



Legislative update from

State Representative

**Marc J. Gergely**

35th Legislative District



**SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES**

SPRING 2011

## **CORBETT BUDGET IS AN IRRESPONSIBLE TAX SHIFT**

In early March, Gov. Corbett presented a spending plan for the next fiscal year. We knew to expect a tough budget, but Democrats and Republicans were immediately concerned the deepest cuts, especially in public education, are nothing more than a tax shift to local property taxpayers.

I am urging my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to work together and negotiate a responsible budget. With the governor's minimal experience crafting a budget, the legislature must take the lead to enable our state to meet the fiscal challenges we face and provide adequate funding in our communities.

### **Public schools cut \$1.2 billion**

Perhaps in an effort to fundamentally change public education and weaken unions, the governor proposed slashing public school funding and that's unacceptable. Basic education, which is considered pre-kindergarten through 12th grade, is slated to be cut by \$550 million or 9.5 percent.

Additional funding for early education was eliminated. That funding supports many of the pre-kindergarten and full-day kindergarten classes in our school districts. Schools also would need to spend an additional \$224 million for students to attend cyber and charter schools.

Struggling districts would be hit the hardest under Corbett's plan because state funding is a larger percentage of their total budgets. As a result, districts throughout the Mon Valley are announcing teacher layoffs, increasing class sizes and eliminating important classes, such as foreign languages, computer technology and business.

### **Gov. Corbett's Recommended Education Cuts**

School District	Total Cut	Percent Cut
Duquesne City	-\$2,092,640	-26%
East Allegheny	-\$1,241,734	-17%
Elizabeth Forward	-\$1,482,362	-15%
McKeesport Area	-\$4,387,303	-16%
South Allegheny	-\$1,451,963	-14%
Steel Valley	-\$1,983,833	-21%
West Mifflin Area	-\$1,240,617	-17%
Woodland Hills	-\$4,336,978	-24%

### **Property tax shift**

Cutting teacher positions and programs will not fix the problems that would be created by Corbett's draconian budget. Local property taxes would need to be increased to make up for the decrease in state support. This is nothing more than a tax shift from the state to local residents, who already are being hit hard in this economy.

### **Higher education cut 50 percent**

Gov. Corbett questioned the value of funding the University of Pittsburgh and other colleges when he called for a 50 percent decrease in state support for higher education.

Corbett's plan calls for Pitt to lose \$80 million, plus another \$33 million in medical and research funding. Penn State officials are concerned its \$186 million cut will force a tuition hike that triggers a drop in enrollment, forcing some regional campuses to close.

Students at Pitt, Penn State, as well as Slippery Rock, Indiana, Clarion, California and all state-owned universities should also expect a big tuition hike.

When we should be encouraging job creation, these cuts will lead to job cuts and prevent many students from achieving the American dream that an education can provide.

#### **Other miscues in the Corbett budget:**

- Fails to address the transportation crisis;
- Maintains \$900 million in business tax loopholes;
- Refuses to consider a Marcellus Shale natural gas severance tax;
- Cuts environmental funding.

### **Protecting the Mon Valley**

The Corbett budget undermines public education from kindergarten through college and shifts a greater burden onto local property taxes and middle- and low-income families. This governor has virtually no experience crafting a complicated government budget and it shows. The legislature must amend his flawed plan to protect the interests of the Mon Valley and beyond.

### **SIGN UP FOR FREE E-MAIL ALERTS**

Visit my updated website at [www.pahouse.com/Gergely](http://www.pahouse.com/Gergely) to stay up-to-date on my legislation and community initiatives. You can also sign up to receive free e-mail alerts about my work in Harrisburg and important state programs that may affect your life. To sign up, click "Contact Me" and fill out the form.

## Taxpayer-paid tuition vouchers leave children behind

In addition to slashing funding for public schools, the Corbett administration is pushing for taxpayer-funded tuition vouchers. A proposal would give specially selected low-income students in struggling schools thousands of tax dollars to transfer to a public or private school, including religious schools.

