



STATE SENATOR *Judy* **Schwank** *Reports*

Fall 2012

◆ State Budget Includes More Cuts, But Helps Other Areas

The Pennsylvania budget for the 2012-13 fiscal year was passed on June 30. While the new state budget achieves an appropriate funding level, I voted against it because it doesn't properly fund many

critical programs and services, including basic education and higher education, economic development and social services. This is a "pass-the-buck" budget that passes costs down to local government and counties and,

ultimately, the taxpayer.

However, I was pleased to vote for other legislation that provides critical resources that will positively impact Berks County.

I voted to provide additional funding to financially distressed school districts, including \$3.7 million for Reading. To ensure the distressed funding money allocated to Reading is properly spent, I included language in the bill that requires it to be subject to review by the Department of Education and the Berks County Intermediate Unit. I also supported legislation that expands the Education Improvement Tax Credit (EITC).

Protecting Family Farms

I also supported the new law that eliminates the state inheritance tax on working farms. Many of our local farms have been operated by the same family for generations. The inheritance tax put a strain on farms that wanted family members to stay in the business.

Now, surviving family members on working farms can continue to operate without worrying about whether they can afford to pay the tax and keep their family business going. ■



Sen. Schwank joins people with disabilities, advocates, families, service organizations and supporters at a May 8 rally in Harrisburg that called for the restoration of state funds to programs that support individuals with intellectual disabilities.

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SENIOR CITIZENS' ASSISTANCE

Property Tax/Rent Rebate Form
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Reduced Auto Registration Form

VOTER SERVICES

Registration • Election Calendars
Applications for absentee ballots



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◆ Legislation Introduced

I am working hard in Harrisburg to craft and support meaningful legislation that has a positive impact on Berks County and the entire state. I have sponsored and co-sponsored numerous bills and amendments, including the following:

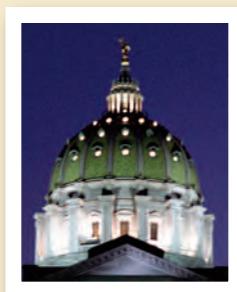
■ **SCHOOL PROPERTY TAX REFORM:** In conjunction with my co-sponsorship of Senate Bill 1400, which provides alternatives to using property tax revenue to fund our schools, my colleagues and I in the Local and School Property Tax Relief Caucus have requested that the Independent Fiscal Office assist with a revenue analysis of the legislation and the current property tax system.

■ **REDUCING THE SIZE OF THE LEGISLATURE:** Senate Bill 1079 would reduce the House of Representatives to 121 members and the Senate to 40. The state Constitution now provides for 203 Representative and 50 senators. Because of approval requirements for constitutional amendments, the earliest the change could take effect would be for the 2015-2016 term of the General Assembly. Although the number of 203 representatives was not expressly stated before the 1968 constitution, the current size essentially was set in 1874. The 19th century need for a large number of members so voters could have contact with their legislators does not exist with today's communication and transportation technology. Besides wasting millions of tax dollars every year, an oversized legislature allows parochial and petty interests to distract the legislature from responding efficiently and effectively to economic, technological and social challenges Pennsylvania must meet to compete with other states and foreign countries.

■ **BLOCKING POLITICAL ROBOCALLS:** My amendment to Senate Bill 932 — a bill that would further protect individuals from commercial telemarketer phone calls — would protect voters from automated political phone calls commonly known as “robocalls.” This is a major election cycle, in which voters will be casting ballots for president, members of Congress and positions on a state level. Automated political robocalls are incessant and disruptive during campaign cycles, and this measure will protect individuals who are on Pennsylvania's do-not-call list from a flood of these automated calls.

■ **PRIORITY ASSISTANCE GRANT FOR EDUCATION (PAGE) PROGRAM:** Senate Bill 1430 would create the PAGE Program, which would make \$30 million available to support research-based strategies and interventions proven to increase student achievement in our most academically or financially distressed school districts. Eighteen school districts, including Reading School District, would qualify for a grant under this program.

