Urging for joint hearings on oil-train derailments

In March, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas wrote a letter to the Republican chairman of the House Commerce Committee, and to the chairman of the House Transportation Committee, and urged their cooperation in holding a joint hearing on derailments of trains carrying hazardous fuel sources. “Accidents are bound to happen, as we saw with the derailment of an oil train in West Virginia,” Thomas said. “We need to make sure we are doing everything in our power to prevent accidents, and that we are ready to act if an incident like that were to ever happen in Philadelphia or anywhere in the commonwealth.”

I believe the best way to do that is by holding a joint hearing of the House Commerce and Transportation committees. “Current estimates anticipate that rail will move nearly 900,000 car loads of oil and ethanol this year, each of which can hold 30,000 gallons of fuel,” Thomas said. “If just one accident occurs in a highly populated urban area, like Philadelphia, the result could be devastating in both the human and financial sense.”

Thomas’ letter coincides with a letter Gov. Tom Wolf sent to President Barack Obama seeking federal assistance in helping to prevent oil train accidents in Pennsylvania. Thomas wrote in his letter that Gov. Wolf may be willing to recommend testifiers for the joint hearing. “I am asking for a joint hearing because this issue deals with both transportation and commerce,” Thomas said. “I am optimistic that my colleagues will understand the need for a hearing, and that we will develop a bipartisan plan to help keep everybody in the commonwealth safe.”

Commonwealth Court rules Act 192 unconstitutional

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas commended the Commonwealth Court in June for its decision to declare Act 192, also known as the town-punishing law, unconstitutional due to a violation of the original purpose and single subject rules. Originally, the bill that became Act 192 was introduced in the House with the intention to deal with theft of scrap metal, but was amended by the Senate to include a provision that would give standing to any resident of Pennsylvania or membership organization such as the National Rifle Association to challenge local ordinances that attempt to restrict access to guns while forcing the municipality to pay for the legal fees.

“I am very grateful to the Commonwealth Court for declaring Act 192 unconstitutional,” Thomas said. “From the start this legislation was flawed. The concept endangers the people of our commonwealth and the process in which it was passed ignores the principles and policy of our state constitution. I am grateful that the court understood that we are dealing with an epidemic of violence and a staggering loss of life due to gun violence in our country, and that we should be committed to solving that issue rather than creating loopholes in the law for special interest groups.”

The passage of Act 192 spurred Philadelphia City Council to suspend about a dozen firearm ordinances to avoid a potential lawsuit from the National Rifle Association. Thomas said the city council has since reenacted those ordinances.

“I would be eager to have a serious conversation about sensible gun control in Harrisburg, but until that day comes it is up to our local officials to do what they believe is in the best interest for their residents and I fully support that effort,” Thomas said.

Relevant legislation introduced by Rep. Thomas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bill Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House Bill 285</td>
<td>Would limit individuals with mental illness from receiving a gun permit and/or purchasing firearms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>House Bill 286</td>
<td>Would require that as long as there is a case backlog of six months or longer, the Board of Pardons would merit review at least 540 applications a year, or at least 60 applications a month, nine months a year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>House Bill 309</td>
<td>Would provide for an independent prosecutor to investigate peace officers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>House Bill 314</td>
<td>Would provide for the discharge of restitution liabilities maintained by parents of convicted children.</td>
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In January, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas took the oath of office and began his 14th term in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

Thomas also returns to another term as Democratic chairman of the Commerce Committee, where he helps guide legislation and policy involving the banking and financial services industries.

As chairman of the Commerce Committee, Thomas said he is particularly focused on job creation, retention and stabilization and moving Pennsylvania from 47th in the nation in terms of job growth to first.

The swearing-in ceremony in the House chamber marked the beginning of the 199th legislative session. The state constitution mandates that the legislature convene at noon on the first Tuesday of January.

In January, Rep. Thomas celebrates the inauguration of Gov. Tom Wolf with his fellow House Democrats.
Caucus rule change formalizes diversity council

In April, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas successfully motioned to alter the rules governing both the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and the House Democratic Caucus. Thomas’ motion resulted in the adoption of an amendment to establish a Diversity Council within the House and a Diversity Advisory Council.

The state House of Representatives spends millions of dollars each year on staffing, procurement, legal, copying and editing. More often than not, the beneficiaries of these tax dollars are devoid of disadvantaged individuals, businesses of color or veterans. The purpose of the Diversity Council is to do business and operate in a way that is reflective of the Keystone State.

“I was glad to offer a change to the caucus rules that make our proven practices official policy,” Thomas said. “I committed to ensuring that diversity is more than just a buzzword at the Capitol.”

While the Diversity and Inclusion Council has been in operation since 2012, Thomas’ rule change ensures its future operation, officially establishes the council’s mission and clarifies its organizational structure.

“Diversity enriches our lives, but is also vital to ensure that the House accurately reflects the population of the commonwealth,” Thomas said. “Celebrating diversity is good for its own sake, but it also strengthens us as public officials, so I look forward to continuing to work with the Diversity and Inclusion Council on these important issues.”

The Diversity and Inclusion Council’s mission includes engaging all caucus members and staff through education, raising awareness of the benefits of a fully inclusive workplace, and identifying ways to improve and preserve diversity among Capitol and regional staff. In addition, the council hosts special events on issues that impact the lives of caucus members and employees.

Thomas has long sought to establish a diversity council in the House. During the tenure of previous House leaders, Thomas worked with his colleagues as he researched diversity councils in other states, including the Virginia legislature. Thomas has praised current House Democratic Leader Frank Dermody for supporting the ideals of diversity and the mission of the diversity council even while it was an informal part of the caucus.

Thomas calls on community to assist police at All Life Matters Rally

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas joined with community members to hold the All Life Matters Rally, in response to the murder of Kim Jones, who was gunned down while waiting for a morning bus near Temple University.

At the rally, Thomas and other community leaders spoke about the brazen nature of the attack and the senselessness of targeting Jones, a 56-year-old mother of two. The rally was held near the site of the murder, which occurred in the 181st Legislative District.

“We are at a crucial crossway right now,” Thomas said. “Someone laid in wait in the middle of the day and murdered someone, one of our neighbors, in cold blood, supposedly without being seen by anyone. If this person can walk around on the street, what is to stop him from murdering your mother, your sister?”

Thomas urged attendees at the rally to assist police in their investigation of the murder in any way possible. The Philadelphia Police arrested a man and charged him with murdering Jones two weeks after the All Life Matters Rally.

Liquor privatization plan would endanger public safety, destroy jobs

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas voted against a plan backed by Pennsylvania House Republicans to sell off state liquor stores saying it would endanger public safety in Philadelphia and across the state, while destroying thousands of family-sustaining jobs.

“This liquor privatization plan is bound to harm Pennsylvania business, workers and consumers if it becomes law,” Thomas said. “While many of my colleagues and I would be interested in discussions about improving the current system, this plan simply would dismantle what is working with little regard for the effect it will have on the public.”

