



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Daniel McNeill

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GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED BUDGET FAILS PENNSYLVANIA

Gov. Tom Corbett recently released his proposed 2014-15 budget and again it fails the people of Pennsylvania. After cutting almost \$1 billion in funding for public schools in his previous budgets, the governor's proposed budget does very little to address the shortfall that has resulted in increased class sizes, staff cuts and rapidly rising property taxes. Obviously, education funding is not a priority of the Corbett administration, and unfortunately, the burden of educating our children has fallen to local taxpayers, who will continue to see increased property taxes.

Instead of restoring funds to programs that have been proven to work, the governor wants to massively increase Pennsylvania's debt to help pay for new, unproven election-year education programs and small increases in a handful of other programs.

I am also frustrated because these education cuts could be reversed if the governor would enact a nominal, competitive extraction tax on gas-drilling companies. Every other state with natural gas drillers in their borders has a tax on Marcellus Shale drilling, and to refuse to do so in Pennsylvania is irresponsible. With a reasonable tax on natural gas drillers, we could provide our schools with a significant amount of much-needed funding.

STANDING WITH LABOR AGAINST UNION-BUSTING BILL

I recently stood with labor leaders and workers from across the state to rally against a so-called "Paycheck Protection" bill that would outlaw public workers from having their union dues automatically deducted from their pay. This misleading name hides what Wall Street special interests and right-wing extremists are really trying to do. It's more like "paycheck deception" because H.B. 1507 is a politically-motivated attack to silence working families and give control of our state government to corporate CEOs. Supporters of this legislation contend that they are protecting working individuals,

when in reality they're looking to silence workers' voices in the legislature and the workplace. I will do everything in my power to stop the passage of this union-busting bill.

Rep. McNeill stands with fellow legislators and Rick Bloomingdale, president of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO, at a rally in Harrisburg against so-called "paycheck protection" legislation, which will harm workers.



FILE YOUR TAXES FOR FREE

You may qualify to file your state and federal tax returns simultaneously for free using reputable tax preparation software. Go to www.pafreefile.com and answer a couple of questions to determine which e-file options you qualify for. The two options include:

■ **Free File tax software** – available online from reputable vendors. It prepares state and federal filings simultaneously for free for individuals with federal adjusted gross income of \$58,000 or less for the tax year.

■ **Free File fillable forms** – online versions of tax forms designed for people comfortable preparing their own tax returns. These forms include basic math calculations and are generally available to all Pennsylvania taxpayers except nonresidents and part-year residents. These forms can be filed electronically for free or may be printed and mailed to the department.

In addition, the AARP is offering free tax preparation for seniors at sites across the Lehigh Valley. A list of the sites is available on my Facebook page, www.Facebook.com/RepMcNeill or you can call my office and we can help you find the location near you.

JUDGE STRIKES DOWN PA'S VOTER ID LAW

A Commonwealth Court judge recently struck down the state's voter ID law, which was enacted two years ago against strong objections. There was strong opposition to the law because it disenfranchises the elderly, the poor and students. Had it been carried out as written, it likely would have cost thousands of Pennsylvanians the most important right in a democracy – the right to vote.

This needless law has also cost the state millions of dollars that would have been better spent on priorities such as education, instead of making it more difficult, if not impossible, for many people to vote.

In his 103-page ruling, Judge Bernard L. McGinley said the law would unjustly burden the fundamental right to vote and that, "Voting laws are designed to assure a free and fair election; the Voter ID Law does not further this goal."

As a result, you will NOT be required to show an ID when you vote, including in May's upcoming Primary Election, except if you are voting for the very first time at a polling place. This is a huge victory for our constitutional rights.



Rep. McNeill signs a beam for Allentown's new hockey arena, the PPL Center. The 8,500-seat hockey arena is scheduled to open in September 2014. The Philadelphia Flyers' top affiliate will move to Allentown when the arena is finished.

PROPERTY TAX/RENT REBATE FORMS AVAILABLE

There's good news for older adults and residents with disabilities: my office has Property Tax/Rent Rebate forms.

The rebate program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians 65 or older, widows and widowers 50 or older, and people with disabilities 18 or older. The income limit is \$35,000 a year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for renters, and half of Social Security income is excluded.

The maximum standard rebate is \$650. About 600,000 households are expected to benefit from the program.

Applicants may obtain Property Tax/Rent Rebate claim forms (PA-1000) and related information online at www.revenue.state.pa.us, by calling 1-888-222-9190, or contacting my district office.



HOME HEATING ASSISTANCE STILL AVAILABLE

This winter has been brutally cold. Keeping your home properly heated is essential for good health and in making sure your pipes do not freeze. But many families, particularly senior citizens on fixed incomes, have struggled and will struggle to pay the cost of heating their homes.

If you need help paying your home heating bills, 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.

The deadline for this program is April 4, 2014. Grants are based on family size, income, type of heating fuel and heating regions.

If you received LIHEAP assistance last year, you should have received a renewal application. If not, you may want to check into the program.

For more information on LIHEAP, call the Department of Public Welfare helpline at 1-800-692-7462.

Household Size

Income Limit

1 \$17,235

2 \$23,265

3 \$29,295

4 \$35,325

Each additional person Add \$6,030

GOVERNOR FINALLY GIVES UP ON EFFORTS TO PRIVATIZE THE LOTTERY

Gov. Tom Corbett announced on Dec. 30 that he had dropped his efforts to sell the Pennsylvania Lottery's management. I have opposed this privatization maneuver and applaud the decision.



