



State Representative

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Smoke-and-mirrors budget will lead to larger fiscal crisis

I voted against the 2014-15 state budget because it continues to underfund education and is full of one-time fixes and overly optimistic revenue projections that will set up a larger fiscal crisis.

The state's share of school funding continues to decline. Currently, it provides 35.2 percent of school funding, as compared to 40 percent in 1995-96 and the national average of 44 percent. When the state's share declines, school districts must make cuts that hurt students, find other sources of revenue, such as raising property taxes, or both.

Across Pennsylvania and here in Mercer County, lack of support for basic education has resulted in larger class sizes, fewer course offerings, higher property taxes and the loss of 20,000 education jobs.

In addition, I am concerned that the use of one-time sources of revenue in the budget will come back to haunt us. The one-time sources of revenue include a \$30 million raid of the Volunteer Fire Company Loan Fund that threatens its future.

The budget nearly depletes the Small Business First and Machinery and Equipment Loan funds. It takes \$95 million of \$100 million in the Small Business First Fund and \$85 million of

the \$100 million in the Machinery and Equipment Loan Fund.

Most recent economic development projects in Mercer County have used financing from the Machinery and Equipment Loan Fund. We should not be jeopardizing economic development initiatives, particularly during a time when Pennsylvania has plunged near the bottom in job growth and projected job growth. We need every tool possible to help our economy, and those loan funds are important tools.

In addition, the budget assumes \$95 million will be generated through

the additional leasing of mineral rights in state parks and forests for natural gas drilling, continuing the Corbett administration's questionable environmental policies. We shouldn't be renting out Penn's Woods and turning them into industrial sites.

Instead, we should have a reasonable severance tax on natural gas drillers in line with what other states levy to fund critical priorities. Failure to follow the lead of other states and enact this tax has cost the state billions of dollars.



The National Guard Armory in Hermitage held an open house earlier this year.

House Education Committee to review findings of report to improve financial education in Pa. schools

A task force that was the result of a 2010 law I authored offered several recommendations to improve financial education in Pennsylvania schools.

The state House Education Committee, of which I am a member, will examine the findings of the report during a hearing scheduled for Oct. 6 in Harrisburg. I am hopeful that this hearing will spur action so Pennsylvania students are better prepared to handle their finances.

The Task Force on Economic Education and Personal Financial Literacy Education found that schools should play an important role in financial education because many parents do not feel confident to teach these skills.

The task force has recommended the state take the following steps:

- Make connections between reading, literature, and mathematics state tests, such as PSSAs and Keystone Exams, and economic and personal finance concepts;
- Develop additional materials to help school districts teach the economic and personal finance concepts within state academic standards;
- Offer professional development to teachers in both curriculum and content knowledge about economics and personal finance; and
- Identify the best and the brightest economics and personal finance teachers and provide ways for these teachers to share their expertise.

Mercer County has a seat at the table on the Basic Education Funding Commission

Recently, I was appointed by the Speaker of the House to serve on the Basic Education Funding Commission. I am honored to be one of only six House members on the commission, which is charged with developing a basic education funding formula and identifying factors that may be used to determine how to distribute basic education funding among Pennsylvania schools.

Providing quality education for all Pennsylvania children is one of my legislative priorities. I am thankful for the opportunity to have a seat at the table to discuss ways to provide fair and adequate funding for all of our schools.

As part of its work, the commission must consider potential consequences of a funding formula that does not provide the same level or proportion of state funding as school districts received in the prior year.

The commission is required to issue a report on its findings and recommendations by June 10, 2015 and to draft proposed regulations and legislation based upon its findings. Legislation would have to be enacted to adopt a new funding formula.

As developments warrant, I will provide updates through news releases, emails and on my Facebook page, www.facebook.com/RepLongietti.



I read "The Boy Who Harvested the Wind" to children at Farrell Elementary School and "Green Eggs and Ham" to children at Mercer County Head Start.



Bill to help businesses grow, first suggested in Mercer County, passes Pa. House

Currently, businesses may have to navigate a maze that includes the state, a local economic development agency and a regional economic development agency – just to secure a loan that will help them grow. A bill that was first suggested at a 2009 Mercer County hearing I organized would cut the red tape and allow for one-stop shopping.

H.B. 1550 would consolidate Small Business First and its affiliated programs – Community Economic Development, Pollution Prevention Assistance and Export Financing – along with the Machinery and Equipment Loan Fund and Industrial Development Financing. They would be placed under the jurisdiction of the Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority (PIDA), which was created in the mid-1950s.

Applications for the low-interest loan programs would be made through economic development organizations certified

by the state. They would be reviewed by the economic development organizations, and then sent to PIDA for consideration.

H.B. 1550 also would allow PIDA to transfer money among the loan funds it manages, making more cash available for high-demand programs that help businesses that are growing quickly and would hire more Pennsylvanians.

The bill also would increase the limit for capital development loans from \$200,000 to \$400,000 or half the cost of the project, whichever is less. The program would be allowed to issue lines of credit up to \$100,000 for working capital.

The loan funds are revolving funds, providing new loans as other loans are repaid. The funds do not require new revenue from the commonwealth.

The bill is awaiting consideration in the state Senate.

I'm helping to fight Pa.'s diabetes epidemic

As co-chairman of the Diabetes Caucus, I have introduced a resolution that aims to prevent more Pennsylvanians from developing this disease.

H.R. 936 would call on the Joint State Government Commission to provide an assessment of diabetes programs and diabetes-related planning within state agencies. It also would develop goals and benchmarks to reduce the incidence of diabetes.

