

Senate News Brief

from Senate Republicans

"In my experiences working with my family's small business, I have found that it is essential to control spending and stay within financial constraints. Government must operate under those types of constraints as well. We have a responsibility to the people of Pennsylvania to ensure that state spending is prudent."

– **Sen. Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland)** announcing the Taxpayer Protection Act, legislation and a proposed constitutional amendment to limit state spending.

Preview

GOVERNOR TO UNVEIL BUDGET

SENATE REPUBLICANS will keep a close eye on new programs and spending when the governor unveils his proposed budget for 2007-08 on Tuesday. **Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Gib Armstrong (R-Lancaster)** has urged caution and restraint in state spending, given the current fiscal situation.

EMS TAX REFORM, VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER AID ON WEEK'S AGENDA

SEPARATE BILLS REFORMING THE SO-CALLED EMS TAX and reauthorizing a state grant program that provides financial support for volunteer firefighters and ambulance services could be considered on the Senate floor next week. Senate Bill 218, sponsored by **Sen. Pat Browne (R-Lehigh)**, would require municipalities to collect the tax spread out over an entire year, rather than a single lump-sum payment, and would rename the EMS Tax to the more accurate "Local Services Tax." Senate Bill 10, sponsored by **Sen. Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland)**, was approved by the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee this week (see *Review* below).

Review

GOP SENATORS PUSH FOR LIMITS ON STATE SPENDING

CITING THE NEED TO SET FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE LIMITS on state government spending, a group of Republican Senators on Monday unveiled the Taxpayer Protection Act.

The Taxpayer Protection Act, a constitutional amendment and bill, sponsored by **Sen. Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland)** and **Sen. Mike Folmer (R-Lebanon)**, respectively, would limit state spending to an inflation-based index. Also on hand to announce the proposal were **Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati (R-Jefferson)**, **Sen. Bob Robbins (R-Mercer)**, **Sen. Jake Corman (R-Centre)**, **Sen. Jeffrey Piccola (R-Dauphin)** and **Sen. Pat Browne (R-Lehigh)**. [For more on GOP spending limits, please see *In the Spotlight*, below.](#)

COMMITTEE VOTES TO REAUTHORIZE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER, EMS AID

THE SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Lisa Baker (R-Luzerne)**, unanimously approved legislation Tuesday to reauthorize a state grant program that provides essential financial support for volunteer firefighters and ambulance services.

Sponsored by **Sen. Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland)**, Senate Bill 10 is a top priority of the Senate Republican Caucus. Since 2000, the General Assembly has regularly appropriated \$25 million to the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency to provide grants to volunteer fire and EMS departments. Senate Bill 10 would update and reauthorize the Volunteer Fire Company and Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Program through 2007.

SMOKE-FREE WORKPLACE BILL APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

THE SENATE PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELFARE COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Ted Erickson (R-Delaware)**, moved forward legislation Wednesday to provide smoke-free workplaces and public places in Pennsylvania.

Senate Bill 246, sponsored by **Sen. Stewart Greenleaf (R-Montgomery)**, was approved by a 9-2 vote and sent to the full Senate for consideration. (The committee roll call vote, and all Senate committee roll call votes, can now be found online at www.pasen.gov.)

The legislation provides a comprehensive definition of workplace and provides a list of examples of public places. It exempts private residences except for those used as child day care, adult day care or health care facilities, along with tobacco shops and the workplaces of manufacturers, importers and wholesalers of tobacco products. Hotels and motels would be able to designate 25 percent of their rooms as smoking rooms.

PUBLIC HEARING ON LCB HIRING OF CEO, BEER SALES IN STORES

THE SENATE LAW AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. John Rafferty (R-Montgomery)**, held a second public hearing Tuesday on the process used to hire a CEO at the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board. The hiring was made with no public input and less than 48 hours notice. The panel also discussed whether Pennsylvania should allow beer sales in grocery stores and gas stations. Sen. Rafferty said he plans to hold a public hearing in March on those issues. He raised concerns that the move could lead to more underage drinking.

COMMITTEE HOLDS PUBLIC HEARING ON PA GAMING REGULATION

THE SENATE COMMUNITY, ECONOMIC AND RECREATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Jane Earll (R-Erie)**, held an informational hearing Tuesday on Pennsylvania's emerging gaming industry, focused on funding for the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board and industry regulation. Committee members questioned members of the PGCB and the administration about a plan to assess fees on casinos to pay regulatory expenses.

SEN. PICCOLA PROPOSES NEW OVERSIGHT OF PA FARM SHOW COMPLEX

LEGISLATION CHANGING THE OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT of the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex was unveiled Wednesday by **Sen. Jeffery Piccola (R-Dauphin)**.

Joined by state, county and local officials, as well as regional business leaders, Sen. Piccola outlined legislation that would create the Pennsylvania Exposition and Farm Show Authority to oversee and improve the operations of the Pennsylvania State Farm Show Complex building in Harrisburg. The Pennsylvania State Farm Show Complex is one of the largest exhibition facilities in the nation. Sen. Piccola explained that the complex is underutilized as many exhibitors struggle to meet the rental costs and deal with parking and traffic control issues.

In the Spotlight

IN ADDITION TO THE SPENDING LIMITS IN THE TAXPAYER PROTECTION ACT, the proposal also sets realistic restrictions on the use of surplus revenues received by the Commonwealth.

Specifically, 75 percent of any revenues over the spending limits imposed by the bill would be returned to the taxpayers. The remaining 25 percent would go directly into the Rainy Day Fund to help the Commonwealth cope with unanticipated revenue shortfalls. While the legislation sets clear limits on spending, it also provides exceptions for extraordinary circumstances.

The legislators stressed that reasonable limits on spending are needed to improve Pennsylvania's economic and job growth. While state spending has increased by nearly 28 percent over the past four years, Pennsylvania is consistently near the bottom of rankings for job growth, personal income growth, and population growth during the same period.

The Taxpayer Protection Act bill could be enacted this year, while the constitutional amendment must be approved by the Legislature in two successive sessions and be approved by the voters.

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.