

Mariano: Session Deadline Exposes What's Realistic, Impossible

Speaker Ready To Compromise To Get Bills Enacted

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BOSTON, MAY 26, 2022.....With the end of the legislative session within sight, House Speaker Ronald Mariano pitched business leaders Thursday on the central pieces of the agenda he hopes to successfully wrap up by the end of July and called on them to help develop ideas to address child care needs next session.

In remarks that reflected on two years of working through and against a global pandemic, Mariano told the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce that he wants to bring the same "spirit of collaboration and shared purpose" to legislative talks on offshore wind, sports betting, health care policy, early education investments, cannabis industry reforms and more before the July 31 end of formal sessions.

"Anyone who's been involved with the Legislature knows that we operate best up against deadlines because it forces people to take a realistic view of their position," he said. "And my hope is that the conference committees that we have going that are very, very important to me personally and to the House as their priorities -- and that's the offshore wind and the gaming piece -- we can resolve those conference committee issues, let's say, before July 31 and begin to start to tackle some other things that we have that might be a little bit less confrontational."

Many items on the end-of-session agenda are [already in the hopper](#). Conference committees are assembled to hash out the House and Senate differences on offshore wind and climate policy, election reforms, sports betting legalization, and changes to the state's soldiers' homes. Reforms to the state's cannabis industry are also due to be

worked into a compromise bill and Mariano said Thursday that the House has a mental health bill in the works "that we think will go to conference."

And with the Senate expected to wrap up its debate on a nearly \$50 billion state budget for fiscal 2023 later Thursday, a budget conference committee is not far behind either. Both branches have packed their budget bills with earmarks and policy changes.

In his remarks Thursday, Mariano indicated that he's more interested in getting bills to the governor's desk than he is in getting all of the House's priorities into the final product.

"I've often stressed the importance of never letting perfection be the enemy of the good. Those of you in this room who have worked with us on Beacon Hill know that politics, more than anything, is the state of the art of what's possible. During my time in the House, I have seen too many good pieces of legislation fail because of a willingness to abandon any progress when one side didn't get exactly what they sought," the speaker said. "Since my inauguration, my goal as speaker has been to facilitate discussions that get us past entrenched positions and towards workable legislation that can be signed into law and stand the test of time."

But the speaker on Thursday also threw some shade at the Senate and particularly at the chamber's approach to sports betting. The Senate's betting bill would not allow wagers on collegiate sports and includes far more restrictions on advertising and promotions than the House bill.

"It's hard for me to figure out what the purpose of the Senate bill is," he said, pointing specifically to its prohibition on college betting.

Mariano said the two events that are bet on the most are the NCAA basketball tournament each March and college football bowl games and that the Senate's approach would allow the illicit betting market to continue to thrive in those areas.

"The Senate bill is a paternalistic bill, it has all these anti-gaming protections so you don't get hooked on gaming. But you leave those two things to the black market. There's no bookie I know that'll check you into a rehab to help you beat a gaming addiction," the speaker said. "To take the two biggest betting events out and say, 'we're not gonna deal with those' so anyone who's betting in there is going to get no help for any addiction issues they have, I think makes no sense."

Mariano spoke to the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce at an uncertain time for the state's outlook. On one hand, tax revenues keep overwhelming expectations and the COVID-19 pandemic is being held mostly in check while federal aid begins to surge through the economy.

But on the other hand, inflation is making it harder for everyone to buy the things they need for daily life and the good economic numbers are not translating into a sense of comfort among workers. And talk of a potential recession next year has picked up considerably in recent weeks, with a recent Boston Globe headline declaring it would be a miracle if a downturn is avoided.

And many businesses are on guard as legislative Democrats keep their cards close to their chests when it comes to tax relief and as the effort to convince voters to approve a new 4 percent surtax on annual household income above \$1 million gears up. The business community has long resisted the so-called millionaire's tax and has warned that it will irreparably harm the state's business ecosystem.

But Mariano used his remarks to the chamber Thursday to call on the business community to partner with lawmakers to address the state's needs and to engage in good-faith talks on policy matters.

"Many of the goals that I outlined this morning, and many of the goals that you all have for your businesses, will struggle to come to fruition if the public and private sectors work against each other, rather than with each other," the speaker said at the Westin Waterfront. "This doesn't mean that we always have to agree, but it does mean that our

mutual success, and the success of the commonwealth, hinges on our ability to converse with an open mind."

Talking about one of his priorities for this session, expanding access to and improving the quality of early childhood education and care, Mariano made a specific request of the business leaders who picked at pastries and fresh fruit while he spoke Thursday.

"I'm calling on businesses across the commonwealth to come together and present the House with a proposal for debate in the next legislative session to require companies of a certain size to provide child care resources to your employees," Mariano said. Though he acknowledged that "this isn't a complete fix," the speaker added, "The time is now for business leaders to join with the Legislature and help solve this issue once and for all."