



# THE THOMAS *Report*



**Serving the 181st Legislative District**

**SPRING 2015**

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## Wolf budget proposal is a bold starting point

### Job Creation Highlights of the Wolf Budget Proposal

#### **Improving the state's reputation to the business community –**

Gov. Tom Wolf's budget would reduce the Corporate Net Income tax from 9.99 percent to 5.99 percent, bringing Pennsylvania's tax rate below the national average. Within two years, the rate would drop to 4.99 percent, making it the 10th-lowest in the nation. This rate would be sure to help retain jobs in the commonwealth while attracting new business to the state.

**Making work pay by increasing the minimum wage –** Job creation efforts are insufficient if they do not provide workers with a livable wage, which is why Gov. Wolf's budget proposal calls for increasing the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10 per hour. Additionally, Gov. Wolf is calling for automatic future increases to ensure the minimum wage keeps pace with inflation.

**Infrastructure and Facilities Improvement Program –** An additional \$11 million for multi-year grants to debt-issuing authorities for assistance on major economic development projects, which will help to create new jobs while renewing our infrastructure.

**Mixed Used Development Program –** \$15 million through the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency to increase affordable housing and commercial corridor development opportunities in areas of the commonwealth where significant need and potential impact are identified.

**Career and Technical Education Equipment Grants –** The budget includes \$5 million for Career and Technical Education equipment grants, with priority for Career and Technical Education grant applicants that show an in-kind monetary contribution from employers or other partners.

**Made in Pennsylvania Job Creation Program –** The budget also includes a tax credit that will be distributed to manufacturing companies that are creating good-paying, middle-class jobs.

As we enter the budget season seriously, two things have become abundantly clear: one, Pennsylvania is on the brink of a historic investment in education and health and human services; and two, we need to be creative, wise and inclusive about how we pay for it.

To make this investment, Gov. Tom Wolf has proposed a reduction in property taxes across the state in exchange for a change in the sales-tax structure, but he also has called for a severance tax on the natural gas drilling industry harvesting from Pennsylvania's Marcellus Shale.

#### **Other highlights from Gov. Wolf's budget proposal include:**

Increasing the state sales tax by 10 percent to 6.6 percent and the personal income tax by 20 percent to 3.7 percent, in return for \$3.8 billion in school property tax relief and eliminating school property taxes for 270,000 senior households;

Restoring devastating cuts to public education by investing \$400 million more in basic education, \$100 million more in special education and \$120 million more in early childhood education;

Expanding home- and community-based long-term care to enable more older Pennsylvanians to obtain care in their homes; and

Significantly reducing the funding raised from the Lottery Fund so the money is available to support programs for older Pennsylvanians.

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State Representative  
**W. CURTIS THOMAS**



# House Commerce Committee chairman appointment

It was an honor to be reappointed Democratic chairman of the House Commerce Committee, and I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to ensure that the banking and financial service industries in our state are renowned for their fairness and security.

The Commerce Committee has oversight of the Department of Banking, Department of Community and Economic Development, Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency, the Securities Commission and the Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority, to ensure Pennsylvania stays competitive in a world marketplace. Additionally, the committee reviews bills that control interest rates, wage and employment issues, and more.

Committees are where a good portion of the legislature's work actually gets done, and for a bill to become a law, it first must be passed from at least one committee before being considered by the full House. As Democratic chairman of the Commerce Committee, I have helped focus my colleagues on attracting, creating and retaining well-paying jobs throughout the state while championing strong consumer protections throughout our financial industry. I intend to continue fighting for those principles and I will keep you informed about the actions of the Commerce Committee.

