



State Representative

John J. Siptroth

189th Legislative District



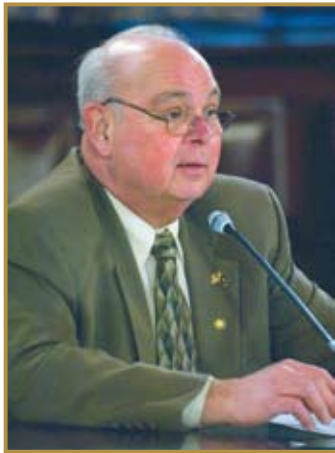
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WINTER 2009/10



New budget increases school funding \$300 million, protects volunteer fire departments, veterans' organizations and environment

I was frustrated that the state budget took too long to pass, but a bad fiscal plan would have been a disaster for the state.

I held my ground in opposing education cuts that would have eroded the quality of schools and shifted more of the tax burden to local homeowners. The new budget includes a \$300 million increase for basic education that should help to keep school property taxes in check. The Senate's budget plan did not include that increase.

Rep. Siptroth listens during an Appropriations Committee hearing.

The increase in basic education funding also will allow teachers to continue many quality programs that have resulted in significant gains in math and reading levels.

We also made significant cuts to the budget, spending less than we did last year and avoiding broad-based tax increases. Because I and other House members stood firm, the new budget does not include a proposed tax on the small games of chance that volunteer fire departments, veterans' groups and other community organizations use to raise money. Volunteer firefighters save Pennsylvania taxpayers an estimated \$6 billion per year.

We were also able to avoid many of the cuts in funding for veterans care programs that the Senate sought to impose.

The final budget also encourages economic opportunity while protecting the environment during drilling in the huge Marcellus Shale gas field. I worked with a group of environmentally conscious representatives to ensure that while the economic and energy potential of the gas field are developed, the extent of drilling and related operations are controlled to protect against adverse impact on the environment. We can still see the results of uncontrolled coal mining during the last century, and we're still working to clean it up and eliminate its effect on our waterways.

A better way to generate additional state revenue

I believe the best way to generate revenue is taxing the extraction of natural gas from the Marcellus Shale formation. Pennsylvania ranks 15th in natural gas production in the country. Of the top 15 natural gas producing states, we are the only one that does not charge a severance tax, except for California, which charges a conservation fee. Much of the Marcellus Shale natural gas will be leaving the state when Pennsylvania is close to full production.

A severance tax on natural gas would generate more than \$600 million per year after economic stimulus money

ends. We cannot afford to ignore this proposal. However, it isn't in this year's budget because the state Senate refused to vote for it. Instead, the Senate and several House members suggested leasing 390,000 acres of state forest land to gas companies. That would have destroyed huge amounts of state forest, just so they could say: "I did not vote for a tax increase."

The final budget compromise drastically scales back the forest leasing proposal and includes safeguards to protect these fragile lands for hunting, fishing, tourism and the benefit of future generations.

REP. SIPTROTH SEEKS STUDY ON IMPACT OF REDUCING SIZE OF LEGISLATURE

I have introduced a resolution that would direct the Joint State Government Commission to study the impact of reducing the size of the state's General Assembly. Several bills have been introduced to amend the Pennsylvania Constitution to reduce the size of the Legislature. They range from modest to sharp reductions.

We should have comprehensive data about the potential impact that reducing the General Assembly would have. Under my bill, the Joint State Government Commission would consider cost savings to taxpayers, residents' accessibility to their elected representatives, legislative effectiveness and efficiency, and how rural and urban areas would fare.

Under H.R. 571, the commission would report its findings to the General Assembly by Dec. 10, 2010.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, Pennsylvania has the second-most representative districts and the sixth-most senatorial districts in the nation. Pennsylvania is the sixth-most populous state. It ranks 14th in constituents per representative district and seventh in constituents per senatorial district.

SUPPORTING REFORM

I have co-sponsored several reform measures offered by my colleagues in the House of Representatives. One of those measures would reduce the number of Senate seats from 50 to 37 and the number of House seats from 203 to 185. It also would "nest" five House seats within one Senate district. I believe this would reduce the size of the legislature, but avoid giving more populous urban areas greater power.

Another measure I support would create a legislative Reapportionment Commission, whose chairman would be a registered Pennsylvania voter who does not hold any elected position and who has held no political office for 10 years previously. This commission would redraw legislative districts to make them equal, contiguous and related to county and municipal boundaries. The plan would be posted on the Internet for every citizen to see and for any citizen to appeal. I believe this would end the practice of gerrymandering in the Commonwealth.

Finally, I am co-sponsoring a bill that calls for a referendum at the next general election on holding a constitutional convention.

PLANNED COMMUNITY STUDY UNDER WAY

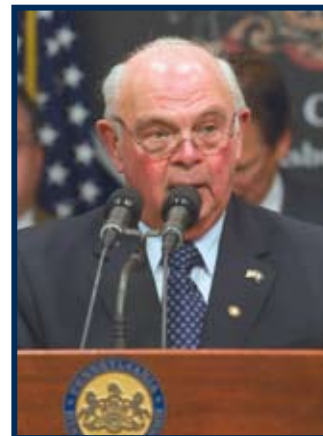
The nation's first study of planned communities, their infrastructure and how they can better access state funding is under way. It is the result of legislation I introduced.

