



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**W. Curtis
Thomas**

181ST LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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Job Creation

Ensuring that constituents have access to good jobs and workplace benefits is a top priority for Rep. Thomas. Each year, Thomas hosts two job fairs.

Five years ago, Thomas began to sponsor two job fairs a year to bring job seekers and employers together. Every job fair has resulted in employment and contract opportunities for constituents in the 181st Legislative District.

In October, more than 1,000 job seekers attended Thomas' Private Sector Job Fair at Beloved St. John Church. More than 20 companies were represented by recruiters at this event.

In February, Thomas sponsored his first job fair for 2011. Job seekers from all parts of the district attended the fair at the William H. Gray III Youth Center.

Thomas is very pleased to announce that prominent employer-participants from past events have decided to hire several constituents who attended these fairs.

These new jobs are a demonstration of Thomas' commitment to ensuring that all residents of his district have access to quality employment opportunities. Thomas would like to thank the recruiters and job seekers who make these job fairs a resounding success.



Thomas sworn in for 2011-12 legislative session



On Jan. 4, Rep. Thomas was sworn in to his 11th term as state representative to the 181st Legislative District. This year, Thomas continued his tradition of bringing students from his district to Harrisburg to observe the swearing-in ceremony.

More than 45 students and chaperones from a number of public, private, parochial and charter schools in the district were in attendance. The guests observed the swearing-in ceremony and took a tour of the state Capitol. Students and chaperones participated in a mock swearing-in ceremony facilitated by the Honorable LaVon Postelle, a Dauphin County magisterial district judge.

Thomas would like to thank Temple University for providing swearing-in day transportation to and from Harrisburg, and for donating use of the Temple University Harrisburg Campus for the mock ceremony.

Thomas supports adultBasic health coverage

On March 1, Gov. Tom Corbett allowed a program that provides low-cost insurance to working Pennsylvania families to expire. This means that more than 41,000 Pennsylvanians who had been covered by the state-subsidized adultBasic plan are now without basic health insurance.

Leading up to the expiration of adultBasic, Rep. Thomas took a strong stand to support continued funding of the program. The program,

which has been funded since 2001 using tobacco settlement money, offered health coverage to low-income Pennsylvanians who do not qualify for Medicaid and aren't old enough to qualify for Medicare, but cannot afford private health insurance.

During the past six years, contributions from the state's Blue Cross and Blue Shield plans, which are tax exempt and have a combined surplus of \$5.6 billion, helped to fund

the plan. However, the agreement with Blue Cross and Blue Shield expired Dec. 31, and the fund ran out of money Feb. 28.

Thomas believes this issue was a defining moment for the type of leadership we can expect from the new governor. Rather than standing up for Pennsylvanians and saving a program that provided health care access to thousands, Gov. Corbett chose to make deep cuts that hurt working families.

Thomas speaks out against school voucher bill

Rep. Thomas is speaking out against proposed legislation (S.B. 1) that he says would have disastrous effects on Pennsylvania's public school system.

In March, Thomas participated in a public debate aimed at informing residents about the intent and possible ramifications of the bill. The debate, held at Bright Hope Baptist Church, was sponsored by Reverend Dr. Kevin Johnson and the Pennsylvania State Social Action Network.

Also participating in the debate were state Sen. Anthony H. Williams, who is a sponsor of the bill, state Rep. Tony Payton, D-Phila., state Rep. James Roebuck, Jr., D-Phila., and Democratic Chair of the House Education Committee, and NAACP Philadelphia Branch President J. Whyatt Mondesire.

Senate Bill 1 would require

taxpayers to subsidize non-public schools through the use of school vouchers.

Rep. Thomas has thoroughly reviewed the bill and discussed it with the Pennsylvania State Education Association, parents, students, advocacy groups, teachers, school administrators and community leaders. After careful review, Thomas said he has reached the conclusion that S.B. 1 is an assault on public education and public values.

Thomas said his guiding principle in those discussions was Article III, Section 14 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania which states:

“The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth.”

This legislation would cut public dollars out of public schools, which are already facing an uncertain financial future, and deposit those funds in the hands of private, parochial and charter school operators. Unlike public schools, these private operators do not have a public mandate to educate all students; they do not have to disclose behavioral incidents; and in many cases they do not have to participate in the state PSSA exams.

Thomas said he is unwilling to accept a proposal that gives away tax dollars without any mechanism in place to determine whether the public is getting any value for its investment.

Thomas' full public statement and a fact sheet detailing his opposition to S.B. 1 can be found on his website at www.pahouse.com/thomas/statements.asp.

Thomas hosts Parent Resource Days at local schools

Rep. Thomas has hosted a series of parent resource days at local elementary schools to connect parents and educators with resources in the community. To date, parent resource days have been held at Morrison Elementary, Dunbar Promise Academy and Potter-Thomas Promise Academy.

At these events, parents can learn about neighborhood afterschool programs; health and life insurance options for their children; domestic violence counseling and intervention services; and credit repair and financial counseling. Feedback from parents has been very positive and additional parent resource days will be held at other locations in the coming months.

Thomas said that making sure parents have the resources they need and ensuring the success of local children is critical for the future development and stability of the community.

Additionally, Thomas presented awards to the winners of his “I Have a Dream” letter writing contest at the Dunbar Elementary School Parent Resource Day. In his contest, students in 5th through 8th grades wrote a letter about how they apply the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to their own lives.



Legislative Update

Thomas continues as chairman of Urban Affairs Committee

Rep. Thomas is pleased to announce that he will continue to serve as the Democratic chairman for the House Urban Affairs Committee in the 2011-12 legislative session.