## Wolf budget proposal is a bold starting point

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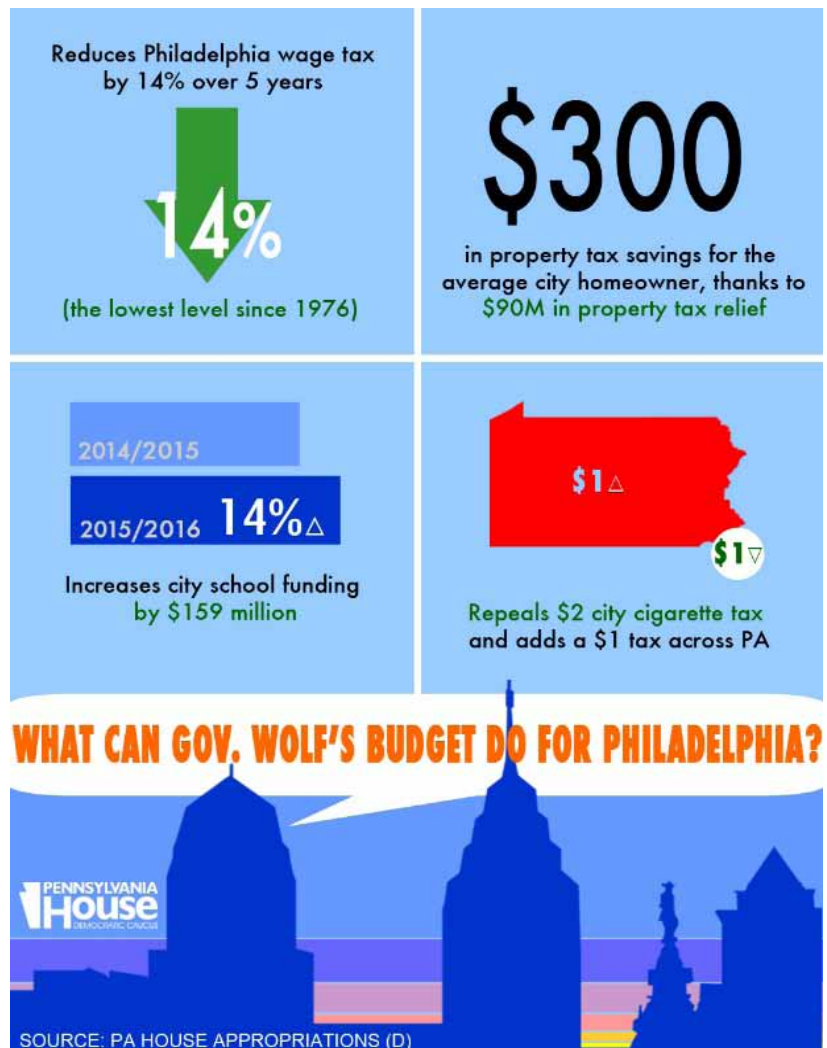
Gov. Wolf's proposal would also mean relief from Philadelphia constantly shouldering more than its fair share. The city's current \$2-a-pack tax on cigarettes would be replaced with a statewide \$1-a-pack tax. The city's wage tax would also be reduced by 14 percent over the next five years, which will result in more money left in everyone's paycheck and a more vibrant economy for the city.

Perhaps most importantly, Gov. Wolf's proposal would increase funding for Philadelphia schools by \$159 million next year alone. After years of disinvestment by the former administration, I am glad to see we finally have a governor who understands the need for great schools all across the state and has the fortitude to support that goal.

Gov. Wolf's proposed \$29.88 billion spending plan is sure to undergo changes during negotiations between the Democratic governor and the Republican-dominated General Assembly, but it is worthwhile to grasp what he has proposed as a starting point even if it is sure to be changed.

I am eager to work with Gov. Wolf and leaders on both sides of the aisle to ensure a state budget that truly serves the best interests of the 181st Legislative District and all of Pennsylvania.

