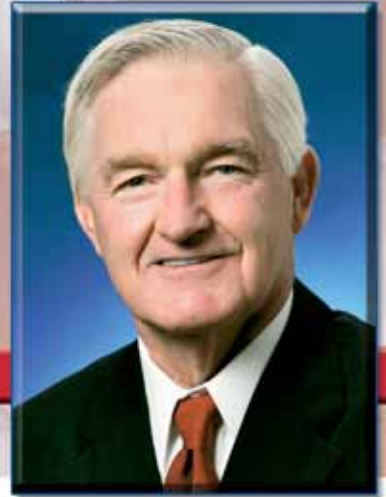


State Senator Bob Robbins

REPORTS TO THE 50TH DISTRICT

WINTER 2006



Property Tax Reform Plan Approved by Senate

As part of the Special Session on Property Tax Relief, the state Senate passed a comprehensive property tax reform plan that could begin providing tax relief in 2006.

Senate Bill 30 would allow voters to decide in the 2006 primary election whether to reduce school property taxes through local earned income taxes. Under the bill, the minimum property tax reduction offered would be at least 35 percent of the maximum

homestead exclusion. In addition, voters would have the power to vote “yes” or “no” on future tax hikes that go beyond the inflation rate.

Senate Bill 30 would also double the size of the popular Property Tax and Rent Rebate Program, increasing payments by \$131 million and enabling 281,000 additional low-income seniors to receive tax relief.

This plan would get the most relief to those who most need it, and would

provide **tax reductions to all property taxpayers** in the quickest time possible. Unlike other proposals, there will be no need to wait for gaming revenues to start coming in. The Senate and House of Representatives are now working to reach a compromise on their two plans.

Senate Votes to Limit Spending, Cut Income Taxes

The Senate recently approved historic legislation I co-sponsored that would limit state government spending and set aside surpluses in a new fund to reduce the state Personal Income Tax.

Senate Bill 4, the Taxpayer Fairness

Act, would **bold state spending increases to inflation** by statute. A companion measure, Senate Bill 884, would make the spending limits part of the state Constitution. In addition to restricting state spending growth, the bills would put a portion of surplus revenues in a new Taxpayer Fairness Fund to reduce the state Personal Income Tax.

To benefit families and small businesses, the Senate also voted to cut the state Personal Income Tax to 3.03 in 2007 and 2.98 in 2008.

Limiting Government Land Seizures

The Senate unanimously passed legislation I co-sponsored, Senate Bill 881, which states that government can only take private property through “eminent domain” when it is absolutely necessary and **only for a truly public purpose**. Further, in those rare instances where such a taking is necessary, individuals must be fairly compensated. Pennsylvania must not allow the abuse of eminent domain.

We acted after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that governments can seize property to make room for private development projects such as offices and hotels.

Pay Raise Repealed

The Senate passed legislation to repeal the pay raise for the legislative, executive and judicial branches initially approved in July.

We made a mistake. We apologize to our constituents for doing so. I supported this repeal measure and am returning the pay increase I received.

Lobbyist Reform Passed

The Senate approved a measure in April designed to give the public a complete and clear accounting of lobbying activity in Pennsylvania.

Senate Bill 1, the “Lobbying Accountability Act,” establishes an obligation to disclose who is working on what legislation and how much is being spent to advocate those positions. Its passage was a top legislative priority of mine.

Bringing State Funding to Our Communities

As a member of Senate Leadership, I am able to bring significant state dollars back to the 50th District. Following is a sample of some of these tax dollars working for local projects:

BUTLER COUNTY

- \$82,917 to improve public transportation for county seniors.
- \$76,929 to cover half of the county's cost in meeting sewage standards.
- \$55,600 to improve recycling collection.