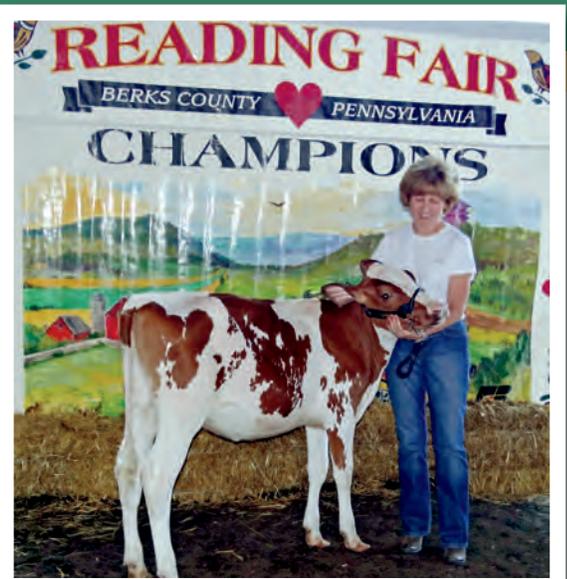
■ **PROTECTING CONDO OWNERS:** Senate Bill 1576 would protect condominium owners by closing gaps in the current law that allow a potential for harsh injustices. It requires that terms of a planned sale of a condo be disclosed prior to a termination vote by the condo association. It would also require that objecting owners be paid the full, fair market value of their units and interests in common areas when a single owner or multiple owners acting in concert control enough votes to set the sale price. The bill would also increase the minimum approval needed from remaining owners when a single owner or multiple owners acting in concert control enough votes to set the sale price. ■





Sen. Schwank and Vietnam veteran Doug Graybill at the May 19 Berks County Armed Forces Day parade.

Around The 11th DISTRICT



▶ Sen. Schwank presents a cow in the celebrity show ring at the Reading Fair.



Sen. Schwank discusses the new ground water treatment plant remediation project for the Crossley Farms Superfund site with EPA Regional Administrator Shawn Garvin.



▲ Sen. Schwank joins volunteers, including Reading Phillies Jiwan James and Troy Hanzarwa, at Pendora Park to participate in a May 5 spring cleanup. Senator Schwank partnered with Spring Clean Berks, in conjunction with the Great American Clean Up, to hold the countywide cleanup initiative which yielded almost 100 bags of litter.



◀ Sen. Schwank speaks with attendees at the Topton Seniors Picnic.



Sen. Schwank speaks with attendees of her community outreach meeting, held at the Cumru Township building. Schwank regularly holds these town hall-style meetings to keep constituents informed and encourage dialogue about issues and concerns.

▶ Sen. Schwank and Gold Star mother Charlene Flannery at the Wyomissing Fourth of July parade.



◆ Help for College

Getting a good education is the key to a bright and successful future. That's why I am pleased to report that the commonwealth is again making a significant investment in the PHEAA scholarship grants for college students.

Between the state appropriation and an investment from PHEAA, more than \$400 million is available for college scholarships and related programs for the 2012-2013 school year. In my senatorial district alone, more than 4,500 students will receive PHEAA college scholarships



valued at \$11,285,000 with a maximum individual grant award of \$4,348.

This year we also have created a new initiative — the PA Targeted Industry Program (PA-TIP) — which offers grants to students seeking training in high-demand occupations, such as energy, diversified manufacturing, and the agriculture and food production fields.

Information on these programs is available by contacting my Reading district office and will be presented at the financial aid night I am sponsoring on Sept. 27. ■

JOIN US!

SENATOR SCHWANK'S **College Financial Aid Night**

Thursday • September 27 • 7-9 p.m.

Alvernia University • Bernardine Hall • Lecture Hall
400 St. Bernardine Street • Reading



◆ Saving for College

While the investment of funds in the PHEAA scholarship programs will help 170,000 deserving students state-wide pay for college, most students still need to find additional monies to help cover college costs.

The Pennsylvania Department of Treasury Tuition Account Program (TAP) program offers a unique way for families to save money for college. TAP offers two savings options: a Guaranteed Saving Plan, which allows families to buy college credits at today's prices for use when a

student is ready to go college, and an Investment Plan, which allows families to choose a variety of market-based investment options and the potential for larger growth in college savings. Grandparents, parents, and other

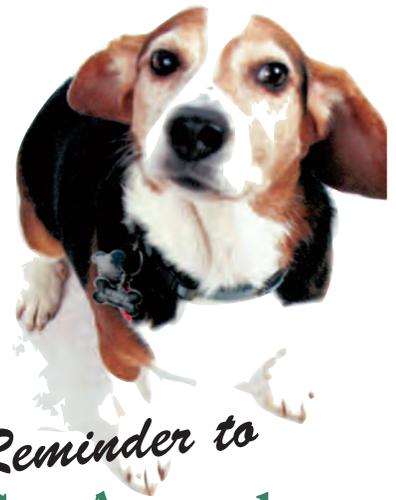
family members can make contributions to TAP. I used the TAP program to help fund my daughter's tuition at Penn State.

