

**ADDRESS BY SENATOR STANLEY ROSENBERG
AT THE
621ST REGULAR MEETING OF THE FACULTY SENATE
SEPTEMBER 18, 2003**

Good afternoon everyone. I had hoped to be here at the end of the last semester, but the budget process and situation prevented me from doing so, but it turns out that the Senate, which had hoped to be in a full formal session today did not occur. I had the opportunity to zip out here and I appreciate the fact that there was still room on the agenda for me to come and chat with you a little bit. As usual, I will provide some information that I hope will be useful to you and then I would be happy to entertain comments and questions, if that is the desire of the group.

I don't have to tell anybody how ugly the budget process was last year. We ended up in a very disappointing situation where the Commonwealth ended up cutting out \$2 billion out of the state budget and every part of state government took cuts and they were pretty disastrous in many areas. Very, very disappointing for us was the fact that, not only did we have to deal with the potential for budget cuts, but we also had to deal with what turned out to be a very ugly debate that was really predicated principally on politics and not on substance and rational thinking about the future of the public higher education system. We suffered a little bit more than an 18% cut for the University which was really quite shocking, not only because it's a large number, but because it was larger than the cut that the state colleges and the community colleges sustained. They sustained just over a 13% cut. The story as I am told – I am not a member of the House, so I wasn't on the floor during all of the process – was when they decided to handle the amendments, they decided they were going to do them in batches by broad subject matter and they ended up corralling huge numbers of legislators and state representatives who were interested in that broad category, in this case education, arts and a few other things and they corralled them in a room and had these debates behind closed doors about what amendments should be accepted, why and the size of them. Then, after everybody got their say, the chair of the Ways and Means Committee on the House side, Mr. Rogers, would go off, come back with an amendment and say this is the amendment I intend to put on the floor. At that point, you were either in or out and it was basically take it or leave it because they were then going to fight to insure that that was the version of the amendment for that category to get approved. I am told that when it came to education, they had a very short discussion. Not everybody was in the room who should have been and then they came up with the amendment and they pushed it through. What they did was take \$25 million of the \$30 million set aside in the House Ways and Means Committee version of the budget intended for performance rewards. In other words, you do good and we're going to give you some extra money. They took \$25 million of the \$30 million and they divided it among the state and community colleges and not a penny for the University. When asked why they did that, they said first of all, the University could compete for part of the \$5 million that was still at the Board of Higher Ed and, besides, the Senate would take care of the problem anyway because they always take care of the University.

The Senate budget came out with a cut not as deep as the House and the whole system was treated equally. Community, state colleges and the University all got the same treatment and, when it went into the Conference Committee, I am told what ended up happening was they did the healthcare stuff first. When they finished healthcare, there was no money left, so they went to the low number in every single case and it didn't matter which branch had the low number. If the House had the low number, that was the number that agency got. If the Senate had the low number, that was the number the agency got, so we ended up going into conference with a lower number, that is a smaller cut for the community and state colleges and a larger cut for the University. In the Conference Committee where you would have thought they would have worked out the problem because it was inequitable, they said there was no money and they couldn't do it. We have been pushing ever since to try to get a supplemental appropriation to close that gap between the 13 and the 18% cut, that is worth \$26 million. The negotiations are ongoing with regard to a supplemental budget and I am still hopeful, but it "ain't done until it's done" and, if we succeed, it will be the first time in anybody's memory that we've ever gotten a supplemental appropriation for the University for general operating expenses and so it would be quite a happy day for us, although in truth, we're simply reducing the size of a very substantial cut.

There is the other side of the coin in this whole picture I consider to have been quite good news for us. Some of you puzzled about why I was fighting so hard for the Board of Higher Education and why I was fighting so hard about a UMass President's Office and why I was fighting so hard on all of these structural and organizational issues. The reason, very simply, is because it does not matter how you organize the public higher education system. What matters is how much money and who pays. Every eight to ten years in Massachusetts, we go through the same song and dance. We go through a fiscal crisis. There's a downturn. It is claimed that the public higher education system is overfunded, inefficient, students are paying too little, campuses are fat and lazy and the structure is inefficient, so it's time to reorganize. So then, we reorganize. That is the cover that is used while they cut the heart out of your budget and while student charges climb through the roof. The last time this happened, I was in the legislature as a member of the House and I was a relatively junior member. I did the best I could in dealing with these issues, but this time, I'm in the Senate. I'm a relatively senior member and I said I am not going to stand by and let this charade play itself out again. I was able to convince the Senate President that we put a little working group together. I was able to convince that working group that this was all a charade and that they had all the tools they needed in existing state law, we may have to tweak a little bit here and there and that we should not let them get away with accusing the public higher education system and the faculty and the staff of being lazy, inefficient and ineffective and on and on and on because as a matter of a provable, demonstrable fact, the public higher education system in this state improved dramatically over the last decade and there are just so many measures of that and they ignored all of that. They went in there and pretended they knew what they were talking about, like they knew what they were doing and, in fact, they absolutely did not. An example of that was a television show that I saw with my own two eyes of our Lieutenant Governor sitting on a Boston television station saying "You know, we've got to set the Amherst campus free so we can strengthen the flagship campuses, Amherst, Lowell and Dartmouth." So, here is a new administration with absolutely no background in public higher education, no knowledge of this system, a brand new administration faced with a dramatically terrible fiscal situation granted and they just started flailing left and right and just grabbing things and speaking as though it were the truth and gospel and nobody was questioning it other than a handful of us in the Senate. I am happy to report, happy from my point of view and I hope from your point of view, that we did not blow up the Board of Higher Education; we did not blow up the President's Office; we did not merge and close community college campuses; we didn't do all of those things that they proposed to do for which there was no basis in reality and no good would have come from it. I've been around the public higher education system long enough to have learned a few truths and one of the truths is that the best campuses and the best systems have strong boards of trustees, strong local leaders and some form of central administration that coordinates but keeps their hands off of most of the policies and most of the day-to-day stuff. One of the other things that I have learned is it doesn't matter in what institution you sit, everybody above you is totally unnecessary and you do not want them there. So, if you are a campus of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, you want no President's Office. If you are a President's Office, you want no Board of Higher Education and, if you're a Board of Higher Education, you want no Secretary of Education. You want independence, you want your own ability to set your own course, set your own direction and to pursue it. That was the kind of system that we were working toward. That was the kind of system that we were trying to develop by putting as much power, authority and responsibility at the lowest possible levels of the system as possible and it was actually working. It was actually starting to work and make a difference and I consider it an enormous success that we did not allow them to cloud the fact that they were cutting the heart out of our budget affecting the lives of so many students by driving up tuition and fees by allowing them to have not only a free run in the media, but a free run in the legislature. We beat back every one of those silly proposals that would have done absolutely nothing.