

7TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

Why I voted against the 2011-12 state budget

I voted against the 2011-12 state budget because it cut too deeply into education, economic development and social service funding while hundreds of millions of dollars were left sitting idle.

Shenango Valley area school districts were cut in the budget by \$5.6 million, resulting in local property tax increases, teachers being furloughed and the elimination of some programs that help students succeed.

For example, Sharpsville Area School District raised taxes by 1.5 mills, and the Hermitage School District furloughed eight employees and eliminated another three positions through attrition.

The budget also cut state aid to Pennsylvania's state-owned and state-related universities by \$200 million. That forced the University of Pittsburgh to raise tuition by 8.5 percent, Penn State to increase tuition by an average of 3.8 percent and state-owned universities such as Slippery Rock and Clarion to hike tuition by 7.5 percent. Meanwhile, the state's community colleges were cut by \$23.6 million, or 10 percent, in their state appropriation.

The budget will hurt Mercer County economically. Hospitals, which are a significant employer, will have their assessment paid to the Commonwealth increased by 9 percent while state funding for uncompensated care is cut by 20 percent.

Hospitals already eat at least 50 percent of the cost of uncompensated care, and this budget makes it much worse.

The budget also eliminated funding for the business retention and expansion program that saved jobs in Mercer County, eliminated funding for training activities and cut customized job training by 40 percent. It also cut small business development centers by almost 25 percent.

Additionally, this budget cut millions of dollars from county services and programs – where state funding is reduced, counties must either replace it with local revenue or cut services. This includes cuts to county child and youth programs, mental health, behavioral health, homeless assistance and the human services development fund.

While cuts were coming, obvious sources of revenue were left on the table. As we were debating the budget, the state had a \$785 million surplus that could have been used to ease the cuts.

Further, the governor refused to consider a tax on natural gas drilling companies, some of which had gross profits of more than \$1 billion last year.



State funding cuts to local school districts

School District	Dollar Difference from 2010-11	Percent Difference from 2010-11	Cut Per Student
Farrell	-\$604,133	-8.0%	-\$674
Hermitage	-\$730,459	-11.5%	-\$337
Reynolds	-\$775,778	-9.1%	-\$573
Sharon City	-\$2,048,630	-13.1%	-\$931
Sharpsville	-\$698,027	-10.4%	-\$550
West Middlesex	-\$697,412	-11.7%	-\$616



Property Tax/Rent Rebate application deadline extended until Dec. 31



I have some news to report about the state's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program and a word of caution about a non-government organization that has been soliciting seniors.

The deadline to apply for the program has been extended until December 31, 2011.

The program provides state rebates on property taxes or rent paid in 2010 to eligible Pennsylvanians 65 or older; widows and widowers 50 and older; and people with disabilities 18 and older. The income limit to qualify is \$35,000 for homeowners and \$15,000 for renters. Applicants must count all sources of income toward the limit but only half of any Social Security, Supplemental Security or federal Railroad Retirement Tier 1 benefits count toward total income.

The maximum standard rebate is \$650 but supplemental rebates for qualifying homeowners can increase the rebate to \$975. Last year more than 603,000 homeowners and

renters across the state received more than \$281 million in property tax and rent rebates as a result of this program. If you think you are eligible, please apply now. Applications are available at my office.

YOU SHOULD NOT PAY TO APPLY TO THE PROGRAM.

A non-government organization in Harrisburg identifying itself as the Senior Advisory Center has been soliciting seniors in Mercer County and across the state, offering to complete the application for a \$39 fee.

There's no need to pay to complete forms for this state-sponsored program.

Seniors can receive free assistance with the forms by contacting my local office at 2213 Shenango Valley Freeway, Unit 2-E, Hermitage. The phone number is 724-981-4655.

