



State Representative

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## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

FALL 2011



Dear Friend,

As the first year of the 2011-12 legislative session comes to a close, I wanted to update you on the issues we've been debating in Harrisburg, legislation I am sponsoring and new laws that will soon be in effect.

The first year of the Corbett administration and Republican majorities in the House and Senate has been challenging. While we were able to come together on some issues, such as new rules to keep new drivers safer on the road, I remain at odds with GOP lawmakers over many public policy issues affecting you, your family and your neighbors, including public education funding, regulating the Marcellus shale natural gas industry, the state budget and your right to vote. My concern with those issues and more is detailed in this report.

As always, please contact me if I can help you with any state-related matter. My best wishes go out to you and your loved ones.

Sincerely,

## A call for action on jobs

Since June, when the Republican majority passed a budget that slashed education, health care, human services, libraries, tourism, environmental protection, and many other programs, unemployment remains high.

More than **half a million** (523,000) of our fellow Pennsylvanians are officially unemployed. I know people want to work and I believe the legislature should be doing more to help.

I continue to call on Gov. Corbett and Republicans who control the voting schedule to get to work on jobs. I am supporting a plan – JumpstartPA – that would make job creation the No. 1 priority for the state legislature.

### JumpstartPA would:

- Fix and upgrade roads, bridges, and mass transit;
- Restore state funding for public schools to develop a more competitive workforce;
- Increase early childhood education subsidies to help reduce the burden of child care on working families;
- Protect unemployed workers from discrimination; and
- Establish incentives for Pennsylvania employers to create family-sustaining jobs.

The plan is highlighted in more detail at [www.pahouse.com](http://www.pahouse.com).



*I was delighted to take part in the August 2011 ribbon cutting for the new Superfresh grocery store in Northern Liberties. Local residents can now access the convenience of a national supermarket chain, while also seeing job creation and neighborhood stabilization in the community.*

## Corbett policies would undo education gains of last decade

In November the U.S. Department of Education released the 2011 math and reading results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, commonly known as “the nation’s report card.”

The report singles out Pennsylvania as one of only a few states in the nation that made significant progress from 2003 to 2011 in all subjects and grade levels tested. This timeframe is a key period for evaluation because, thanks to a Democratic governor and Democratic legislators who made it a priority, it was a consistent period of targeted state investment of resources and technical assistance for schools, particularly in the area of early childhood education.

That progress is now in jeopardy. From a plan to use taxpayer-funded vouchers for private schools to pursuing a massive disinvestment in basic education, Gov. Corbett and his allies are systematically working to undo all of our kids’ progress. Corbett’s \$900 million cut to public schools in this year’s budget alone has already resulted in thousands of layoffs, larger class sizes and fewer proven educational programs.

I am working to beat back attempts to further weaken public education in our state.



## A gift to gas drillers, GOP bill ignores taxpayers and environment

I’ve been part of a three-year fight for a responsible extraction tax on natural gas companies drilling in the Marcellus shale. Instead of embracing the proposals Pennsylvanians want, House Republicans pushed through legislation (H.B. 1950) in November that favors drillers over taxpayers.

Here’s why this Corbett-Republican bill is so bad.

- Its drilling fee of 1 percent is far less than the rate of every other natural gas producing state in the nation. West Virginia’s is 6 percent.
- It strips the rights of local governments to determine how best to regulate drilling activities in their communities.
- It fails to protect our water, air and land from the serious hazards posed by drilling activities.
- It incentivizes more drilling in our state parks and forests.
- It fails to fairly distribute drilling revenues across the state.

The bill passed without my vote. The Senate passed similar legislation the same week. As of this writing, the two chambers are working on a compromise bill.

I will continue fighting to ensure that drillers are held accountable for their activities, that the state will make wise use of any revenues it receives from drilling, and that our environment is protected.

*As a member of the House Democratic Policy Committee, I traveled to western Pa. this summer to tour a Marcellus shale drilling site and hear from local residents and drilling companies regarding the impacts of natural gas drilling. My goal was to hear from people who are feeling its impacts every day, as well as share with them the concerns of Philadelphians on this issue.*



## Texting while driving banned in Pa.

Pennsylvania became the 42nd state to ban texting and driving for ALL drivers when Gov. Corbett signed the enabling legislation into law.

Act 98 makes reading, writing or sending a message while driving a primary offense, meaning police can stop drivers for this violation alone. The fine for a violation will be \$50. Violations will not result in points on a driver’s record.

