



Report to the People

Summer 2017

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19th Legislative District

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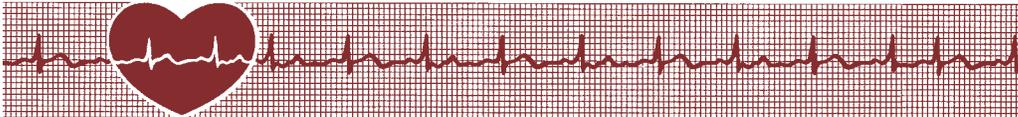
5th Annual Health and Wellness Weekend Set for Aug. 18-20

This month, I will host the 5th Annual Health and Wellness Weekend. Beginning Friday, Aug. 18 with an opening night reception and fundraiser for the K. Leroy Irvis Scholarship Fund hosted by state Rep. Ed Gainey and I, the weekend will culminate in a Health Expo at the Warrington Recreation Center on Sunday, Aug. 20 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Saturday, Aug. 19 events will begin at 7 a.m. with the UpHill 5k, which is aimed at increasing the health and wellness of African-Americans in Pittsburgh and is part of a deeply rooted legacy to bring awareness to health disparities that exist within the Hill District and beyond.

Community Day will follow from noon to 5 p.m. and will take place along Centre Avenue in collaboration with the Thelma Lovette's YMCA Spin-A-Thon, the Hill District Education Council's Back to School Drive, Wesley AME Zion's Clothing Drive, Macedonia Baptist Church and Central Baptist Church.

For more information please visit www.hww19th.com or contact my office at 412-471-7760.



The Job of a Legislator & How a Bill Moves in Harrisburg



Being your state representative means this: I work for you, my office is your office, and my time is your time. It also means that you are welcome in my Pittsburgh district office or my Harrisburg Capitol office any time, to discuss issues that matter to you.

I take nothing more seriously than my role in representing you in all the decisions I make as your elected official. My newsletters always list the services provided by my district office, but the job is much more than that. It is also very complex.

There are 203 members of the House of Representatives (of which I am one) and 50 state Senators. Before the governor can sign a bill into law, it has to be approved by both the House and the Senate.

When bills are first introduced they get assigned to a committee based on subject matter. I serve as Democratic chairman of the House Finance Committee, which is responsible for determining how to most responsibly collect and provide public dollars for economic growth. There are over 20 committees in each chamber, such as Transportation, Education, Judiciary, Urban Affairs, etc., each focusing on a particular area.

The committees' job is to help prepare legislation and make sure each bill is well-vetted before it receives full consideration in the Chamber of the House or Senate.

Committees get assigned many bills, but only when the majority chairman decides to consider a bill does it receive a committee vote.

If a bill makes it out of committee to the House or Senate Chamber, after three separate days of consideration there, including one day where any member can offer amendments to the bill for a vote, it gets a final vote. If the bill receives a majority "yes" vote in each chamber, with the exact same language voted on, it goes to the governor for his signature or veto. Bills that have any changes and thus do not contain exactly the same wording have to go back and forth between the chambers until the same language is approved before they are sent to the governor.

Each legislative session is two years long, and any bill that doesn't become law during a particular session has to be reintroduced and go through the process all over again during the next legislative session.

In a typical session, between 3,500 and 5,000 bills get introduced – and no more than 150 to 250 become law. As your legislator, helping navigate bills through the process is another of the things in my job description. Doing so successfully takes time and acquired experience, and requires building friendships and relationships with other legislators and stakeholders across the entire political spectrum.

As your state representative for 15 years, I have worked hard to see our interests best represented in Harrisburg. I pledge to remain faithful to that mission.

Finance Committee Makes Strides



As Democratic chairman of the House Finance Committee, I wanted to give you an update on some of the important work we've been doing, including vetting bills and moving them forward in the law-making process.

