

Senate News Brief

from Senate Republicans

"If the Taxpayer Protection Act was already in force today, state spending could increase by no more than 3.2 percent this year, which is in stark contrast to Gov. Rendell's proposal to skyrocket spending by 9.8 percent and impose seven new tax increases."

– **Sen. Mike Folmer (R-Lebanon)** sponsor of one of two measures to limit state spending to the average inflation rate plus the average percentage change in state population.

Preview

SEPARATION OF FEDERAL, STATE JUDICIAL PAY ON SENATE AGENDA

THE SENATE next week could consider Senate Bill 44, sponsored by **Senate State Government Committee Chairman Jeffrey Piccola (R-Dauphin)**, which would break the current link between federal and state judicial pay.

The Senate is also expected to hold confirmation votes on many of the governor's cabinet nominees, including the secretaries of Agriculture, Corrections and General Services, along with the State Police Commissioner.

COMMITTEE TO HOLD PUBLIC HEARING ON IMPLEMENTATION OF CHIP EXPANSION

THE SENATE PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELFARE COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Ted Erickson (R-Delaware)**, will hold a public hearing Tuesday to examine the Commonwealth's plans to implement an expansion of the state Children's Health Insurance Program. The committee will also examine why some children are not enrolled in CHIP and discuss successful community outreach efforts to enroll children.

Review

LATEST REFORM: STRENGTHENING PENNSYLVANIA'S RIGHT-TO-KNOW LAW

LEGISLATION TO SIGNIFICANTLY STRENGTHEN Pennsylvania's Right-to-Know Law has been introduced by **Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi (R-Delaware)**.

Senate Bill 1 would make several important changes, including making the General Assembly's financial records subject to the Right-to-Know Law. It is part of a continuing effort to make government at all levels more transparent and responsive.

The measure would also add the Judicial branch's financial records to the law, and clarify that the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency is covered by the law. Records at state-related universities and community colleges would also be covered. For more on Senate Bill 1 and other Senate reforms, please see *In the Spotlight* and *Fast Facts*, below.

SENATORS INTRODUCE BILLS TO LIMIT STATE SPENDING

ACTING ON A SENATE REPUBLICAN PLEDGE to set fiscally responsible limits on state government spending, **Sen. Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland)** and **Sen. Mike Folmer (R-Lebanon)** introduced bills to enact the Taxpayer Protection Act through a constitutional amendment and a statute.

Senate Bill 7, sponsored by Senator Regola, would provide for a constitutional amendment to limit state spending to the average inflation rate plus the average percentage change in state population over the three preceding years. Senate Bill 707, by Senator Folmer, would provide the same limitation by statute.

In addition to spending limits, the Taxpayer Protection Act also sets realistic restrictions on the use of any surplus revenues received by the Commonwealth.

Specifically, 75 percent of any revenues exceeding the spending limits imposed by the bill would be returned to taxpayers. The remaining 25 percent would go directly into the Rainy Day Fund to help the Commonwealth cope with unanticipated shortfalls.

TAX RELIEF FOR SERVICE MEMBERS MOVES FORWARD

THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Pat Browne (R-Lehigh)**, recently approved measures to provide tax relief to Pennsylvanians serving in the military and to employers who hire "citizen-soldiers."

Senate Bill 143, sponsored by **Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill)**, would exempt military personnel on active duty outside the Commonwealth from occupational assessment, per capita, and other similar taxes. Senate Bill 330, sponsored by **Sen. Bob Robbins (R-Mercer)**, would amend the Tax Reform Code of 1971 to provide a tax credit for employers of members of a reserve component of the armed forces.

Other measures approved by the committee would relieve certain members of the Armed Forces from several local tax filing deadlines, and provide an extension of exemption from payment of real estate taxes to the surviving spouse of a veteran who was killed or missing in action.

THIRD HEARING HELD ON PENNSYLVANIA CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

THE SENATE STATE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Jeffrey Piccola (R-Dauphin)**, held its third public hearing Wednesday to discuss legislation providing for the convening of a constitutional convention for the reform of state government.

The purpose of the hearings is to gather information on how a constitutional convention is convened, how it should be structured, and what sections of the Constitution should be addressed.

Among those testifying at the hearing, held in Philadelphia, were legal scholars and the president of the League of Women Voters of Southeastern Pennsylvania.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HOLDS LATEST LISTENING SESSION

THE SENATE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Mike Brubaker (R-Lancaster)**, held its latest community meeting today as part of its "Building a Vision for Rural Pennsylvania" series.

The sessions are designed to help committee members identify the concerns and priorities of the agriculture and rural communities for the 2007-2008 legislative session. The gathering in Gallitzin, Cambria County, was the committee's fourth session since kicking off the effort in February.

In the Spotlight

IN ADDITION TO MAKING THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S FINANCIAL RECORDS SUBJECT TO THE RIGHT-TO-KNOW LAW, Senator Pileggi's legislation would also create an Open Records Clearinghouse in the Department of Community and Economic Development to provide information, training and advisory opinions on open records.

Senate Bill 1 would require agencies to accept email requests; shorten the period in which state agencies must respond to a request for documents from 10 days to 5 days; and improve the process for appealing denials. It would also require all agencies to appoint an open records officer to specifically deal with requests, and require the Governor's Office to create a standard form which may be used to request records, making it easier for citizens.

Senate Bill 1 would also increase penalties for noncompliance from \$300 to \$1,000 for a first offense, and up to \$2,000 for subsequent offenses. The measure comes on the heels of Senate Bill 729, introduced by Senator Pileggi to require the posting of all state employee salaries online.

Fast Facts

SOME OF THE REFORMS ENACTED BY THE SENATE IN 2007

- Limiting Senate session times to between 8 a.m. and 11 p.m.
- Requiring amendments to be posted to the Internet before they may be offered on the Senate floor.
- Establishing a minimum six-hour waiting period before the Senate votes on an amended bill or a conference committee report.
- Requiring all roll call votes from the Senate floor to be posted to pasen.gov within 24 hours, and Senate committee votes to report legislation be posted within 48 hours.
- Requiring posting the Senate's Legislative Journal – which includes the full text of all floor debates – within 45 days.
- Requiring an updated fiscal note for a bill when an amendment to that bill has a fiscal impact.
- Eliminating private leases for Senate vehicles.
- Prohibiting members who live within 50 miles of the Capitol from claiming per diems.

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 pasenategov.com.