

Senate News Brief

from Senate Republicans

"This legislation will ensure that every vote counts, and that the elderly, disabled and military personnel fighting overseas are not disenfranchised. The Voter Protection Act will also keep our polling places free of threats and unethical activities that can cloud an election."

-- **Senate State Government Committee Chairman Charles Lemmond (R-Luzerne)** on Senate passage Feb. 15 of House Bill 1318, the Voter Protection Act. The bill is now awaiting the governor's signature or veto.

Preview

SENATE BUDGET HEARINGS BEGIN MONDAY

THE SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Noah Wenger (R-Lancaster)**, is scheduled to begin hearings on Gov. Ed Rendell's proposed 2006-07 budget on Monday, Feb. 27. The hearings are scheduled to run through March 9.

Review

SENATE MAKES LOBBYIST DISCLOSURE FILINGS INTERNET ACCESSIBLE

SENATE PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE **ROBERT JUBELIRER (R-BLAIR)**, a long-time leader on open government issues, announced Feb. 15 that lobbyist disclosure reports collected by the state Senate since the start of 2003 are now available to the public by way of the Internet.

Citizens will be able to see who is lobbying, who individuals are representing, and how they are spending their money. They also will be able to see the number of clients each lobbyist has and what each lobbyist is spending per client.

Lobbyists are only required to report their spending as it affects the Senate, but they are allowed to report their entire spending. The lobbyist disclosure reports can be found under "Topics of Special Interest" at www.pasen.gov.

SENATE APPROVES VOTER PROTECTION ACT

THE SENATE ON FEB. 15 APPROVED a comprehensive election reform measure aimed at protecting the vote of every state resident. House Bill 1318, the Voter Protection Act, was the product of a Senate-House conference committee that included **Senate Majority Leader David Brightbill (R-Lebanon)** and **Senate State Government Committee Chairman Charles Lemmond (R-Luzerne)**.

The measure would make Pennsylvania law consistent with federal voter-identification requirements, guard against fraud and ensure the integrity of the election process. For details, please see *In the Spotlight* and *Fast Facts*, below.

SENATE JOINS FIGHT AGAINST PENNSYLVANIA NATIONAL GUARD CUTS

THE SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Don White (R-Indiana)**, held a joint hearing Feb. 15 with the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee and Pennsylvania Adjutant General Jessica Wright on proposed cuts in the Army National Guard that would heavily impact Pennsylvania.

The U.S. Defense Department has proposed cutting six National Guard heavy combat brigades across the nation. Pennsylvania is home to two brigades, in Washington, Pa. and Scranton. One plan would remove one heavy combat brigade and portions of an aviation brigade stationed at Fort Indiantown Gap. If the cuts go through, Pennsylvania could lose 4,000 soldiers and \$50 million in economic benefits. The Senate and House of Representatives adopted resolutions calling on the President, Congress and Department of Defense to reconsider the proposed cutback.

SENATE APPROVES SEN. MADIGAN'S CLEAN VEHICLES PROGRAM ACT

THE STATE SENATE APPROVED LEGISLATION FEB. 15 that would delay until at least 2010 a Rendell Administration plan to impose California vehicle emission standards on Pennsylvania motorists.

The Senate approved an amended Senate Bill 1025, sponsored by **Senate Transportation Committee Chair Roger Madigan (R-Bradford)** and **Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee Chair Mary Jo White (R-Venango)**, that would require the state Department of Environmental Protection to work with groups representing motorists, vehicle manufacturers, health experts and others to study the impact of the California standards prior to imposing them on Pennsylvania motorists.

In the meantime Pennsylvania would continue following the federal emission standards established in 2000. The administration's plan would force Pennsylvania motorists to purchase more expensive vehicles beginning in 2007.

SEN. WENGER ELECTED SENATE APPROPRIATIONS CHAIRMAN

SEN. NOAH WENGER (R-LANCASTER) WAS ELECTED Majority Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee on Feb. 14.

Senator Wenger, who had served in Senate Republican leadership as Majority Caucus Chairman, succeeds Sen. Robert Thompson who passed away Jan. 28.

Senate Republicans today also elected **Sen. Joe Conti (R-Bucks)** the new Majority Caucus Chairman. **Sen. Joe Scarnati (R-Jefferson)** was appointed Majority Policy Committee Chairman by **Senate President Pro Tempore Robert Jubelirer (R-Blair)**.

In the Spotlight

THE VOTER PROTECTION ACT would prevent fraud by requiring voters to provide identification at the polling place. The Department of Transportation would be required to issue a non-driver ID, at no charge, to registered voters who state they are unable to obtain another form of photo identification and are unable to pay the required fee for the identification card. Any voter unable to produce identification will be allowed to vote using a provisional ballot, which could be verified later.

The Voter Protection Act also addresses concerns and lawsuits arising from the 2004 election. It would extend the deadline for county receipt of absentee ballots cast by military personnel serving overseas and their families. Counties would be required to accept ballots seven days following the election, if the absentee ballots are post-marked by the day before the election.

Fast Facts

SENATE APPROVES THE VOTER PROTECTION ACT

- Establishes a statement of voters' rights and requires it to be posted at all polling places.
- Requires voters to provide photo or non-photo identification at every election, such as a valid driver's license; U.S. passport; a student, employee or government ID; or a county voter registration card.
- Prohibits polling sites from being located in the private homes of elected or appointed officials and candidates, places where alcohol is served, or places that are inaccessible to the physically disabled.
- Imposes penalties on any individual who assists someone that he or she knows is not a qualified absentee elector in filling out an absentee ballot.

Question or comments? Contact the Senate Republican Communications Office at senaterepublicancommunicationsoffice@pasen.gov or call 717-787-6725. Current and archived News Briefs are also available online at www.pasenategop.com. For a free download of the Adobe Acrobat reader for PDF files, visit www.adobe.com.