Since our first meeting in February, the Finance Committee has held eight additional voting meetings and considered 24 pieces of legislation. A number of these bills attempted to spend taxpayer dollars without providing for sources of revenue – and I led members of the committee to stand against such fiscally irresponsible actions.

I will continue to take that stance, especially during times of such budgetary hardships. It is our responsibility as members of the House Finance Committee to be responsible fiscal stewards of taxpayer money.

Along that same line, the House Finance Committee also gained legislative approval to form a select subcommittee within its ranks, which will take a look at Pennsylvania's tax structure and search for ways to make improvements. This was my initiative and is something I am very excited about.

Through the work of this subcommittee, Pennsylvania's antiquated tax structure will be re-evaluated to find ways to address inequity across the commonwealth. It is my hope that we can modernize the way Pennsylvania taxes its citizens, businesses, schools and other organizations that exist throughout the commonwealth.

Other House Finance Committee actions included:

- On Feb. 7, approval of House Bill 151, sponsored by state Rep. Bryan Cutler. A relatively technical bill, it allows for certain employees of the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to inspect and monitor businesses involved with the Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority (PIDA), which provides loans and lines of credit to eligible businesses that are committed to creating and maintaining full-time jobs.
- On June 27, a hearing on House Bill 1477, sponsored by state Rep. Jeff Wheeland. The bill would make changes to the 40 percent wholesale tax on electronic cigarettes that began in 2016. Testifiers included representatives from the PA Vape Association, the Vape Technology Association, state Department of Revenue Secretary C. Daniel Hassell and bill sponsor Rep. Wheeland. They made their case for the current tax rate and the proposed new tax rate.

The Real ID Act

Now that Gov. Wolf has signed Act 3 of 2017 (S.B.133), what does that mean for you?

Post 9/11, Congress passed the REAL ID Act in 2005, requiring states to change their procedures and requirements for driver's licenses and identification cards, if they are to be accepted as identity documents by the federal government.

Many states, including Pennsylvania, and civil libertarians objected to the idea, saying the Real ID Act infringed on citizens' privacy rights and placed an increased cost on citizens. As a result, Pennsylvania passed S.B. 354 (Act 38 of 2012) which restricted the state from implementing Real ID.

The Department of Homeland Security recently granted Pennsylvania a limited extension through Oct. 10, 2017 that will allow Pennsylvanians to continue to enter federal facilities without supplemental identification. It also means you will still have the ability to fly domestic airlines and access post office buildings until Jan. 22, 2018.

Though it is currently an option to obtain a Real ID for a cost, PennDOT estimates Real ID-compliant IDs and driver's licenses will be available in 2019.



Affordable Housing Remains Top Goal

Last spring, my office hosted an affordable housing meeting with representatives from local nonprofits, city departments, the Urban Redevelopment Authority, development firms, residents from community organizations and Executive Director Brian Hudson of the Pennsylvania Housing and Finance Agency.

We discussed questions related to housing policy, practices and procedures in the city and commonwealth. We heard community-based organizations voice concern about low-income housing tax credits and a selection process whose criteria was not fully understood or available to the public.

A prime area of concern came from cash-strapped nonprofits, regarding the burden of paying a non-refundable \$1,000 fee to apply for tax credits to help low-income residents stay in the communities they've long called home.

We also heard from displaced residents who were shuffled around the city as their former homes were torn down.

We took action, following up vigorously with the URA and PHFA, and the effort resulted in policy changes. Nonprofits' application fees are now returned if they are not selected for funding – and the remaining residents of Fineview will be the first in our city to benefit from a build-first housing development model, meaning they will only have to move once.

I am committed to seeing this same model take shape as further Hill District public housing units are redeveloped. It is no longer acceptable to allow our low-income residents to be moved around or offered vouchers to live in other areas in our county, unless until we have truly made an effort to ensure they have been offered a legitimate and fair opportunity to stay just where they are.

