

State Representative

# Neal P. Goodman



## WINTER 2016 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

CAPITOL OFFICE: 512-E Main Capitol • P.O. Box 202123 • Harrisburg, PA 17120-2123 • (717) 787-2798

DISTRICT OFFICES: 39 W. Centre St. • P.O. Box 66 • Mahanoy City, PA 17948 • (570) 773-3075 • Toll-Free: (866) 861-1311  
18 N. 2nd St. • P.O. Box 97 • Saint Clair, PA 17970 • (570) 429-1222

[www.pahouse.com/Goodman](http://www.pahouse.com/Goodman)

### More than \$15 million in state grants, loans aid numerous local projects

I'm pleased that local governments and organizations throughout the 123rd Legislative District have been able to secure a variety of state grants and loans to protect drinking water supplies, improve the environment, provide affordable housing and protect the public.

They include:

■ **Schuylkill County Municipal Authority** – A \$3.2 million grant and \$489,000 Pennvest loan to provide drinking water to 100 homes in the Village of Newtown, Reilly Township.

■ **Mahanoy Township Authority** – A \$2.8 million Pennvest loan to improve the Lofty Dam and install 2,100 new water meters. The authority earlier this year received a \$1.67 million grant from Pennvest's H2O program.

■ **West Mahanoy Township** – Keystone Anthracite received a Pennvest loan for \$2 million to remediate acid mine drainage into Shenandoah Creek and Mahanoy Creek via the Weston Tunnel.

■ **Gilberton** – The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development awarded \$335,000 in federal HOME Investment Partnerships Program grants to help low-income residents with home repairs.

■ **Schuylkill Technology Center, Frackville** – The Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board awarded an \$8,489 grant to create a youth initiative to combat underage drinking.

■ **Schuylkill County Municipal Authority** – A \$6.4 million low-interest Pennvest loan to repair three deteriorating water storage tanks – two in Pottsville and one in New Castle Township. It also will replace 10,000 aging water meters in all 22 municipalities it serves.

■ **Cass Township** – A \$40,000 state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) grant to rehabilitate and further develop Condor Commons Park, including fencing and play equipment with required safety surfacing.

■ **Foster Township** – A \$17,500 DCNR grant to prepare a development plan for a 45-acre community park.

■ **Mahanoy City** – A \$150,000 DCNR grant to develop Kaiers Playground, including building a pavilion and installing play equipment with required safety surfacing.

■ **New Philadelphia** – A \$65,000 DCNR grant to develop the New Philadelphia Walking Trail, including a half-mile trail from New Philadelphia Recreation Area to Riverside Drive, a rain garden and a fishing pier.

■ **Reilly Township** – A \$40,000 DCNR grant to further develop Branchdale Park, including building a pavilion.

■ **Saint Clair** – A \$40,000 DCNR grant to rehabilitate and further develop Third Street Playground, including installing play equipment with required safety surfacing.

### My bill to extend Persian Gulf Veterans' Bonus Program becomes law

Gov. Tom Wolf has signed into law my legislation that extends the Persian Gulf Veterans' Bonus Program by three years.

The program, which provides a small, one-time stipend to veterans of the first Gulf War, expired on Aug. 31, 2015. Eligible veterans would have been shut out without this law, Act 50 of 2015.

This program is Pennsylvania's way of thanking the brave men and women who risked their lives and made many sacrifices serving our country. No eligible veteran should be turned away, and I'm pleased that my colleagues in the legislature and the governor agree.

I authored the law that led to a November 2006 referendum asking Pennsylvania if the state should create the program. Voters overwhelmingly approved it.

To learn more about this program and eligibility requirements, visit [www.persiangufbonus.state.pa.us](http://www.persiangufbonus.state.pa.us).



# Beware the IRS phone scam



There is a telephone scam making the rounds in which a caller claims to be from the IRS and either demands payment on taxes owed or says you are entitled to a large refund. They may even alter caller ID to make it look like the IRS is calling.

Always be wary of unsolicited phone calls in which someone claims to represent a business or government entity and aggressively demands payment. The IRS does not operate this way and will always send official correspondence through the mail to make its first contact with you.

Additionally, it is important for you to know that the IRS:

- Never asks for credit card, debit card or prepaid card information over the telephone.
- Never insists that taxpayers use a specific payment method to pay tax obligations.
- Never requests immediate payment over the telephone and will not take enforcement action immediately following a phone conversation. Taxpayers usually receive prior notification of IRS enforcement action involving IRS tax liens or levies.

