

# Senate News Brief

## from Senate Republicans

*"It is the Governor's spending impulses, rather than alleged federal tightfistedness, that are largely responsible for the revenue hole in the state budget."*

– **Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Gib Armstrong (R-Lancaster)** on budget figures showing the potential reduction in federal funding for fiscal year 2007-08 to be much less significant than the Rendell administration claims.

### Preview

#### ADDITIONAL BUDGET HEARING SET FOR WEDNESDAY

THE SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Gib Armstrong (R-Lancaster)**, will hold a special public hearing on the proposed 2007-08 state budget on Wednesday. The hearing is a first-time opportunity for research and advocacy groups from across the political spectrum to directly register opinions about the administration's proposed state budget, the taxes and borrowing he has recommended, and other facets.

Hearings involving department heads concluded Thursday. *(Please see Review, below.)*

#### JOINT PUBLIC HEARING ON 2008 PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DATE CHANGE

THE SENATE MAJORITY POLICY COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Jake Corman (R-Centre)**, and the Senate Minority Policy Committee will hold a joint public hearing Tuesday to discuss efforts to move the 2008 Presidential Primary to an earlier date.

Appearing before the committees will be Secretary of the Commonwealth Pedro Cortes, members of the County Commissioners Association, party officials and others who have an interest in the subject.

#### FIRST ACT 85 REPORT ON UNDERAGE DRINKING TO BE DISCUSSED

THE SENATE LAW AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. John Rafferty (R-Montgomery)**, will hold a public hearing Wednesday to discuss the first Act 85 Report on High Risk and Underage Drinking.

The report is required by legislation produced by the committee last year after a series of public hearings. Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board Chairman Patrick Stapleton, board member Thomas Goldsmith and William Poe, Director of the Bureau of Alcohol Education, will provide an overview of the report and answer questions.

#### HEARINGS SCHEDULED FOR NOMINATIONS TO CABINET POSTS

SENATE COMMITTEES are holding public hearings this week on nominations for department secretaries in the Rendell administration. [For a list of hearings, please see Fast Facts, below.](#)

### Review

#### COMMITTEE HOLDS TWO WEEKS OF BUDGET HEARINGS

THE SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE completed two weeks of public hearings on the proposed 2007-08 state budget.

Members questioned administration officials and department heads on spending requests and department performances over the past year. **Committee Chairman Gib Armstrong (R-Lancaster)** and others strongly criticized the administration for failing to acknowledge a letter from top Senate leadership asking for a change in the governor's on-going practice of cutting funding for programs and services of interest to the Legislature.

*Comprehensive summaries of the hearings, along with video and audio, can be accessed at [pasenategop.com](http://pasenategop.com).*

#### SENATE COMMITTEES SEEK ANSWERS ON STATE'S WINTER STORM RESPONSE

THE SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Roger Madigan (R-Bradford)**, and the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, chaired by **Sen. Lisa Baker (R-Luzerne)**, held a joint public hearing Feb. 22 to examine the state's response to the recent winter storm, which closed large sections of Interstates 78, 80, and 81.

Members questioned administration and emergency management officials on the state's failure to manage the storm response and the communications breakdowns that occurred before and during the storm that led to the road closings. [For more on the hearing, please see In the Spotlight, below. Video of the hearing, and additional information, can be found at \[pasenategop.com\]\(http://pasenategop.com\).](#)

## SEN. ORIE RE-INTRODUCES MEASURE TO REFORM PA MEDICAL LIABILITY SYSTEM

LEGISLATION THAT WOULD PROVIDE DEMONSTRATION GRANTS to hospitals and affiliated physicians for the development and implementation of alternatives to litigation for resolving disputes is being introduced by **Sen. Jane Orie (R-Allegheny)**.

The grants would establish pilot projects designed to reduce health care costs and reduce medical errors. The pilot projects would provide for: a uniform schedule of compensation for injuries related to medical treatment; identification of preventable errors; and better and more open sharing of information between health care providers regarding preventable medical errors, without fear of recrimination.

The bill implements a recommendation of a 2005 Joint State Government Commission study entitled "Medical Professional Liability Reform for the 21st Century: A Review of Policy Options."

## SEN. REGOLA ANNOUNCES BILL TO CUT UNNEEDED BUILDING CODE MANDATE

LEGISLATION THAT WOULD ELIMINATE A COSTLY, NEW MANDATE on Pennsylvania homebuilding was announced Tuesday by **Sen. Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland)**.

Senate Bill 437 would eliminate a mandate that took effect on January 1, 2007, under the International Residential Code. The mandate, designed for states affected by hurricane conditions or earthquakes, requires all new residential construction to have "anchor bolts" when the foundation and retaining walls are built.

Pennsylvania has never had a documented case of failure under the previous wall-bracing standards. The mandate could increase the cost of an average size, single-family home in Pennsylvania by up to \$3,000. Senate Bill 437 would repeal the new mandate and reinstate the previous standards on foundation wall bracing.

## In the Spotlight

THE SITUATION ON I-78, I-80, AND I-81, where thousands of motorists were stranded in traffic jams in sub-freezing temperatures – some for nearly 24 hours – received the most attention at the joint hearing of the Senate Transportation Committee and the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

Senators referred to more than 600 emails from individuals impacted by the storm, including many who were trapped in their cars with no food. They wanted answers to a number of questions, including who was responsible for coordinating the response effort and why did it take so long to react.

Sen. Madigan, who chairs the Senate Transportation Committee, said Pennsylvania needs to do a much better job when planning for and responding to snow emergencies. He said changes need to be made immediately to ensure that a similar situation does not occur again and to establish a clearer chain of command to improve communications.

Sen. Baker, the chair of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, wants a thorough review of the incident, stressing that the Commonwealth has to be ready to meet any and all emergency situations. She said the Commonwealth has an obligation to come up with solutions and to be answerable to the many people who were affected by the disaster.

## Fast Facts

### SENATE HEARINGS ON CABINET NOMINATIONS

- Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee, chaired by **Sen. Mary Jo White (R-Venango)**, on the nomination of Michael DiBerardinis as Secretary of Conservation and Natural Resources.
- Senate Aging and Youth Committee, chaired by **Sen. Pat Vance (R-Cumberland)**, on the nomination of Nora Dowd Eisenhower as Secretary of Aging.
- Senate Transportation Committee, chaired by **Sen. Roger Madigan (R-Bradford)** – Allen Biehler, Secretary of Transportation.
- Senate Community, Economic and Recreational Committee, chaired by **Sen. Jane Earl (R-Erie)** – Dennis Yablonsky, Secretary of Community and Economic Development.
- Senate Judiciary Committee, chaired by **Sen. Stewart Greenleaf (R-Montgomery)** – Jeffrey Beard, Secretary of Corrections.
- Senate State Government Committee, chaired by **Sen. Jeffrey Piccola (R-Dauphin)** – James Creedon, Secretary of General Services.
- Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee, chaired by **Sen. Ted Erickson (R-Delaware)** – Calvin Johnson, Secretary of Health.

*All hearings are scheduled for Tuesday, March 13, except for Health, which will take place on Wednesday, March 14.*

*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.pasenategov.com](http://www.pasenategov.com).*