Rep. Wheatley Champions After-School & Out-of-School Time



I have always believed that my ability to stay safe and grow positive as a young child was due in large part to my involvement in out-of-school programs such as the Boys and Girls Club. Programs like that provided safe environments while exposing me to educational stimuli.

This past May, I was proud to receive an Allegheny Partners for Out-of-School Time (APOST) Making Time for Afterschool 2017 Advocacy Award. During my acceptance comments, I explained the social value of such programs, noting that they can keep youth out of the juvenile and criminal justice systems, increase the likelihood of success in their educational careers, and place them on a path toward finding gainful employment.

These programs are also proven to maintain and advance students' academic and social growth, keep children safe and healthy during summer months, and send them back to school in the fall more ready to learn.

As co-chairman of the legislature's After-school Caucus, I pledge to work collaboratively within the General Assembly to create a budget line item that would support these programs in the future, providing additional protections as federal grant funding continues to be threatened.

Allentown Transformation Underway

If you had driven down East Warrington Avenue in Allentown just three years ago, it would not have looked like a thriving business district. Empty storefronts and blight plagued the area – and not a lot of positive comments were made about the neighborhood from throughout the city.

Fast forward three years and things are very different. East Warrington is now a stretch of diverse and unique businesses, each offering something new to the residents of Allentown. This transformation is exactly what the area needed, and The Hilltop Alliance deserves much of the credit.

In 2014, the business vacancy rate in Allentown was around 40 percent, which is when the Hilltop Alliance brought in Siena Kane as the Allentown business district manager. Since then, 14 new businesses have taken advantage of the rent abatement program offered by the Hilltop Alliance, and have cut that vacancy rate down to 17 percent.

In the past year alone, the Hilltop Alliance has helped attract new businesses such as Leon's Restaurant, Onion Maiden and Work Hard to East Warrington. With continued support from the community and diligent work from the Hilltop Alliance, Allentown should continue its rebirth as a vibrant neighborhood.

Hazelwood Workforce Development Gets Boost

Figuring out a deliberate process to provide access to high-quality jobs and careers for Hazelwood and Glen Hazel residents was the goal when my office began meeting with stakeholders two years ago.

We initially wanted to leverage jobs at the Almono site and beyond, but over time it became evident that our community partners needed to collaborate with high-quality training programs to give residents the skills needed to enter the construction trades field.

In February – working with the A. Phillip Randolph Institute, World Class Industrial Network LLC, Glen Hazel Community Resident Management Corp. and P.O.O.R.L.A.W. – we partnered with UPMC to bring a unique job training program to Hazelwood residents, through the state Department of Community and Economic Development's Neighborhood Assistance tax-credit program.

This training program will serve residents of the greater Hazelwood community, incorporating OSHA safety, HAZWOPER, Green Energy, Weatherization and other trainings, along with Life Skills instruction. Up to 30 residents can enter the program and they will need to successfully complete a TABE test, interview panel and a drug screen to be accepted. They will also receive a stipend up to \$1,200.

Hazelwood residents Michael Wilson and Sandra Cole have been the community face of the recruitment and case management of potential candidates. They have been administering the TABE test at the Glen Hazel Recreation Center weekly and have recently partnered with the Allegheny Intermediate Unit to bring remediation classes to Hazelwood every Tuesday and Thursday.

Portions of the trainings will be conducted in Hazelwood this summer and I am excited to have worked with our partners to provide opportunities for residents to access high-quality jobs and careers. This will provide wages that will enable them to survive and thrive as the area is economically revitalized.



Budget Update 2017

As we prepared to enact the Fiscal Year 2017-18 state budget, I remained dedicated to fighting for 19th Legislative District priorities. As your advocate in Harrisburg, improving our community remains at the core of each decision I make.

During the tenuous budget process, my Democratic colleagues and I dealt with solid Republican majorities in the state House and state Senate that were reluctant to resolve a \$3 billion structural deficit.

As Democratic chairman of the House Finance Committee, I know that to achieve everyone's goal of providing mandated services and meeting critical needs, we must figure out how to pay the bill. And we can't keep adding to the overwhelming tax burden on our working class and small businesses who are already paying more than their fair share.

