

SENATOR MIKE WAUGH



Reports

TO YORK COUNTY

Spring 2006



A Message from Senator Waugh

The last few months have been a very busy time for the General Assembly. I was proud to work with my colleagues to address a number of issues of great importance to our Commonwealth as 2005 came to a close. We enacted a comprehensive package of legislation to benefit our National Guard members, and we also established the Military Family Emergency Relief Fund to assist our soldiers who are struggling financially due to their service. In addition we passed a number of bills to protect the safety and security of Pennsylvanians, including legislation to increase the number of State Police troopers patrolling our Commonwealth.

While we accomplished a great deal at the end of 2005, there is still much work to be done. Enacting real, meaningful property tax relief is one of the General Assembly's top priorities for 2006. Both the House and Senate have passed legislation to reduce property taxes during the current Special Session, and I am confident we will reach some common ground on these proposals and deliver on our promise for property tax reform in the coming weeks.

While property tax reform is our most important issue, there are a number of other matters that deserve our attention. Issues like election reform, eminent domain, gambling reform and state spending controls are all likely to see legislative action, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to tackle these pressing issues.

As always, your opinion is important to me as we craft legislation to move Pennsylvania forward. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, concerns or to voice your opinion on these and other important issues for our Commonwealth.

Legislature Continues Work on Property Tax Reform

Governor Rendell called for a Special Session on Property Taxes in September, and the General Assembly continues its attempts to provide residents of Pennsylvania with significant property tax reform. However, there is the

ever present challenge of finding a proposal that 253 House and Senate members, as well as the Governor, can agree on.

I know many of you were hopeful that a decreased yet expanded sales tax would replace the property tax, and I realize there is the desire to have total elimination of property taxes. Unfortunately, neither of these

options seems to have the necessary support at this point, and there is great concern for making up the needed revenue, should property taxes be completely eliminated.

In February the Senate passed House Bill 39 of the Special Session. This legislation calls for a shift from property taxes to earned income taxes

Continued on page 3

Waugh Opposes Legislative Pay Raise

In the weeks following the approval of a controversial executive, legislative, and judicial pay raise, many of you called and wrote to express your opposition to and disdain for the raise passed by the General Assembly in July. I feel it important to follow up and reiterate the fact that I voted against the pay raise, and I did not accept the unvouchered expenses.

Since then of course, the pay raise has been repealed thanks to the active role that many of you took to advocate against the issue. I, too, supported the repeal because at a time when we must be working to be fiscally responsible and combat other pressing issues, it was irresponsible of the legislature to pass such a measure.



Sen. Waugh recently received the Distinguished Service Award from the PA Association of Community Bankers. L to R: Larry J. Miller, President/CEO of Peoples Bank, A Codorus Valley Co.; Frank Pinto, PACB President/CEO; Sen. Waugh; Bud Maus, Former PACB Chairman

Property Tax Reform Bill Would Expand Rebate Program for Seniors

Since seniors living on fixed incomes are hit hardest by steep property tax hikes, House Bill 39 contains a measure that would double the size of the Property Tax and Rent Rebate (PTRR) Program in 2006, increasing payments by \$147 million and adding 281,000 new participants.

While I have supported numerous

proposals for local tax reform, I voted against HB 39 for the fact I believed it did too little for Pennsylvania taxpayers, the expansion of the PTRR Program has been a priority in many of the Senate proposals, and I certainly understand the importance of providing this needed assistance to our Seniors. We cannot keep allowing those on a fixed income to lose the

homes they worked so hard to own. Therefore, as we move forward on the issue of property tax reform, I will continue working to find a balance that will provide the needed relief for our fixed-income seniors, as well as all taxpayers struggling to pay their tax bill on top of other financial obligations.

Waugh Legislation Protects Equine Industry

I was proud to sponsor legislation that was recently signed into law that supports and benefits Pennsylvania Agriculture.

The new Equine Activity Liability Act limits civil liability for injury or death that occurs in connection with equine activity. The bill protects owners from lawsuits where no party is at fault for injury or damages.