Thomas said public safety concerns are more than just speculation. Research from the Centers for Disease Control has concluded that privatization of alcohol sales results in a reduction in enforcement of sales regulations, including enforcement of underage drinking laws.

“Research has shown that the current system benefits our children by protecting them,” Thomas said. “But the state store system also benefits all Pennsylvanians by ensuring convenience and choice, while providing a stable source of revenue to the state.”

In addition, Thomas said he believes this bill was drafted with little consideration for the state’s differing urban, rural and suburban communities.

The nearly 4,000 state store employees are also of great concern to Thomas, and he said the House Republican plan does little in terms of providing them with training or educational opportunities. Thomas said he doubted if it would be possible for all those workers to find new jobs in Pennsylvania that provided a similar family-sustaining wage and benefits.
Relevant legislation introduced by Rep. Thomas

**House Bill 289** – Would prevent new health insurance policies from imposing a pre-existing condition exclusion for pregnancy and would require insurers to provide coverage of essential maternity care.

**House Bill 311** – Would require the School Reform Commission to prepare and provide two revenue estimates for the Philadelphia Public Schools to the Budget Secretary and House and Senate Education Committee chairmen.

**House Bill 312** – Would require the School Reform Commission to provide two revenue estimates annually and provide an extra 60 days to the disposition statute dealing with the closure of schools.

**House Bill 313** – Would add a new layer of transparency to the process by which school boards can sell, lease or otherwise dispose of unwanted public school property in Pennsylvania.

**House Resolution 466** – Would direct the General Assembly to establish a commission to study the academic and financial needs of Cheyney University of Pennsylvania and make recommendations.

**House Bill 634** – Would increase safety for students who ride school buses by addressing the problem of illegally passing school buses.

**House Bill 1333** – Would add a new layer of transparency to the disposition statute dealing with the closure of schools.

**House Bill 1334** – Would require private academic schools to archive the academic transcripts of graduates with the Department of Education.

**House Bill 1434** – Would dedicate a portion of the 10-year tax abatement to education in Philadelphia County.

**House Bill 1435** – Would require private academic schools to archive the academic transcripts of graduates with the Department of Education.

**House Bill 1436** – Would establish a grant program to bring Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEAM) to the middle schools.

**House Bill 1738** – Would require public school buses to be equipped with retractable seat belts.

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**Raising awareness about homeless youth**

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas joined members of the Bright Hope Baptist Church Youth Coalition and Beta Sigma Theta at a rally in November to raise awareness and highlight the issue of homeless youth in Philadelphia. The rally was held in the parking lot of the Bright Hope Baptist Church, followed by a “sleep out” to emphasize and empathize with the plight of the homeless in the city.

“Too many of our young people do not have a place to call home,” Thomas said. “Too many of our youth live on the streets with histories of abuse and neglect, some with mental health disabilities or drug and alcohol dependency. Their education is faltering or nonexistent. "I joined in today’s rally to both highlight the issue of homelessness in our community, as well as to send a message to our youth that there are people who do care and who want to lift them up and help them live their lives safe and secure,” he said.

Thomas said tackling homelessness among young people in the city is a unique challenge. He said state, local and federal governments have made some strides toward reducing homelessness among all populations, but more work needs to be done.

“I am ready to work with all local, state and federal authorities to find solutions for our city’s homeless youth, including creating more safe places for teens who should be in school and finding ways to connect more young people with social services and health professionals, including psychologists,” Thomas said.

“As state representative for Philadelphia and the 181st District, I continue to advocate for a state budget that takes seriously the social service needs of all members of our community. The time for cuts to social services is over. We need better solutions for those who will lead our county and our communities in the future."

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**Food baskets distributed to those less fortunate**

In November, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas and his staff handed out close to 100 food baskets to needy families in the 181st Legislative District.

“About 13 percent of Pennsylvanians live below the poverty level, but in Philadelphia, that figure doubles to 26 percent, with nearly half of those living in abject poverty,” Thomas said, referring to figures from the U.S. Census. “Many of these struggling families live in the 181st District.

“As the weather gets colder and heating costs rise, and the holidays get closer, more and more families are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. I just want to do my part to make things a little easier for these families.”

Thomas thanked Browns’ ShopRite, the Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition, the Rev. Lewis Nash and The Goldenberg Group for assistance in providing the food baskets to those in need.
Community gathers to welcome Commissioner Ross to the 181st District

In December, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas joined other area elected officials, civic and faith-based organizations, area business leaders and community members to welcome then First Deputy Police Commissioner Richard Ross to the 181st District for a conversation about community and public safety.

Ross, who was named by retiring Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey as his successor, met with Thomas and other community members at the Freedom Theater. In the past, Ross has played a pivotal role in building a rapport with community leaders, and Thomas said he looks forward to working with the commissioner in the future.

Thomas spreads cheer and gifts at his annual holiday celebration

In December, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas hosted his annual holiday celebration, which was attended by his staff, community members and many excited area children.

The celebration, which was held on Sat., Dec. 19 at the St. Paul’s Community Center, included good food, interesting educational workshops on celebrations from other cultures, and gifts for children from families in need.

“This year, I am very proud to announce that we were able to give, at a minimum, gifts to 500 area children,” Thomas said. “I believe it is important for all of us, as a community, to come together to make the holidays a little extra special for these children, and I would like to thank the community members who made doing that this year possible.”

Thomas thanked Barbara Carroll, Vivian VanStory, Connections for Humanity, Rust Real Estate, and New Barber’s Hall for making the event possible by donating the gifts for children from families in need.

“The holiday season is about giving and fellowship, so I am glad to have had the opportunity to host this celebration,” said Thomas.

The 2015 honorees are:

- Iyonna V. Voques, Benjamin Franklin High School
- Dessler Watson-Sharer, Bodine High School for International Affairs
- Nikrunah Frazer, Carver High School for Engineering & Science
- Stone Christie, Murrell Dobbins High School
- Kaleem Lovelace, Delaware Valley Charter School
- Attyiana Coe, Parkway Center City High School
- Brittany Goddard, Philadelphia Military Academy at Elverson
- Semaj N. McDowell, St. Joseph Preparatory School
- Nakiyah Andrews, Hope Partnership for Education
- Khaya Bryant, KIPP Philadelphia Charter School
- Irvin Dinkins Jr., General Philip Kearny School
- Amir Evers, Dunbar Promise Academy
- Aliasyha Garcia, LaSalle Academy
- Alyssa Mickens, LaSalle Academy
- Inayah Johnson, St. Malachy Independent Mission School
- Tealang Lloyd, Alliance for Progress Charter School
- Imani Murdock-Laws, Young Scholars Charter
- Nadia Pace, Gesu School
- Ikeem Rice, James R. Ludlow School
- Chase Robbins, Independence Charter School
- Hafsaah Thomas, Al Aqsa Islamic Academy
- Jordan Keith West, Young Scholars Charter School
- Christian Christber, Gen. George G. Meade Elementary School
- Katherine Vargas, John F. Hartmann Elementary School
- Sanaijah Z. Scott, John Moffet Elementary School
- Ciora Palmer, Spring Garden Elementary School
- Shemar Bates, Tanner Duckrey Elementary School

Rep. Thomas speaks at a rally at the Capitol held by students and alumni of Cheyney University. At the rally, Thomas called for increased funding and support for the historically black Pennsylvania university.
Local graduates and teachers honored at 25th annual awards banquet

In July, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas honored area students and teachers at his 25th annual State Representative Awards. Multiple students from public, charter and parochial schools in the 181st Legislative District were honored for academic excellence and contributions to their school and community.

