



Summer 2018

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Wall That Heals: Paying homage to our Vietnam veterans

In May, The Wall That Heals, a traveling replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., came to Harrisburg for several days.

It was displayed on the State Capitol grounds and as Democratic Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I was honored to be part of the host committee and participate in the opening

ceremony. Former governor and Vietnam War hero Tom Ridge was the keynote speaker. He gave a passionate address.

This wall honors more than 3 million Americans who served in the U.S. Armed Forces in the Vietnam War and reflects the names of more than 58,000 brave men and women who were killed in Vietnam.

Unfortunately, many Americans are unable to make the trip to Washington, D.C., to visit the memorial, so the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund – creators of the original wall and its replica – wanted to give all veterans and their families an opportunity to see the memorial. The wall and its mobile education unit are traveling across the United States and will be displayed at Renziehausen Park in McKeesport from August 9-12. McKeesport, south of Pittsburgh, is just a short drive from Lawrence County.

This is just one way we can pay respect to all those who paid the ultimate sacrifice during the Vietnam War.



New budget has NO new taxes

The General Assembly passed a balanced budget without an increase in taxes, and it was signed into law on June 22. Although the bill is not perfect, it does address some of the commonwealth's most vital needs without increasing the tax burden on residents. It makes education and school safety major priorities, providing additional funding for both areas, including \$70 million toward school safety. The budget also continues the commonwealth's dedication to combat the opioid crisis.

Every one of our local school districts received extra funding. You can view this chart to see how much:

SCHOOL DISTRICT	2017-18 BASIC ED FUNDING	2018-19 BASIC ED FUNDING
Laurel	\$7.57 million	\$7.59 million
Mohawk Area	\$9.93 million	\$9.97 million
Neshannock Township	\$3.2 million	\$3.24 million
New Castle Area	\$23.5 million	\$23.8 million
Shenango Area	\$7.3 million	\$7.37 million
Wilmington Area	\$5.7 million	\$5.73 million
Union Area	\$4.7 million	\$4.8 million

Additionally, school districts statewide received more funding for special education, and will share in an additional \$25 million for early education, such as Pre-K Counts and Head Start.

Career training and workforce development also received extra funding to help ensure our next generation of Pennsylvania workers is prepared for the high-tech jobs of today and tomorrow.

Higher education also benefitted, with community colleges and the state-related universities (Penn State and Pitt) receiving a 3 percent increase, and the 14 universities in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education receiving a 3.3 percent increase.

All in all, it's a good, commonsense budget that should yield tangible benefits without imposing the burden of higher taxes or fees.



It was an honor to present a Pennsylvania House of Representatives Legislative Citation to the Lawrence County Career and Technical Center Skills USA Team on winning the Gold Medal State Championship for the third straight year. Congratulations on this amazing accomplishment and making Lawrence County Proud!

Helping our veterans

Our veterans struggle with both visible and invisible wounds; many of them grow frustrated and disenfranchised with the extremely complicated system for assistance and benefits. This is a critical issue I want to address.

That's why I have co-sponsored legislation (H.B. 985) that would establish a Veteran Suicide Prevention Grant Program to be administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

Our veterans fought for our freedom, so we should do all we can to provide them with mental health programs when they return home.



It was an honor to participate in Lawrence County's seventh annual Veterans Stand Down at the New Castle Armory.

Helping our medical military personnel transition into the civilian world

As the Democratic Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I've co-sponsored important legislation that would assist our medical military personnel with transitioning into medical roles in the civilian world.

House Bill 2023, or the Military Medic Pilot Program, if passed, would provide services for members with military medical experience an opportunity to put their medical skills to the test in the civilian world.

Although the program would not grant licensure or certification, it would open the door to potential employment and educational opportunities across the commonwealth. The supervising physician or podiatrist would have to hold an active, unrestricted license issued by the state and the responsibility of full patient care would remain under the supervising physician. The bill is before the House Professional Licensure Committee.

New Castle Division of Vital Records walk-in service restored

Earlier this year, I fought to have the New Castle Division of Vital Records walk-in service restored after the services ended last year.

By advocating on behalf of those in the 9th Legislative District and through talks with the Pennsylvania Department of Health secretary, I'm happy that walk-in service has been restored. It is located at 105 Nesbit Road in New Castle and is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays.

Citizens may now receive both birth and death certificates and they can even pick them up on the same day if the request is made by 11:30 a.m.

