

# **GREG VITALI**

STATE REPRESENTATIVE — 166TH DISTRICT

P.O. BOX 202166

HARRISBURG, PA 17120-2166

lpo-jc-1109

## ***LEGISLATIVE REPORT***

NOVEMBER 2009

# **GREG VITALI**

**STATE REPRESENTATIVE — 166TH DISTRICT**

**DISTRICT OFFICE:**

1001 East Darby Road  
Havertown, PA 19083  
(610) 789-3900

E-MAIL: [greg@gregvitali.com](mailto:greg@gregvitali.com)

**CAPITOL OFFICE:**

103 East Wing, Main Capitol Bldg.  
P.O. Box 202166  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2166  
(717) 787-7647

WEB SITE: [www.gregvitali.com](http://www.gregvitali.com)



## ***Helpful information available in my office***

Here is a sampling of brochures that are available in my district office in Havertown. Please stop by to pick some up or call to have any of them sent to you.

**Home Energy Efficiency Checklist:** This checklist can help you make your home more energy-efficient.

**H1N1 Swine Flu:** This brochure explains the symptoms of the H1N1 flu and what you can do to stop its spread.

**Important Information for Consumers:** This brochure has information about Pennsylvania's Do Not Call list. It also outlines how to deal with junk mail, telemarketers and unsolicited credit offers.

**PA 529 College Savings Program:** This provides information about how to enroll in the program and its benefits.

**Unclaimed property:** This brochure can help you track down unclaimed property, such as bank accounts, uncashed checks or stock. One in ten Pennsylvanians has unclaimed property.

**U.S. Census:** The next U.S. Census day is April 1, 2010. This brochure provides information about how the census works, who is counted and the importance of providing accurate information.

## ***Pennsylvania releases draft Climate Change Action Plan***

A draft Climate Change Action Plan released by the state in October calls for Pennsylvania to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to at least 30 percent below year 2000 levels by 2020. The final plan is due on Dec. 18. The Action Plan, which includes 52 recommendations that the governor and legislature can implement in order to reach that goal, grew out of legislation I originally introduced in 2001. I am serving on the citizen advisory committee that developed the Action Plan.

Pennsylvania accounts for about 1 percent of the world's greenhouse gases. We have a responsibility to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. I support the goals outlined in the Climate Change Action Plan and, therefore, I am sponsoring legislation that would implement several of the plan's recommendations.

My legislation (H.B. 80), as well as similar legislation in the state Senate (S.B. 92), would require electric companies in Pennsylvania such as PECO to significantly increase the

share of electricity they obtain from renewable sources such as wind, solar and geothermal. The bill would also require the legislature to create a framework for establishing a system in Pennsylvania to capture and store carbon dioxide produced by coal-fired power plants, and would require electric distribution companies to purchase at least 3 percent of their electricity from coal-fired plants that capture carbon dioxide.

These steps alone would eliminate approximately 16 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions per year – the equivalent of 3 million cars being removed from Pennsylvania's roads – and create thousands of jobs. Enacting H.B. 80 or S.B. 92 is one of the most important steps the legislature can take this session toward advancing the goals of the Climate Change Action Plan.

You can contact my office for more information on the state's Climate Change Action Plan or my legislation.

## ***Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program deadline is Dec. 31***

The deadline to apply for Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program has been extended to Dec. 31. To be eligible, homeowners must have a household income of \$35,000 per year or less, and renters \$15,000 per year or less; be 65 or older; a widow or widower 50 or older; or 18 or older with a permanent disability. Based on the property taxes or rent they paid in 2008, eligible Pennsylvanians can receive rebates of up to \$650.

The program also has a new online feature to help Pennsylvanians track their property tax or rent rebate. Six weeks after submitting a Property Tax/Rent Rebate application, applicants can check the status of their rebate by visiting [www.papropertytaxrelief.com](http://www.papropertytaxrelief.com) and clicking the "Where's my Property Tax/Rent Rebate?" link.

You will need to enter your Social Security number, anticipated rebate amount and date of birth in order to confirm the claim status, rebate amount and the date a rebate is expected to be mailed or direct-deposited.

