

Senate News Brief

from Senate Republicans

"The reality is, there are thousands of registered sex offenders across the commonwealth, and families could be living next door to one and not know it."

Sen. John Pippy (R-Allegheny), sponsor of legislation that would require that all address information for sex offenders be listed on the state Megan's Law web site, rather than just county, hometown and zip code.

Preview

MEMBERS OF SENATE ATTEND THOMPSON MEMORIAL SERVICE

MEMBERS OF THE PENNSYLVANIA SENATE attended the memorial service for **Sen. Robert Thompson (R-Chester)** on Saturday in West Chester.

Senator Thompson, who represented the 19th District including parts of Chester and Montgomery counties, passed away Jan. 28. For highlights of Senator Thompson's career, please see *Fast Facts*, below.

Review

COMMITTEE HOLDS HEARING ON MINE SAFETY LEGISLATION

THE SENATE ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Mary Jo White (R-Venango)**, held a public hearing Jan. 31 on proposed mine safety legislation.

Senate Bill 939 is a 217-page bill that represents plans for implementing changes proposed following the 2002 Quecreek mine incident in Somerset County.

Senator White expressed her intent to move quickly and report a bill to the Senate. The committee plans to look at personal tracking devices, as proposed by committee member **Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill)**, as well as safety chambers and additional oxygen caches.

SEN. PIPPY UNVEILS BILL TO LIST SEX OFFENDER ADDRESSES ON STATE WEB SITE

LEGISLATION THAT WOULD REQUIRE THAT ALL ADDRESS INFORMATION for sex offenders be listed on the state Megan's Law web site has been introduced by **Sen. John Pippy (R-Allegheny)**.

Senate Bill 1054, would require that the addresses of Pennsylvania's 7,800 convicted sex offenders be listed on the site, which is maintained by State Police. Presently, addresses of only about 100 offenders designated as a "sexually violent predator" are listed. The remainder includes only county, hometown and zip code.

The measure would also require the site to note which sexual offenders committed their crime against children. For more on efforts to strengthen sex offender laws, please see *In the Spotlight*, below.

EFFORT TO COMBAT UNDERAGE DRINKING MOVES FORWARD

THE EFFORT TO PASS A 14-BILL PACKAGE aimed at curbing underage drinking and high-risk drinking continued Feb. 1 when the Senate Judiciary Committee, chaired by **Sen. Stewart Greenleaf (R-Montgomery)**, approved Senate Bill 780.

Sponsored by **Sen. John Rafferty (R-Montgomery)**, the measure would provide immunity from prosecution on underage drinking charges for anyone who seeks medical attention for someone sickened by alcohol consumption. The measure would apply when the sole means for law enforcement officers to become aware of the person's violation is because the person placed a 911 call and reported that another person was in need of medical assistance due to alcohol consumption. Three other bills in the package were recently approved by the Senate Law and Justice Committee, chaired by Senator Rafferty.

BILL WOULD REQUIRE TRAINING, EXAMS FOR NEW SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN **JAMES RHOADES (R-SCHUYLKILL)** on Feb. 1 called for a statewide training program for newly elected school board members, to benefit students and taxpayers.

Senator Rhoades is sponsor of Senate Bill 298, which would require newly elected school board members to complete a program before they are sworn into office. Members who complete the program, which would be free of charge, would be issued a certificate.

The training would cover state and federal law, school taxes, school finance, academic standards and other matters school board members need to understand.

The state Department of Education would prescribe and approve the subject matter for the course, the contents of the examination and the criteria for passage of the examination. The department would be assisted by an advisory committee made up of school board members, superintendents, principals, business managers, teachers and curriculum specialists.

SEN. WONDERLING URGES N.O.L. RELIEF FOR PA BIOSCIENCE FIRMS

SENATE COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN **ROB WONDERLING (R-MONTGOMERY)** is urging the Rendell administration to provide the Pennsylvania bioscience industry with relief from the Commonwealth's burdensome policies on net operating loss (NOL).

Senator Wonderling believes the administration's new proposal to help nurture the bioscience industry in Pennsylvania may be a step in the right direction, but it fails to address the difficulties the bioscience industry faces bringing products to market.

The administration has previously vetoed attempts to increase the \$2 million annual cap on the ability of companies to carry forward net operating losses against future income. The senator noted the administration's budget proposal to raise the cap to just \$3 million will have little effect on the companies that incur billions of dollars of losses in order to bring one life-saving technology to market.

LAWMAKERS PRAISE FREE EDUCATION TO CHILDREN OF U.S. SOLDIERS KILLED IN IRAQ

STATE SEN. **BOB ROBBINS (R-MERCER)** joined fellow lawmakers and officials Jan. 31 to recognize Widener University's Children of Active and Reserve Educational Scholarship (CARES) program and urge other colleges and universities to offer similar scholarships.

CARES provides free undergraduate education to any qualified dependent of a member of the U.S. Armed Forces who was killed in action during Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Senate Resolution 213, recognizing the program, was adopted in the Senate, while a companion measure was adopted in the House of Representatives.

In the Spotlight

SENATE BILL 1054 is part of a legislative package entitled "Pennsylvania's Jessica's Law" – also including Senate Bill 944, sponsored by **Sen. Jane Orié (R-Allegheny)** and **Sen. John Rafferty (R-Montgomery)** – which would strengthen the Pennsylvania Megan's Law by increasing penalties, requiring GPS monitoring of sexual predators, and adding stricter registration requirements.

A "sexual offender" is a person who has been convicted of one of 14 sexually violent offenses, including rape and unlawful contact with a minor. A "sexually violent predator" is a sexual offender who has been determined by the court to have a mental abnormality or personality disorder that makes the person likely to engage in predatory sexually violent offenses.

Megan's Law is named after a New Jersey girl who was raped and killed by a neighbor who was a convicted sex offender. Jessica's Law is named for Jessica Lunsford, a Florida girl kidnapped, raped and murdered by a sexual offender with a long criminal history.

Fast Facts

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS OF SEN. ROBERT THOMPSON

- Majority Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee
- Elected to the state Senate in 1995
- Chairman of the West Goshen Township Board of Supervisors
- Chairman of the Chester County Board of Commissioners
- Member of the Chester County Hospital Board, the Immaculata President's Council, and other boards
- Founding Executive Director of the Chester County Chamber of Commerce
- First President of the Chester County Chamber of Business and Industry
- Chairman of the West Chester Area Day Care Association
- Trustee of the Chester County Library

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