



State Representative

SCOTT PETRI

178th District

Fall 2011

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to provide you with this update on legislative activities. I hope you find this information helpful. As always, I look forward to hearing your thoughts and comments.

As your state legislator, it is my duty to keep you informed on legislation and other activities in state government that affect you. I do this through email, my website, occasional telephone town halls, public meetings and this newsletter. With printing and postage, my newsletter is the least cost-effective mode of communication. In order to save tax dollars, I am encouraging constituents who have computer access to consider signing up to receive my newsletters via email. If you wish to do so, simply go to **RepPetri.com** and select the box on the upper right side of the screen. You will be asked for your email information. This information will not be shared with outsiders.

As you undoubtedly know by now, Pennsylvania passed its first on-time budget in eight years. In fact, the Commonwealth ended the fiscal year on June 30, 2011, with revenues about \$700 million ahead of projections. That means that the state did not outspend its revenues for the first time in several years.

The budget process was difficult. No one wanted to make the cuts that had to be made so we could avoid the need for tax increases in a weak economy. The House Appropriations Committee, of which I am a member, modified the governor's proposed budget by shifting funding away from the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) and increasing funding for public schools. The loss of federal stimulus funding for education necessitated a \$900 million cut statewide for K-12 education. The budget restores education funding to pre-stimulus levels. The governor's budget also proposed deep

cuts for higher education. We were able to restore a substantial portion of that funding.

When my colleagues and I return to Harrisburg this month, we will be looking to reduce unfunded mandates, evaluate reimbursements to cyber charter schools, discuss and, hopefully, pass a Marcellus Shale impact fee or tax, and find efficiencies in the delivery of services. Various regulatory reforms will also be considered.

As a result of an investigation I conducted into a program included in the DPW budget, I discovered that the administrative cost to deliver services for those who qualify for subsidized child care is too high. At 9 percent, which translates to \$59 million statewide, the cost to verify eligibility and to partially administer the program wastes dollars that could be used to provide services and to reduce the waiting list for those who want to work. The department is now implementing measures to reduce these administrative costs.

This is an example of what I believe state government must do to reduce its cost. It is clear that the path of the past, where Commonwealth spending surpassed inflation, is not sustainable. With that said, community support and public-private partnerships will be important tools as we move forward in these challenging economic times.

Scott A. Petri
State Representative
178th Legislative District

We've Moved!



In an effort to cut costs, I moved my district office into a smaller site just down the street from my former Almshouse Road office. I am now located at **998 State Street Pike in Richboro**. Office hours and phone numbers have not changed, and we remain committed to providing the same high level of constituent service that you have come to expect.

Please stop by. We are on the first floor of the former Spread Eagle Inn. We look forward to assisting you!

To familiarize you with our office and the services we provide, I will be hosting an open house at my district office on **Oct. 12, from 4 to 6 p.m.**

I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks and gratitude to Brian Shotts who has left my district office to attend Drexel Law School. All the best to you Brian as you pursue your new endeavor. I would also like to take this opportunity to introduce and welcome Pat Caimano of Wrightstown to my staff. For a list of items that my district office can assist you with, please check the back of this newsletter.

For more information visit www.RepPetri.com today!

Lawmakers Consider Taxes, Fees on Natural Gas Extraction

Many of my constituents, as well as the majority of respondents in several statewide polls, have voiced their overwhelming support for a tax on natural gas extraction from the Marcellus Shale. What is believed to be the largest natural gas field in the United States and perhaps the world, represents a major boon for Pennsylvania. Not only does an extraction tax make sense, but I believe we would be remiss if we didn't take advantage of the opportunity to provide funding for environmental concerns, impacts to roads and bridges, proper support for our state parks and historical assets, and to address any environmental accidents that occur. I am in favor of both a severance tax and an impact fee as long as those taxes and fees are in line with those assessed elsewhere in the country. I am a co-sponsor and supporter of Rep. Marguerite Quinn's bill to impose an impact fee, and will do my very best to get House Bill 1700, or similar legislation, passed this fall.

I am also sponsoring a bill to raise revenue from state leases to fully fund our state parks and historical sites. My bill would create a dedicated funding source to provide for their on-going maintenance and repair.

New Law Provides Greater Transparency, Protects Taxpayers

It is incumbent on us as state lawmakers to show taxpayers how their hard-earned tax dollars are being spent. I supported legislation that was recently signed into law that will do just that. Act 18 creates PennWATCH, a comprehensive, searchable online database of state budgeting and spending information.