CRAWFORD COUNTY

- \$750,000 to help Precision Manufacturing Institute (PMI) boost training in the local tooling industry and improve productivity.
- \$500,000 to assist PMI in the construction of its new Meadville facility.
- \$532,000 in loans and grants to help Advantage Mold & Design/Advantage Precision Plastics relocate, expand and hire more workers.
- \$44,000 for improvements to PMI's Kerr Technology Center.
- \$195,000 loan to help Aristocrat Spring Water purchase a plant and hire additional workers in Saegertown.
- \$526,500 low-interest loan for Cochranon Borough to design a new sewage treatment plant.
- \$88,000 to help Crawford County cover the cost of recycling.
- \$112,000 to improve public transportation for county seniors.
- \$149,000 to maintain dirt and gravel county roads in an environmentally sound manner.
- \$55,000 to assist with the relocation of overhead electrical lines and relocation of livestock barns at the Crawford County Fairgrounds.
- \$250,000 to purchase equipment and increase productivity at D & M Tool, Inc.
- \$2.5 million loan to purchase new equipment creating 100 new jobs at Lord Corp. Cambridge Springs and Saegertown facilities.
- \$408,542 to extend Port Meadville Airport runway safety zone.

- \$206,850 to upgrade and expand Greenwood Township Sewage Treatment Plant.
- \$439,344 to weatherize area homes through Northwest PA Weatherization Inc.
- \$12,898 to construct a high-pole barn at Spartansburg Community Fairgrounds.
- \$324,500 loan to help Target Precision construct a new facility in Harmonsburg, creating and retaining 22 jobs.
- \$170,000 to City of Titusville to improve financial planning.

LAWRENCE COUNTY

- \$7.5 million in loans and grants to develop Lawrence County Millennium Park for job creation.
- \$25,714 to improve public transportation for county seniors.
- \$137,500 to help develop C. J. Long Spartan Park in Hickory Township.
- \$29,466 to reimburse the county for 50 percent of the recycling coordinator's salary and expenses.
- \$25,000 to develop a new county recreational park.
- \$15,000 to maintain dirt and gravel county roads in an environmentally sound manner.
- \$113,118 in grants and loans to allow Slippery Rock Volunteer Fire Dept. to refinance vehicle debt.
- \$20,000 to help the Neshannock Township Fire Department construct new training facilities to accommodate firefighters from across Lawrence County.

MERCER COUNTY

- \$1.85 million in loans, grants and tax credits to help CCL Contain Corp. of Hermitage expand, retaining 190 jobs and creating 61 new jobs.
- \$627,000 in loans, grants and tax credits to expand Hodge Foundry in Greenville, retaining 105 jobs and creating 36 new jobs.
- \$206,000 to help Fredonia Borough construct a new, safer water tower.

- \$2.29 million in loans, grants and tax credits to expand Joy Cone Co. of Hermitage, retaining 325 jobs and creating 100 new jobs.
- \$536,250 for Greenville Municipal Airport runway rehabilitation.
- \$40,000 to demolish six blighted buildings on Canal Street in Greenville to make room for retail development.
- \$345,000 for improvements to downtown Grove City Borough and vicinity.
- \$5 million loan to improve the Grove City regional sewage system.
- \$22,267 to help Hermitage pay for recycling program.
- \$154,474 to replace four pedestrian bridges near Jamestown Borough schools.
- \$40,000 to develop a new Jefferson Township park.
- \$600,000 loan to expand family-owned Lakeland Dairy Farms in New Wilmington.
- \$48,000 to maintain dirt and gravel county roads in an environmentally sound manner.
- \$1 million to construct Premier Hydraulics manufacturing facility in Sharon, which employs 105 workers.
- \$805,000 to improve safety at five Sharon intersections.
- \$120,000 to complete phase four of Sharpsville Borough streetscape improvements.
- \$100,000 low-interest loan to allow Transfer Volunteer Fire Dept. to refinance vehicle debt.
- \$175,000 to redevelop the former Westinghouse facility in Sharon.
- \$500,000 loan to help VEC Technologies establish a regional manufacturing center at its Greenville facility.

CRAWFORD/MERCER COUNTIES

- \$500,000 to fund job-creation incubators in Meadville, Titusville and Greenville.

