

# Senate News Brief

## from Senate Republicans

*“With Governor Rendell’s veto almost two years ago of legislation that would have made a number of needed reforms to the law, it is obvious there will be only one opportunity to fix it before facilities open. That is why it’s important to get it right now.”*

– **Sen. Bob Robbins (R-Mercer)**, joining fellow Senate Republicans in pushing for comprehensive reform of Pennsylvania’s gambling law, following a public hearing Sept. 19.

### Preview

#### SENATE MOVES FALL AGENDA FORWARD

THE SENATE is in session this week, continuing work on an aggressive fall legislative agenda.

Among the priorities are enacting gaming reform, tightening lobbyist disclosure, and expanding children’s health insurance.

### Review

#### COMMITTEE HOLDS FOURTH HEARING ON URBAN VIOLENCE

THE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Stewart Greenleaf (R-Montgomery)**, today held a public hearing in Harrisburg on urban violence.

It was the fourth and final committee hearing on urban violence and efforts to control violent crime in Pennsylvania cities. Previous hearings were held in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Altoona.

#### SENATE GOP PLAN TO REFORM GAMBLING LAW TOPIC OF HEARING

A GROUP OF SENATE REPUBLICANS who authored a comprehensive package of bills to make major structural reforms to the two-year-old gambling law advocated more aggressive reform at the conclusion of a Senate Rules Committee hearing on the law on Sept. 19.

The committee, chaired by **Senate Majority Leader David Brightbill (R-Lebanon)**, received testimony on Senate Bill 862 and amendments which have been discussed recently by the governor and the legislative caucuses. The comprehensive gaming reform package is being advocated by numerous members of the Senate. The legislative package, which would go beyond the governor’s ideas, would close ethics loopholes; enhance the accountability of the Gaming Control Board; improve administration of the law; and provide greater oversight by the Attorney General and the General Assembly over the conduct of gaming in Pennsylvania.

#### HEARING HELD ON SEN. ROBBINS’ HOME HEATING ASSISTANCE MEASURE

THE SENATE PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELFARE COMMITTEE held a public hearing Wednesday on legislation sponsored by **Sen. Bob Robbins (R-Mercer)** to get home energy assistance to more needy Pennsylvania citizens.

The committee, chaired by **Sen. Jake Corman (R-Centre)**, heard testimony on Senate Bill 1270, the Home Energy Assistance in Time of Need, or HEAT ON Act. The measure would maximize the use of federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) dollars and ensure that heating aid reaches as many Pennsylvania families as possible. The bill would also put in place several accountability provisions to ensure that funding goes to those most in need. [For more on HEAT ON legislation, please see \*In the Spotlight\*, below.](#)

#### PANEL GATHERS INPUT ON MERGER INCENTIVES FOR VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANIES

PENNSYLVANIA’S EMERGENCY RESPONDERS generally support efforts to encourage mergers and partnerships among companies, several officials told the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee on Sept. 6.

Senate Bill 1236, sponsored by committee chairman **Sen. Don White (R-Indiana)** and **Sen. Mike Waugh (R-York)**, would provide economic incentives to companies that merge. The senators stressed that more work is needed before the bill is finalized.

Senate Bill 1236 would make grants available to private, non-profit volunteer fire companies or EMS organizations, and local governments applying on behalf of the fire companies. The grants would be conditional on creating partnerships and reducing costs. For more on Pennsylvania's volunteer fire companies, please see *Fast Facts*, below.

## SEN. WONDERLING INTRODUCES BILL TO PROVIDE GAMBLERS WITH WIN/LOSS INFO

SEN. ROB WONDERLING (R-MONTGOMERY) has introduced legislation to give active casino gamblers regular updates of their winnings and losses.

Senate Bill 1304 would provide gamblers who participate in a "total rewards program" offered at casinos with a monthly statement of their winnings and losses. Casinos use the total rewards program to track the amount of money and time gamblers spend in order to determine the value of complimentary services they provide to their patrons.

*"Often times, individuals who regularly gamble may not be aware of the amount of money they are losing each month. A monthly statement may serve as a wake-up call to possible gambling addicts and their families that their losses may lead to financial ruin,"* said Sen. Wonderling.

## In the Spotlight

SPONSORED BY SEN. ROBBINS, the Home Energy Assistance in Time of Need -- or HEAT ON -- would set into law that those making 150 percent of the poverty level (\$29,025 for a family of four) or less are eligible for LIHEAP. This past year, approximately 70,000 additional households were made eligible for grants when income guidelines were temporarily increased to 150 percent.

Senate Bill 1270 would also require energy vendors that participate in LIHEAP to offer customers budget billing installment plans that allow even payments over 12 months.

To increase accountability, it would require the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) to verify the income of all applicants -- an accountability practice currently not being utilized. It would also require DPW to provide thorough audits and monitoring of funds, and provide copies of audits to the General Assembly.

## Fast Facts

### VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANIES IN PENNSYLVANIA

- Number of volunteer fire companies in Pennsylvania: **2,354**
- Year Ben Franklin founded nation's first citizen fire brigade: **1736**
- Number of active PA volunteer firefighters in 1976: **300,000**
- Number of active PA volunteer firefighters in 2006: **72,000**
- Estimated taxpayer dollars saved through volunteer fire companies: **\$6 billion**

*Question or comments? Contact the Senate Republican Communications Office at [senaterepublicancommunicationsoffice@pasen.gov](mailto:senaterepublicancommunicationsoffice@pasen.gov) or call 717-787-6725. Current and archived News Briefs are also available online at [www.pasenategop.com](http://www.pasenategop.com).*