Local pastor offers benediction at 2011 Commonwealth Prayer Breakfast

It was my honor to serve as chairman of the 2011 Commonwealth Prayer Breakfast held May 10 at the Radisson Penn Harris Hotel & Convention Center near Harrisburg. This annual event is a time of worship, prayer and reflection. It allows us to refocus on why we are called to public service and how we are to provide that service. In attendance were Gov. Tom Corbett, Lt. Gov. James Cawley, cabinet officials, state legislators, and members of the faith community.

The theme of the breakfast was "Build Upon the Rock" and Rev. Paul Sartarelli of The Chapel, Akron, Ohio, delivered the keynote address. His message centered on how our faith guides us in these difficult and tumultuous times. It was a truly uplifting and inspiring event.

I was particularly pleased to welcome my pastor, Rev. John Trojak of First Baptist Church of Sharon, who offered the benediction. In addition, Rev. Trojak, later that day, delivered the opening prayer for the House of Representatives' legislative session. This is a unique opportunity that I would like to extend to other clergy from our area. Please contact my office if you are interested in exploring this opportunity.



I am joined by my pastor, Rev. John Trojak of First Baptist Church of Sharon (center), and House Speaker Sam Smith. Rev. Trojak offered the benediction for the 2011 Commonwealth Prayer Breakfast and the opening prayer for the House of Representatives' legislative session.

Farrell housing project for seniors and those with disabilities gets needed state boost

I was pleased to help the City of Farrell successfully apply for a tax-credit program administered by the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency that allows a collaborative effort to build homes for seniors and those with disabilities to move forward.

Farrell was twice turned down by PHFA for this competitive program, and the project was in jeopardy. But I arranged for PHFA's CEO and Executive Director, Brian Hudson, to visit Farrell last year. He met with me, city officials and the developer to talk about how to strengthen the application. He also toured the site of the Farrell Homes project.

After making some changes to the project, PHFA approved the project for tax credits in July.

Plans call for four one-bedroom apartments, 30 two-bedroom apartments, six three-bedroom family homes and four four-bedroom family homes. The development will serve low-income families and those with special needs.

The project has entered into a partnership with Mercer County Housing Authority and the ARC of Mercer County to provide support services for special needs residents so they can live as independently as possible.

The project is a joint effort between Farrell, the nonprofit organization Community Housing Options Involving Cooperative Efforts (CHOICE) and the developer, NRP Group LLC of Cleveland.

Public school library study advances

Progress is being made on a statewide study of public school library resources and services that is the result of my resolution that was adopted by the House of Representatives last year.

Dr. Mary Kay Biagini from the University of Pittsburgh's School of Information Sciences has analyzed information she received from Pennsylvania's public schools, and roundtables were held in September in Allentown, Harrisburg and Erie.

The State Board of Education is considering public input, and, if necessary, will revise the draft study to produce a final report lawmakers can use to improve public school libraries.

This information is important because quality library programs and staffing result in better reading test scores. However, library resources vary widely across the state, and we do not have any data on these resources.

The information compiled will include the number of hours students have access to their school library, the availability of up-to-date and useful print and electronic resources, the average age and conditions of books, and Internet access.

I would like to thank Shenango Valley school librarians, as well as the Pennsylvania Public School Librarians Association, who approached me about this issue and asked me to sponsor the resolution.

Bill to set standards for electronic filings advances

My bill that would establish uniform standards for county recorders of deeds to electronically record deeds, mortgages, leases and other property documents is in a position to be considered by the full House of Representatives. It was voted out of the House Commerce Committee in June.

Pennsylvania has permitted the filing of electronic documents, electronic signatures, and electronic notarization by recorder of deeds since 1999, when it enacted the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. However, it does not have uniform standards to record those documents. Since many Pennsylvania counties allow residents to record property documents electronically, we should do it in a uniform way.