Pennsylvania was one of just six states in the nation that did not limit liability on equine activities. As a result, liability insurance rates were much higher in Pennsylvania, making it unaffordable for most small barn owners and operators. My legislation eases the burden these costs place on horse and stable owners.

Getting this legislation through the

General Assembly required the efforts of a number of individuals and equine owners who dedicated their time and efforts to the cause. The Pennsylvania Equine Council and the Pennsylvania Trial Lawyers Association deserve a great deal of credit for their assistance in drafting the compromise language in the bill and for their dedication to this vital issue for our state's equine operators.

There are expected risks in equine activity, and equine owners should not be forced to accept all of that risk. I have fought to get this legislation passed for some time, and I am relieved that this important protection for our equine owners has finally become law.

Check the Status of a Bill

If you would like to stay on top of the progress of legislation that is before the General Assembly, simply log onto www.legis.state.pa.us and use the "Find Legislation" box in the top right-hand corner of the screen.

Waugh Supports Sensible State Spending Controls

Without hesitation I supported Senate passage of two bills that would limit state government spending and set aside surpluses to reduce the Personal Income Tax.

Senate Bill 4, the Taxpayer Fairness Act, would hold state spending increases to inflation, and Senate Bill 884 would make the spending limits part of the state constitution. These bills ensure that state government will be fiscally responsible while allowing excess revenues to find their way back to where they belong – taxpayers' wallets.

This innovative approach would provide for responsible budgeting while returning surplus money to the taxpayer. A portion of any budget surplus would be set aside in the Rainy Day Fund to use in tight economic times to prevent tax increases. In addition, a portion would go into a new Taxpayer Fairness Fund to reduce the Personal Income Tax. If the Rainy Day Fund reaches a certain percentage of the General Fund, then any additional surplus would go to the Taxpayer Fairness Fund to be returned to taxpayers.

Thirty states have spending controls and/or revenue controls to protect their taxpayers. Pennsylvania is in the minority of states which have no such taxpayer protections, but I am confident that we can see these two bills signed into law in the near future to ensure greater fiscal responsibility in state government.



At the Farm Show, Sen. Waugh looks on as Governor Rendell signs Senate Bill 618, legislation Sen. Waugh sponsored to protect the state's equine industry.

Constituent Letters

With the advent of technology it is easy to send a message with a simple click of a button, which many of you choose as your primary means of communication. However, we have always tried to protect your privacy by having a policy of only responding to constituent letters and e-mails via a letter sent through the U.S. postal service. I realize some of you may expect a quicker response, but please understand that at this point I will continue responding to your communications in this manner.

Legislative Package Benefits National Guard Members

The men and women serving in the Pennsylvania National Guard deserve our deepest thanks for their service. Pennsylvania has more Guard members deployed than any other state, and we cannot take their service for granted.

The General Assembly has passed several bills that have been signed into law to honor the service and sacrifice of our National Guard members. I was proud to support House Bill 875, legislation that provides for the payment of death benefits to the surviving spouse or children or parents of National Guard members killed in the performance of their duties.

I also supported Senate Bill 869, which extends eligibility for health coverage for deployed soldiers who are full time students and return to school following active duty. Many Guard members lose their eligibility for coverage under their parents' health insurance programs when they are called to duty. This legislation would extend eligibility to students for the period of their active duty deployment.

To benefit the many Guard members who are also pursuing higher education, the General Assembly

passed legislation that will provide access to student aid while Guard members complete their studies. Senate Bill 358 allows National Guard members participating in the Educational Assistance Program additional time to complete their education if called to active duty.

In addition to these important bills, the General Assembly also passed House Bill 1261, which mandates that PA National Guard members who are returning from active

duty may not be penalized for renewing or reinstating vehicle insurance coverage, and House Bill 1069, which adds an additional 15 days of annual paid leave for PA National Guard members who are employed by the Commonwealth.

I am very pleased that we've been able to help our Guard members with these important pieces of legislation, and I look forward to finding new opportunities to help them in the future.