Gov. Ridge tried a similar idea and it failed, for good reason. Vouchers leave most students behind in a struggling school with less money to teach. The vouchers, meaning tax dollars, are diverted from efforts to reduce class size, improve teacher quality and provide every student with books, access to computers and a safe learning environment.

This so-called "education choice" is not a choice for all if not every child gets a voucher or if private schools can refuse to accept students based on gender, religion, behavior, and special needs.

As a former school board member, I understand the challenges before our schools. Vouchers will drain state education dollars from our public schools, forcing struggling districts to raise property taxes to educate the remaining students.

## LOCAL HEARING QUESTIONS STATE LIQUOR STORE PRIVATIZATION

While the governor's proposal to slash education funding is getting most of the headlines, he also used his budget address to call for a special commission to study the issue of privatizing Pennsylvania's Wine and Spirit Shops.

I recently hosted a House Democratic Policy Committee hearing in McKeesport to learn how selling the state's 650 liquor stores to private owners who will be motivated by profits would affect our communities.

No proposal has been released, but there are many questions that must be answered before we should allow a valuable state asset to be sold for Gov. Corbett's one-time money grab.

We need to know how much the stores are worth. Estimates of the state stores' value vary widely and seem to change with the wind. We need to know if more stores will open in our neighborhoods. Some conservative groups want to increase the number of stores from 650 to as many as 3,000.

We need to know if private industry will raise prices or reduce selection and how the products will be marketed.

The impact on the system's 4,300 well-trained employees is also unclear. With an average age of 47, will they be replaced by younger, and lower-paid workers with less to lose by selling alcohol to underage customers?

Our local law enforcement may also be affected. Today, the Pennsylvania State Police is responsible for enforcing the state's liquor laws. Privatization could force local police to beef up their forces to enforce the laws.

There is no question that the state store system is a tremendous asset to the state. Operated by the Liquor Control Board, the stores generate \$500 million a year for the state, including \$100 million in profits.



*Rep. Gergely listens as Ed Cloonan, former president of the Independent State Store Union, speaks at a House Democratic Policy Committee hearing dealing with the privatization of state liquor stores at the McKeesport Palisades.*

## Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program now taking applications

My staff is ready to help senior citizens and other residents who qualify for the state's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program.

The program provides state rebates on property taxes or rent paid in 2010 to eligible Pennsylvanians 65 or older; widows and widowers 50 or older; and people with disabilities 18 or older.

The income limit is \$35,000 a year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for renters. Half of Social Security, Supplemental Security, or federal Railroad Retirement Tier I income is excluded from the income limit.

The maximum standard rebate is \$650, but supplemental rebates for qualifying homeowners can boost rebates to \$975. The deadline to apply for a rebate is June 30.

Applications and assistance completing the forms are available at my constituent service offices.

## House passes Gergely's government reform bill

My bill to target fraud or other illegal actions in the legislature by expanding the state's Whistleblower Law to include legislative employees, was passed unanimously by the House.

This additional protection should encourage employees to report fraud or waste in the legislature without the threat of losing their job or other retaliation. Under current law, legislative staff does not have the same protection as those working in the private sector.

My bill also protects legislative employees who take part in investigations or hearings about reported waste or improper activities. Employees who are the subject of retaliation could seek civil damages, including reinstatement of jobs, back wages and benefits and actual damages.

A separate bill also passed the House to extend whistleblower protection to employees of partnerships, associations, for profit or nonprofit corporations receiving public funding to perform public work or services.

I am proud to support many reforms that are making the legislature more open and transparent. These bills provide another layer of protection to ensure tax dollars are used appropriately and public officials are acting responsibly.

The state Senate is considering both bills.

