

# Senate News Brief

## from Senate Republicans

*"We have a no-tax policy in place for this budget, and we will find better ways of moving this budget forward."*

– **Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati (R-Jefferson)** on the Rendell administration's proposed \$2.5 billion in tax increases for 2007-08.

### Preview

#### HEARING SCHEDULED ON PROPOSED \$760 MILLION GAS AND OIL TAX

THE SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Roger Madigan (R-Bradford)**, will hold a public hearing Tuesday on the Rendell administration's proposed \$760 million oil tax. The charge, which would be borne by consumers on heating oil bills and at the gas pump, is part of \$2.5 billion in new taxes and fees proposed by the administration.

#### LEGISLATION TO CONFIRM PEMA DIRECTOR SCHEDULED FOR VOTE

THE SENATE could vote next week on a bill to require that the director of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency be confirmed by the Senate. For more information about Senate Bill 637, sponsored by **Sen. Lisa Baker (R-Luzerne)**, please see the *Review* item below.

### Review

#### SENATE ACTS TO CUT UNNEEDED BUILDING CODE MANDATE

THE SENATE approved legislation that would eliminate a costly new mandate on Pennsylvania homebuilding.

Senate Bill 437, sponsored by **Sen. Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland)**, would eliminate a mandate that took effect in January 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.

In Pennsylvania, which has never had a documented case of failure under the previous wall-bracing standards, the mandate could increase the cost of an average single-family home by up to \$3,000. Senate Bill 437 would repeal the new mandate and reinstate the previous standards. It is part of Sen. Regola's call for comprehensive reform of the state Uniform Construction Code. The measure was sent to the House of Representatives.

#### SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE QUESTIONS PRE-K FUNDING PLAN

THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill)**, held a public hearing Wednesday on the Rendell administration's proposal to increase funding for the Accountability Block Grant program by \$100 million but dramatically cut school options in doing so.

Under the plan, \$25 million of the increase would be limited to full-day kindergarten programs, with \$75 million directed to pre-kindergarten programs. In the current fiscal year, only 45 school districts chose to use their block grant funds on pre-kindergarten.

Senator Rhoades stated: *"Only 45 school districts out of 501 opted to spend their share of \$250 million in block grants on pre-kindergarten. That tells me something. Investing in pre-kindergarten is important. But if only a fraction of our schools have used their block grants to do it, they clearly have other priorities."*

#### COMMITTEE MOVES TO REQUIRE CONFIRMATION VOTE ON PEMA DIRECTOR

LEGISLATION TO REQUIRE THAT THE DIRECTOR OF THE PENNSYLVANIA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY go before the Senate for confirmation was approved Tuesday by the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

Senate Bill 637, sponsored by committee chair **Sen. Lisa Baker (R-Luzerne)**, would require the position to be subject to confirmation by a majority of senators. The PEMA director is responsible for coordinating the state's response to natural and man-made disasters, as well as terrorist attacks and other threats. Secretaries of similar-sized departments, such as Aging and Banking, require Senate confirmation. Hundreds of nominees for various licensure boards, health facilities and state universities also face Senate confirmation. For more on PEMA, please see *Fast Facts*, below.

## DENIAL OF BAIL FOR DANGEROUS INDIVIDUALS APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

THE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Stewart Greenleaf (R-Montgomery)**, approved legislation Tuesday that would allow for the denial of bail in cases involving serious crimes or dangerous individuals.

Under Senate Bill 256, sponsored by **Sen. Pat Browne (R-Lehigh)**, in cases where the maximum sentence is life imprisonment or where no conditions other than imprisonment will reasonably protect public safety, denial of bail would be permitted.

Voters amended the Pennsylvania Constitution in 1998 to allow for such denials. However, the language in the state Judicial Code was not changed. The bill was sent to the full Senate for consideration.

## MEASURE REQUIRING BETTER SCHOOL CRIME REPORTING PASSED BY COMMITTEE

SCHOOL DISTRICTS THAT DO NOT IMMEDIATELY REPORT CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES to law enforcement officials would face disciplinary actions and fines under a measure approved Tuesday by the Senate Education Committee, chaired by **Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill)**.

The committee amended Senate Bill 112, sponsored by **Sen. Jeffrey Piccola (R-Dauphin)**, to include a provision introduced by **Sen. Pat Browne (R-Lehigh)**.

Senator Browne's amendment would expand the scope of the working agreement between school districts and local law enforcement agencies. Under the measure, schools would be required to immediately report violent offenses and those involving weapons possession to law enforcement officials or face fines ranging from \$2,500 for a first offense to \$5,000 for a third or subsequent offense.

## SEN. REGOLA INTRODUCES BILL TO PROHIBIT CALLER ID "SPOOFING"

**SEN. BOB REGOLA (R-WESTMORELAND)** has introduced Senate Bill 460, legislation that would prohibit the use of false Caller ID information, a practice known as "spoofing," to trick individuals into taking their calls.

Spoofing has emerged as a tool for identity thieves and scam artists. Individuals use false numbers and identification to make it appear that they are calling from another legitimate location. They know that most people will ignore their calls if they allow their correct information to be displayed on a Caller ID screen.

Senate Bill 460 is part of the Senate's ongoing efforts to address the misuse of technology to commit crimes such as ID theft. The bill is before the Senate Consumer Protection and Licensure Committee, chaired by **Sen. Tommy Tomlinson (R-Bucks)**, who has introduced legislation to make it a crime to engage in computer "phishing." *For more, please see [In the Spotlight](#), below.*

## In the Spotlight

IN "PHISHING," an individual takes on the identity of a legitimate business to induce a person to provide personal information, such as bank account, credit card or Social Security numbers.

Senator Tomlinson's legislation, Senate Bill 84, would make it a crime to engage in phishing, and also make it illegal for a person to sell or distribute any identifying information obtained with the intent to defraud or injure anyone. The bill gives the Attorney General authority to investigate any violation involving more than one county within the Commonwealth or another state.

The Senate passed several new laws last year to combat ID theft, including measures to protect computer users from "spyware" and to ensure confidentiality of Social Security numbers.

## Fast Facts

### PENNSYLVANIA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Community and State Emergency Planning
- 9-1-1 Compliance
- Nuclear Plant Safety
- Hazardous Materials Safety
- Urban Search and Rescue
- Grant Funding
- Training and Certification

*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).*