

STATE SENATOR ROB WONDERLING

Reports



TO THE 24TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT

SUMMER 2006

Wonderling Targets Meth Production

The production and use of methamphetamine is a growing problem across the Commonwealth. To stop the production of this deadly drug, I

joined with several of my colleagues in the Senate to pass the Pennsylvania Combat Meth Initiative, a comprehensive package of legislation to attack the problem from all angles.

One of the reasons why the drug is growing in popularity is because pseudoephedrine, one of the main ingredients used to “cook” the drug, can be found in many over-the-counter cold medicines.

I sponsored legislation passed by the Senate that would limit the sale of pseudoephedrine. This bill will make it easier for law enforcement officials to crack down on those who manufacture this deadly drug without placing undue restrictions on individuals who use it legally to treat cold symptoms. The bill prohibits the sale of cold and allergy medicine containing more than 3.6 grams of ephedrine and other methamphetamine precursors. The product must be sold behind the counter and retailers are required to record the purchaser’s name and amount sold in a logbook.

In addition to my bill, the Combat

Meth Initiative includes legislation that would create “Meth Watch,” a cooperative program between the Attorney General’s Office and retailers to educate and provide warnings regarding methamphetamine and the common ingredients used to make it.

Another part of the legislative package would allow the courts to assess environmental cleanup costs against a defendant convicted of an offense involving a meth lab. Meth labs are highly dangerous and can often be costly to clean up, so this legislation will ensure that municipalities are not forced to cover the costs of dealing with these environmental problems.

The legislative initiative also includes new protections for children. Part of the package would make it a criminal offense to operate a meth lab and imposes additional penalties for operating a lab near a school or day care center, and additional legislation would make it a misdemeanor for a parent or guardian to knowingly operate a meth lab in the vicinity of a child.

Fighting For Reform

Over the past few months, citizens across the Commonwealth have made it abundantly clear that we need to do things differently in Harrisburg. I couldn’t agree more. As legislators, we are sent to represent the interests of the people, and this is a mission we can never take lightly.

Last summer, a number of legislators voted for and accepted a pay raise. I voted against the pay raise, and I did not accept the extra money because I believe it was wrong. The citizens and the media spoke out about their opposition to the pay raise, and I was proud to join my colleagues in abolishing the pay raise a few months later.

However, I believe that the pay raise repeal was not the end, but rather the beginning of a new era of government reform.

I was pleased to support recent legislation to require lobbyist disclosure, and I also supported legislation that places controls on spending at the local level. In the future, I hope to see legislation signed into law that would prevent election fraud to ensure honest and fair elections, as well as legislation to eliminate the practice of legislators leasing automobiles.

There are a number of ways that we can be better stewards of the taxpayer dollar, and we need to work together to institute meaningful reform and restore the public trust. I look forward to working with my colleagues to make these goals a reality in the coming months.



Senator Wonderling met with Sarah Schultz, Meghan McAllister, Caleb Kolb, and Detective Randy Floyd of the Telford Police Department to discuss Senate Bill 1116, Wonderling’s legislation to limit the sale of over the counter cold and allergy medicine used to make meth.

Customer Choice Could Help Reduce Cable Rates

There are currently over 3.7 million cable subscribers in Pennsylvania, ranking the state 8th in the nation in the percentage of households with cable television. Yet many cable consumers are dissatisfied with escalating monthly bills and a lack of choice when it comes to video services.

This summer, the Pennsylvania legislature will be weighing in on the future of cable television in the Commonwealth. Currently, any company that wants to provide video services to customers in the state must negotiate individual franchise agreements with municipalities to get access to public right-of-ways for their cable or fiber optic lines.

Legislation, Senate Bill 1247, was

introduced to grant a statewide franchise to any company (cable or otherwise) that wants to provide video services in the state.

The role of local government in cable franchising cannot be overlooked. Municipalities will still preserve their authority over right-of-way access and operate public, educational, and governmental channels. The legislation will also ensure local governments have continued access for public safety and educational information.