The report would be submitted to the chairmen of the Diabetes Caucus and the Human Services Committee every two years.

The plan would help lawmakers and policymakers assess, review and prioritize efforts to contain the reach, scope and costs of the epidemic of diabetes and its complications.



Diabetes in Pennsylvania

- ✓ In Pennsylvania, the number of adults diagnosed with diabetes grew by 67% from 1995 to 2010.
- ✓ About 991,000 Pennsylvanians 18 and older have been diagnosed with diabetes, and another 517,000 are likely to have undiagnosed diabetes.
- ✓ An estimated 3.27 million Pennsylvanians are at risk of developing diabetes.
- ✓ Diabetes and its complications are the seventh leading cause of death in Pennsylvania.
- ✓ Diabetes will cost Pennsylvanians an estimated \$14.7 billion in 2015 and grow to an estimated \$18.4 billion by the year 2025.

Irene McMurray was surrounded by her children as she celebrated her 90th birthday. I enjoy meeting constituents at community events and celebrations.



Bill would address electricity bill spikes

Last winter, thousands of Pennsylvanians were shocked when their electric bills doubled or tripled in one month. Customers who had a variable-rate contract with an electric supplier or who had a fixed-rate contract that expired were subject to the price spikes.

Currently it takes up to one full billing cycle for a customer to change electric suppliers. This is too long and results in customers being stuck with high rates even after they switch suppliers.

H.B. 2104, which I co-sponsored, would require switching requests to be completed within five business days. It also would limit electric rate increases for customers with a variable rate to no more than 30 percent per billing cycle.

These changes would protect consumers from future dramatic and unexpected rate increases associated with variable rate supplier contracts.

Meanwhile, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission has approved a rule that requires competitive energy suppliers to clearly disclose the details of their offers, especially the risks of variable-rate offers. Suppliers must notify customers with fixed-rate contracts by mail if their contracts are expiring or if there are changes to terms of service.

You can learn more about shopping for electricity suppliers, or choose another supplier by visiting www.papowerswitch.com, a website maintained by the PUC.

Home heating assistance starts in November

Keeping your home properly heated is essential. But many families, particularly senior citizens on fixed incomes, will struggle to pay the cost of heating their homes over the next several months.

If you need help paying your home heating bills this winter, assistance is available through the federally funded Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. LIHEAP offers cash grants to help purchase home heating fuel and crisis grants for unexpected fuel shortages and necessary furnace purchases or repairs.

Grants are based on family size, income, type of heating fuel and heating regions.

Household Size	Proposed 2015 Income Limits
1	\$17,505
2	\$23,595
3	\$29,685
4	\$35,775
5	\$41,865
6	\$47,955
7	\$54,045
8	\$60,135
9	\$66,225

If you received LIHEAP assistance last year, you should have received a renewal application. If not, you may want to check into the program. This program is administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare through the local public welfare office.



Hammond), Bishop Martha Sanders, Diane Samuels (representing Martha Richards) and Mayor Olive McKeithan, one of the event's organizers.

On the left: I joined Lisa McCoy, Farrell Mayor Olive McKeithan and Rosalyn Wright to celebrate the 20th Annual Juneteenth Celebration in Farrell. On the right: Seated with me are the Farrell Juneteenth honorees Bob Hammond (representing Rudy

Mercer County on the move

Local companies receive rail grants

Two grants that I helped champion will aid rail projects in Mercer County and boost our economy.

Ellwood Crankshaft & Machine Company received a \$262,500 grant for a rail construction project that is part of the company's expansion plan for its Sharon facility. NLMK of Farrell, the former Sharon Steel facility, was awarded a \$551,777 grant that will help maintain 570 jobs at the plant.

Ellwood Crankshaft & Machine will use its grant to help build 500 feet of new track to enter the north end of the facility, and a turnout. The company has committed to an \$80 million expansion project at the Sharon site, which will create 75 jobs. The facility will manufacture some of the largest crankshafts in the world for use in container ship engines and other ocean-going vessels.

NLMK will use its grant to rehabilitate railroad tracks, turnouts and a grade crossing and to install new turnouts and replace cross-ties and surface track. This project will keep 14,000 railcars moving in and out of the facility, improve efficiency throughout the mill and keep the company competitive.

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation awarded both grants through the Rail Transportation Assistance Program. I sent PennDOT Secretary Barry Schoch letters of support for both projects. In addition, I assisted with a presentation NLMK made to PennDOT's Bureau of Rail Freight, Ports and Waterways for its grant proposal.



Congratulations to Michael Funera for earning Eagle Scout status.

Next generation of ATVs now permitted in Pa.

A new law that I voted for allows the next generation of all-terrain vehicles to be used in Pennsylvania.

The law increases the weight limit for ATVs from 1,000 pounds to 1,200 pounds. It also ends the requirement that ATVs be equipped with inflatable tires, allowing for the use of airless, never-flat tires that are installed on new ATVs and improve handling on rugged terrain.

ATV enthusiasts from Mercer County, as well as ATV manufacturer Polaris, approached me and asked me to support this legislation. In addition to voting for the ATV legislation that became law, I co-sponsored companion legislation in the state House.

Pennsylvanians spend more than \$3 billion a year on off-road vehicles, and this legislation was important to both outdoor enthusiasts and our economy.



Congratulations to the Farrell Boys basketball team and the Hickory Girls basketball team, which won District 10 championships.





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Inside:

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The Hermitage Rotary Club planted flowers at the Route 62 island.



Congratulations to Patty Meehan for being honored as the John Fabian Person of the Year by the Sharon Rotary.



I supported the efforts by the American Red Cross in Farrell to distribute smoke alarms.