



Legislative Report

SPRING 2009



From State Senator Pat Vance

Budget Proposal Could Create Future Problems

Despite plummeting state revenues due to the recession, the governor recently proposed a state budget that increases spending 4.6 percent and relies on billions in short-term federal stimulus money to fill funding gaps for the current fiscal year and the two succeeding fiscal years.

In addition to a significant amount of federal stimulus funding, the governor also depends heavily on one-time measures – such as tapping the Rainy Day Fund and making transfers from other Commonwealth funds – to support his spending proposals.

Economic forecasts suggest a lengthy recovery from the recession. If these forecasts are correct, an economic recovery may not come soon enough or be strong enough to avoid painful decisions two years from now.

The proposed budget uses the federal fiscal stimulus funding and one-time revenues without undertaking meaningful reforms. An alternative approach would be to use the extra time provided by these short-term

solutions to create an orderly process to restructure state government and restrain spending increases. Failure to

do so increases the possibility of severe program cuts and tax increases when the funding runs out.

Vance Continues to Chair Aging and Youth Committee

It is once again my privilege to chair the Senate Aging and Youth Committee, with particular focus on the vulnerable populations. I will also continue as vice chair of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee, which has jurisdiction over many health care issues. Another key

committee assignment is the Appropriations Committee, which plays an important role in the budget process. Rounding out my committee assignments are positions on the Banking and Insurance, Finance, and Policy committees.

For the latest information on the budget, go to pasenategop.com.

Sen. Pat Vance confers with Acting Secretary of Aging Mike Hall prior to an Appropriations Hearing on the department's budget.



Vance Returns COLA to Treasurer

Earlier this year, statewide elected officials and cabinet members received an automatic cost-of-living adjustment. Those officials who wish to decline the COLA must write a check to the state treasurer.

Due to the current economic conditions, I have been doing just that each month. It is my preference that the issue be handled more uniformly through the enactment of legislation to suspend the COLA.

Grants to Assist With Chesapeake Upgrades

An \$800 million municipal grant program for water, sewer and high-hazard dam projects will help reduce the financial burden our communities are facing in order to make wastewater treatment upgrades to comply

with the Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy. The legislation creating the grant program was signed into law at the Mechanicsburg Wastewater Treatment Facility.

Pennsylvania has been working

with other states over the last two decades to meet federal goals for the improvement of the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay. New discharge limits that are part of the strategy are being imposed to meet pollution reduction targets. A third-party study recently showed it will cost \$1.4 billion to meet the targets.

It has been my goal to ensure that projects undertaken to meet the Chesapeake mandates receive priority consideration.

Many municipalities in the 31st Senatorial District have submitted applications. While competition for the grants is strong, I am hopeful they will obtain positive outcomes.

Senate Republicans Push Reform

Senate Republicans recently reintroduced a 10-bill package designed to increase the accountability and transparency of state government.

Most of the bills passed the Senate last session and then stalled in the House. The package includes legislation to:

- Reform procurement of consulting contracts. (Senate Bill 102)
- Increase accountability for state vehicle use. (Senate Bill 104)
- Create an online budget database for greater spending accountability. (Senate Bill 105)
- Eliminate "lame duck" sessions. (Senate Bill 106)



Sen. Pat Vance speaks to students from Red Land High School who won a schoolwide mock election for a seat in the Pennsylvania House.

Law Reduces Idling

A law that went into effect in early February will greatly reduce idling by diesel-powered commercial vehicles and buses.

Under Act 124 of 2008, idling of diesel-powered vehicles weighing more than 10,000 pounds will be limited to five minutes within a 60-minute time period. Motor homes and farm vehicles are exempt from these provisions. In addition, a bus or school vehicle may idle for up to 15 minutes each hour for passenger comfort. There also is an exemption until May 1, 2010, for extreme heat and cold during a trucker's rest period.

Violators of the law face a fine of between \$150 and \$300.

Sen. Pat Browne and I worked to craft the law.

Access to Government Records Expanded

Pennsylvania's new Open Records Law, which expands access to government records, is now in effect.

Act 3 of 2008 makes it easier for the public to review records and puts the burden of proof on a government agency that seeks to deny access to a record.

The Office of Open Records has established a Web site

<http://openrecords.state.pa.us>

with useful information for anyone wanting to request records or who has been denied access to records.

In addition, the Senate has posted information about the new law at www.pasen.gov/RTKL.

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