A statewide franchise will mean greater access for families in rural or less populated areas. Since only a statewide option would be available, companies will not be allowed to cherry-pick, taking only the lucra-

tive contracts in certain municipalities, leaving the less fortunate municipalities without service.

Senate Bill 1247 has been referred to the Communications & Technology Committee. As chairman of the committee, I am committed to moving the bill forward while working to ensure that any video franchise legislation the General Assembly considers will address the issues of accountability, access, and service. Allowing competition in other utilities across the state has resulted in more choice, better service and lower costs for consumers, and I am confident that cable competition will have the same effect for consumers.



Senator Wonderling presented a Senate Citation to the Souderton Area High School Boys' Water Polo Team for winning the 2005 PA State Boys' Water Polo Championship.

Legislation Cracks Down on Sexual Predators

The General Assembly recently passed legislation to crack down on sexual offenders who commit crimes against children. These criminals are among our state's most reprehensible offenders, and keeping them behind bars is an important priority to help protect our children.

Senate Bill 944, also known as Jessica's Law, would impose a minimum of 25 years in prison for anyone over 18 years who is convicted of sexually assaulting a child. The law was named for Jessica Lunsford, a 9-year old Florida girl who was kidnapped and murdered by a convicted sex offender.

The legislation also includes mandatory GPS monitoring for life for convicted offenders, as well as a 50 year sentence for anyone convicted of a second offense.

The bill also provides additional penalties for anyone convicted of knowingly harboring or aiding a sex offender who has failed to register under Megan's Law. It also enhances the current Megan's Law website

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Military Update

Last year I worked with my colleagues to pass a package of legislation to help our National Guard members.

This summer, I cosponsored legislation now signed into law that will expand the tuition credit program for children of National Guard members who are killed or die as a result of injuries received while on active duty.

The program currently provides a 50 percent tuition credit at one of the state-owned universities or an approved trade school. The legislation would expand the program to provide a waiver of all tuition costs and fees remaining after the receipt of other scholarships, education benefits, and federal and state grants. The program would also be further expanded to include state-related universities and Pennsylvania community colleges and to provide assistance to the spouses of National Guard members.

In order for the children and spouse to be eligible, the National Guard Member must have been a bona fide resident of Pennsylvania at the time of his or her death and been performing in an official duty status authorized under federal or state law. A spouse would remain eligible for the benefit for a period of 10 years following the death of the member or until he or she remarries, whichever occurs first.

I also introduced Senate Resolution #124 to direct the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to study the advantages and disadvantages of creating a separate cabinet-level Department of Veterans Affairs. Pennsylvania is home to one of the largest population of veterans in the nation, and we have a duty to make sure they are being provided with the highest level of benefits and services offered by the federal and state governments. The results of the report should be available this fall.

General Assembly Extends Prescription Assistance Program

Pennsylvania has been a leader in providing affordable prescription drugs for our senior citizens. Our state's PACE and PACENET programs are a national model for helping seniors afford the rising cost of prescription drugs. With the new federal Medicare prescription assistance program now available to seniors, the Senate has passed legislation that would restructure PACE and PACENET so they work seamlessly with the federal Medicare prescription drug program.

Among other provisions, Senate Bill 1188 would pay Medicare Part D premiums for PACE enrollees, eliminate the PACENET deductible, and provide coverage for Part D co-payments in excess of the current PACE/PACENET amount. It would also provide assistance to PACE/PACENET recipients in deter-

mining if they are eligible for the Medicare subsidy and in determining which plan to choose.

The bill does the following:

- Authorizes the Commonwealth to assist PACE/PACENET recipients in signing up for the most appropriate Medicare prescription drug plan.
- Creates real-time online coordination of benefits between PACE and appropriate Medicare plans, so enrollees in PACE/PACENET and Medicare can continue to fill their prescriptions at pharmacies without additional cost, delay or paperwork.
- Shifts some costs that have typically been incurred by the state program to the federal program.
- Pays Part D premiums for PACE enrollees.
- Eliminates the PACENET deductible.

- Provides coverage for Part D co-payments in excess of the current PACE/PACENET amount.

Seniors who have questions about PACE, PACENET and Medicare can contact my district offices for assistance.

Health Care Technology Could Reduce Long-Term Care Costs

While moving into a nursing home is necessary for many seniors who have special health needs, most seniors would prefer to remain in the comfort of their own homes. In 2004, Pennsylvania spent over \$2.7 billion on nursing home care under the Medicaid program, so finding ways to keep seniors in their homes longer is an important priority to maintain their sense of independence while reducing the cost to the state.

In 2005, I formed the Technology in Healthcare Working Group to find solutions to the increasing costs of long-term institutional care for the elderly and disabled by using innovative technology to keep people in their homes longer. The group is made up of experts in the health care industry, including senior hospital managers, health care providers, non-profit directors, academics, and government officials.

The Technology in Healthcare Working Group will examine methods such as using electronic prescriptions; innovative independent transportation; providing caregivers with tools for better data management; use of home monitoring devices; and a host of other issues.

The Communications and High Technology Committee, which I chair, will hold a series of public hearings beginning this summer to collect information from health care experts and citizens about these issues. I am confident that these hearings will provide us with the information we need to have a positive impact on the long-term care of our seniors.

Legislation Cracks Down on Sexual Predators

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and offender reporting requirements by mandating more specific residence information and reducing the time permitted for an offender to register after his or her release or relocation.

According to the Pennsylvania State Police, there are over 7,100 registered sex offenders in the state, and children under 12 account for 34 percent of all sexual assaults. Last year, sexual assault centers

around the Commonwealth served approximately 38,000 people, nearly a third of whom were children.

Keeping sexual predators behind bars and keeping close tabs on those who are released is crucial to protecting our children, and I am proud that Pennsylvania is at the forefront of this nationwide effort to crack down on sexual predators who target our children.



Senator Wonderling spoke at the Easton Heritage Day Ceremony about the importance of good citizenship and involvement with government at all levels.

Wonderling Works to Restore Passenger Rail Service

Anyone traveling along the Route 309 corridor has experienced the ever-increasing congestion. This gridlock can cause motorists a lot of stress and frustration. As a frequent commuter on this popular roadway, I know firsthand how problematic these traffic jams can be.

I have been working with the Regional Improvement Consortium

and the Bucks and Montgomery County Planning Commissions to assist with efforts to improve the transportation system in our area. Several years ago, I provided a grant to the Bucks County Transportation Management Association to help fund a Quakertown-Stony Creek Business Plan. Released earlier this year, the plan outlines the funding opportunities and processes involved in restoring commuter service along this line.

Thanks to a \$300,000 federal grant secured by Congressman Mike Fitzpatrick and local funds provided by Bucks and Montgomery County, the Bucks County TMA has initiated a proposal to determine the cost of

restoring the Quakertown-Stony Creek passenger rail line, a 21-mile section from Shelly through Perkasio and Telford to Lansdale, that will connect with Norristown and existing transit services.

If you are interested in the traffic patterns in our area or in utilizing passenger and freight service along the Quakertown-Stony Creek Rail lines, please feel free to visit the Regional Improvement Consortium's website to take the survey now open for public input at www.QSCrail.org. You can also obtain a copy of the Quakertown-Stony Creek Business Plan at www.bctma.com under News and Info.

State Senator Rob Wonderling

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Save the Date

SEPTEMBER 9, 2006

Discovery Kids Expo will be held from
11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Da Vinci Discovery Center
of Science and Technology in Allentown.

*Admission will be free. The event is designed to be
educational and entertaining.*

Plan on a fun day for the entire family.

Senator Wonderling met NASCAR driver Bobby Labonte during NASCAR Day at the Capitol on June 7. Pennsylvania is the No. 1 state in fan attendance and the Pocono races have an economic impact of \$300-\$500 million, according to preliminary studies underway (above).