“These young men and women were faced with difficult odds through the years but they were able to turn great challenges into real success,” Thomas said. “I believe it is appropriate to honor these students for what they have achieved.”

Mann Frisby, former Philadelphia Daily News reporter and author, was the special guest. The students and their families were treated to a pre-reception followed by the award presentations featuring performances by Georgia E. Gregory Interdenominational School of Music student Charliene Panning and Philadelphia-based emcee Ai-Que.

Former State Representative Award recipients Tiffany Gibson, Sharae Scott and Linda Fleming were also in attendance to show this year’s recipients what they could do with their lives with the right amount of dedication, respect and a commitment to education.

All three former recipients are currently pursuing advanced degrees.

“I was glad to see former recipients attend this year’s ceremony because their continued success proves something important,” Thomas said. “If we invest in young people properly now, it will pay dividends in later years through their good work and accomplishments.”

Since 1990, Thomas has honored more than 800 elementary, middle and high school graduates who have been selected by their principals for academic excellence. Each honoree receives a certificate of recognition and a gift comprising 200 contributors for academic excellence and contributions to their school and community.

Thomas fights for a budget to put Pennsylvania on the right path

During former Gov. Tom Corbett’s administration, the Republican majority in Harrisburg passed budgets that drastically cut funding for education and human service programs and locked in most of those cuts from 2011 to 2014. In November 2014, the voters of Pennsylvania made it perfectly clear that they wanted to stop shortchanging the youth and needy in our state by electing Gov. Tom Wolf by a wide margin.

However, the Republican majority in the General Assembly resisted the will of the people by sending Gov. Wolf a spending plan in June that some have come to call “Corbett’s 5th budget.” Republicans knew he would never sign such a budget, which failed to make a proper investment in education along with many other issues, including creating a $3 billion structural deficit. Gov. Wolf vetoed their spending plan, which set off a summer full of tense negotiations.

Over the summer, state Rep. W. Curtis Thomas attempted to act as a voice of reason by holding a series of news conferences focused on fiscal solutions and compromise.

Thomas held his first budget news conference in July to discuss the state of health and human service providers during the budget impasse. In August, Thomas’ news conference focused on the need to make a sufficient investment in education after years of harsh cuts. His third news conference, which was also held in August, focused on the impact the budget impasse was having on the local workforce development board and related workforce development programs.

“My Democratic colleagues and I know the pain the lack of a budget is causing our schools, social service agencies and others, but we also know if we do not stand strong now, we will lose a critical opportunity to restore the billion dollars that Corbett’s budgets cost our schools,” said Thomas during his July news conference.

“Enough is enough. The people of this commonwealth made their priorities clear last November when they elected Gov. Wolf. They made it clear that they’ve had enough of the cuts and enough of tricks and gimmicks.”

Throughout the impasse, Thomas voiced his support for ideas that could bring both sides together, close the structural deficit while funding education and offering property tax relief.

“We’ve gone too long without a budget, and we should come together on issues we agree on,” Thomas said. “Instead of a quick fix, we need to use myriad revenue sources which neither punish people nor provide unintended consequences.”
Because of this political gamesmanship, the Senate hurriedly sent a poorly planned and structurally unbalanced budget bill to the governor, simply to avoid closure of cash-strapped schools and human service providers after the Christmas holiday. The governor vetoed large chunks of the budget bill he was handed but approved enough money to keep schools open and sent funding to vital nonprofits, with the understanding that his vetoes would require continued negotiations.

However, negotiations were less than successful and, in order to focus on the upcoming 2016-17 budget, Gov. Wolf allowed another poorly crafted, gimmick-filled Republican spending plan to become law without his signature in March 2016.

While this budget process has been frustrating, I stand behind Governor Wolf and remain committed to fighting for a budget that truly serves the needs of the people of this great commonwealth,” Thomas said.

Thomas fights for a budget to put Pennsylvania on the right path

New charter school moratorium needed

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas responded to media reports in February by calling on the School Reform Commission not to approve any of the 39 charter school applications currently under review, and to institute a moratorium on any and all new charter schools in Philadelphia.

At the time, the media reported that the Philadelphia School Partnership, a nonprofit organization, had offered the SRC $35 million in hopes that multiple charter schools would be approved in the city.

Thomas said he is not opposed to the concept of charter schools as they were originally intended, as a complement to public schools. However, he said he believes the SRC, the city and community advocates should be focused on improving Philadelphia’s public schools.

“Historically, as Americans and as Pennsylvanians we have identified challenges in the political and economic arenas and have stepped up to the plate to resolve these issues,” Thomas said. “We should be investing in what we know works. Why is it though, when it comes to children, so many are ready to dismantle the system in place and start over? If there is $35 million available, why not use it to fix our already existing schools? If we accept this money and expand the charter school system, then we are abandoning our children and our public school system.”

Ultimately, the SRC voted on opening five new charter schools from the 39 applications.

In February, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas attended a personal meeting with Gov. Tom Wolf to commend the governor on his leadership and to vocalize his support for the dismantling of the School Reform Commission.

“In the 25 years I’ve been serving my district in Harrisburg, I have never seen a governor make an effort to reach out to every member of the General Assembly like Gov. Wolf has done,” Thomas said. “It is encouraging to know that he has the ability to lead because our state currently faces serious challenges, particularly as it comes to education in Philadelphia.”

Thomas said he spoke to Gov. Wolf about many issues of concern to constituents in his district, but their conversation mainly focused on education and news of the SRC’s recent approval of five new Philadelphia charter schools.

In March, Thomas commended Gov. Wolf after he learned about the dismissal of Bill Green as the head of the SRC. Thomas took the opportunity to again urge him to maintain the momentum by demolishing the SRC completely.

“I am glad that Gov. Wolf understands the educational environment in Philadelphia is in peril, and he seems willing to replace whatever personnel he needs to in order to achieve the change necessary,” Thomas said. “It is my hope that the governor will

Thomas: Dissolve the SRC, return district to local control

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More hearings needed to better understand virtual currencies

As virtual currencies like Bitcoin become more common each passing day, House Commerce Committee Democratic Chairman W. Curtis Thomas urged his colleagues in April to hold further hearings to guarantee that those currencies are being properly regulated in Pennsylvania and that sufficient consumer protections have been established.

“These virtual currencies have appeared and have been adopted rapidly, but the government hasn’t reacted to the unique nature of these funds and how they interact with the rest of our financial system,” Thomas said. “I feel that it’s vital for the General Assembly to hold intensive hearings on this subject to ensure members have a thorough understanding of virtual currencies and that the appropriate consumer protections are in place throughout the state.”