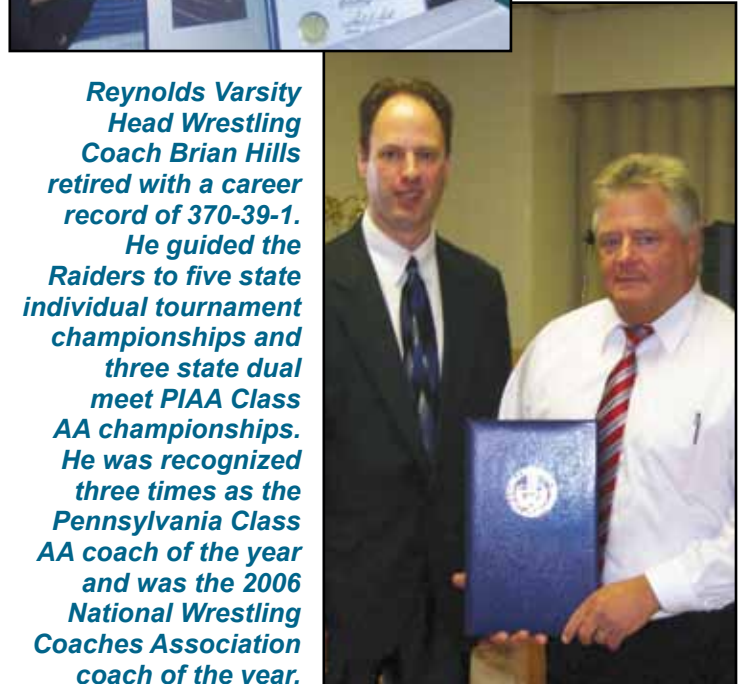
My bill would establish a 13-member Electronic Recording Commission to establish the uniform standards. It does not require electronic recording and specifies that paper documents may be used for recording.

However, my legislation would help recorder of deeds offices in Pennsylvania work with similar offices in other states because 25 states have adopted the Uniform Real Property Electronic Recording Act.

The legislation is endorsed by the County Recorder of Deeds Association, the Pennsylvania Bankers Association, the Pennsylvania Bar Association, the Pennsylvania Notaries Association and the Pennsylvania Land Title Association.



Joe Plawky of Hermitage turned 100 on Aug. 18. He's a pillar of our community who operated a thriving dairy farm business for 75 years. I presented him with a legislative citation.



Reynolds Varsity Head Wrestling Coach Brian Hills retired with a career record of 370-39-1. He guided the Raiders to five state individual tournament championships and three state dual meet PIAA Class AA championships. He was recognized three times as the Pennsylvania Class AA coach of the year and was the 2006 National Wrestling Coaches Association coach of the year.



Hundreds of Mercer County seniors attended my annual free Senior and Health Education Fair July 15 at the Sharon American Legion where they received free health screenings, farmer's market coupons, information and services. I'll be holding another senior fair next summer.

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LONGIETTI LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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Sunday hunting survey

The Pennsylvania Game Commission is calling for an end to the ban on Sunday hunting in the state, but that request needs approval from the General Assembly.

Over the past few months, many constituents have contacted me about this issue. As this issue is being debated in Harrisburg, I am very interested to learn how you feel. What do you think? Do you support legalizing Sunday hunting or do you oppose it?

Please visit my website at www.pahouse.com/Longietti to take a survey on this issue, or send a letter to my local office at 2213 Shenango Valley Freeway, Unit 2-E, Hermitage, PA 16148.



A bigger role in the House Democratic Caucus

I was honored to be named a vice chairman of the House Democratic Policy Committee for the 2011-12 legislative session by committee Chairman Mike Sturla, D-Lancaster. The appointment gives me an opportunity to bring the needs and concerns of Mercer County residents to the table as our party shapes its agenda.

As a vice chairman, I help develop the caucus policy agenda, in determining topics for public hearings and acting as a liaison to other caucus members on policy ideas.

The committee had a busy summer, as we traveled from Philadelphia to Erie and many points in between to discuss topics such as the impact of state budget cuts, a proposal to privatize state liquor stores and the Marcellus Shale natural gas industry.



The House Democratic Policy Committee discussed a proposal to privatize state liquor stores during a hearing in McKeesport.