

village view

by Andrea Leonard

At a recent gathering someone asked some questions crying for answers. One question: "Why do newspapers devote four or five pages to sports, but only limited space to what happens in Washington or on Beacon Hill?"

There are obvious answers to this one, of course; people are more interested in the outcome of a ball game, tennis match, or golf tournament than in following the long torturous progress of bills making their way through Congress or the State Legislature.

For one thing, games are concluded in a matter of hours, but bills take weeks, sometimes months, to reach final disposition. And often a bill in which a particular group of people has a vital interest fails to pass; then if it's ever to pass, it must be brought up again and go through the same labyrinth a second or third time.

People become discouraged, bored; their attention is distracted, interest flags. It's not difficult to whip up short-term enthusiasm for a good and just cause, but it's almost impossible to sustain it over months and years unless people feel their personal safety is actually threatened.

People will endure severe hardship, loss of loved ones, physical, emotional and financial pain and injury, even death, in time of war. But they are apathetic about what lawmakers do because it takes so long to accomplish anything. The action is far removed from their private lives, and the results of legislative action are seen and felt only after it's too late to take effective corrective action without resorting to exhaustive expense in time and money.

Another good question was asked: "Why don't newspapers occasionally report a condensation of action taken on various bills?"

Newspapers, like other media, poll their readership to determine what news appeals, what the people want to read about, and what makes newspapers sell. Newspapering is a business like any other; unless it provides what its customers want, circulation drops. When that happens, advertising falls off. And advertising pays for publishing newspapers.

Suppose you were to turn each week to Village View and find it devoted primarily to reporting the disposition of bills and regulations before the State Legislature. After a few weeks, would you continue to read the column?

Let's see: there follows a report on final disposition of several bills to come before the legislature over the past several months. How concerned are you, even in the ones that could affect you?

Senate Bill 720, Subject: **Mortgage Foreclosure**. NO ACTION. This could be a very important piece of legislation. It could affect everyone in the Commonwealth who has a home mortgage. How many of us even know what it's all about?

Take Senate Bill 1286, Subject: **DCA Administered Rental Assistance**. It's ended its life in the House Ways and Means. This bill, if passed someday, will cost money. Do you care? How much money? Do you have an opinion about whether it should become a law?

Consider Senate Bill 1505, Subject: **Homestead Protection**. House Ways and Means. This bill could protect the elderly from confiscation of residential property should their finances be exhausted. It could also encourage disbursement of personal estates to escape expenses of caring for elderly people privately.

There's House Bill 107, Subject: **Indian Housing Authori-**

ty. Adverse Report Accepted. An educated guess would be that this bill attempted to establish a separate Authority to provide housing (at public expense) for the Indian population. But that's only my guess.

We have House Bill 1305: **Homeowner's Tax Credit**. It's now LAW. What's this? Sounds good, but we won't know until the tax forms come out next winter. We may not know then.

House Bill 3433, Subject: **Expand Elder Eligibility**. Died On The Senate Floor. Should it have?

House Bill 4828, Subject: **Limit Landlord Entry**, became LAW. Maybe if you're a landlord, you've followed this bill. If you're a tenant, it could be important to you, if you know about it.

Senate Bill 586 got as far as a second reading in the Senate and concerned **Hospital Bill Collection**. Then came adjournment. Next year it will come up again. Could you be affected? You bet you could.

House Bill 1769, Subject: **Hospital's Indigent Care** reached the House Ways and Means. Someday it might matter to you.

There was a bill, Senate 620, having to do with **Adoption**; it actually got all the way to the Governor's desk where it was vetoed. Why? What was that all about?

Several bills, House 1309, House 3624, Senate 387, House 10, House 1365, and House 2774 concerned lead paint. Only one, House 5452, Subject: **Lead Paint Exemptions**, became LAW. Does it matter?

A bill to **Improve Medicaid Administration** (House 176) reached the House Ways and Means Committee. Try again next year.

Of two bills dealing with **Battered Women**, one for a hotline ended up in the Senate Ways and Means; the other, providing disaster relief, went to a third reading in the Senate. It never reached the Governor's desk.

There were numerous bills considered that have to do with children and youth. Senate 446: **Children's Rights**; Senate 448: **Foster Parent Training**, Senate 451, **Day Care Sliding Fee**, Senate 456: **Child and Family Rights**, and Senate 523, **Foster Care Review**; all of these were under consideration by the Senate Ways and Means Committee at adjournment. Senate 692: **Maximum Sentencing** was still awaiting action by the House Ways and Means at the end of the session.

House Bill 1552: **Right To Counsel** became LAW. This deals with children's right to counsel when brought before the court.

Another House Bill, 2023, **Department of Social Services**, is also now LAW. Another guess: we have one more state department to support. Maybe we need it. Who knows?

In the field of economic development and jobs, four laws were enacted. Senate Bill 120, **Displaced Homemakers**; Senate Bill 1546, **Urban Revitalization**; House 5665: **Mass. Industrial Finance Agency**; House 5674, **Technology Development Corporation**, and House 5681, **Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation** are now LAW. In what ways will these new laws touch the average voter and his pocketbook?

Senate 1445, **Spouse Abuse**, is LAW. Senate 1479, **Correctional Legal Service Comm.** is LAW. House 912, **Publish Tax Delinquents** is LAW. House 1781, **Pregnancy Maintenance** is LAW, and House 6054, **Classification** is LAW.

These are only a very few of the bills considered by the Massachusetts House and Senate in the session recently adjourned. What do most of us know about these bills and how their passage will change our lives?

And what do we care? Do we care? Should we care?

Copies of any or all of the new laws are available to us. Just write your senator or representative; he'll see you get copies of those you ask to receive. Another question: How many will care enough to find out anything about them?

And another: How many Village View readers have completed this column? And a last one: If newspapers printed reports like this from time to time, would you read them instead of the sports pages?