At an informational meeting in late March, the House Commerce Committee examined House Bill 850, which would update and expand the Money Transmission Business Licensing Law to give it the authority needed to regulate virtual currency in Pennsylvania similar to how traditional currency is currently regulated.

“While each virtual currency has different pros and cons, the heart of the problem is that they are all issued without any government affiliation or association with a central authority such as a bank,” Thomas said. “There may be benefits for some users, but it is also a medium that could be corrupted by scammers, money launderers and those seeking to avoid paying their fair share of taxes.”

While there was a general consensus at the informational meeting that the law needed to be updated, there was less agreement exactly how that should be done. At the meeting, Thomas called on House Commerce Committee Republican Chairman Adam Harris to hold further hearings to ensure sufficient consumer protections are instituted with any other needed regulation.

House Bill 850 awaits further consideration from the House Commerce Committee.

Relevant legislation introduced by Rep. Thomas

- **House Bill 28** – Would set guidelines for preauthorized fund transfers for financial institutions.
- **House Resolution 64** – Would direct the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to conduct a study of, and offer recommendations on the fiscal impact of transitioning Pennsylvania from a single, flat rate Personal Income Tax to a graduated tax structure.
- **House Bill 284** – Would establish the Small Business Forgivable Loan Program.
- **House Bill 286** – Would allow those who have graduated from high school or college within the last four years to participate in job training opportunities provided under the Keystone Works Program.
- **House Bill 287** – Would create a statewide Surety Bond Guarantee Program within the Department of Community and Economic Development.
- **House Bill 632** – Would provide additional business access to capital by reinvigorating the much underutilized Second Stage Loan Program.
- **House Bill 810** – Would allow businesses that have existed more than seven years to participate in the Second Stage Loan Program and give the Commonwealth Financing Authority the ability to determine the maximum guarantee amount and percentage.
- **House Bill 1320** – Would create the Mixed-Use Development Fund within the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency.
- **House Bill 1434** – Would require all beneficiaries of the Educational Improvement Tax Credit program to be held to the same standards as others who benefit from public funds such as the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program.
House passes bill to modernize Second Stage Loan Program

In June, the state House of Representatives passed legislation authored by Rep. W. Curtis Thomas that would modernize and streamline the Second Stage Loan Program.

“I’d like to thank my colleagues in the House and especially the members of the Commerce Committee for their support of this effort. Creating an environment that allows businesses to prosper is a vital component of ensuring a bright future for Pennsylvania,” said Thomas, Democratic chairman of the House Commerce Committee.

The Second Stage Loan Program, one of eight programs created in 2004 when the Commonwealth Financing Authority was established, provides loan guarantees to commercial lending institutions that make loans to Pennsylvania businesses in the startup phase but have not yet matured enough to be able to borrow funds based on their financial strength.

House Bill 810 alters the requirements of the Second Stage Loan Program to allow businesses that have existed for more than seven years to participate. Currently, only businesses that are at least two years but less than seven years old are eligible for the program. The bill would also give the CFA the authority to determine the maximum loan guarantee and adjust it based on market conditions.

“The restrictions on the age of the businesses and other components proved to be unnecessarily restrictive, which resulted in the program being underutilized. I am glad that my colleagues understood a few small changes in the law could make the program a valuable tool for businesses across the state,” Thomas said.

Additionally, Thomas’ legislation would add a requirement that participants demonstrate that the loan will result in jobs being created or retained in Pennsylvania. Since its inception, the Second Stage Loan Program has approved eight projects, which have created 135 jobs in the state and retained another 176.

House Bill 810 is currently awaiting consideration from the Senate.

Appointment to national committee on labor and workforce development

In July, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas was appointed to a national legislative committee focused on labor, employment, workforce and economic development, international trade and cultural affairs.

Recommended by Democratic Leader Frank Dermody, Thomas will work with the Labor and Economic Development Committee within the National Conference of State Legislatures.

“I am honored to have been appointed to this national committee by Leader Dermody and I look forward to working with my colleagues from all across the country to improve job opportunities and stimulate workforce development,” Thomas said. “Philadelphia shares many of the same issues and roadblocks with other major urban areas and this appointment provides a great opportunity to work collaboratively on solutions.”

Thomas said NCSL is a bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of all 50 states, providing research, technical assistance and a forum for policymakers to exchange ideas on pressing state issues.

“This committee helps to shape policy recommendations for legislatures across the country on some of the most pressing labor issues facing our communities,” Thomas said. “I look forward to advocating for the people of Philadelphia and this commonwealth while emphasizing the critical need to prepare our workforce for a modernized and globalized economy.”

Job fairs connect constituents with employment

Over the year, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas and his staff hosted multiple events to help constituents connect with family-sustaining jobs or the training needed to be considered for one.

In May, Thomas hosted the Building the Bridge to Tomorrow Career and Job Training Summit at Beckett Life Center. The summit focused on opportunities available to young people between 16 and 24 and included an open discussion on the recent growth seen in the health care and technology industries.

In September, Thomas hosted his 10th Annual Private Sector job fair to help area residents connect with family-sustaining jobs. The job fair, which was held at the William H. Gray III Youth Center, had a great turnout of both employers and job-seekers. Thomas’ staff was also at the job fair to facilitate constituents networking with employers, and to help anyone who needed it develop resumes.

Over 15 community members have been able to secure jobs with employers, including Comcast and FedEx, through Thomas’ various job fairs.

House passes bill to require certification for Philadelphia property assessors

In October, the state House unanimously passed legislation introduced by Rep. W. Curtis Thomas that he said would bring a new level of professionalism, uniformity and accuracy to Philadelphia’s assessment process.

Once signed into law, Thomas’ bill (House Bill 321) would require the city to use only certified property assessors. Currently, Philadelphia is the only county exempt from a state law that requires those responsible for assessing property to be certified by the State Board of Real Estate Appraisers. The bill would remove that exemption.

“For too many years, Philadelphia’s assessment practices have been unfair, unpredictable and confusing,” Thomas said. “Steps were taken to rectify the system by transferring property reassessment functions from the city’s Board of Revision of Taxes to a separate Office of Property Assessment, but more needs to be done to restore homeowners’ confidence in the process. My bill would do just that.”

State law requires a certification process that includes a minimum of 90 hours of course study related to appraisals and assessments, an exam on the appraisal process and assessment procedures, and 20 hours of continuing education. Under the Thomas bill, Philadelphia assessors now would be subject to all of this, and have three years to become certified.

“These requirements would give our assessors the tools they need to ensure that city assessments are accurate and fair, and I believe three years is enough time for current employees to upgrade their skills and knowledge,” Thomas said.

As of this writing, the bill awaits consideration from the Senate.
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Recommended by Democratic Leader Frank Dermody, Thomas will work with the Labor and Economic Development Committee within the National Conference of State Legislatures.

