, regulations and policies on agriculture, rural development, natural resources and energy.
- **Other Committee and Leadership Posts.** In addition to my Committee Chairmanship, I have been appointed as Vice-Chair of the Senate Committee on Third Reading, and as a member of the Joint Committees on Financial Services, Veterans and Federal Affairs, Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure, and the Senate Committee on Post Audit and Oversight. Closer to home, I have assumed the role as Co-chair of the Leadership Council for the Berkshire County Commission to End Homelessness.

### **Launched a Community Forum Series**

Communication is everything – now that I am serving in office, I wanted to be sure to stay in touch with my constituents. In March, I hosted two community forums, in Great Barrington and Williamsburg, with my House colleagues Representatives Smitty Pignatelli and Steve Kulik. These events were open to all and meant to provide everyone with a chance to share their ideas, concerns, priorities, etc. with their local legislators. I found the forums to be incredibly helpful and positive, and an effective way to keep in touch with what is important to the residents of western Mass. A third forum has been scheduled for Northern Berkshire County – join me and Representative Dan Bosley on April 20<sup>th</sup> from 7 to 8PM at the MCLA Campus Center, Sullivan Lounge.

### **Supported a Joint House and Senate Resolution Increasing Chapter 70 Local Aid for Municipalities and School Districts by \$220 Million**

On April 4 the Senate and House voted to endorse a Joint Resolution outlining the distribution of FY 2008 Ch. 70 (education) local aid. This Joint Resolution increases aid over FY 2007 levels by \$220,591,441. Statewide, every community and school district will receive more Ch. 70 funding this year than they did last year. It represents significant commitment to the Five Year Plan adopted by the House and Senate in FY 2007, which states that by FY 2011 every school district will be

accountable for only the “target” figure which represents the cost of educating its students. Having this Resolution in place by early April is key for municipal and regional school district leaders, who can now proceed with their budgeting plans – using *real* numbers for state aid, and not having to rely upon proposals or estimates. In years past, local officials did not have the benefit of actual figures until the state budget was completed, which usually does not happen until June.

### **Established a Local Art Exhibition Program**

Having moved into new office suites in the State House and at 20 Bank Row in Pittsfield, I wanted to fill the spaces with works of local artists. As such, I began a Local Art Exhibition Program, hoping to help propel the success of local artists and celebrate the thriving artistry in Berkshire, Hampshire and Franklin Counties. Everyone is welcome to drop in and enjoy these works of art during business hours. It is a pleasure to be able to provide a place to showcase this local talent and increase artists’ exposure. To date three incredibly talented Berkshire County artists - Joan Ciolifi, Douglas Truth, and John Stitch - have participated in my Exhibition Program.

### **Participated in the Election of Two Senate Presidents**

I was sworn in on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, taking part in the Inaugural Celebration of the 185<sup>th</sup> Biennium of the General Court. On this day, I joined my colleagues in re-electing Senator Robert Travaglini (D – East Boston) as Senate President. President Travaglini resigned from his seat on March 21<sup>st</sup> to pursue a career in the private sector, allowing the Senate to again make history. My colleagues and I unanimously elected Senator Therese Murray (D – Plymouth) to lead our chamber as Senate President. President Murray is the first female in the history of the Commonwealth to lead a legislative body.

### **Stay Involved – Keep in Touch!**

If you are interested in state politics – use my office as a vehicle to stay involved. Keep up with current affairs – watch for my quarterly newsletters and visit my website ([www.bendowning.org](http://www.bendowning.org)) regularly for updates on what I am doing and for more on the latest action on Beacon Hill. Want to be even more active? I have internship opportunities available in both my Pittsfield and Boston offices; contact my chief of staff for more information. Remember, never hesitate to share your ideas, questions or concerns with me, I find it extremely helpful when I hear from my constituents about what is important to them. Lastly, if you ever find yourself in a situation where you think I can be of assistance – navigating through state bureaucratic systems is sometimes easier when you have a legislative sponsor – call my offices at (413) 442-4008 or (617) 722-1625. I am posed and at the ready to be of assistance.

Thank you for your support - here’s to the next 100 days!



**BENJAMIN B. DOWNING**, *Senator*  
*Berkshire, Hampshire & Franklin District*