

Dukakis pitches sentencing reform

BOSTON (AP) — Gov. Michael S. Dukakis urged lawmakers yesterday to support his plan to provide a more uniform prison sentencing system, a measure that the Legislature has rejected for the past four years.

"We must send a clear message that violent criminal acts are going to be prosecuted firmly and fairly. And we must make it equally clear that those convicted of committing violent acts will go to prison," Dukakis told the Criminal Justice Committee.

"The piece that is missing from our system is one that lets criminals, victims and the public know what kind of sentence can be expected for a given crime and how much time a violent offender will have to serve on that sentence," he said.

Under the administration's "truth in sentencing" bill, judges would be given strict guidelines to follow for specific crimes. But the governor said judges' discretion would be preserved by a section that allows sentences beyond the measure's limits with a written opinion outlining the judge's reason for the unusual sentence.

Dukakis said he saw in his time as a practicing attorney that criminals with high-paid lawyers invariably received lighter sentences than the poor and minorities.

"The notion that the presumptive sentencing system would disadvantage the poor and the under-

privileged ... is preposterous. It's the present system that does that," the three-term governor said.

Dukakis, responding to worries that the measure would further add to the state's prison overcrowding problem, said plans to provide new prison space has solved that problem.

But former state Sen. Jack Backman attacked the measure. "This prison enhancement nonsense will fill our already overcrowded jails even further," the Brookline Democrat said.

Superior Court Judge Roger Donahue expressed reservations about the bill, saying it could result in "more people in jail for less time" and worried that the state's prison system could not handle the added prisoners.

Dukakis said his measure would eliminate the "Concord sentence," which he described as an outdated sentencing structure that allows a convict sentenced to 20 years to be released in two years "no matter how heinous the crime."

The governor said other states with similar laws, like North Carolina, have had success. He said the law has not caused an increase in plea bargaining and other problems critics have said would result from the statute.

Dukakis' aide James Dorsey said the governor has filed the measure every year since his return to office in 1983.

Reforms sought on insurance

By GLENN A. BRIERE
Statehouse bureau chief

BOSTON — State Sen. Linda J. Melconian, D-Springfield, sought support yesterday for a comprehensive auto insurance reform bill which is designed to end what she calls the subsidization of Boston area insurance rates by Western Massachusetts motorists.

Melconian, Senate chairman of the Legislature's Insurance Committee, relinquished the chair to appear before her committee to testify in support of the five-point measure.

"The time has come for those who have had their auto insurance premiums subsidized to begin to pay their own share," she said.

"For too long, the majority of Massachusetts auto insurance consumers have borne the financial burden of a system that is inequitable, piecemeal and on the verge of collapse."

Melconian said the fact that state Insurance Commissioner Peter Hiam has not yet announced



SEN. LINDA J. MELCONIAN

the 1987 auto insurance rates is an indication that the system is "totally out of control."

Her legislation seeks to eliminate all cross-subsidization of automobile insurance premiums from one part of the state to the other, and would end the subsidization of the base rate which is "flattened" across Massachusetts to keep compulsory rates in the Boston area from skyrocketing.

The measure would also require an independent study of accident claims for the past five years, establish a safety repair board to scrutinize auto body repair shops and institute a five-year pilot program of competitive rate-setting for optional coverages.

State water authority drops permit appeal

BOSTON (AP) — The board of the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority voted unanimously yesterday to drop a legal appeal of a federal water discharge permit, clearing a potentially troublesome hurdle to the cleanup of Boston Harbor.

"I am very pleased that we're in a position now to move forward," James Hoyte, the state environmental affairs secretary and chairman of the MWRA board, said immediately after the vote.

"This is indeed a happy day for the harbor," added Michael Deland, the regional administrator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "I'm delighted that the appeal is behind us and we can get on with the joint effort to clean the harbor."

The authority, which provides most of greater Boston with drinking water and sewer services, is embarked on a vast construction project that will cost at least \$2.5 billion over the next decade to stop the discharge of raw and partially treated sewage into the har-

bor and its tributaries. Deland, who is not part of the MWRA, appeared at the authority's headquarters overlooking the long-polluted harbor just after the board vote in order to join Hoyte in a public show of common purpose.

As the official in charge of enforcing the federal Clean Water Act, Deland has been at odds with the MWRA management over the terms of the authority's permit to discharge treated sewage into the harbor.

The discharge permit issued by EPA, in cooperation with the state Department of Environmental Quality Engineering, threatened to expose the MWRA to enormous fines because the existing pollution placed the authority instantly in violation of federal standards.

MWRA executive director Michael Gritzuk initially decided to fight the terms of the permit in court, but said yesterday he was comfortable with the board's decision to forego an appeal.

Low-number plate returned

BOSTON (AP) — Officials at the Registry of Motor Vehicles returned a coveted low-numbered license plate to a Needham lawyer and his wife after the couple sued for return of No. 62.

Thomas Giblin, who was handed back the plate Tuesday outside Suffolk Superior courtroom, had charged that his civil rights were violated when a public-safety official appeared at his home and took the plate.

Gov. Michael S. Dukakis ordered the plate seized two months ago after learning that Registrar Alan Mackey, with permission of Public Safety Secretary Charles Barry, gave the plate to the Giblins, who are friends of House Speaker Geroge Keverian.

Dukakis banned such distribution of plates in 1983. Dukakis aides declined to comment on the return of the plate.

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