“I am honored to have been appointed to this national committee by Leader Dermody and I look forward to working with my colleagues from all across the country to improve job opportunities and stimulate workforce development,” Thomas said. “Philadelphia shares many of the same issues and roadblocks with other major urban areas and this appointment provides a great opportunity to work collaboratively on solutions.”

Thomas said NCSL is a bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of all 50 states, providing research, technical assistance and a forum for policymakers to exchange ideas on pressing state issues.

“This committee helps to shape policy recommendations for legislatures across the country on some of the most pressing labor issues facing our communities,” Thomas said. “I look forward to advocating for the people of Philadelphia and this commonwealth while emphasizing the critical need to prepare our workforce for a modernized and globalized economy.”

Job fairs connect constituents with employment

Over the year, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas and his staff hosted multiple events to help constituents connect with family-sustaining jobs or the training needed to be considered for one.

In May, Thomas hosted the Building the Bridge to Tomorrow Career and Job Training Summit at Beckett Life Center. The summit focused on opportunities available to young people between 16 and 24 and included an open discussion on the recent growth seen in the health care and technology industries.

In September, Thomas hosted his 10th Annual Private Sector job fair to help area residents connect with family-sustaining jobs.

The job fair, which was held at the William H. Gray III Youth Center, had a great turnout of both employers and job-seekers.

Thomas’ staff was also at the job fair to facilitate constituents networking with employers, and to help anyone who needed it develop resumes.

Over 15 community members have been able to secure jobs with employers, including Comcast and FedEx, through Thomas’ various job fairs.

House passes bill to require certification for Philadelphia property assessors

In October, the state House unanimously passed legislation introduced by Rep. W. Curtis Thomas that he said would bring a new level of professionalism, uniformity and accuracy to Philadelphia’s assessment process.

Once signed into law, Thomas’ bill (House Bill 321) would require the city to use only certified property assessors. Currently, Philadelphia is the only county exempt from a state law that requires those responsible for assessing property to be certified by the State Board of Real Estate Appraisers. The bill would remove that exemption.

“For too many years, Philadelphia’s assessment practices have been unfair, unpredictable and confusing,” Thomas said. “Steps were taken to rectify the system by transferring property reassessment functions from the city’s Board of Revision of Taxes to a separate Office of Property Assessment, but more needs to be done to restore homeowners’ confidence in the process. My bill would do just that.”

State law requires a certification process that includes a minimum of 90 hours of course study related to appraisals and assessments, an exam on the appraisal process and assessment procedures, and 20 hours of continuing education. Under the Thomas bill, Philadelphia assessors now would be subject to all of this, and have three years to become certified.

“These requirements would give our assessors the tools they need to ensure that city assessments are accurate and fair, and I believe three years is enough time for current employees to upgrade their skills and knowledge,” Thomas said.

As of this writing, the bill awaits consideration from the Senate.
More hearings needed to better understand virtual currencies

As virtual currencies like Bitcoin become more common each passing day, House Commerce Committee Democratic Chairman W. Curtis Thomas urged his colleagues in April to hold further hearings to guarantee that those currencies are being properly regulated in Pennsylvania and that sufficient consumer protections have been established.

“These virtual currencies have appeared and have been adopted rapidly, but the government hasn’t reacted to the unique nature of these funds and how they interact with the rest of our financial system,” Thomas said. “I feel that it’s vital for the General Assembly to hold intensive hearings on this subject to ensure members have a thorough understanding of virtual currencies and that the appropriate consumer protections are in place throughout the state.”

While there was a general consensus at the informational meeting that the law needed to be updated, there was less agreement exactly how that should be done. At the meeting, Thomas called on House Commerce Committee Republican Chairman Adam Harris to hold further hearings to ensure sufficient consumer protections are instituted with any other needed regulation.

House Bill 850 awaits further consideration from the House Commerce Committee.


Relevant legislation introduced by Rep. Thomas

House Bill 28 – Would set guidelines for preauthorized fund transfers for financial institutions.

House Resolution 64 – Would direct the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to conduct a study of, and offer recommendations on the fiscal impact of transitioning Pennsylvania from a single, flat rate Personal Income Tax to a graduated tax structure.

House Bill 284 – Would establish the Small Business Forgivable Loan Program.

House Bill 286 – Would allow those who have graduated from high school or college within the last four years to participate in job training opportunities provided under the Keystone Works Program.

House Bill 287 – Would create a statewide Surety Bond Guarantee Program within the Department of Community and Economic Development.

House Bill 632 – Would provide additional business access to capital by reinvigorating the much underutilized Second Stage Loan Program.

House Bill 810 – Would allow businesses that have existed more than seven years to participate in the Second Stage Loan Program and give the Commonwealth Financing Authority the ability to determine the maximum guarantee amount and percentage.

House Bill 1230 – Would create the Mixed-Use Development Fund within the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency.

House Bill 1434 – Would require all beneficiaries of the Educational Improvement Tax Credit program to be held to the same standards as others who benefit from public funds such as the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program.
Because of this political gamesmanship, the Senate hurriedly sent a poorly planned and structurally unbalanced budget bill to the governor, simply to avoid closure of cash-strapped schools and human service providers after the Christmas holiday. The governor vetoed large chunks of the budget bill he was handed but approved enough money to keep schools open and sent funding to vital nonprofits, with the understanding that his vetoes would require continued negotiations.

However, negotiations were less than successful and, in order to focus on the upcoming 2016-17 budget, Gov. Wolf allowed another poorly crafted, gimmick-filled Republican spending plan to become law without his signature in March 2016.

“While this budget process has been frustrating, I stand behind Governor Wolf and remain committed to fighting for a budget that truly serves the needs of the people of this great commonwealth,” Thomas said.

Relevant legislation introduced by Rep. Thomas

- **House Bill 151** – Would require pipeline operators that take taxpayer-funded agriculture and conservation easements to replace them within the same county.
- **House Resolution 181** – Honors the life and service of Officer Robert Wilson, resident of Philadelphia.
- **House Bill 321** – Would include Philadelphia under the Assessors Certification Act.
- **House Bill 631** – Would provide for notice requirements for online sales vendors regarding sales tax collection for online sales.
- **House Bill 633** – Would protect farm land by eliminating exemptions in the condemnation process.
- **House Bill 818** — Would require pipeline operators to notify property owners affected by their proposed pipeline.

**New charter school moratorium needed**

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas responded to media reports in February by calling on the School Reform Commission not to approve any of the 39 charter school applications currently under review, and to institute a moratorium on any and all new charter schools in Philadelphia.

At the time, the media reported that the Philadelphia School Partnership, a nonprofit organization, had offered the SRC $35 million in hopes that multiple charter schools would be approved in the city.

Thomas said he is not opposed to the concept of charter schools as they were originally intended, as a complement to public schools. However, he said he believes the SRC, the city and community advocates should be focused on improving Philadelphia’s public schools.