**If you receive one of these calls, please hang up. You may report the call to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration at 1-800-366-4484.**

## Blight-fighting bill advances

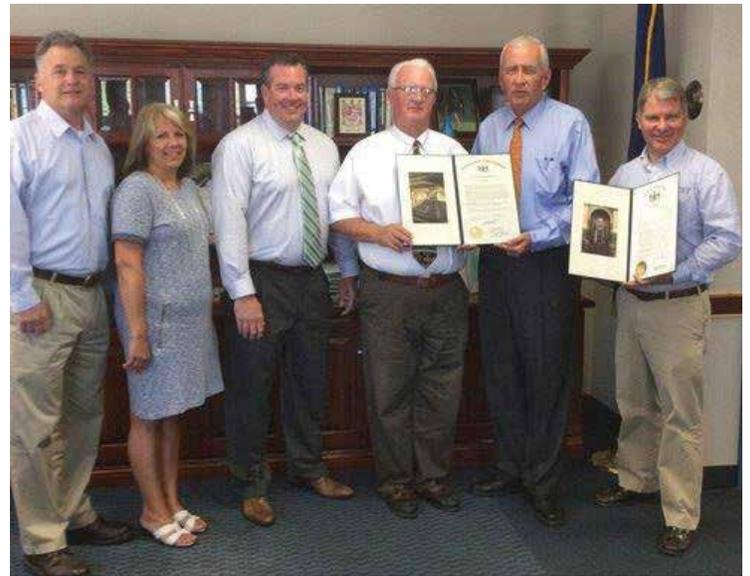
The House Urban Affairs Committee has voted out my bill that would reduce the time a purchaser of a building has to correct known code violations or demolish the structure from 18 months to 12 months.

Addressing blight as quickly as possible is important because run-down and abandoned buildings drive down the value of nearby properties, can serve as a haven for illegal activity and give the impression that a community's best days are behind it.

My legislation would give municipalities flexibility. It would not prevent municipalities from enforcing ordinances with stricter time frames or from negotiating longer time frames if the need arises.

This legislation is the result of a suggestion by a local code enforcement official, and is a product of the joint House and Senate Blight Task Force.

The bill is in position to be considered by the full House of Representatives.



***The Schuylkill County Municipal Authority received a 2015 Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence from the Department of Environmental Protection. Honoring SCMA are me, Jean Wilcox from state Rep. Mike Tobash's office, SCMA Executive Director Patrick Caulfield, state Rep. Jerry Knowles, SCMA Board Chairman Franklin K. Schoeneman and state Sen. Dave Argall.***

## House passes my bills to protect veterans' access to valuable state programs

Many Pennsylvania veterans, including those who were blinded, lost a limb or were paralyzed as a result of their service, receive stipends from the state and federal government.

Unfortunately, these payments could push veterans over the income limit for Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program, as well as prescription-drug assistance programs called PACE and PACENET.

I think it's unfair to exclude our veterans from these programs simply because they receive a few extra dollars because of their service to our country, and so do my colleagues in the state House.

The House passed two bills I introduced that would allow Pennsylvania veterans to participate in the programs, even if a state veterans benefit or federal disability payment puts them over the income limit.

House Bill 493 passed the House in November and House Bill 494 passed the House as an amendment to House Bill 683 in May. I am hopeful the Senate will send them to Gov. Tom Wolf to be signed into law.

## College financial planning tool available online

The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency offers an interactive online tool to help people understand earnings potential and the long-term implications of repaying student debt.

Found at [www.EducationPlanner.org](http://www.EducationPlanner.org), MySmartBorrowing offers estimators to compare the cost of higher education at different schools, future salary projections and job availability for various degrees, and potential to repay student loans comfortably.

Borrowing wisely can be a key to graduating college with a healthy and manageable financial footing. MySmartBorrowing helps make a potentially complicated process easy and simple.

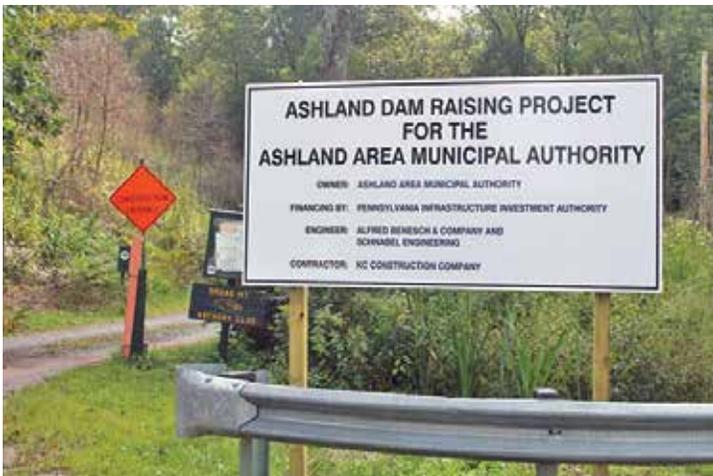
# Ashland Authority repairs hazardous dam with help from Pennvest loan

The Ashland Area Municipal Authority has made necessary safety improvements to its 110-million-gallon reservoir in Butler Township.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection had placed the dam off Malones Road in Butler Township on its list of high-hazard dams, deeming it a threat to residents who live downstream. The authority raised the crest of the reservoir by five feet, allowing it to better control water releases during major storms.

