

# Senate News Brief

## from Senate Republicans

*"Because the budget this year will be so tight, it is clear to me that we cannot fund all of the education initiatives that the governor has proposed. But we can give our school districts the option to fund these programs with whatever state funding is available to them through the accountability block grant program."*

– **Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill)**, chairman of the Senate Education Committee, which voted to fold several of the administration's education spending proposals into the accountability block grant program, eliminating the need to fund them as stand-alone initiatives.

### Preview

#### SENATE TO TAKE UP MEASURE TO EASE REGULATORY BURDENS ON JOB-CREATORS

THE SENATE this week may take up Senate Bill 354, legislation sponsored by **Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee Chairman Mary Jo White (R-Venango)** that limits the scope of petitions submitted to the state Environmental Quality Board. The bill would prohibit back-door efforts to impose regulatory burdens on job-creators which are unnecessary to meet any state or federal environmental statute requirements.

### Review

#### SENATE PASSES MEASURE SEPARATING STATE, FEDERAL JUDICIAL SALARIES

LEGISLATION THAT WOULD ELIMINATE THE TIE-IN between federal judicial salaries and those of Commonwealth judges was approved overwhelmingly by the Senate on Wednesday.

**Senate State Government Committee Chairman Jeffrey Piccola (R-Dauphin)** introduced Senate Bill 44 in response to a Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruling last year that partly reinstated a pay raise repealed by legislators. The ruling reinstated the raise just for judges. The court decided that the repeal violated the constitutional provision that prohibits the reduction of compensation during a judge's term in office. As a result, the repealed 2005 pay raise remains in effect for judges, tying their salaries to their federal counterparts.

Senate Bill 44 also includes a provision to raise judicial salaries by \$1, which should bolster its chances of withstanding a court challenge. *"This would assure the new salary system would not violate the constitutional ban on diminishment of judicial pay, which was the argument the court cited to reinstate the pay raise for Pennsylvania's judges,"* said Senator Piccola. Senate Bill 44 was sent to the House of Representatives.

#### SENATE APPROVES INVESTIGATION OF "STRATEGIC SOURCING"

THE SENATE approved legislation Wednesday directing the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to study Gov. Rendell's so-called "strategic sourcing" initiative.

Strategic sourcing is a series of procurement practices, including reverse auctions and the aggregation of purchasing contracts. The administration asserts the Commonwealth has saved over \$180 million since the inception of the strategic sourcing program in 2004. However, unlike private business, the "bottom line" savings the state has seen may be negated by the effect strategic sourcing has had on Pennsylvania's economy.

Senate Resolution 41, sponsored by **Sen. Rob Wonderling (R-Montgomery)**, requires the LBFC to analyze procurement spending data to accurately measure actual savings and costs of strategic sourcing, including government operational costs, economic development costs and any decrease in revenue to the Commonwealth from a possible loss of corporate and personal income tax revenue.

#### COMMITTEE VOTES TO PROVIDE FLEXIBILITY FOR EDUCATION SPENDING

CHOOSING LOCAL DECISION-MAKING over state mandates, the Senate Education Committee today voted to fold several of Gov. Rendell's education spending proposals into the accountability block grant program, eliminating the need to fund them as stand-alone initiatives.

Committee Chairman **Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill)** sponsored the amendment to Senate Bill 399.

The amendment inserted the "Classrooms for the Future," "Science, It's Elementary" and "Project 720" initiatives into the accountability block grant program as approved spending options. School districts already have the option to spend block grant funds on full-day kindergarten and pre-kindergarten programs.

The governor wants to hike spending on the programs by \$216 million in his proposed 2007-08 state budget. Senate Bill 399 was sent to the full Senate for consideration.

## PACKAGE OF BILLS TO COMBAT METHAMPHETAMINE PASSED BY SENATE

CONTINUING EFFORTS TO COMBAT THE PRODUCTION OF METHAMPHETAMINE, the Senate approved a four-bill package sponsored by **Sen. John Gordner (R-Columbia)** on Tuesday.

The package is designed to make it more difficult to obtain the ingredients necessary to produce methamphetamine, add new protections for children and clean up the environmental damage caused by illegal meth labs. The package of bills was sent to the House of Representatives. [For more about the bills, please see \*Fast Facts\*, below.](#)

## LONG-TERM CARE INSURANCE INCENTIVE APPROVED BY SENATE

THE SENATE approved legislation Tuesday that would provide a strong financial incentive for consumers to invest in long-term care insurance and reduce financial costs to taxpayers.

Senate Bill 548, sponsored by **Sen. Jake Corman (R-Centre)**, would create the Long-Term Care (LTC) Partnership Program, which would provide a financial incentive for individuals to buy the insurance, and orders the state Department of Public Welfare to file Pennsylvania's state plan for LTC insurance by June 30. The measure is intended to give people the opportunity to protect their personal assets by buying this insurance.

Gov. Rendell's Department of Public Welfare missed its self-imposed deadline to submit Pennsylvania's plan to the federal government, necessitating the legislation. Senate Bill 548 was sent to the House of Representatives.

## DISABILITY ASSISTANCE MEASURE APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Pat Browne (R-Lehigh)**, approved legislation Wednesday to assist disabled Pennsylvanians and their families.

Senate Bill 54, sponsored by **Sen. Ted Erickson (R-Delaware)**, would authorize the creation of Disability Savings Accounts for individuals with mental retardation.

The accounts, which could be created by an individual, or by an employer or family member for the benefit of a mentally retarded person, could be used to assist the beneficiary to achieve and maintain financial independence. Increases in the value of a Disability Savings Account and distribution for qualified disability expenses would be excluded from state Personal Income Tax. The measure is now before the full Senate.

## In the Spotlight

UNDER SENATOR WONDERLING'S RESOLUTION, the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee will investigate the Department of General Services' development and implementation of strategic sourcing, especially with regard to the impact on Pennsylvania small businesses. Additionally, pre-strategic sourcing and post-strategic sourcing procurement data regarding small business and women-owned and minority-owned businesses will be compared.

Contractors and vendor awards will be reviewed for compliance with current procurement policies and statutes. Local governments and school districts will be surveyed and the implementation of cooperative purchasing program contracts will be assessed. The study will also include an evaluation of other contracting methodologies, including vehicles such as federal General Services Administration and state consortium contracts.

## Fast Facts

### SENATE REPUBLICAN ANTI-METH PACKAGE

- Senate Bill 436 provides for the specific offense of operating a methamphetamine laboratory, and increases penalties if the lab is operated near a school, day care center or playground.
- Senate Bill 434 provides for penalties for possessing the ingredients necessary for the production of methamphetamine.
- Senate Bill 433 provides for defendants to be assessed the environmental clean-up costs associated with methamphetamine laboratories.
- Senate Bill 432 combines the criminal provisions of Senate Bill 436 and the environmental provisions of Senate Bill 433.

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