These programs offer a number of tax advantages, including a state tax deduction of up to \$13,000 per year, per beneficiary (\$26,000 if married



For more information visit:
www.pa529.com

filing jointly). ■



Reminder to Get Annual Dog License

If you own a dog, remember that Pennsylvania law requires you to purchase an annual dog license. Obtaining a state license is not only the law, but it's also one more way you can show your love for your four-legged friend. A license can be crucial if a dog gets lost, so take this simple preventative step to protect your beloved pet.

Dog owners can purchase an annual license from the state for \$8.45 or a lifetime license for \$51.45. For dogs that are spayed or neutered, the annual license is \$6.45 and a lifetime license is \$31.45. State law requires that all dogs three months or older be licensed.

Owners who fail to get a dog license face a maximum \$300 fine per unlicensed dog. ■

To obtain a dog license,
log on to

www.agriculture.state.pa.us

and click on the icon
"License Your Dog. It's the Law."

or visit the

County Treasurer's Office
Berks County Services Center
633 Court St. • 2nd Floor
Reading



◆ Property Tax/Rent Rebate Application Deadline Extended

The deadline to apply for Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate program for older adults and residents with disabilities has been extended to Dec. 31. Last year, nearly 19,000 Berks County residents received \$8 million in rebates.

The rebate program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians age 65 and older; widows and widowers age 50 and older; and people with disabilities age 18 and older. The income limit is \$35,000 a year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for renters, and half of Social Security income is excluded.

The maximum standard rebate is \$650, but supplemental rebates for qualifying homeowners can boost rebates to \$975.

For more information and to obtain Property Tax/Rent Rebate claim forms (PA-1000), call 1-888-222-9190 or visit www.revenue.state.pa.us

Claimants who already applied can also check the status of their claims on the website or by calling 1-888-PATAXES.

◆ Making Basic Education Improvements a Priority

As school districts across Pennsylvania struggle with gaping budget deficits and subsequent cuts in staff and programs, we need to consider the future of education in a thoughtful and deliberative way. We have allowed a budget process to dictate the direction of basic education in Pennsylvania and that needs to change.

That's why I introduced a Senate resolution that called on the governor to develop a comprehensive legislative plan to improve basic education. The resolution recommended that Gov. Corbett establish an advisory commission made up of parents, teachers, students, school administrators, higher education leaders, business leaders and legislators to examine the issue and make specific recommendations.

The committee should look at a range of issues, including the following:

- Current education funding formula and alternative funding sources
- The issue of property tax reform and how to fund education in the next 10 to 20 years
- How to address schools in financially distressed communities
- Explore revising the PA school code
- Recommend shared services and school consolidation options.

Several local school advocates recently joined me in Reading when I introduced this resolution, and they were very supportive of the idea.

◆ Focusing on Job Growth

Over the past year, I have been working hard to try and promote economic growth and job creation in our area.

I successfully secured nearly \$5 million in state grant funding to help build water and sewer infrastructure, which will help create jobs at area employers, including East Penn Manufacturing.

My legislation to provide job creation tax credits, if passed, would help businesses create even more jobs.

And, to be a more effective advocate for local businesses and workers in Harrisburg, I formed a business advisory council and have visited over 30 local businesses in the past year.

◆ Support Local ...Buy Local!

Agriculture is the No. 1 industry in Berks County and the entire commonwealth. We are home to many local farms and businesses that produce a variety of goods that we consume and use every day.

Agriculture annually generates about \$6 billion in sales statewide. In Berks County alone, the market value of agricultural products sold is about \$400 million per year. These sales support thousands of family farms and thousands of jobs.

Local products are fresh, produced by our own friends and neighbors, and contribute to the health of our economy, so it's important that we support local and choose local.

For more information on buying locally grown products, visit the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's PA Preferred website: www.papreferred.com





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◆ Your Opinion is Important to Me!

As your elected official, it's my duty to represent you and to make our community a better place. Your input is important to me. If you have any comments or concerns, please email me at senatorschwank@pasenate.com or write them below and send it back to my office. I look forward to hearing from you!

Please cut this page from the newsletter, fold, insert in envelope, apply first class postage and mail to:

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How can my staff and I provide a better service to you and all of our constituents?

How can I better represent your needs when I'm in Harrisburg?

What legislation or issue should the state legislature make a priority?

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO RESPOND TO LET ME KNOW YOUR THOUGHTS.