Within the first year, the website must contain annual appropriations and expenditure information for Commonwealth agencies, including information identifying vendors receiving payment, the amount of each expenditure and the funding source. By the end of 2013, the site is to incorporate hyperlinks to state contracts, a description of the program under which an expenditure is made and the expected outcomes of the expenditure.

The House also adopted several other reform measures that are awaiting action in the Senate, including bills to:

- Increase penalties for lobbyists who violate the state's Lobbyist Disclosure Act.
- Extend whistleblower protections to employees of nonprofits and private sector companies with state contracts who report waste of public money obtained by their employer for services or work.
- Enhance the state contracting process by allowing for public review of a contract not awarded by a competitive bid process prior to execution of the agreement and by prohibiting an employee of the administration who previously worked for a company bidding on a state contract from participating in the evaluation of that proposal.
- Prohibit lawmakers from creating nonprofit organizations that receive public funds.

Fair Share Act Curbs Frivolous Lawsuits, Boosts Job Growth

After the state budget, perhaps the most significant piece of legislation to be signed into law was a bill known as the Fair Share Act – also referred to as lawsuit abuse reform. The act restores fairness to the state's judicial system and breathes new life into our state's economy.

Until now, Pennsylvania ranked among the most hostile-to-business tax and regulatory environments in the country. That hurt our ability to attract new employers and create jobs. This new law will move our state's economy in a positive direction.

In addition to the challenges it poses for employers, the previous law also resulted in hidden "lawsuit taxes" for consumers. These included inflated insurance rates, increased health care costs, and higher prices for consumer goods.

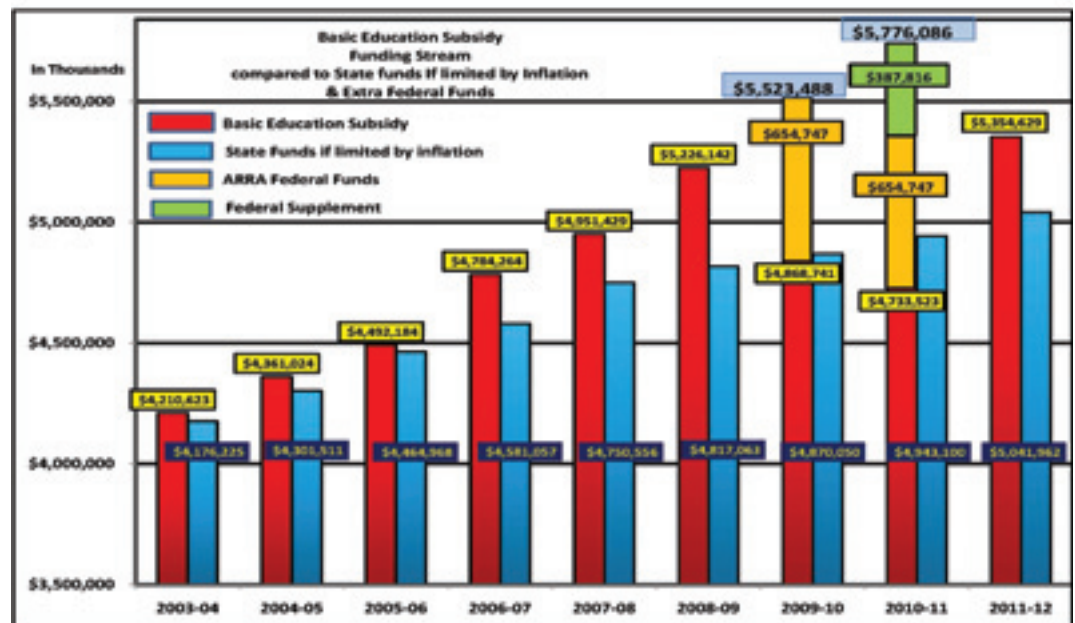
Under the Fair Share Act, defendants found less than 60 percent liable in a civil case would be responsible for only their "fair share" of damages. Previously, someone found even 10 percent liable could be forced to foot the bill for 100 percent of a jury's verdict if other responsible parties were unable to pay.

The Fair Share Act was signed into law in 2002, but was later struck down on a procedural court challenge. It passed again and was vetoed by Gov. Ed Rendell in 2005. Gov. Corbett, who had made passage of the Fair Share Act one of his highest priorities, signed the measure into law in late June.

The Fair Share Act was a long-overdue and much-needed reform of our state's legal system. It restores fairness and will strengthen our economy by reducing the burden on our employers and job creators.