“Historically, as Americans and as Pennsylvanians we have identified challenges in the political and economic arenas and have stepped up to the plate to resolve these issues,” Thomas said. “We should be investing in what we know works. Why is it through, when it comes to children, so many are ready to dismantle the system in place and start over? If there is $35 million available, why not use it to fix our already existing schools? If we accept this money and expand the charter school system, then we are abandoning our children and our public school system.”

Ultimately, the SRC voted on opening five new charter schools from the 39 applications.

**Thomas: Dissolve the SRC, return district to local control**

In February, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas attended a personal meeting with Gov. Tom Wolf to commend the governor on his leadership and to vocalize his support for the dismantling of the School Reform Commission.

“In the 25 years I’ve been serving my district in Harrisburg, I have never seen a governor make an effort to reach out to every member of the General Assembly like Gov. Wolf has done,” Thomas said. “It is encouraging to know that he has the ability to lead because our state currently faces serious challenges, particularly as it comes to education in Philadelphia.”

Thomas said he spoke to Gov. Wolf about many issues of concern to constituents in his district, but their conversation mainly focused on education and news of the SRC’s recent approval of five new Philadelphia charter schools.

In March, Thomas commended Gov. Wolf after he learned about the dismissal of Bill Green as the head of the SRC. Thomas took the opportunity to again urge him to maintain the momentum by demolishing the SRC completely.

“I am glad that Gov. Wolf understands the educational environment in Philadelphia is in peril, and he seems willing to replace whatever personnel he needs to in order to achieve the change necessary,” Thomas said. “It is my hope that the governor will...”
Thomas: Dissolve the SRC, return district to local control

continue his reforms by returning control of the Philadelphia School District to the county and getting it out of the hands of the state.”

Thomas also called on Gov. Wolf to open a thorough investigation of the SRC’s conduct and finances. Thomas believes such a probe will lead to clear and convincing evidence that would support SRC dissolution.

“It is time for Philadelphia to come in line with other school districts and counties across the commonwealth, under the leadership of an independent board that has been granted full responsibility for governance of the school district,” Thomas said.

“There is no reason why Philadelphia schools should be different from any of the other 499 school districts. I know given the opportunity, a local school board would work to bring about additional change and positive reforms for all students of the district.”

Local graduates and teachers honored at 25th annual awards banquet

In July, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas honored area students and teachers at his 25th annual State Representative Awards. Multiple students from public, charter and parochial schools in the 181st Legislative District were honored for academic excellence and contributions to their school and community.

“These young men and women were faced with difficult odds through the years but they were able to turn great challenges into real success,” Thomas said. “I believe it is appropriate to honor these students for what they have achieved.”

Mann Frisby, former Philadelphia Daily News reporter and author, was the special guest. The students and their families were treated to a pre-reception followed by the award presentations featuring performances by Georgia E. Gregory Interdenominational School of Music student Charlene Panning and Philadelphia-based emcee Ai-Que.

Former State Representative Award recipients Tiffany Gibson, Sharee Scott and Linda Fleming were also in attendance to show this year’s recipients what they could do with their lives with the right amount of dedication, respect and a commitment to education. All three former recipients are currently pursuing advanced degrees.

“I was glad to see former recipients attend this year’s ceremony because their continued success proves something important,” Thomas said. “If we invest in young people properly now, it will pay dividends in later years through their good work and accomplishments.”

Since 1990, Thomas has honored more than 800 elementary, middle and high school graduates who have been selected by their principals for academic excellence. Each honoree receives a certificate of recognition and a gift comprising of recognition and a gift comprising

Thomas fights for a budget to put Pennsylvania on the right path

During former Gov. Tom Corbett’s administration, the Republican majority in Harrisburg passed budgets that drastically cut funding for education and human service programs and locked in most of those cuts from 2011 to 2014. In November 2014, the voters of Pennsylvania made it perfectly clear that they wanted to stop shortchanging the youth and needy in our state by electing Gov. Tom Wolf by a wide margin.

However, the Republican majority in the General Assembly resisted the will of the people by sending Gov. Wolf a spending plan in June that some have come to call “Corbett’s 5th budget.”

Republicans knew he would never sign the budget, which failed to make a proper investment in education along with many other issues, including creating a $3 billion structural deficit. Gov. Wolf vetoed their spending plan, which set off a summer full of tense negotiations.

Over the summer, state Rep. W. Curtis Thomas attempted to act as a voice of reason by holding a series of news conferences focused on fiscal solutions and compromise.

Thomas held his first budget news conference in July to discuss the state of health and human service providers during the budget impasse. In August, Thomas’ news conference focused on the need to make a sufficient investment in education after years of harsh cuts. His third news conference, which was also held in August, focused on the impact the budget impasse was having on the local workforce development board and related workforce development programs.

“My Democratic colleagues and I know the pain the lack of a budget is causing our schools, social service agencies and others, but we also know if we do not stand strong now, we will lose a critical opportunity to restore the billion dollars that Corbett’s budgets cost our schools,” said Thomas during his July news conference.

“Enough is enough. The people of this commonwealth made their priorities clear last November when they elected Gov. Wolf. They made it clear that they’ve had enough of the cuts and enough of tricks and gimmicks.”

Throughout the impasse, Thomas voiced his support for ideas that could bring both sides together, close the structural deficit while funding education and offering properly tax relief.

“We’ve gone too long without a budget, and we should come together on issues we agree on,” Thomas said. “Instead of a quick fix, we need to use myriad revenue sources which neither punish people nor provide unintended consequences.”

In December, shortly before the New Year, it appeared that an agreement had been reached that would have put an end to this unfortunate impasse. A bipartisan group of legislators, with Gov. Wolf, agreed to a comprehensive budget framework that would properly fund Pennsylvania’s schools and health and human service providers while starting to address the structural deficit that previous administrations had created.

Yet, in the hours leading up to the final vote, Speaker of the House Mike Turzai canceled the rest of session and sent all representatives home for the holiday.

Rep. Thomas stands with his Democratic colleagues to demand consideration of a budget that properly invests in education and resolves the structural deficit.

Continued next page
Community gathers to welcome Commissioner Ross to the 181st District

In December, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas joined other area elected officials, civic and faith-based organizations, area business leaders and community members to welcome then First Deputy Police Commissioner Richard Ross to the 181st District for a conversation about community and public safety.

Ross, who was named by retiring Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey as his successor, met with Thomas and other community members at the Freedom Theater. In the past, Ross has played a pivotal role in building a rapport with community leaders, and Thomas said he looks forward to working with the commissioner in the future.

Thomas spreads cheer and gifts at his annual holiday celebration

In December, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas hosted his annual holiday celebration, which was attended by his staff, community members and many excited area children.

The celebration, which was held on Sat., Dec. 19 at the St. Paul’s Community Center, included good food, interesting educational workshops on celebrations from other cultures, and gifts for children from families in need.

“This year, I am very proud to announce that we were able to give, at a minimum, gifts to 500 area children,” Thomas said. “I believe it is important for all of us, as a community, to come together to make the holidays a little extra special for these children, and I would like to thank the community members who made doing that this year possible.”