The solution I advocate revolves around commonsense proposals to require corporations and the very wealthy to start contributing more.

One example: More than half the states in our country require corporations to use combined reporting as the method to report their taxes, which forces them to pay a fairer share to that state. Currently, Pennsylvania allows corporations that operate in multiple states to slide income over to a state with a more favorable tax rate, for tax reporting purposes.

You can't do that – so why should they be allowed to? It's like you and your friends ordering an eight-slice pizza with 16 pepperonis, but when it comes to the table, some slices have three or four pepperonis and others have none. For it to be fair on the consumption end, each slice should have two pepperonis. So it goes with corporate profits – Pennsylvania should get a fair share of the income generated within its borders.

I also support amending the Pennsylvania Constitution to

eliminate or exclude the Uniformity Clause, so we can enact a graduated income tax similar to the federal government and most other states. Taxpayers who work 40 hours a week and earn modest incomes should not be paying the same income tax rate as wealthy day traders and hedge fund managers who make significant profits off of other people's money. "Money made on money" should be taxed at a higher rate than money made on labor or services.

I also support taxing luxury items – which are so costly our minimum wage and middle-class workers could never afford them – at a higher rate than everyday family purchases. Cigars should also be taxed here, as they are in nearly every other state, and I support allowing adults to smoke marijuana if they choose, as long as it is stringently taxed so we can lower the burden on everyone else.

Finally, even though we should have done this years ago, it is time to enact a severance tax on natural gas extracted in Pennsylvania. Since every other natural gas-producing state has such a levy, we are inexplicably leaving money on the table at a time when families can't afford to pay any more.

All of the above proposals represent sustainable revenue sources that would address the deficit and safeguard against untenable increases in your taxes.

I supported Gov. Tom Wolf's budget proposal and in any negotiations I will continue to advocate for all initiatives that help us grow and thrive. As my constituents, you should know I am always willing to hear new ideas and discuss priorities most important to you. Do not hesitate to contact my office to give me your opinion on the budget or any other issue you deem important.



Beltzhoover Consensus Group Seeks to Transform Old School

Kudos to the Beltzhoover Consensus Group for submitting the winning bid for the closed Beltzhoover Elementary School, which it plans to transform into a vibrant community center.

When the school closed in 2005, the fate of this historic landmark on Cedarhurst Street was in doubt. Thanks to the tireless efforts of community leaders and residents, the building is well on its way to a new purpose that will again make it a vital fixture in the fabric of life in Beltzhoover.

The hard work of the Beltzhoover Consensus Group and its commitment to restoring the neighborhood, one project at a time, is a fine example of what can be accomplished when we work together with a common goal.

MY OFFICE CAN HELP YOU WITH:

- Car registrations, special tags, titles and license applications
- Information on financial assistance for higher education
- Unemployment compensation problems
- Birth and death certificate applications
- Problems with Pennsylvania income taxes
- Problems with Department of Human Services (food stamps, welfare)
- Requests for literature of all kinds — bills, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information, student aid information, etc.
- Citations from Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding local accomplishment and family milestones
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the PUC
- Consumer complaints
- Problems or questions about PennDOT
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups
- Disability license plates and placards
- Getting and filling out state forms of all kinds, like PACE (Pharmaceutical Assistance for qualified senior citizens), voter registration, Property Tax/Rent Rebate (for qualified seniors), PHEAA (PA Higher Education Assistance), etc.
- Problems or questions about the state lottery
- Local government officials' problems with state agencies



Follow me on social media  @RepWheatley •  Facebook.com/RepWheatley

Please contact me with any ideas and issues you feel are important. I am your advocate in Harrisburg and your opinions matter. Also let me know of any special or upcoming events your organization is hosting or you are having in your community that may need recognition and/or support.

I am also available to speak at your meeting, event or activity.