The Joint State Government Commission is speaking with planning commissions, community associations and others as part of this study. The commission plans to determine:

- The number of private communities in each county and municipality.
- The amount of state and local taxes their residents pay per year.
- The amount and condition of infrastructure in these communities.
- Whether these communities should be allowed to access state money to improve infrastructure.
- Whether there are ways for the state to make sure these communities receive adequate services at an affordable cost.

I have been approached by representatives from private communities because roads, bridges, dams, wells and wastewater systems are becoming obsolete and overused as these communities grow. Many of these communities are not wealthy and lack the money to fund these often expensive repairs. Although residents in these communities support state funding programs with their tax money, they are often ineligible for many funding programs.

The study will form the basis for a series of legislative proposals I intend to write to help these communities and their host municipalities access more state funding.



Rep. Siptroth participates in a Capitol news conference expressing concerns about a plan to lease more than 200,000 acres of state forest land for natural gas drilling. The lawmakers were ultimately able to defeat the proposal.

BE COUNTED

Every 10 years, the Census Bureau wants you to take 10 minutes to answer 10 questions. Your participation in the Census is required by law and vitally important because Census data directly affects how more than \$300 billion per year in federal and state funding is allocated to communities for neighborhood improvements, public health, education, transportation and more.

All information you provide on the questionnaire, which will be mailed in March, is kept confidential. If you have any questions, please visit www.census.gov/2010census, or call the Census Bureau Call Center toll free at 1-800-923-8282. As always, you can call my constituent service office toll free at 866-604-5578.

NEW LAW WILL HELP MORE YOUNG ADULTS GET HEALTH INSURANCE

A new law I supported, Act 4 of 2009, will allow more parents to extend their health insurance coverage to their uninsured children through age 29. Many young adults are beginning their careers in jobs that do not offer benefits. Other young people are staying in school longer and pursuing advanced degrees. In either situation, this law gives many of them a way to secure affordable health-care coverage.

The law allows uninsured children through age 29 to be added to a parent's or guardian's employer-paid health coverage. It gives the policy holder – usually the parent's or guardian's employer – the right to decide if an adult child is added to the policy. I supported a House bill that would have let the employee make the choice, but the Senate would not agree to that. The new law also requires the employer to pay the cost of adding the dependent child to the coverage, with the cost determined by the insurer.

Health coverage costs 33 percent to 50 percent less, on average, when a young adult is added onto their parents' plan instead of when they must buy health insurance on their own. In Pennsylvania, 37.5 percent of the uninsured are between the ages of 19 and 29. This new law should help many of them.



Rep. Siptroth, a Navy veteran, speaks at a Capitol news conference attended by Operation Free, a coalition of veterans that support efforts to reduce carbon pollution and oil dependency because they recognize those issues as threats to national security. Rep. Siptroth is a strong advocate of using renewable sources of power, such as wind and solar, and energy efficiency to reduce our use of carbon-based fuels.

PPL RATE CAPS COME OFF

Caps were removed from PPL's electric generating rates on Jan. 1. A law passed in 1996 deregulated the supply of electricity in Pennsylvania and capped rates at 1996 levels for a number of years while utilities recovered their infrastructure costs prior to the transition. The law is designed to eventually drive the price of electricity down by introducing more competition.

That competition is not sufficient yet, however, and I do not believe rate caps should have expired at this time. I would have preferred to see the caps lifted gradually. The good news is that the deregulation law allows consumers to choose which company generates the electricity they use. This may help lower utility bills for many households.

For example, when rate caps expired for Duquesne Light Co. in the Pittsburgh area, prices initially increased. But after competitors entered the market, prices dropped below what they were when the rate caps were in place.

You can review shopping guides and statistics for electricity service at the Pennsylvania Office of Consumer Advocate at www.oca.state.pa.us.

Meanwhile, I will continue to support local energy technology companies, which can help bring more power to the market and make energy use more efficient. Some of these companies were highlighted at my Green Fair in November, which was attended by hundreds of people.

If I can be of assistance, please contact me by calling (866) 604-5578 or visiting my Web site at <http://www.pahouse.com/siptroth>.



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Marshalls Creek bypass moves ahead

I'm continuing to work on permitting issues with the federal government for the Marshalls Creek Bypass. Once those issues are resolved, the project should go out to bid in the spring.

I was happy to see the Marshalls Creek Park and Ride open late last year. I hope it will help ease traffic congestion in the area by encouraging commuters to share rides. I want to thank the many state and local offices who helped make the 418-space park and ride come to fruition. That was an important step, but a lot of work remains ahead. I will use my position on the House Transportation Committee to advance the project.

You can stay up to date on the project by visiting <http://marshallscreekbypass.com>.



Rep. Siptroth gets a seasonal flu shot during his Monroe County senior fair in October. He also hosted a senior fair for his Pike County constituents. Hundreds of seniors were able to get flu shots and information about important state programs.





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Fighting for Pike to receive its fair share of gaming money

Earlier this year, I voted against a measure that would have capped at \$1 million the proceeds from gaming money going to Department of Community and Economic Development projects in Pike County. In 2009, Pike County received \$1.7 million. The measure, which was ultimately defeated, was offered as an amendment to S.B. 711, which permits casinos in Pennsylvania to offer table games and introduces new reforms in Pennsylvania's casino gaming law.

I will continue to fight any efforts like the defeated amendment. And I will continue to work with the Pike County Commissioners and Pike County Industrial Development Authority to support economic development projects they have identified as priorities.

The addition of table games has been approved as a way to generate revenue for the Pennsylvania budget, boost economic development across the state, and provide further school property tax relief.

It will also create thousands of jobs in this tough economy, jobs that Pike County residents would benefit from.



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