Legislative Agenda: A Scorecard

In February, leaders of the Senate and House of Representatives laid out an ambitious agenda for 2005-2006. The following is the agenda and a scorecard on what has been achieved:

★ FIGHTING FOR TAXPAYERS

Rollback of Personal Income Taxes (*HB 515 passed Senate, vetoed by Governor*)

Government Spending Limits (*SB 4/SB 884 approved by Senate, sent to House*)

★ PROMOTING GOOD GOVERNMENT

Election Reform (*SB 5, before Senate State Government Committee*)

Gambling Reform (*SB 862, passed Senate, sent to House*)

★ MAKING COLLEGE MORE AFFORDABLE

Dual High School/College Enrollment (*Funded with \$5 million in 2005-06 budget*)

★ CREATING GOOD JOBS IN PA

Manufacturing Jobs Package (*Key bills passed House, sent to Senate*)

Cutting Taxes on Job Creators (*HB 515 passed Senate, vetoed by Governor*)

★ ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTH CARE

Health Savings Accounts (*HB 107 signed into law; expanded HSAs, SB 854, passed Senate, sent to House*)

Small Business Tax Credits (*HB 734, passed House, sent to Senate*)

★ PUBLIC SAFETY

Additional State Police (*2005-06 budget funds 180 additional troopers*)

★ ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Growing Greener (*Act 35 implements \$625 million environmental bond issue*)

Hazardous Sites Cleanup (*Act 35 secured funding for the Hazardous Sites Cleanup Fund*)

Common-Sense Building Code Amendment

The Governor has signed legislation I introduced that amends the Pennsylvania Construction Code Act to correct an issue that the Department of Labor and Industry is not able to address on its own.

A business located in Coolspring Township, Mercer County has plans to expand its operations and building. However, when they purchased the building in the 1970's, they were not provided an occupancy permit. The Department of Labor and Industry ruled that because the

permit does not exist, the business will need to make the entire building come up to the present Building Code prior to expansion of the building. The cost of such an undertaking is quite **extensive and cost-prohibitive**.

Senate Bill 736 provides such businesses an opportunity to obtain an occupancy permit if they meet several common-sense safety requirements. They would then be exempt from having to bring their existing building up to the Construction Code.

Comprehensive Package for Farmers

The Senate is acting on a comprehensive legislative package aimed at promoting agriculture in Pennsylvania. The **"Farmers First"** initiative is designed to help farmers be productive and successful and to keep the agricultural industry strong in Pennsylvania.

The plan includes:

- Property tax rebates for agricultural preservation.

- A realty transfer tax measure to preserve farmland.
- An agricultural preservation enhancement and sprawl prevention.
- Elimination of the death tax, which hits farm families especially hard.
- Promoting new public/private partnerships to preserve farmland.
- A "Farm to School" agricultural education and nutrition program.

Military Tax Credits, Veterans Home Assistance

I recently joined several lawmakers in unveiling a package of bills providing new benefits for Pennsylvania's soldiers and veterans. The package includes two measures I drafted:

One would provide tax credits to employers who **hire members of the National Guard or Reserves** (Senate Bill 880).

The other would help veterans homes **find more qualified nurses** by providing education loan forgiveness to nurses who agree to work at such facilities (Senate Bill 262).

Other bills in the package would:

- Allow National Guard members participating in the Educational Assistance Program additional time to complete their education if called to active state or federal duty.
- Extend eligibility for health coverage of deployed soldiers who are full time students and return to school following release from active duty.
- Exempt military personnel on duty outside the Commonwealth from occupational assessment, per capita, poll and similar taxes.
- Add an additional 15 days of annual paid leave for PA National Guard members who are employed by the Commonwealth after returning from active duty.
- Clarify that PA National Guard members who are returning from active duty may not be penalized for renewing or reinstating vehicle insurance coverage.

It was an honor to serve in the military, and now it is an honor to work on behalf of those in uniform. We can never repay them for the sacrifice and the risk, but we can do our best to help out where we can.

- New methods for manure disposal.
- Agriculture is so important to Pennsylvania's economy and to its heritage. We have to look at new ways to improve economic opportunities for the men and women who work the land for a living and keep the tradition of farming alive. That's what "Farmers First" does.



More than 80 area high school students took part in Senator Robbins' annual "State Government: A Closer Look" student seminar in October. Held at Thiel College in Greenville, the seminar allowed students to interact with legislators, lobbyists and state officials, giving them a better understanding of state government and the legislative process.