The new law takes effect March 8.

# Keeping kids safe

As of this writing the House is poised to consider my legislation that would help reduce the incidences of children being left in cars while their parents or guardians gamble. I drafted the bills in response to the growing number of incidences of children being left alone in cars in casino lots.

Compulsive gamblers who leave common sense behind while placing bets, and even those who might think their children are responsible enough to handle being left alone, need to be sent a clear and direct message that this behavior will not be tolerated. These incidents represent a direct threat to the safety, health and welfare of young children, and each instance can easily result in tragedy.

Under my bills (H.B.s [120](#) and [121](#)), drivers who leave a child under age 14 unattended in a vehicle on property owned, leased or controlled by a licensed gaming facility would be charged with a crime. Law enforcement also would be required to notify the appropriate children and youth agency within 48 hours of the incident.

Gaming facilities that fail to report violations of unattended children would be subjected to stiff fines. Facilities also would be required to conspicuously post warning signs regarding the penalties for leaving a child unattended in their parking area, and would be fined if they don't.

The Pennsylvania legislature authorized casino gambling in the state, and I believe it is an obligation of this legislature to send a strong message that our children come first.

You can view a video of my remarks on this issue on my website, [www.pahouse.com/OBrien](http://www.pahouse.com/OBrien). The bills are on the House calendar to be voted this session. I will keep you updated.

# Protect your constitutional right to vote

There is a national movement by conservative Republicans to enact legislation that would keep certain people from the voting booth.

In Pennsylvania, the legislation moving through the General Assembly (H.B. 934) would require all voters in every single election to present an unexpired, valid government photo ID in order to vote. Current federal law only requires voters to present identification when they vote for the first time in a new election precinct.

Put aside for a moment the fact that this legislation would cost Pennsylvania taxpayers \$11 million to implement – that's \$11 million to “combat” a nonexistent problem at the same time Republicans are cutting funding for education and health care. The greater cost would be to our constitutional rights. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have died while fighting to ensure this basic right for you and me.

There is zero evidence to support GOP claims of widespread voter fraud in the state. Over the past several elections, you can count on one hand the number of people who've been prosecuted for impersonating someone else in order to vote. Making everyone show a photo ID every time will disfranchise senior citizens, city residents, minorities and naturalized citizens because they are less likely to have or carry photo ID.

I was a no vote on this bill when it passed the House. You also can make your voice heard on this issue. You can send a message to Senate leaders and Gov. Corbett through the “Protect Your Right to Vote” action item at [www.pahouse.com](http://www.pahouse.com).

# New teen driver law

On Dec. 24, a new law that will strengthen teen driver rules, including setting passenger limits and increasing training hours for teen drivers, will be in effect.

The law, which I voted for in September, limits the number of teen passengers to one in a vehicle for the first six months that a junior driver has a license, with exceptions for family members. After six months the limit would be three non-family members.

It also expands training requirements before a teenager can take a test for his or her license, adding 10 hours of night-time and five hours of bad-weather driving to the current 50-hour requirement.

Anyone driving a vehicle with a passenger under 18 who isn't wearing a seatbelt or isn't properly restrained in a booster or car seat also would be charged with a primary offense. That means a police officer could stop a vehicle if the officer

suspects such a passenger isn't buckled up or properly restrained.

I supported this legislation over the past several years in honor of Lacey Gallagher and the thousands of teen crash victims who may have been spared tragedy with stronger, sensible rules. Lacey, a beautiful young woman from Fishtown, was riding with six friends on April 28 of 2007 when her life was tragically cut short. Her family has been working ever since to see this new law in place.

Car crashes continue to be the leading cause of fatalities among American teens. There are numerous studies and statistics that make clear the dangers teenagers face with driving alone or with other teens. Here in Pennsylvania the number of deaths from crashes involving 16- and 17-year-old drivers increased nearly 43 percent in just one year, from 2009-2010.

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*The Friends of Penn Treaty Park are dedicated to preserving and enhancing the beauty and usefulness of this treasured waterfront park in our community. I was honored to receive recognition in September for my work in obtaining state funding to help make park improvements.*

## My office can help you with:

- Car registrations, special tags, handicap placards, titles and driver's license applications
- Information on financial assistance for higher education
- Assistance in obtaining and completing state forms of all kind
- 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 kind – 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
- Information about federal, state and local government agencies

**ANY QUESTION ABOUT STATE GOVERNMENT!**