Thomas thanked Barbara Carroll, Vivian VanStory, Connections for Humanity, Rust Real Estate, and New Barber’s Hall for making the event possible by donating the gifts for children from families in need.

“The holiday season is about giving and fellowship, so I am glad to have had the opportunity to host this celebration,” said Thomas.

The 2015 honorees are:

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
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<tr>
<td>Iyonna V. Voques</td>
<td>Benjamin Franklin High School</td>
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<td>Dessler Watson-Sharer</td>
<td>Bodine High School for International Affairs</td>
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<td>Nikrumah Frazer</td>
<td>Carver High School for Engineering &amp; Science</td>
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<td>Stone Christie</td>
<td>Murrell Dobkins High School</td>
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<td>Kaleem Lovelace</td>
<td>Delaware Valley Charter School</td>
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<td>Attyiana Coe</td>
<td>Parkway Center City High School</td>
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<td>Brittany Goddard</td>
<td>Philadelphia Military Academy at Elverson</td>
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<td>Semaj N. McDowell</td>
<td>St. Joseph Preparatory School</td>
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<td>Nakiyah Andrews</td>
<td>Hope Partnership for Education</td>
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<td>Khayla Bryant</td>
<td>KIPP Philadelphia Charter School</td>
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<td>Irvin Dinkins Jr.</td>
<td>General Philip Kearny School</td>
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<td>Amir Evers</td>
<td>Dunbar Promise Academy</td>
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<td>Aliayahya Garcia</td>
<td>LaSalle Academy</td>
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<td>Alyssa Mickens</td>
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<td>Inayah Johnson</td>
<td>St. Malachy Independent Mission School</td>
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<td>Tealiang Lloyd</td>
<td>Alliance for Progress Charter School</td>
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<td>Imani Murdock-Laws</td>
<td>Young Scholars Charter</td>
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<td>Nadia Pace</td>
<td>Gesu School</td>
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<td>Ikeem Rice</td>
<td>James R. Ludlow School</td>
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<td>Chase Robbins</td>
<td>Independence Charter School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hafsaah Thomas</td>
<td>Al Aqsa Islamic Academy</td>
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<td>Jordan Keith West</td>
<td>Young Scholars Charter</td>
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<td>Christian Christtber</td>
<td>Gen. George G. Meade Elementary School</td>
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<td>Katherine Vargas</td>
<td>John F. Hartrantl Elementary School</td>
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<td>Sanaiah Z. Scott</td>
<td>John Moffet Elementary School</td>
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<td>Ciora Palmer</td>
<td>Spring Garden Elementary School</td>
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<td>Sheimar Bates</td>
<td>Tanner Duckrey Elementary School</td>
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Rep. Thomas celebrates outstanding area students and teachers at his 25th Annual State Representative Awards.

Rep. Thomas speaks at a rally at the Capitol held by students and alumni of Cheyney University. At the rally, Thomas called for increased funding and support for the historically black Pennsylvania university.
Relevant legislation introduced by Rep. Thomas

House Bill 289 – Would prevent new health insurance policies from imposing a pre-existing condition exclusion for pregnancy and would require insurers to provide coverage of essential maternity care.

House Bill 311 – Would require the School Reform Commission to prepare and provide two revenue estimates for the Philadelphia Public Schools to the Budget Secretary and House and Senate Education Committee chairman.

House Bill 312 – Would require the School Reform Commission to provide two revenue estimates annually and provide an extra 60 days to the disposition statute dealing with the closure of schools.

House Bill 313 – Would add a new layer of transparency to the process by which school boards can sell, lease or otherwise dispose of unwanted public school property in Pennsylvania.

House Resolution 466 – Would direct the General Assembly to establish a commission to study the academic and financial needs of Cheyney University of Pennsylvania and make recommendations.

House Bill 634 – Would increase safety for students who ride school buses by addressing the problem of illegally passing school buses.

House Bill 1333 – Would dedicate a portion of the 10-year tax abatement to education in Philadelphia County.

House Bill 1434 – Would require private academic schools to archive the academic transcripts of graduates with the Department of Education.

House Bill 1436 – Would establish a grant program to bring Science, Technology, Engineering, Math and Manufacturing (STEMM) to the middle schools.

House Bill 1738 – Would require public school buses to be equipped with retractable seat belts.

Raising awareness about homeless youth

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas joined members of the Bright Hope Baptist Church Youth Coalition and Beta Sigma Theta at a rally in November to raise awareness and highlight the issue of homeless youth in Philadelphia. The rally was held in the parking lot of the Bright Hope Baptist Church, followed by a “sleep out” to emphasize and empathize with the plight of the homeless in the city.

“Too many of our young people do not have a place to call home,” Thomas said. “Too many of our youth live on the streets with histories of abuse and neglect, some with mental health disabilities or drug and alcohol dependency. Their education is faltering or nonexistent.

“I joined in today’s rally to both highlight the issue of homelessness in our community, as well as to send a message to our youth that there are people who do care and who want to lift them up and help them live their lives safe and secure,” he said.

Thomas said tackling homelessness among young people in the city is a unique challenge. He said state, local and federal governments have made some strides toward reducing homelessness among all populations, but more work needs to be done.

“I am ready to work with all local, state and federal authorities to find solutions for our city’s homeless youth, including creating more safe places for teens who should be in school and finding ways to connect more young people with social services and health professionals, including psychologists,” Thomas said.

“As state representative for Philadelphia and the 181st District, I continue to advocate for a state budget that takes seriously the social service needs of all members of our community. The time for cuts to social services is over. We need better solutions for those who will lead our county and our communities in the future.”

Food baskets distributed to those less fortunate

In November, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas and his staff handed out close to 100 food baskets to needy families in the 181st Legislative District.

“About 13 percent of Pennsylvanians live below the poverty level, but in Philadelphia, that figure doubles to 26 percent, with nearly half of those living in abject poverty,” Thomas said, referring to figures from the U.S. Census. “Many of these struggling families live in the 181st District.

“As the weather gets colder and heating costs rise, and the holidays get closer, more and more families are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. I just want to do my part to make things a little easier for these families.”

Thomas thanked Browns’ ShopRite, the Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition, the Rev. Lewis Nash and The Goldenberg Group for assistance in providing the food baskets to those in need.
Caucus rule change formalizes diversity council

In April, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas successfully motioned to alter the rules governing both the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and the House Democratic Caucus. Thomas’ motion resulted in the adoption of an amendment to establish a Diversity Council within the House and a Diversity Advisory Council. The state House of Representatives spends millions of dollars each year on staffing, procurement, legal, copying and editing. More often than not, the beneficiaries of these tax dollars are devoid of disadvantaged individuals, businesses of color or veterans. The purpose of the Diversity Council is to do business in a way that is diverse and operate in a way that is inclusive and aware of disadvantaged beneficiaries of these tax dollars. The council’s mission and clarifies its organizational structure. Diversity enriches our lives, but is also vital to ensure that the House accurately reflects the population of the Commonwealth, Thomas said. “Celebrating diversity is good for its own sake, but it also strengthens us as public officials, so I look forward to continuing to work with the Diversity and Inclusion Council on these important issues.”