In July, the Department of Revenue reported that the Pennsylvania Lottery set sales records in the 2012-13 fiscal year with \$3.7 billion in sales, an increase of more than 6 percent from a year ago. The lottery earned more than \$1 billion in profits, while keeping the total administrative costs at just 2.07 percent of sales. These records for sales and profits only raised more questions about why the Corbett administration tried for more than a year to execute a private management agreement with a British company.

I am happy with the governor's decision but I am upset that his administration spent millions of state dollars to pursue this bad idea, which the state Attorney General's Office found unconstitutional 10 months ago. The governor wasted an estimated \$4.6 million, more than 11 percent of the lottery's annual operating budget, in pursuit of his plan. It's a shame that this money was not directed toward programs for senior citizens. That amount of money could have provided more than 213,000 additional prescriptions; over 1.7 million additional free transit rides; over 9,000 additional property tax rebates; or provide \$84,800 more in funding for each of the 52 Area Agencies on Aging.

The lottery has a sterling record of producing record sales and profits, and the governor's proposal would have taken money from programs and services that Pennsylvania seniors need and sent it to a foreign firm. I am glad he finally gave up on this misguided plan.



BILL WOULD TOUGHEN PENALTIES ON MUNICIPAL THEFT

Unfortunately, municipal theft occurs way too often not only in our area but across the state. The confidence of many Lehigh Valley residents has been shaken in recent years after a series of high-profile incidents of theft by municipal employees. People who steal from municipal governments and their agencies are stealing from taxpayers. This is one of the big reasons I joined with Rep. Ryan Mackenzie (R-Berks/Lehigh) and Rep. Thomas Caltagirone (D-Berks), the Democratic chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, to introduce legislation that would toughen penalties for individuals convicted of municipal theft. In addition to increasing penalties for municipal employees who steal from local governments, the bill would also target individuals who embezzle funds or otherwise take property from charitable organizations in which they are entrusted to lead.

The embezzlement of funds isn't limited to the municipal government level. It is all too common for youth sports leagues, volunteer fire companies and civic organizations to find their accounts bled dry by dishonest individuals who believe they can get away with it. This bill would send a strong message to anyone who might consider skimming funds away from organizations dedicated to the public good that they will be punished.

Among the penalty enhancements proposed by the legislation, H.B. 1863, are:

- Making the theft of \$100,000 or more a second-degree felony, punishable by up to 10 years in prison.
- Making the theft of \$500,000 or more a first-degree felony, carrying a sentence of up to 20 years in prison.
- Adding up to five years to the sentence of anyone convicted of theft from a charity or government entity.

The bill passed the House unanimously and is awaiting consideration in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Rep. McNeill and NFL Hall of Fame Quarterback Jim Kelly after a news conference supporting legislation to require screening of newborns for the rare debilitating brain disorder known as Krabbe Disease.



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PROJECT LIFESAVER SAVES LIVES

Project Lifesaver was established in 1999 to use state-of-the-art technology to assist emergency responders in locating people with Alzheimer’s, dementia, Autism, Down syndrome or any other cognitive condition that causes wandering. Project Lifesaver has more than 1,200 participating agencies throughout 46 states in the United States, Canada, and Australia, and has performed 2,779 searches during the last 14 years with no serious injuries or fatalities ever reported.

Citizens enrolled in Project Lifesaver wear a small personal transmitter around the wrist or ankle that emits an individualized tracking signal. If the person goes missing, the caregiver notifies their local Project Lifesaver agency, and a trained emergency team responds to the wanderer’s area. Most who wander are found within a few miles from home, and search times have been reduced from hours and days to minutes. Recovery times for Project Lifesaver clients average 30 minutes – 95 percent less time than standard operations.

If you have a loved one you think would benefit from this program, I urge you to contact Project Lifesaver’s Allentown office at 610-966-8511.

SENIOR FAIR COMING IN APRIL

I will be hosting my second annual Senior Fair on Friday, April 25, 2014 from 9 a.m. to noon at the East Side Youth Center, 1140 E. Clair St., Allentown. There will be dozens of vendors and organizations there helping seniors with everything from the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program and PACE, to free health screenings, door prizes and application assistance for federal, state and local programs. I hope to see you there.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS FOR YOUR REFERENCE

Lehigh County Government Center.....	610-782-3000	Community Hope (help for homeless veterans).....	1-855-483-8466
Northampton County Government Center.....	610-559-3000	Northampton County Department of Veterans Affairs.....	610-559-3199
PA Department of Revenue (Bethlehem Office).....	610-861-2000	CareerLink.....	610-437-5627
Internal Revenue Service (Bethlehem Office) ..	610-865-8208	American Red Cross	610-865-4400
AARP – Allentown	610-434-2701	Social Security office (Allentown)	1-877-405-6746
Crime Victims Council of Lehigh Valley	610-437-6611	Social Security office (Bethlehem).....	1-866-783-7458
Turning Point Lehigh Valley Helpline	610-437-3369	LIHEAP (Lehigh County)	610-821-6509
CACLV – Community Action Committee Lehigh Valley.....	610-691-5620	LIHEAP (Northampton County)	610-250-1700
Lehigh County Department of Aging.....	610-782-3034	U.S. Rep. Charles Dent.....	610-770-3490
Northampton County Department of Aging.....	610-559-3245	State Sen. Lisa Boscola	610-868-8667
Lehigh County Veterans Affairs Office.....	610-782-3295	State Sen. Patrick Browne	610-821-8468