Thomas was happy to be selected to continue to serve on this post. Thomas' role as a representative to the constituents of the 181st Legislative District has prepared him for the issues facing this committee. As chairman, Thomas will continue to have a platform for advancing valuable legislation that will improve the lives of all Pennsylvanians living in urban communities.

Thomas re-introduces several bills

Rep. Thomas has re-introduced nine bills to date this year, covering a wide range of issues. These bills continue Rep. Thomas' tradition of legislating for the community by supporting legislation to improve the lives of his constituents.

Those bills include:

H.B. 81 - Would establish a youth advisory council to assist each county workforce investment board in Pennsylvania. These advisory councils would allow young people to play a meaningful role in developing youth engagement and job-training programs.

H.B. 82 - Would allow the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board to deny transfers of liquor licenses to new locations if the new location is within 300 feet of any church, hospital, charitable institution, school or public playground.

H.B. 83 - Would promote the growth of women- and minority-owned businesses by establishing a Surety Bond Guarantee Fund to guarantee bonds are taken out from businesses owned by women and minorities.

H.B. 85 - Would promote job growth by updating and expanding the Keystone Job Creation and Training Tax Credit program. This bill would provide tax credits of up to \$100,000 for businesses that train and/or hire unemployed individuals.

In addition to these bills, Rep. Thomas is planning to re-introduce a number of gun safety measures he authored last session.

Thomas speaks out against governor's budget proposal

In March, Rep. Thomas submitted remarks to the House Appropriations Committee regarding Gov. Tom Corbett's 2011-12 state budget proposal.

Thomas believes the governor's proposal represents a significant shift in priorities, puts the burden of taxes on working families and empowers large corporations. He said that the governor's budget proposal overlooks investments in the people of Pennsylvania, and fails our most vulnerable residents.

In his testimony to the House Appropriations Committee, Thomas pointed to more than \$1 billion in cuts to basic and higher education. Additionally, he said the governor's budget lacks a strategy for putting Pennsylvania's more than 500,000 unemployed residents back to work.

While the supporters of this budget claim that it creates a climate for job creation by investing in companies, Thomas said it is devoid of any provision requiring those companies to provide employment to Pennsylvanians and provides no clear vision for the future of our Commonwealth in this proposal.

Rep. Thomas is planning to offer an alternate budget proposal that would make Pennsylvania's working families and vulnerable citizens the top priority by investing in education and job creation without raising taxes.

Important changes in the House of Representatives

Several major changes occurred in the House of Representatives as a result of the November general election. The Democratic Caucus suffered a number of losses in seats across Pennsylvania and lost its status as the majority party in the House.

This shift in power directly impacts how Thomas and other Democratic representatives can get legislation passed in the current legislative session. In its new role as the majority, the Republican Caucus now has authority to set the House agenda and decide which bills get considered and when they come up for a vote.

Although this new situation presents some challenges, Thomas is confident that he will still be able to promote valuable legislation that improves the lives of people in his district.

To be an effective legislator, Thomas believes he must be able to fight for his constituents regardless of whether or not his party is in the majority. Under previous Republican majorities, Thomas has been able to get important legislation passed and he looks forward to working with the new leadership to move bipartisan legislation that benefits his constituents.



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Thomas desires more scrutiny of Philadelphia taxi and limousine regulations

Rep. Thomas is Democratic chairman of the House Urban Affairs Committee. In March, the committee held an informational meeting on proposed Philadelphia Parking Authority regulations.

Thomas said he believes the committee should take more time to review proposed regulations governing taxicab and limousine service providers in Philadelphia.

The purpose of the proposed rulemaking is to substitute the parking authority's current Taxicab and Limousine Regulations, which were established under procedures pertaining to local government agencies, with regulations approved according to those utilized by state agencies.

The change in procedures was necessitated by a Commonwealth Court ruling which directed the Philadelphia Parking Authority to adhere to the provisions of the state's Regulatory Review Act. Under that act, proposed rulemaking must be submitted for review to the Independent Regulatory Review Commission as well as the designated standing committees of the General Assembly for review and comment.

For purposes of the act, the

Urban Affairs Committee has been designated by the speaker of the House as the standing committee of regulatory review for any regulations proposed by the Philadelphia Parking Authority.

Prior to the committee meeting, Thomas convened a meeting of the Democratic members of the Urban Affairs Committee to discuss the proposed regulations and to learn of any comments, recommendations or objections that they might have with the proposed regulations. A number of the concerns were put to PPA officials for clarification or comment.

Testifying on behalf of the PPA were Executive Director Vince Fenerty; Director of the Taxicab and Limousine Division Jim Ney; and Dennis Weldon, general counsel.

While Rep. Thomas appreciated the opportunity to hear an explanation of the rationale for the provisions provided in the proposed regulations and for members of the committee to offer questions, he feels very strongly that, due to the volume of the proposed regulations, subsequent meetings are needed.

Specifically, Thomas said he would like the committee to hold a public hearing at which all of the regulated parties would have

an opportunity to appear before the members of the Urban Affairs Committee and explain any concerns that they may have.

Thomas said he wants to make sure that all stakeholder issues are publicly aired.

To ensure transparency in the rulemaking process, it is necessary that the concerns of all parties are addressed. Thomas said that includes taxicab and limousine operators, taxicab and limousine drivers and dispatchers. Numerous comments were submitted to the committee and the IRRC from the regulated community during the public comment period, which ended in February.

Among outstanding concerns are provisions in the proposed rulemaking that would force the taxicab industry to purchase new vehicles rather than used vehicles at a significant increased cost to them, the increase in liability insurance that must be maintained by both taxicab and limousine operators, as well as concerns about how the PPA sets the amounts of its fines and whether or not PPA has the statutory authority to do so.