The Diversity and Inclusion Council’s mission includes engaging all caucus members and staff through education, raising awareness of the benefits of a fully inclusive workplace, and identifying ways to improve and preserve diversity among Capitol and regional staff. In addition, the council hosts special events on issues that impact the lives of caucus members and employees. Thomas has long sought to establish a diversity council in the House. During the tenure of previous House leaders, Thomas worked with his colleagues as he researched diversity councils in other states, including the Virginia legislature. Thomas has praised current House Democratic Leader Frank Dermody for supporting the ideals of diversity and the mission of the diversity council even while it was an informal part of the caucus.

Thomas calls on community to assist police at All Life Matters Rally

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas joined with community members to hold the All Life Matters Rally, in response to the murder of Kim Jones, who was gunned down while waiting for a morning bus near Temple University.

At the rally, Thomas and other community leaders spoke about the brazen nature of the attack and the senselessness of targeting Jones, a 56-year-old mother of two. The rally was held near the site of the murder, which occurred in the 181st Legislative District.

“We are at a crucial crossroad right now,” Thomas said. “Someone laid in wait in the middle of the day and murdered someone, one of our neighbors, in cold blood, supposedly without being seen by anyone. If this person can walk around on the street, what is to stop him from murdering your mother, your sister?”

Thomas urged attendees at the rally to assist police in their investigation of the murder in any way possible. The Philadelphia Police arrested a man and charged him with murdering Jones two weeks after the All Life Matters Rally.

Liquor privatization plan would endanger public safety, destroy jobs

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas voted against a plan backed by Pennsylvania House Republicans to sell off state liquor stores saying it would endanger public safety in Philadelphia and across the state, while destroying thousands of family-sustaining jobs.

“This liquor privatization plan is bound to harm Pennsylvania business, workers and consumers if it becomes law,” Thomas said. “While many of my colleagues and I would be interested in discussions about improving the current system, this plan simply would dismantle what is working with little regard for the effect it will have on the public.”

Thomas said public safety concerns are more than just speculation. Research from the Centers for Disease Control has concluded that privatization of alcohol sales results in a reduction in enforcement of sales regulations, including enforcement of underage drinking laws. “Research has shown that the current system benefits our children by protecting them,” Thomas said. “But the state store system also benefits all Pennsylvanians by ensuring convenience and choice, while providing a stable source of revenue to the state.”

In addition, Thomas said he believes this bill was drafted with little consideration for the state’s differing urban, rural and suburban communities.

The nearly 4,000 state store employees are also of great concern to Thomas, and he said the House Republican plan does little in terms of providing them with training or educational opportunities. Thomas said he doubted if it would be possible for all those workers to find new jobs in Pennsylvania that provided a similar family-sustaining wage and benefits.
Thomas joins area public officials to offer a condolence resolution for slain Philadelphia police officer


Wilson, an 8-year veteran of the force, was at a North Philadelphia GameStop in March to buy his son a reward for his good grades when he was gunned down trying to stop a robbery.

“Despite being outgunned and outnumbered, Officer Wilson quickly took action that day by drawing the gunman’s attention away from customers and employees still in the store. His quick thinking and heroic deeds surely saved innocent lives that day,” Thomas said. “Officer Wilson was a credit to the Philadelphia Police Department and deserves to be recognized for his commitment to serve and protect our citizens.”

For his valor, Officer Wilson was posthumously promoted to sergeant, and the department’s Medal of Valor was renamed in his honor.

“We cannot let the unjust and cowardly acts that killed Officer Wilson diminish his accomplishments in life,” Acosta said. “He served as a role model to his children, a hero to his community and a friend to his colleagues. Officer Wilson died serving others, which is how he lived his life as well. We are all indebted to his courageous service.”

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Thomas begins 14th term in state House of Representatives

In January, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas took the oath of office and began his 14th term in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

Thomas also returns to another term as Democratic chairman of the Commerce Committee, where he helps guide legislation and policy involving the banking and financial services industries.

As chairman of the Commerce Committee, Thomas said he is particularly focused on job creation, retention and stabilization and moving Pennsylvania from 47th in the nation in terms of job growth to first.

The swearing-in ceremony in the House chamber marked the beginning of the 199th legislative session. The state constitution mandates that the legislature convene at noon on the first Tuesday of January.
Urging for joint hearings on oil-train derailments

In March, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas wrote a letter to the Republican chairman of the House Commerce Committee, and to the chairman of the House Transportation Committee, and urged their cooperation in holding a joint hearing on derailments of trains carrying hazardous fuel sources. "Accidents are bound to happen, as we saw with the derailment of an oil train in West Virginia," Thomas said. "We need to make sure we are doing everything in our power to prevent accidents, and that we are ready to act if an incident like that were to ever happen in Philadelphia or anywhere in the commonwealth."

I believe the best way to do that is by holding a joint hearing of the House Commerce and Transportation committees. "Current estimates anticipate that rail will move nearly 900,000 car loads of oil and ethanol this year, each of which can hold 30,000 gallons of fuel," Thomas said. "If just one accident occurs in a highly populated urban area, like Philadelphia, the result could be devastating in both the human and financial sense."

Thomas’ letter coincides with a letter Gov. Tom Wolf sent to President Barack Obama seeking federal assistance in helping to prevent oil train accidents in Pennsylvania. Thomas wrote in his letter that Gov. Wolf may be willing to recommend testifiers for the joint hearing. "I am asking for a joint hearing because this issue deals with both transportation and commerce," Thomas said. "I am optimistic that my colleagues will understand the need for a hearing, and that we will develop a bipartisan plan to help keep everybody in the commonwealth safe."

Commonwealth Court rules Act 192 unconstitutional

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas commended the Commonwealth Court in June for its decision to declare Act 192, also known as the town-punishing law, unconstitutional due to a violation of the original purpose and single subject rules.

Originally, the bill that became Act 192 was introduced in the House with the intention to deal with theft of scrap metal, but was amended by the Senate to include a provision that would give standing to any resident of Pennsylvania or membership organization such as the National Rifle Association to challenge local ordinances that attempt to restrict access to guns while forcing the municipality to pay for the legal fees.

"I am very grateful to the Commonwealth Court for declaring Act 192 unconstitutional," Thomas said. "From the start this legislation was flawed. The concept endangers the people of our commonwealth and the process in which it was passed ignores the principles and policy of our state constitution. I am grateful that the court understood that we are dealing with an epidemic of violence and a staggering loss of life due to gun violence in our country, and that we should be committed to solving that issue rather than creating loopholes in the law for special interest groups."

The passage of Act 192 spurred Philadelphia City Council to suspend about a dozen firearm ordinances to avoid a potential lawsuit from the National Rifle Association. Thomas said the city council has since re-enacted those ordinances.

"I would be eager to have a serious conversation about sensible gun control in Harrisburg, but until that day comes it is up to our local officials to do what they believe is in the best interest for their residents and I fully support that effort," Thomas said.