Spending Spree Over; Budget Gets Back to Reality

I voted for the \$27.15 billion budget because it cuts spending by \$1 billion, it does not raise taxes or create new ones, and it contains no new borrowing. Essential programs are maintained and basic education funding has been restored to pre-stimulus levels. We restored \$100 million to the Accountability Block Grant program to provide for pre-kindergarten, full-day kindergarten and early learning support programs, and higher education funding has been increased by \$380 million over levels provided in Gov. Corbett's budget proposal. The budget legislation also created a new, independent fiscal office that will provide more stability to the budget process and, in particular, the forecast of expected state revenues.



Fortunately, state revenues improved slightly at the end of last fiscal year, enabling us to restore some of the education funding proposed to be cut in the governor's budget. Here is the state basic education funding for our local school districts:

Our school teachers waived contracted pay increases to help with budget constraints, and by doing so deserve our thanks.

	CORBETT BUDGET 2011-12	FINAL BUDGET 2011-12
CENTENNIAL	\$10,749,659	\$13,659,447
CENTRAL BUCKS	\$15,623,682	\$21,185,887
COUNCIL ROCK	\$12,698,851	\$17,636,484

For more information visit

Corbett Signs Legislation to Permit Honor Guard Burials at Washington Crossing National Cemetery



It was gratifying to see legislation I sponsored to extend full honor guard burials to veterans at Washington Crossing National Cemetery become law. My video remarks following the event are available at RepPetri.com.

Schools Need Relief from Mandates

Legislation now pending in the House would enable schools to get out from under onerous government directives and invest more of their limited resources directly toward student learning.

House Bill 1595, now pending in the House Education Committee, would give school boards the authority to seek suspension of state mandates and avoid the need to increase taxes. A school district would be required to justify any suspension of mandates and follow up with reports assessing the impact of the suspension through an open process that allows for public debate. The school board is required to pass a resolution and seek approval from the department that maintains oversight. The district must then file reports on the results of the suspended mandates. The legislation prohibits suspension of mandates pertaining to Right-to-Know and Sunshine laws, health and safety laws, election acts, due process laws, the ethics act, the state construction code, state or federal court orders, or existing contracts.

New Law Gives Taxpayers Greater Say in School Funding

In the waning hours of the budget deadline, Corbett signed into law changes to Act 1 that reduce the number of exceptions to the general rule that increases in a school budget are limited to the rate of inflation. Under the new provision, voter approval is necessary for increases above the rate of inflation except for increases associated with the change in pension contributions for existing employees and increases in special education costs.



Unemployment Compensation Benefits Extended

Act 6, which was recently signed into law, extends unemployment benefits and reforms the unemployment compensation system to control costs.

The changes in the Unemployment Compensation Reform Act require anyone receiving unemployment compensation to actively search for a job. The law also permits a person to receive severance payments up to \$17,853 before his or her unemployment benefits are affected.

These changes are expected to save the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund more than \$1 billion through 2018, but more reforms are needed to settle Pennsylvania's \$4 billion unemployment compensation debt owed to the federal government.

Bill Restores Integrity to Election Process

I co-sponsored legislation requiring voters to show photo identification before casting their election ballots. The goal of House Bill 934 is to prevent fraud, ensure the sanctity of each person's vote and restore confidence in our electoral system. The legislation passed in the House and is pending in the state Senate. Secretary of the Commonwealth, Carol Aichele, recently came out in support of the bill, citing the arrests of voter registration workers in Pittsburgh on charges of federal election fraud and the discovery of about 8,000 fraudulent voter registration forms in Philadelphia. Both cases were connected with a political action group known as ACORN.

Welfare Reforms a Good Start, More Changes Needed

Taxpayers are rightfully demanding accountability when it comes to how their hard-earned tax dollars are being spent – particularly when it comes to welfare spending.

Pennsylvania's welfare system accounts for about 40 percent of our total state budget.

Audits of the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) by Auditor General Jack Wagner revealed widespread fraud and abuse, costing taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.

A package of welfare reform bills that was recently signed into law will curb waste, fraud and abuse while ensuring that help is available for those truly in need. The Welfare Code authorizes DPW to implement changes to assistance programs to improve efficiency and prevent public assistance fraud – ensuring precious funding goes where it is most needed.

Anyone who applies for public assistance will have his or her Social Security number checked against 19 different electronic databases to determine whether the applicant is eligible to receive welfare benefits. This prevents fraud before it starts. Another significant change in the law would require drug testing for convicted felons who are applying for benefits or are already receiving them.

Additional reform measures under consideration in the House would strengthen penalties for those who commit welfare fraud; require photo identification to help ensure benefits are not misused; reduce abuse in a welfare program that transports eligible individuals to and from doctor appointments, pharmacies, methadone clinics, dialyses treatments, physical therapy and other medical appointments; and prohibit the purchase of tobacco with welfare benefit cards.