People with limited or no Internet access can access a similar feature by calling toll-free 1-888-PATAXES (1-888-728-2937).

You can fill out the PTRR form online or request to have an application mailed to you by visiting [www.PaPropertyTaxRelief.com](http://www.PaPropertyTaxRelief.com). My office can also provide the necessary forms, as well as assistance in filling out and filing the application.

## ***nowU: helping you today for the high costs of college tomorrow***

Pennsylvania's Tuition Account plan has a new name — nowU — and more investment options.

Sponsored by the state and administered by the Treasury Department, nowU offers a range of resources to help families save for college.

Named for Section 529 of the Internal Revenue Code, 529 college savings plans provide important tax advantages and are considered by many financial experts to be one of the best ways to save for college.

The nowU program offers two 529 college savings plans: the Pennsylvania 529 Guaranteed Savings Plan, which is tied to the rate of college tuition inflation, and the

Pennsylvania 529 Investment Plan, which gives college savers the flexibility to choose from among 13 investment options managed by Vanguard, one of the world's largest financial services companies.

Both plans provide important tax advantages, such as a state income tax deduction on contributions to a nowU account, tax-deferred growth on earnings and tax-free withdrawals when funds are used for qualified educational expenses.

For additional information, please visit Treasury's web site at [www.patreasury.org](http://www.patreasury.org) or phone (800) 440-4000 (Guaranteed Plan) or (800) 294-6195 (Investment Plan).

## ***Update on Haverford Reserve***

Here's what's new with the Haverford State Hospital development project:

In September, the Haverford Township Board of Commissioners awarded a contract to the architectural firm of Kimmel Bogrette to design a 35,000-square-foot indoor recreation facility. The awarding of this contract does not commit the township to build the facility.

A final decision has not been made on whether to build the recreation center. If it is built, a swimming pool at this facility appears unlikely unless there is a strong push from the community. Residents are urged to call their commissioner to let him know how they feel about an indoor recreational facility at Haverford Reserve.

To help pay for this indoor recreation facility, state Sen. Daylin Leach and myself have jointly secured a commitment

of \$1 million from the state. Haverford Township has begun the application process for these funds. The township expects their application to be filed by Dec. 4, 2009.

A synthetic field complete with lights and a multipurpose grass field are complete and in use, as are two hiking trails. Two more grass fields — a softball and another multipurpose field — are expected to be ready for use by spring.

The private residential component of this development contemplates six condominium buildings containing a total of 200 units and 50 carriage house duplexes. One of six condominium buildings is substantially complete and most of the units in that building are sold and occupied. The second condominium building is currently under construction. One duplex carriage house is complete and two more are under construction.

## ***Recent changes to laws affecting health-care coverage***

You should be aware of recent changes to laws affecting your health-care coverage. Here is information that may be helpful to you regarding those changes.

### ***Adult children***

Adult children in Pennsylvania can now remain on their parents' health insurance policy through the age of 29.

This extension of coverage applies to adult children who are unmarried, have no children and are residents of Pennsylvania or are full-time college students. Employers are not required to carry the extension in their health plans.

For more information, contact your employer or insurance company. My office also has brochures available on this law and other health insurance options available for young adults.

### ***COBRA coverage extended to small businesses***

A new law in Pennsylvania makes COBRA health insurance coverage available to employees in small businesses with fewer than 20 employees. In the past, the law only applied to businesses with more than 20 employees. Last year, there were more than 236,000 businesses in Pennsylvania with

19 or fewer employees. This means, when a person loses their job, they are able to continue their health insurance coverage through their previous employer for up to eighteen months under this federal program.

### ***COBRA changes***

A new federal law (the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, or ARRA) also provides a 65 percent reduction in COBRA premiums, using the federal stimulus program to pay the difference for workers laid off from their jobs. This will help thousands of Pennsylvania workers.

To be eligible for a reduced rate for COBRA coverage, a person must meet the following guidelines:

- Be eligible for COBRA continuation coverage any time during Sept. 1, 2008, through Dec. 31, 2009.
- Choose COBRA coverage when first offered or during the additional election period.
- Be eligible for COBRA coverage as a result of involuntary job loss during the period beginning Sept. 1, 2008, and ending Dec. 31, 2009.