I'm thankful that the Department of Health chose to reinstate walk-in services in March, because it allows the area to regain the ability to personally obtain important documents. I want to remind you that birth and death certificate copies are \$20 each and must be paid with check or money order. Also, a fee may be waived if the applicant is a member of the U.S. Armed Forces, the legal spouse of the Armed Forces member or widow/widower (unless remarried), or a dependent child of the Armed Forces member. The office does not accept cash or credit cards.

With the coming of Real ID, it's ever more important to have these services available.

Veterans Outreach in my office

A representative from the American Legion Service Office Outreach program is available in my office to provide information on services available to veterans and their families. The outreach program is the last Thursday of the month from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the New Castle office. Legion membership is not required to take advantage of the help.

Persian Gulf Veterans' Bonus Program deadline Aug. 31

I want to thank all veterans who served during the Persian Gulf Conflict; so that's why I would like to remind those veterans that the deadline for the Persian Gulf Veterans' Bonus Program is approaching.

To veterans of operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the deadline for the Persian Gulf Veterans' Bonus Program is Aug. 31, 2018.

Those who served on active duty between Aug. 2, 1990, and Aug. 31, 1991, may qualify for the bonus.

The program provides eligible veterans \$75 for each month of active duty, with a \$525 maximum bonus limit. The program further provides Prisoners of War (POWs) an additional \$5,000 bonus, and a beneficiary of a soldier who died in combat, or as a result of service-related injuries, would receive an additional \$5,000. Proof of such service shall be the official military records of the U.S. or such other evidence as is deemed sufficient by the Adjutant General.

For more information about this program or other state programs that benefit veterans, please visit the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website at www.dmva.pa.gov.

House passes veterans bills

As you know, I have sponsored a number of bills designed to improve the lives of veterans and military families. Here are a few that were reported out of my committee and passed the House and are now awaiting Senate action:

H.B. 302 – This bill would help former military medics who are transitioning to civilian work by requiring the state Department of Health to consider their military education, training and experience for purposes of fulfilling requirements for professional credentials related to EMTs. The bill is currently with the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

H.B. 980 – This bill would exclude veterans' federal disability compensation or pension from being considered when calculating income for purposes of state assistance programs or rebates. The bill would also extend the exclusion to an unmarried surviving spouse. This bill passed the House and is in the process of being considered by the Senate.

H.B. 984 – The Military Family Relief Assistance Program is funded by a tax check-off that permits taxpayers to donate all or part of their tax refund to the program. This bill would remove the check-off, which is expiring, through January 2023. The bill passed the House and is awaiting consideration by the Senate Appropriations Committee.

I'm encouraged by legislative action that has moved each of these bills forward and will continue to update you on their progress.



Celebrating the New Castle Cross-Country Championship Team with a Legislative Citation at their banquet. They were the 2017 PIAA Section 5, Division 1 Champions. They also won the Mid-Atlantic Athletic Conference Championship for the first time since 1960!



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Local fire departments receive state grants

I am pleased to announce that nine fire companies in the 9th District received more than \$122,000 combined in state grants from Pennsylvania's Fire Company and Emergency Medical Service Grant Program.

Volunteer firefighters and emergency personnel put their lives on the line every day to help protect and serve others; therefore, we must ensure they have everything they need to continue their selfless work. These grants are a vital source of funding and help them focus on protecting our communities.

The following fire companies received state grants:

- Hickory Township Volunteer Fire Company, \$11,911.
- Mahoning Township Volunteer Fire Department, \$12,464.
- Neshannock Township Volunteer Fire Company, \$13,939.
- New Castle Fire Department, \$14,307.
- North Beaver Township Volunteer Fire Department, \$12,464.
- Pulaski Township Volunteer Fire Company, \$12,464 and \$7,037.



It was a pleasure spending time with the Pulaski Volunteer Fire Department at Memorial Weekend Parade.

- Shenango Township Volunteer Fire Department, \$13,386.
- South New Castle Boro Volunteer Fire Department, \$12,096.
- Union Township Volunteer Firemans Association, \$12,280.

Grants can be used toward repairing, building or renovating facilities. The money also can be applied toward the purchase of new equipment, training and certification of staff, or it may go to repay debt related to equipment purchases or facility building and maintenance.



It was a beautiful day for New Castle Moose Club's annual picnic.



It was great to see our community come together to support Empty Bowls' annual fundraiser for the Children's Summer Food Program!