Property Tax Reform

Continued from page 1

and implements a backend referendum to allow voters to play a role in the future of property tax increases. HB 39 would give school districts the option to increase their Earned Income Tax (EIT) rate in exchange for a reduction in their property taxes. Districts that do not elect to do so would be required to place a referendum question on the 2007 ballot to allow taxpayers to authorize such an increase.

Personally, I have continued to actively support significant property tax reform for the residents of Pennsylvania. And although I believe the Senate-approved plan contained in HB 39 is a good start, I voted against it because I did not believe it went far enough to provide the significant relief Pennsylvanians need and deserve. However, I am hopeful that we will soon be able to send a meaningful property tax reform bill to the Governor for his signature.

Waugh Supports Legislation Protecting Property Rights

In June, the U.S. Supreme Court made a controversial ruling that allows governments to seize personal property to make room for private economic development projects. While this ruling severely limits the property rights of private citizens, the Supreme Court did give states the authority to pass laws providing greater protection in eminent domain disputes.

The General Assembly has since taken the steps to protect Pennsylvania property owners from having their property taken from them. Legislation has been introduced in both the state Senate and House that would preserve the rights of cities to revitalize blighted neighborhoods, but would prohibit the use of eminent domain for private businesses. Areas within the 28th District certainly need to retain their rights to take blighted properties in order to improve conditions of their towns and cities, and I believe the legislation before the General Assembly strikes the right balance between the property rights of citizens and the economic development interests of their communities.

Senate Bill 881 is one such piece of legislation, of which I am a co-sponsor. At this point it has proceeded through the Senate and is before the House awaiting final consideration.

House Bill 2054 has also garnered the support of the House and is currently before the Senate. Both the Senate and House legislation have received wide bipartisan support.



Sen. Waugh, who serves as Chairman of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, held several public hearings over the summer to review and further develop the Farmers First Agenda, a comprehensive package of legislation to promote Pennsylvania's #1 industry – Agriculture.

Grant Program Benefits Volunteer Firefighters, Ambulance Services

Pennsylvania is the birthplace of the volunteer fire service in North America. Since 1736, when Ben Franklin founded the Union Fire Company in Pennsylvania, our firefighters and emergency services personnel have provided a vital service to our communities. Today we are fortunate to have the services of about 2,500 departments with more than 73,000 volunteer firefighters.

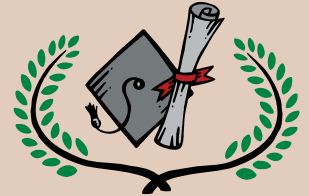
However, many of these volunteer organizations face substantial financial pressures. To provide support to our volunteer firefighters and ambulance services, I was proud to support House Bill 599, legislation that provides \$25 million for the Volunteer Fire Company and the Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Act for the current fiscal year.

These grants would be used to improve and enhance the capabilities of volunteer fire companies and ambulance services across the Commonwealth. Under the program, grants can be used for construction and renovation of facilities, the repair or purchase of equipment for firefighting, ambulance or rescue services, debt reduction, and training and certification of members.

The grant program received strong support from both the Senate and House last year, but the funding was not included as part of the budget for Fiscal Year 2005-06 that was enacted last July. I am very pleased this important grant program is part of the proposed 2006-07 budget. More importantly, we are establishing the funding for this year through HB 599 so the

Commonwealth can also offer these grants to our emergency responders this year.

Whether they are fighting fires or responding to traffic accidents, these men and women are there when we need them. This grant program is an important way to show our volunteers that the people of Pennsylvania appreciate their efforts and their service.



Attention College-Bound Students

As spring approaches, I am sure the excitement of going to college is growing, and PHEAA – Pennsylvania's Higher Education Assistance Agency is there to help! Be sure to check out their website at: www.pheaa.org.



Sen. Waugh hosted West York businessman Roy Wescher and several exchange students from York, Dauphin and Lancaster County schools during a visit to the Capitol in November.

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