## SPORTSMEN'S CORNER

### Gergely re-elected to leadership post with national sportsmen's organization

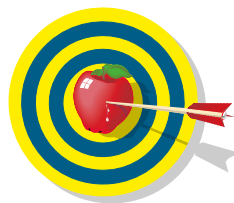
I am honored to have been re-elected to the executive council of the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses. This is a great opportunity to work with legislators from around the country to increase awareness of issues important to sportsmen and to promote legislation and policies that will protect the interests of hunters and anglers.

The NASC executive council provides advice to the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation and its state programs. The executive council helps establish and promote sportsmen's policies and encourages conservation partners and the 38 state caucuses to share information.

In Pennsylvania, I remain chairman of the Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus, a bipartisan organization consisting of members of both the state House of Representatives and Senate.

### SCI 2010 State Legislator of the Year

*Rep. Gergely and Jeff Crane, executive director of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, pose with the award Gergely received as the Safari Club International 2010 state legislator of the year. Gergely was honored for his legislative efforts to protect our hunting heritage and promote wildlife conservation.*



### New laws target dangerous hunters and anglers

Pennsylvania's forests and waterways are safer after action the legislature took recently to crack down on poachers and keep irresponsible hunters, anglers and trappers out of the state.

Before leaving office, Gov. Rendell signed a Senate version of a bill that I introduced that enrolled Pennsylvania in the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact. By joining the 37 other states in the compact, we ensure that if a hunter loses his hunting or fishing license in another state due to a serious violation, then he will lose his license in Pennsylvania.

I also supported the state's new poaching law which rewrites much of the penalty section of the Game Code. It significantly increased fines and penalties for violations for illegal killing of game or wildlife, especially for the illegal taking of big game.

Both new laws are strongly supported by sportsmen and I want to thank the many hunters and anglers who contacted the legislature. The combination of these new laws have ended Pennsylvania's reputation as a poacher's paradise and strengthened our wildlife protection strategies.



### REP. GERGELY 2011-12 COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:

Labor and Industry, Democratic vice chairman

Human Services, Democratic chairman, Subcommittee on Drugs and Alcohol

Game and Fisheries

Professional Licensure

State Representative  
**Marc J. Gergely**

325 Main Capitol Building  
P.O. Box 202035  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2035

**LOOK INSIDE FOR  
INFORMATION ON:**

- **Gov. Corbett's budget hurts schools, families**
- **McKeesport hearing on state stores**

**Also inside:**

**New law targets dangerous hunters**

lpo • kaf • 0411



*Legislative Update from*

State Representative  
**Marc J. Gergely**  
35th Legislative District



**SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES**      **SPRING 2011**

325 Main Capitol Building • P.O. Box 202035 • Harrisburg, PA 17120-2035 • (717) 783-1018  
1540 Lincoln Way • White Oak, PA 15131 • (412) 664-0035  
1705 Maple Street, Suite 110 • Homestead, PA 15120 • (412) 476-3046

**WEBSITE: [WWW.PAHOUSE.COM/GERGELY](http://WWW.PAHOUSE.COM/GERGELY) • E-MAIL: [REPGERGELY@PAHOUSE.NET](mailto:REPGERGELY@PAHOUSE.NET)**

## **My office can help you with:**

- Car registrations, special tags, disability placards, titles and driver's license applications
- Information on financial assistance for higher education
- Assistance in obtaining and completing state forms of all kinds
- Voter registration and absentee ballot applications
- Unemployment compensation, disability and workers' compensation
- Birth and death certificates
- Problems with the Department of Public Welfare (food stamps, medical and income assistance)
- Pennsylvania income tax questions or problems
- Requests for literature of all kinds – bills, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information
- Citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding accomplishments and family milestones
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
- Complaints and problems with insurance companies
- Renewal of state-issued licenses or certifications
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate problems or questions
- Problems or questions about the state lottery
- PACE cards for senior citizens
- Consumer complaints
- Liquor Control Board concerns or questions
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups