

GREG VITALI

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LEGISLATIVE REPORT

JUNE 2014

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How to avoid electricity bill spikes

Thousands of Pennsylvanians were shocked when their electric bills doubled or tripled in one month this winter. 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.

To avoid this problem, you should check the terms and conditions of your contract with your electric supplier.

If you have switched to a competitive electric supplier, your PECO bill has the name and phone number of the supplier, and the current rate you are paying. Additionally, you can obtain information about the current status of your contract, including whether your rate is fixed or variable, and cancellation fees, if any, by calling the supplier.

You can choose another supplier at www.papowerswitch.com.

As a result of the price spikes, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission has approved new rules to help consumers.

One rule, which will take effect in June, requires competitive energy suppliers to more clearly disclose the details of their offers, especially the risks of variable-rate offers. In regard to fixed-term contracts, suppliers must notify customers by mail if their contracts are expiring or if there are changes to terms of service.

Another rule will shorten the time to switch suppliers. Currently, it takes up to 40 days to switch suppliers. The new rule, which is expected to take effect by the end of the year, will require the change to occur within three days of the request.

8-story Cricket lot project advances despite objections

The Lower Merion Board of Commissioners on April 16 approved a preliminary plan to develop the Cricket Avenue parking lot near Lancaster Avenue. The vote was 9-5.

The plan presented by Dranoff Properties calls for an 8-story structure, which would include 121 luxury apartments, 8,300 square feet of retail space, and a 4-level parking garage.

Dranoff must submit its fully engineered plans to the Lower Merion Township Building and Planning Department. Once the plans are approved, Dranoff must apply for building permits before construction can begin.

The project is estimated to cost \$46 million. However, the original proposal relied on \$12 million from the state Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program. The state in December withdrew funding for this project, citing the ineligibility of the residential component of the development and other reasons.

There is a request pending to restore this funding. It is unclear whether the money will be restored and whether the project will proceed without it. Four civic associations have expressed their opposition to the

restoration of this funding: North Ardmore, Ard-Wood, Wynnewood and Gladwyne.

Many residents have contacted me to express their opposition to this project. I also oppose this project because I feel it is too large and out of character with the surrounding neighborhood.

Concerned Lower Merion residents should contact their township commissioner.



This image of the Cricket lot project was presented to Lower Merion Township by Dranoff Properties. The entire presentation can be viewed at www.lowermerion.org.

Vitali introduces legislation to protect conservation fund

I have introduced legislation, House Bill 1500, to ensure that an important environmental conservation fund is used for its intended purposes.

The Oil and Gas Lease Fund was established in 1955 to provide money for conservation, recreation, dam, and flood control projects. This fund receives revenue from oil and gas drilling and timbering on state lands.

Drilling and timbering diminishes the value of state lands. The fund was intended to serve as a counterbalance to this diminishment by providing money for projects that enhance their value. Currently, the money in the Oil and Gas Lease Fund is needed to address a \$1 billion backlog of

infrastructure projects in state parks and forests.

Unfortunately, in recent years money from the fund has been diverted to the commonwealth's General Fund budget and spent for other purposes.

Gov. Tom Corbett wants to expand this ill-conceived policy. His proposed budget for the 2014-15 fiscal year would divert \$227 million from this fund.

My bill would prevent this from happening and restore the Oil and Gas Lease Fund to its original purpose.

The bill was referred to the House Environmental Resources and Energy Committee on Feb. 4, 2014.

Property Tax/Rent Rebate deadline approaches

The official application deadline for the Property Tax/Rent Rebate program is June 30.

The Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program provides a state rebate on 2013 property taxes or rent to income-eligible residents who are 65 or older; widows and widowers 50 or older; and individuals with disabilities 18 or older. To be eligible, your household income must be \$35,000 or less if you are a homeowner, or \$15,000 or less if you are a renter.

When applying, you only have to count half of your Social

Security or federal railroad retirement Tier I benefits toward your total income.

You can obtain an application in my office or download the form online by going to www.revenue.state.pa.us, clicking on "Individuals" on the left side of the page, and then clicking on "Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program." My office can help you apply.

If you have already applied, the state will begin mailing rebate checks on July 1.

New transportation law funds Haverford, Lower Merion, Radnor projects

A major transportation bill (Act 89) that was signed into law late last year is funding highway projects across the state, including work in Haverford, Lower Merion and Radnor townships.

In Radnor Township, the rehabilitation of the **Bryn Mawr Avenue Bridge** over Ithan Creek near South Ithan Avenue is scheduled to begin this summer.

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation plans to replace the concrete deck and beams, and repair the substructure of the 50-year-old bridge. The project is estimated to cost \$300,000 to \$400,000. Motorists will be allowed to use the bridge during construction with lane shifts as needed.

Act 89 also will pay for the estimated \$6 million to \$7 million cost of replacing the **College Avenue Bridge** over SEPTA tracks in Haverford Township. This project is expected to begin in early 2015, and be completed in early 2016.

Work includes replacing the 83-year-old bridge, rehabilitating the four retaining walls on the bridge approaches, and adding left turn lanes on northbound and southbound College Avenue at the Haverford Road intersection.

Traffic will be detoured over Coopertown Road, Darby Road, Ardmore Avenue and Haverford Road during construction.

The resurfacing of **Route 1/City Avenue** through Philadelphia and Lower Merion, estimated to cost \$2.8 million, began in May. This five-mile project will improve travel between Haverford Avenue and the bridge over the Schuylkill River.

The resurfacing portion of the project is scheduled to be completed this summer. Until then, there will be lane closures and slowdowns during construction, which occurs weeknights from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. and weekdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

New law preserves, expands access to PACE and PACENET

A recently enacted state law allows seniors to maintain access to PACE and PACENET programs. Those programs provide low-cost medications to qualified residents who are 65 and older.

About 40,000 Pennsylvanians were in jeopardy of losing access to PACE and PACENET because Social Security cost-of-living adjustments would have put them above income eligibility limits.

The new law provides that any person enrolled in PACE and PACENET as of Dec. 31, 2012 will remain eligible if the maximum income limit is exceeded due solely to a

Social Security cost-of-living adjustment. The law allows them to keep their eligibility for the programs through Dec. 31, 2015.

In addition, the new law excludes Medicare Part B premiums paid by seniors from the definition of income in the PACE law. **This change allows another 10,000 seniors to qualify for PACE and PACENET.**

PACE/PACENET applications are available in my office. For more information about prescription coverage through the PACE/PACENET program, please call 1-800-225-7223 or contact my office.

Veteran's designation now available on Pa. driver's licenses, ID cards

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation is now offering a veteran's designation on driver's licenses and identification cards.

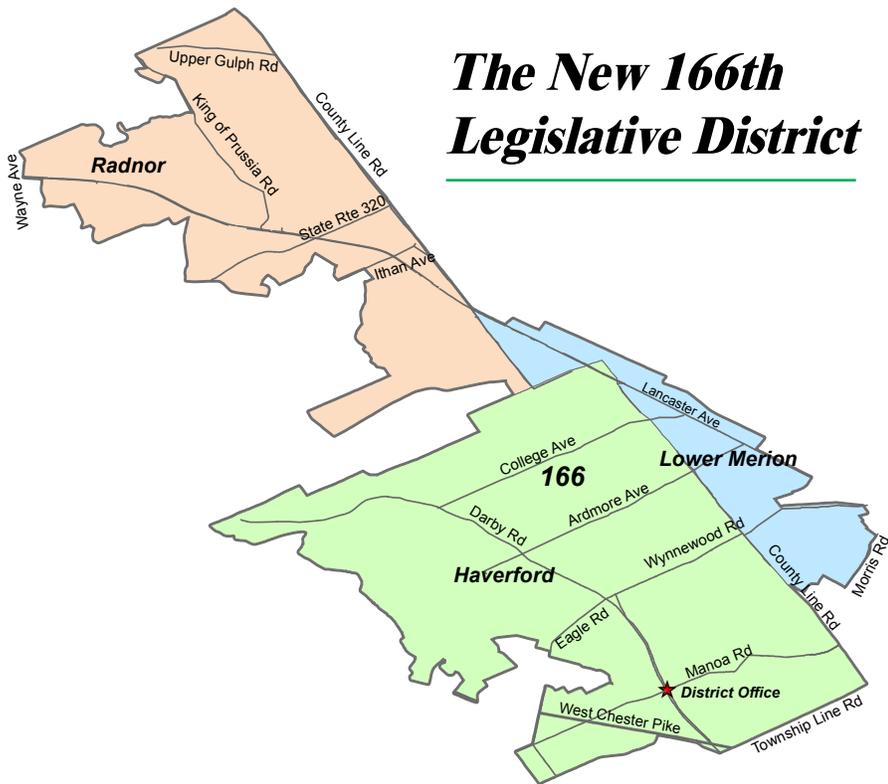
This designation on licenses and ID cards will make it easier for veterans to obtain benefits or get a discount at a hotel or retailer.

Veterans holding a non-commercial driver's license or identification card can immediately apply for the designation by visiting www.dmv.state.pa.us and

clicking on the American Flag/Veterans Designation icon.

Veterans can also apply for the designation by checking off the box on forms for driver's license or ID renewals and duplicates. To renew a commercial driver's license and add the veteran designation, applicants must complete and mail in a DL-143CD form and applicable fees.

There is no fee for the veteran's designation; however qualified applicants must pay any initial issuance, renewal or duplicate license or ID fees.



The New 166th Legislative District

Free notary service at district office

You can have most official documents notarized for free in my district office. Please call ahead to make sure the notary is in the office and can accommodate your type of document. Notary work is done most weekdays between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.

The person whose signature is to be notarized must sign the document in person, in the presence of the notary, and provide proof of identity such as a valid driver's license, photo ID card, or passport. Please let my staff know if witnesses are needed, in addition to the notary, for your documents. We also ask that residents observe a five-signature limit.

My office is on the second floor. If you are unable to climb stairs, please let us know when you call, and we can arrange to have the notary meet you on the ground floor.

Starting Dec.1, 2014, the new 166th Legislative District will consist of Haverford Township Wards 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8; Radnor Township Wards 2 and 7 and Precincts 1-2, 3-2, 5-1; and Lower Merion Township Wards 4 and 8 and Precinct 10-3.

Haverford Township Wards 1 and 9 will be in the 163rd District. Marple Township Wards 3 and 4 will be in the 165th District.

Join my email update list

I maintain an email list for those who wish to receive periodic email updates from me about public meetings, traffic alerts, community events, state and local programs and services, and other items of interest to the community. If you would like to be added to that list, please email my office at RepVitali@pahouse.net.

Receive newsletters electronically

I am sending newsletters via email in an effort to reduce postage costs and help the environment. If you want to opt out of receiving the paper version, and receive only an electronic copy, go to my website, www.gregvitali.com and click on "Sign up for e-newsletters" in the upper left hand corner.

Hazardous household waste and electronics drop-off events

Several HHW and electronics drop-off events will be held in the tri-county area this year. All events will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. rain or shine.

- June 7 (Saturday) at **Marple Transfer Station**, Marpit Drive and Sussex Blvd., Broomall (Only HHW will be accepted)
- June 7 (Saturday) at **Norristown Area High School**, 1900 Eagle Drive, Norristown (Computers, TVs and small electronics only)
- Sept. 14 (Sunday) at **Penn State University-**

Brandywine Campus, 25 Yearsley Mill Road, Media (HHW, computers, TVs and small electronics)

- Oct. 11 (Saturday) at **Government Services Center**, 601 Westtown Road, West Chester (HHW, computers, TVs and small electronics)

Call the Delaware County Solid Waste Authority at 610-892-9627, Montgomery County's Recycling Hotline at 610-278-3618 or Chester County Solid Waste Authority at 610-273-3771 should you have questions about one of their events.