

Senate News Brief

from Senate Republicans

"Let's hope this time our governor exercises gubernatorial leadership by signing House Bill 236. For all of his rhetoric on economic stimulus and growth, a veto would be another disservice to our business community by this administration."

– **Sen. Jeffrey Piccola (R-Dauphin)**, sponsor of the Senate version of legislation approved Wednesday that would provide regulatory flexibility for small businesses in Pennsylvania. Similar legislation was passed in 2004 but vetoed by the governor.

Preview

KEY ISSUES TOP SENATE AGENDA

THE SENATE WILL BE IN SESSION on Monday, tackling several key issues. The Senate is hoping to finalize a comprehensive gambling reform bill and strong lobbyist disclosure legislation, among other measures.

Review

KMI: SENATE VOTES TO REDUCE REGULATORY BURDENS ON SMALL BUSINESSES

THE SENATE GAVE FINAL APPROVAL WEDNESDAY to legislation that would provide regulatory flexibility for small businesses in Pennsylvania.

House Bill 236 will be sent to the governor to be signed into law. The bill is a companion measure of Senate Bill 842, sponsored by **Sen. Jeffrey Piccola (R-Dauphin)**, and is a component of the Keystone Manufacturing Initiative. KMI is a package of bills sponsored by members of the General Assembly that are designed to re-establish Pennsylvania as a competitor for jobs and job opportunities.

Modeled after the federal Regulatory Flexibility Act, the legislation would require state agencies to consider the negative impact on small businesses before imposing regulatory mandates. It would also require state agencies to examine alternatives for small businesses that would achieve the desired regulation, ensuring the protection of important public policy goals without sacrificing jobs and family financial security.

SENATE APPROVES BILL TO HELP DIGITIZE MEDICAL RECORDS

THE SENATE APPROVED LEGISLATION MONDAY to help hospitals, doctor's offices, and health care clinics get the funding they need to create computerized systems to better diagnose and treat patients.

Senate Bill 934, sponsored by **Senate Communications and Technology Committee Chairman Rob Wonderling (R-Montgomery)** and **Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee Chairman Jake Corman (R-Centre)**, would enable grant recipients to receive up to \$1 million in matching funds to purchase health information technology, help pay the costs and expenses associated with implementation, and train personnel in the use of the new system. [For more on Senate Bill 934, please see *In the Spotlight*, below.](#)

SENATE PASSES BILL TO EXTEND PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR DISABLED VETERANS

THE SENATE APPROVED LEGISLATION MONDAY that would extend property tax exemptions to more of Pennsylvania's disabled veterans.

Veterans who suffered a total permanent disability as a result of military service can apply for exemption from paying property taxes if they demonstrate financial need. Senate Bill 19, sponsored by **Sen. Tommy Tomlinson (R-Bucks)**, would establish guidelines for determining need to make the property tax exemptions available to more veterans.

Under Senator Tomlinson's bill, applicants can earn up to \$75,000 and are presumed to be eligible for property tax exemption. The bill would also extend eligibility to disabled veterans who own a home with his or her spouse. Senate Bill 19 will now go to the House of Representatives for consideration.

SENATE VOTES TO SEND BAN ON PRICE GOUGING DURING DISASTERS TO GOVERNOR

THE SENATE APPROVED LEGISLATION WEDNESDAY to protect Pennsylvania consumers from price gouging during and after a state of disaster emergency.

House Bill 2001 is identical to legislation sponsored by **Sen. Mary Jo White (R-Venango)** and approved by the Senate last year. House Bill 2001 will be sent to the governor to be signed into law.

The legislation would prohibit “unconscionably excessive” pricing during a declared state of disaster emergency and 30 days after within the geographic region that is the subject of the declared emergency. Drafted in cooperation with state Attorney General Tom Corbett, the measure gives the Attorney General the authority to investigate possible price gouging and imposes penalties on violators.

SENATE AUTHORIZES REVIEW OF PA HOMELAND SECURITY EFFORTS

THE SENATE ADOPTED A RESOLUTION TUESDAY calling for a comprehensive review of the Commonwealth’s efforts to improve homeland security.

Senate Resolution 366, sponsored by **Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee Chairman Don White (R-Indiana)**, directs the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to review homeland security funding and preparedness in the Commonwealth and provide a report of its findings to the Senate no later than June 1 of 2007.

According to Senator White, Pennsylvania has received more than \$615 million in federal funding for homeland security programs and initiatives since 9-11, but the Legislature hasn’t seen a detailed account of how that money has been invested at the state or local levels. [For details of the pending review, please see *Fast Facts*, below.](#)

SENATE PASSES MEASURE TO GIVE VETS EASIER ACCESS TO PHARMACEUTICALS

LEGISLATION THAT WOULD PROVIDE LONG-TERM CARE patients who are veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces easier access to pharmaceuticals was approved by the Senate on Tuesday.

Under Senate Bill 808, sponsored by **Sen. Gib Armstrong (R-Lancaster)**, veterans in long-term care facilities will gain access to low-cost drugs through the Veterans Administration. The bill would authorize a long-term facility pharmacy to receive the lower cost drugs directly from the VA drug benefit program in the patient’s name and to repackage those drugs so that they may be dispensed in unit doses.

The change would make it much more affordable and easy for veterans in such facilities to obtain their necessary medications. The measure was sent to the House of Representatives.

In the Spotlight

SENATE BILL 934 IS PART OF A NATIONWIDE EFFORT proposed by President Bush to digitize medical records across the country.

Currently, 90 percent of healthcare data information is exchanged via telephone, fax, or mail. Federal officials estimate that over \$140 billion a year can be saved with a nationwide electronic health records network.

In addition to reducing health care costs, Senate Bill 934 can help consumers in other ways. Patients would be able to get their lab results sent to their home computer, prescription drugs could be renewed with a click of a button, individuals could receive medical advice from their doctor over the internet, and parents could print out their child's immunization records at home.

Fast Facts

SENATE AUTHORIZES COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF PA HOMELAND SECURITY

- How much federal funding has the Commonwealth received and how much money has been distributed to counties, municipalities, school districts, hospitals and emergency responders for homeland security programs?
- Which state and local agencies are receiving money and is it provided in accordance with their critical needs?
- What obstacles are agencies facing when seeking federal funding for homeland security?
- Do state agencies have adequate resources and sufficient authority to effectively direct the coordination of homeland security efforts?
- What oversight mechanisms are in place to ensure that homeland security funds are being used for their intended purposes?

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.pasenategov.com.