More information on federal COBRA requirements is available from the U.S. Department of Labor by calling toll free 1-866-444-3272 or visiting [www.dol.gov/cobra](http://www.dol.gov/cobra).

## ***Delaware County Public Transportation Map and Guide***

Delaware County public transportation maps are free and now available in my district office. One side of the map shows routes for buses, regional rail, trolley and high-speed rail services in Delaware County and some neighboring counties and the City of Philadelphia as well. The other side provides information on transit fares, regional rail stations, and all bus routes serving Delaware County, including the frequency of bus

service, the number of parking spaces at train stations, parking permit requirements, ticket and pass prices, and on-board bicycle policies, as well as bicycle parking at regional rail stations. It also provides information on regional transit partners such as Delaware County TMA, Amtrak, DART First State, New Jersey Transit, and PATCO.

# ***Home Improvement Consumer Protection Act***

## ***New law protects homeowners***

Pennsylvania recently enacted the Home Improvement Consumer Protection Act to protect consumers who hire contractors to perform home improvements.

The act requires a written contract between the contractor and consumer if the total cost of the work exceeds \$500. If you need to hire a contractor, be aware of your rights:

- A copy of the complete contract, free of charge, must be provided by your home improvement contractor.
- You may get out of your contract without penalty within three business days of the signing date, except as provided under law for emergency situations.
- If it does not include all of the information required by law, a home improvement contract is not enforceable against a consumer.
- A contractor may not demand any payment for a home improvement before the contract is signed.

## ***Pa.'s 511 information system***

Pennsylvania recently launched its PennDOT 511 system – 511PA.

511PA provides free, 24-hour information services including traffic delay warnings, weather forecasts, regional tourism information and links to transit agencies and major airports. The service is available by calling 511 from cellular phones and land lines or through the Internet by visiting [www.511PA.com](http://www.511PA.com).

Users are also able to register through the Web site to receive personalized traveler alerts, provided through e-mail and text messaging.

The 511PA roadway network includes all 1,759 miles of interstate including the Pennsylvania Turnpike, as well as other major roadways in Harrisburg, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Traffic information for the majority of this network includes incident reports such as crashes, construction activities and, starting in November, winter road conditions.

Additionally, average traffic speeds are available for several interstates and other major roadways in urban areas.

## ***Join my e-mail update list***

I maintain a list of constituents who wish to receive periodic e-mail updates from me about public meetings, traffic alerts, community events, state and local programs and services, and other items of interest to the community. If you would like to be added to that list, please visit my

- It is now illegal for a contractor to ask for more than a third of the overall cost for a down payment. However, there is an exception to this if the project requires special materials. Under these circumstances, contractors can ask for full payment of those materials.

All contractors are now also required to register with the state through the Attorney General's Web site at [www.attorneygeneral.gov](http://www.attorneygeneral.gov). The site lists basic information including the contractor's phone number, address, Home Improvement Contractor number, president's name, and insurance information. The Home Improvement Consumer Protection Act sets criminal penalties for home improvement fraud as well as civil penalties for violations of the law.

Copies of the brochure, "What Consumers Need to Know," are available in my office.

## ***Free notary services at district office***

If you are a resident of the 166th Legislative District, you can have most official documents notarized free in my district office. Please call ahead to make sure the notary is in the office and can accommodate your type of document. Notary work is done most weekdays between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.

The person whose signature is to be notarized must sign the document in person, in the presence of the notary, and provide proof of identity such as a valid driver's license, photo ID card or passport. Please let my staff know if witnesses are needed, in addition to the notary, for your documents. We also ask that residents observe a five-signature limit.

My office is on the second floor. If you are unable to climb stairs, please let us know when you call and we can arrange to have the notary meet you on the ground floor.

Web site at [www.pahouse.com/vitali](http://www.pahouse.com/vitali) and click the "Contact Me" tab on the left. Fill in the information and you will automatically be added to the list. You can unsubscribe at any time, if you so choose.