Senator Robbins attended the Crawford County Chapter of the Pennsylvania Association of School Retirees Legislative Breakfast in October. From left (seated): Walter Seley, Chapter L/PEC Chairman; Richard M. Genung, Region IX L/PEC Chairman; Anthony Bevacqua, Crawford Chapter President. (Standing): Kurt Daloise, representing the Sixth District; Rep. John Evans (5th District); Rep. Rod Wilt (17th District); and Senator Robbins.



Senator Robbins presented a Senate Citation to John Choffel, Jr. (left) and Lee Livingston (right), who were honored by PENNDOT in October for their participation in the Statewide School Bus Driver Safety Competition. Mr. Choffel, of Cochranon, was the Third Place winner in the Transit Style Division and is employed by Girardat Transportation. Mr. Livingston, of Conneaut Lake, was the Third Place winner in the Conventional Division and is employed by Warren Brothers, Inc.



Senator Robbins received the inaugural “Virgil F. Puskarich Award” presented by Robert Wollyung, President of the Pennsylvania State Association of Elected County Officials (PSAECO). The award, which recognizes Senator Robbins’ commitment to assisting county officials, is named in honor of Virgil Puskarich, the late executive director of the Local Government Commission for 30 years. PSAECO consists of all the county row offices, including the Auditors, Commissioners, Controllers, Coroners, District Attorneys, Jury Commissioners, Prothonotaries/Clerks of Courts, Recorders of Deeds, Registers of Wills/Clerks of Orphans’ Court, Sheriffs, and Treasurers. Senator Robbins has been a member of the Local Government Commission since February 1994. He served as Chairman of the Commission from 1995-2000.

Senator Robbins joined Adjutant General Jessica Wright and others to announce that the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency has established a Veterans Homes Nursing Loan Forgiveness Program. The program will provide 50 percent reimbursement, up to \$10,000 total, for recently graduated nurses who agree to work three years in one of Pennsylvania’s six veterans homes. Senator Robbins introduced legislation to create such a program which is needed to ensure veterans homes can find a sufficient number of qualified nurses to care for veterans.



Pastor Dennis See (center), of the Altar International House of Prayer in Meadville, participated in the opening of the Senate session as the Senate Guest Chaplain in October. A Guest Chaplain opens each session of the Pennsylvania Senate with a word of prayer and Pastor See was able to participate at the invitation of Senator Robbins. The pastor was accompanied by Ryan Fitzsimmons, also of Meadville.

Home Heating Help Available

Legislation approved by the Senate and signed by the Governor will provide approximately \$25 million in additional funds to help low-income families with their heating bills.

Households with incomes less than 135 percent of the federal poverty income guideline can receive cash and/or crisis grants through the

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). To apply for LIHEAP, individuals should call one of the following county assistance offices: Crawford County Assistance Office (814-333-3400), Mercer County Assistance Office (724-983-5022), Lawrence County Assistance Office (724-656-3021 or 724-598-2088),

or Butler County Assistance Office (724-284-8855). Those with Internet access may apply electronically via the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Access to Social Services (COMPASS) Web site at www.compass.state.pa.us.

Mentored Youth Hunting Program

Pennsylvania has enacted a new law I supported that authorizes the Game Commission to create a "Mentored Youth Hunting Program."

The program will provide a **hands-on experience for youngsters** ready and willing to learn about hunting. The hunt would consist of one adult, one youth and

one hunting device. The youth hunter would be within arm's length of the licensed hunter at all times. Hunting would be limited to deer, turkey and smaller game.

Hunting teaches responsibility and respect for the outdoors, and I look forward to the establishment of this program.

Dental Care for Cancer Patients

I am working with Dr. Susan Calderbank, a Mercer County dentist and member of the State Board of Dentistry, to promote **proper dental care for cancer patients**. Problems in the mouth are the number one reason patients cannot complete their cancer treatment protocol. When a cancer patient under treatment dies

from an infection, 56 percent of the time it's from an organism originating in the mouth. It is recommended that cancer patients receive a pre-treatment dental examination before the start of treatment. Please ask your dentist what you can do to protect your mouth during cancer treatment.



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