The state budget contains about \$400 million in welfare savings while protecting the needs of our most vulnerable citizens.

★ Special Awards & Citations ★

As always, we have many who serve our community and deserve our recognition. I had the pleasure of presenting citations on behalf of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives to the following organizations, groups and individuals in honor of their distinguished service, exemplary actions or achievements.

Eagle Scouts

The following attained the rank of Eagle Scout, the highest honor awarded by the Boy Scouts of America: **Kevin Bazzel**, Southampton; **Justin Lehman**, Newtown; **Derek Schlosser**, Ivyland; **Brian Stoll**, Churchville; **Jared Kozak**, Churchville; **Srikar Vegesna**, Churchville; **Christopher Shepherd**, Richboro; **Alexander Landis**, Ivyland; **Jake Meyers**, Richboro; **Daniel Bachman-Gregori**, Ivyland; **Bob Gieda**, Wrightstown; **Brett Wiley**, Holland; **Ryan Carlin**, Richboro; **Samuel Sheckman**, Holland; and **Michael Newman**, Holland.

Service Awards & Special Recognition

I presented House citations to the following individuals and organizations upon receipt of awards or recognition for exemplary service to their community and its citizens:

Central Bucks Chamber of Commerce, Burpee Fire Services Award recipients: **Amy McCallister** of Warminster; **George Rowe** of Wycombe; **Steve D'Agostino** of Huntingdon Valley; and **Raymond**

Breuninger of Holland.

Lower Bucks County Chapter of the American Red Cross, Real Heroes Award for Fire Rescue: **Northampton Township Volunteer Fire Company** and **Southampton Fire Company No. 1**. Fire Rescue Heroes: **Kenneth Moore**, **Gregory Waters**, **Robert Sutherland**, **Russell Davis**, **Steve Szymnaski**, **Thomas Richmond**, **Glenn McKenney**, **Mark Showmaker** and **Harold Card**.

The following students from the Council Rock School District were recognized for contest entries they submitted on Fire Safety in the Home, sponsored by the Chartered Property and Casualty Underwriters and the school district: **Lee Weiler**, **Julietta Lucci**, **Nick Gehringer**, **Patrick Mallon**, **Anastasiya Koziychuk**, **Diane Harris**, **Taylor Schwartz**, **Camryn Mentzer**, **Jordan Checkoff**, **Juliana Lupo**, **Kaylan Purpura** and **Karina Pugman**.

Retirements

Virginia Geyer of Holland after 40 years of distinguished service to the Northampton Township Historical

Commission; **Chief Joseph Costello**, Warwick Township Police Department after a 31-year career; and **Sgt. Jeffrey Delp** from the Upper Southampton Township Police Department after 32 years of service.

A special note of thanks to **Dot Ryan** for her service in my district office. Best wishes to her in her retirement to West Virginia.

Condolences

Doris Kennedy, Washington Crossing; **Francis Gorski**, Penns Park; **Jack Callender Jr.**, Ivyland; **Russell Darling Jr.**, Holland; **Joseph Fluehr Jr.**, Southampton; and **Master Sgt. Kenneth B. Elwell**, Holland.

Master Sgt. Kenneth B. Elwell, 33, of Holland, was killed in action in Afghanistan in July and was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery on Aug. 10, 2011. A 1997 graduate of Council Rock High School where he was an accomplished soccer player, Elwell is the son of Janice Smith Elwell and husband of Kristen Mirabella Elwell. The couple has two children.



Rep. Petri and Speaker Sam Smith presented a House citation to the **Council Rock North golf team** on winning the PIAA state golf championship.



I had the privilege of presenting a House citation to Lindsay Rheiner of Council Rock North on taking first place in the 2010 PIAA State Class AAA Girls' Individual Cross Country Championship. It gives me great pride and satisfaction to recognize Lindsay for her outstanding accomplishments as she begins her studies at the U.S. Naval Academy.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE SCOTT A. PETRI DISTRICT OFFICE SERVICES

My district office is here to help you. Services my staff and I provide include:

- Referrals to agencies to resolve state-related matters
- Assistance with PennDOT road/motor vehicle issues
- PACE and PACENET information
- Property Tax and Rent Rebate programs
- Voter registration forms and absentee ballot applications
- State tax information
- Student aid information
- State maps and state park information
- Copies of legislation
- Tours of the state Capitol

If you need help with any of the above or with any other state-related matter, please do not hesitate to call.

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