The project was financed with a \$1.67 million low-interest loan from Pennvest that Sen. David Argall and I helped to secure.

The reservoir supplies drinking water to Ashland and portions of Butler Township.



**Ashland Municipal Authority President Francis Menne and Sean Reilly of Alfred Benesch and Company explain recent improvements made to the authority's dam in Butler Township.**

## Working to protect and improve our hunting heritage

I have always enjoyed outdoor activities that Pennsylvania offers, particularly hunting and fishing. As a legislator, one of my priorities is to protect and improve outdoor recreation.

In response to concerns raised by hunters, I have introduced the following bills:

■ House Bill 1710 would put into law current regulations that limit the number of antlerless deer licenses a hunter may receive to three per year, unless the state Game Commission needs to issue more to reduce the herd in a local area. Codifying the three-license limit and retaining the commission's flexibility to issue more licenses to target an area where the herd needs to be thinned would eliminate confusion and misconceptions about these licenses, stemming from stories of hunters receiving up to 40 licenses in some areas.

■ House Bill 1764 would add the theft of trail cameras to a section of the state's Game Code that addresses theft or destruction of hunting property. The bill also would increase penalties for violations of this section of the Game Code from a second-degree summary to a first-degree summary. A first-degree summary violation is punishable by a fine of \$1,000 to \$1,500, and a possible jail sentence of up to three months. As an additional deterrent, the bill also would require any licensed hunter found guilty of this section of the Game Code to lose their hunting and trapping privileges for a year.

■ House Bill 1765 would require any hunter who had their hunting privileges suspended to take a remedial hunter education and safety course before receiving a new license. The fact that a hunter's license has been suspended shows the need to complete the remedial hunter education course, which includes study of hunting and trapping laws and discussions of participants' past violations.



## Working to shine light on "dark money" election ads

During the past several elections, Pennsylvanians have been bombarded with ads from third parties seeking to shape public opinion. These electioneering and issue-advocacy organizations are sometimes called "dark money" groups because of their lack of disclosure.

I believe it's time to allow our citizens to know the identity of groups that

seek to shape public opinion, and the source of their money. That would help ensure our elections are run in a fair, transparent manner.

My bill, House Bill 1695, would require 501(c) and 527 groups that engage in electioneering and issue-advocacy activities to file campaign finance reports detailing their spending if it exceeds \$1,000, as well as the names

of donors contributing \$100 or more.

This is a bipartisan issue. State Sen. Dominic Pileggi, a Chester County Republican, introduced the same legislation in his chamber. Both bills are modeled after a 2013 Delaware law, Delaware's Election Disclosure Act, which was upheld after being challenged in federal courts.



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Harrisburg, PA 17120-2123

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## Property Tax/Rent Rebate assistance available

Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program applications for the 2015 tax year are now available at my Mahanoy City and Saint Clair offices – **and my staff is ready to help you file yours for free!**

Applications are also available online at [www.revenue.pa.gov](http://www.revenue.pa.gov) or by calling 1-888-222-9190.

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. Half of Social Security income is excluded, and the maximum standard rebate is \$650.

Claimants must reapply for rebates every year because they are based on annual income and property taxes or rent paid each year. Spouses, personal representatives or estates may file rebate claims on behalf of deceased claimants who lived at least one day in 2015 and meet all other eligibility criteria.

The deadline to apply for a rebate on property taxes or rent paid in 2015 is June 30, 2016, and the rebates normally are distributed beginning July 1.

## My "Made in PA" bill advances in the state House

We all want to do what we can to support the jobs of our friends, neighbors and fellow Pennsylvanians.

That's why I'm pleased that legislation I introduced to establish a "Made in PA" program has advanced in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. The House Commerce Committee has voted out the legislation, and it can now be considered by the full House of Representatives.

The goal of my bill is to encourage Pennsylvanians to buy products made by Pennsylvanians. To do that, they must know the product was made here.

My bill would permit the use of a "Made in PA" label on products manufactured or produced in Pennsylvania. It also would establish a database on the Department of Community and

Economic Development website to help buyers identify products, locations and sources of made-in-Pennsylvania products.

As you might know, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture already runs the successful PA Preferred Program to promote food and agricultural products grown, produced or processed in the state. My legislation would build on that program.

Another component of the proposed program is a business-to-business database to help Pennsylvania manufacturers connect with Pennsylvania suppliers. This database was included in the legislation at the request of manufacturers, including the Northeast Pennsylvania Manufacturers and Employers Association.



*It was my pleasure to welcome students from Trinity Academy to the state Capitol.*



*Pottsville High School students in the Science in Motion program demonstrated their knowledge during a visit to the state Capitol.*