



August 2014

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Why I opposed the new state budget

On June 30, the House passed the 2014-15 state budget without my vote. I voted no because the budget underfunds public education and it uses \$1.7 billion in unsustainable one-time transfers and questionable funding gimmicks to make it appear balanced on paper.

As Democratic chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I have grave concerns that \$30 million from the Volunteer Fire Companies Loan Fund is being diverted to help balance the budget.

There are about \$12 million in outstanding loans from this fund to fire departments across the commonwealth, and the program will not be able to issue new loans until they are repaid.

In addition, the budget cuts \$1.9 million from the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

The department provides resources and assistance to Pennsylvania's nearly one million veterans and their

families. It also prepares the Pennsylvania National Guard for combat and combat support operations, as well as providing aid during natural disasters and civil strife.

Our veterans and members of the guard deserve as much assistance as possible.

The budget also hurts economic development efforts by depleting the Small Business First and Machinery and Equipment Loan funds, taking \$100 million from each.

Lastly, I am concerned that education again has been underfunded, as it has for the past four years. In fact, funding for education is less than 2008-09 levels, pre-stimulus funding. Lack of state support for basic education has resulted in larger class sizes, fewer course offerings, the elimination of 20,000 teaching and other school jobs as well as higher property taxes.

As a former educator, I find this unacceptable and I will continue to work with my colleagues to increase basic education funding in the future.



I joined the New Castle Area Honor Guard and Marine Corps League for the cannon rededication at New Castle's Westside.

Volunteer fire departments not required to provide health coverage

In early January, the U.S. Treasury Department officially announced that volunteer fire departments are not required to provide health care under the Affordable Care Act.

There were many concerns that the new law treated volunteers as employees, pushing most volunteer fire companies over the 50-employee threshold for requiring health care.

The statement from the Treasury Department removes any doubt about how they are to be treated. This is good news for the fire departments, which could have faced financial ruin if they were required to provide the health coverage for their volunteers, which was never the intent of the health insurance law.

Volunteers staff 95 percent of Pennsylvania fire companies. Total volunteers number more than 70,000, which represents the largest number of volunteer firefighters in the nation.

L&I clears 14- and 15-year-olds to ride in emergency vehicles

Recent changes to child labor laws led to confusion regarding the legalities of 14- and 15-year-old junior firefighters riding with crews to emergency scenes.

While the language in the law removed the specific clearance for junior responders to ride along, the state Department of Labor and Industry, responsible for enforcing the law, has reviewed the issue and declared that 14- and 15-year-olds still may ride along on official fire department vehicles.

This is great news, as our volunteer fire departments are watching their numbers dwindle. The ability to encourage and involve our youth will hopefully lead to more volunteers as they reach the appropriate age to volunteer.



Shenango High School's senior AP government class paid tribute to our veterans during the school's annual Veterans Day ceremony.



Local veterans were able to receive supportive services during Lawrence County's Veteran Stand Down.

New law helps first responders

A recently enacted law allows costs related to advanced life support (ALS) or paramedic training (EMT-P) to be paid for by volunteer firefighters' relief association funds.

First-responder organizations face significant financial challenges, and this is one way to help volunteers who serve the community.

There had been 16 categories that could be funded with relief association money, and the new law, Act 65, expands the list to include the reasonable expenses of those who attend emergency medical technician or paramedic training schools.

New law establishes EMS Memorial Flag

A new law that establishes an EMS Memorial Flag was signed by the governor to become Act 57 of 2014. The Bureau of Emergency Medical Services, with the cooperation of the PA Emergency Services Council, will create the flag.

The EMS flag may be displayed at memorials or related services for fallen EMS personnel and may be displayed over EMS memorials, funeral processions or from the flag poles of any public ground or political subdivision after the death of any EMS personnel.

New law creates specialty license plates for Pennsylvania veterans

Act 109, which I supported, provides for new license plates designed to honor military service.

One of the new license plates honors Combat Infantry Badge recipients, while others are available for those who have earned the Combat Action Ribbon, the Combat Action Badge, the Combat Action Medal, and the Combat Medical Badge. The law also expands eligibility for Merchant Marine plates to those who served during the Korean War, the Vietnam Conflict, Operation Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Desert Shield.

Additionally, Act 109 creates a Pennsylvania Monuments license plate that will have a replica of the PA Memorial Monument at the Gettysburg National Military Park and display the words "Gettysburg 1863." The fee for the monuments plate is \$54 in addition to the annual registration fee, of which \$23 will be used for grants to nonprofit organizations for the cleaning, repair and restoration of monuments.

Other specialty plates include a United States Olympic plate to help amateur athletes from Pennsylvania advance to the Olympic Games.

These plates are expected to be available late this fall or winter.

Veterans' assistance at my office

I have arranged to have a representative from the American Legion make regular visits to my local office at 20 S. Mercer St., Z-Penn Building, New Castle, to help veterans with concerns about a variety of issues.

The service is available on a first-come, first-served basis from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. the last Thursday of every month.

Information available as part of this service includes veteran housing benefits, financial assistance, employment benefits, veteran and dependent education benefits and other state-sponsored veteran programs.



It was my pleasure to meet with members of VFW Post 315 during the organization's picnic.



I visited with Mahoningtown Community Watch at Darlington Park after the Mahoningtown Memorial Day Ceremony.



I was pleased to participate in a Veterans Day ceremony at JFK Elementary School.

Heroic Service website created

In 2013, the House of Representatives unanimously voted for House Bill 1460, which requires colleges and universities in the commonwealth to place an "M" or "Military" on students' grad transcripts for classes they are unable to complete due to military leave of absence.

On June 9, the Senate amended the bill to include a provision that creates

the Heroic Service Website. This provision requires Pennsylvania's Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) to provide public access to a database that contains the names of anyone who has been awarded a medal for heroic service in the US Armed Forces including the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Navy Cross, the Air Force Cross or the Silver Star.

The database will include the recipient's full name, dates of service, as well as the name and date of the award or decoration.

As Democratic chairman of the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I am pleased to inform you that House Bill 1460 was signed into law on June 18 as Act 59.



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2013-14 local Fire Company and Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Program Awards

Hickory Township Volunteer Fire Company	\$12,161.20
Mahoning Township Volunteer Fire Department	\$12,809.25
Neshannock Township Volunteer Fire Company	\$13,619.31
New Castle Fire Department	\$13,133.27
North Beaver Township Volunteer Fire Department	\$12,972.07
Pulaski Township Volunteer Fire Company	\$12,647.24
Pulaski Township Volunteer Fire Company (EMS).....	\$3,545.70
Shenango Township Volunteer Fire Department	\$12,972.07
South New Castle Boro Volunteer Fire Department	\$12,809.25
Union Township Volunteer Firemans Association	\$12,323.21



I visited members of the Hickory Township and Neshannock Township fire departments during the annual pumper pull competition in New Castle.

Local fire companies receive state grants

Again this year, the Fire Company and Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Program is helping many of Lawrence County's fire companies continue their lifesaving work.

In 2012, the program's annual funding was increased from \$25 million to \$30 million, through a law

I co-sponsored. The average grant to fire departments increased from \$9,500 to \$12,000, with a maximum grant of \$15,000, and the average grant to volunteer ambulance companies increased from \$4,500 to \$5,600, with a maximum grant of \$10,000.

The law also extends eligibility for the grant program to 35 paid fire companies across the state, including the Sharon Fire Department and Greenville Fire Department.

The Fire Company Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Program is funded by gaming revenue.