**I want to know what YOU think about Gov. Wolf's budget proposal. Fill out and return the panel at the end of this newsletter to let me know how you think I should vote on the Wolf budget proposal.**



# Bipartisan At-Risk Caucus dedicated to building a better Pennsylvania for all

In late 2013, state Sen. Stewart Greenleaf and I collaborated to form a bipartisan, bicameral caucus in the Pennsylvania General Assembly aimed at examining, investigating and addressing issues such as school truancy and dropout, delinquency, poverty, family separation due to incarceration, and other problems facing many Pennsylvania families, especially children.

Initially, the caucus was named the At-Risk Children and Family Caucus, but after realizing that many of the systemic problems facing children and family are rooted in the communities where they reside, caucus members changed the name to the At-Risk Children, Family and Communities Caucus.

Through meetings with some of the organizations and

individuals working on a state level with children and families, the caucus hopes to identify, confront and recommend solutions to a diverse set of challenges that pose risks to the health, safety and welfare of Pennsylvania's children and families.

While this caucus is still relatively new, I am encouraged by the commitment and passion shown from my colleagues. There is plenty of work ahead of us in the new legislative session, but I believe there is a consensus that we need to be doing more for our most vulnerable populations.

The At-Risk Children, Family and Communities Caucus will continue its work in the 2015-16 legislative session. The goal of the caucus is to improve the lives of at-risk children and families throughout Pennsylvania.

## TRUE MEDICAID EXPANSION A WELCOME DEVELOPMENT IN PENNSYLVANIA

As a longtime supporter of expanding Medicaid in Pennsylvania, I support Gov. Tom Wolf's directive to transition over 120,000 Pennsylvanians off the complex Healthy PA plan on to a traditional Medicaid expansion plan called HealthChoices.

The new expanded Medicaid program moves Pennsylvania to a single, comprehensive adult benefit package that provides individuals enhanced coverage for both physical and behavioral health. The Department of Human Services (DHS) completed the update to its data systems that enabled the transition to HealthChoices. All future applications will now go through the new, simplified HealthChoices system.

More information about the HealthChoices transition can be found at [www.HealthChoicesPA.com](http://www.HealthChoicesPA.com).



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PLACE  
STAMP  
HERE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
**W. CURTIS THOMAS**

P.O. Box 202181  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2181



## Meet Philly's new state representatives

In January, Reps. Leslie Acosta and Jason Dawkins were sworn in as two of Philadelphia's newest state representatives, and I am glad to have these two public officials working with me for the betterment of Philadelphia and the entire commonwealth.

Acosta, who represents the 197th District, is a former social worker who previously served as a child advocate with the Philadelphia Public Defender's Office, and a former vice president of the board of directors of the Bucks County Mental Health Clinic. Dawkins, who represents the 179th District, is an expert on recreation-based development and community engagement and formerly served as senior legislative aide to Philadelphia City Councilwoman Maria Quiñones Sánchez.

I am confident that both of these bright, young officials will be true stewards of the public trust.

### Rep. Leslie Acosta's District Office

511 W. Courtland St., Suite 197  
Philadelphia, PA 19140  
(215) 457-5281

### Rep. Jason Dawkins' District Office

4915 Frankford Ave.  
Philadelphia, PA 19124  
(215) 744-7901

## 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 kinds
- Voter registration and absentee ballot applications
- Unemployment compensation, disability and workers' compensation
- Birth and death certificates
- Problems with the Departments of Health and Human Services (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 prescription-drug 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 problem with state government?*

## STAY INFORMED!

If you would like to be kept informed via email about what is going on in Harrisburg, visit [www.pahouse.com/thomas](http://www.pahouse.com/thomas) and under the CONTACT tab, click Sign Up for Emails.

## HOW SHOULD I VOTE ON THE 2015-16 WOLF BUDGET PROPOSAL?

- \_\_\_\_\_ I support the Wolf budget proposal and want you to fight for this historic investment in our schools and middle class.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I do not support the Wolf budget proposal.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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PLEASE FILL OUT, CUT OUT AND RETURN TO REP. W. CURTIS THOMAS