Making sure voters can make their voices heard - safely

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in many changes to the primary election as we worked to ensure voters could still exercise their right to vote. The House and Senate worked in bipartisan fashion to postpone the primary to June 2 and allowed counties to consolidate polling places, relocating those that would have been in place like senior centers. Legislation also allowed counties to begin processing and tabulating mail ballots beginning at 7 a.m. on Election Day, rather than after the polls close at 8 p.m.

Still, the primary was unlike any other. Nearly 1.5 million mail-in and absentee ballots were cast in Pennsylvania. 17 times the number that voted absentee in the 2016 primary, when approximately 84,000 absentee ballots were cast. The Montgomery County Board of Elections set up drop-off sites for ballots, for those who were worried about getting their votes in on time, and Governor Wolf extended the period for some counties, like ours, to count those votes.

In the weeks after the primary, the General Assembly passed H.B. 1352, which the Governor signed as Act 3 of 2020, requiring the Department of State to publish a report on the June 2, 2020, primary election. This will help us identify the many issues that we need to try to address before the November election. I will continue to work with the county Election Board. We simply must do better so our elections can be safe and a reliable and fair reflection of the opinions of the electorate.

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Unemployment Compensation claims surge

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Emergency declaration remains critical to recovery

Without a strong federal response to the global pandemic, our governors filled the void. Governor Wolf issued and renewed his declaration of a disaster emergency on March 6, 2020, the day the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in Pennsylvania. These emergency declarations give our governors the necessary powers to protect the health and safety of our citizens and our communities. It is important to remember that an emergency declaration is not about rushing to reopen recklessly and dangerously. I felt it was the height of the pandemic, but I voted against any attempt to create safe industry-specific protocols while we reopened.

We always need to work together for us to be at our best, and I supported the implementation of the Pennsylvania COVID-19 public health emergency declaration as well as the extension of that declaration because it is necessary, especially now that we are seeing an increase in COVID-19 cases.

As we move forward, we need to work together so that we can be vigilant against this virus. For most of us, wearing a mask is a small but important step we can take to protect ourselves and those around us, especially our most vulnerable populations. It's unfortunate that something as simple and effective as wearing a mask is now a subject of political debate.

While I did not support the central bill in the budget package, there were still numerous provisions in the final version of the state budget that will help our communities. The newly adopted legislation providing CARES Act relief funds included $692 million for nursing homes to put personal protective equipment into the hands of health care workers and other essential employees who need assistance from our nursing homes, make it harder to get visitors and more.

We passed a plan that ensures federal CARES Act money will go to work for our schools, our students, and their families. I'm always inspired by the results! We are lucky to have such compassionate and intelligent students and members of our community.

The 11th Annual "There Ought to be a Law" contest, which drew around 500 entries from area fifth-grade students.

For driver licenses, photo ID cards and learner’s permits, the expiration date has been extended from Oct. 10, 2020, to Oct. 10, 2021, in response to COVID-19 and the need to prevent new infections. For those with national driver's licenses, the expiration date has been extended until Oct. 10, 2021. For those with REAL ID, PennDOT is offering 60-day extensions. PennDOT will also extend the renewal date for Pennsylvania driver's licenses, photo ID cards, and learner’s permits. For more information about Real ID, PennDOT extensions and REALID, visit the PennDOT website, under the Real ID section: www.penndot.gov/realid.


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My mask protects you; Your mask protects me
As we reopen our economy, it remains critical that we continue our efforts to protect one another to slow the spread of COVID-19 to a minimum.
Wearing a mask is still required when entering a business, anywhere in the state, unless you have a health exemption. Multiple studies support the effectiveness of wearing masks in helping to flatten the curve and slow the spread of the virus. If you are not feeling well, wearing a mask is a small inconvenience, and it could help save the lives of our more vulnerable community members. Let’s work together to keep each other healthy!

Emergency declaration remains critical to recovery
Without a strong federal response to the global pandemic, our governors filed the void. Governor Wolf issued and renewed his declaration of a disaster emergency to help maintain staffing at state agencies and medical experts. We don’t want to see our care system crumble under the weight of an impossible demand.

Emergency declarations were critical to the reopening of our state’s economy.

In June, a universal testing order went into effect for nursing homes, requiring all nursing homes to complete initial testing by late July. The requirement should have made much sense, but I was underestimating the lack of testing supplies available at the start. The requirement made a requirement more likely to be ignored.

This has been very difficult for those with loved ones in facilities. The health and Labor and Industry departments recently issued updated guidance for long-term care facilities to meet several prerequisites, now moving into a 3-step reopening process. The remaining prerequisites include specific criteria for testing, staffing, asymptomatic, non-essential personnel, visitors and persons.

Find more information at health.pa.gov/facilities/long-term-care.

Recently adopted legislation outlining how Pennsylvania will spend federal CARES Act relief funds included $322 million in funding for the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency has said the declaration is still needed to continue the response to the pandemic and ensure local, county and state governments are eligible for federal CARES Act funds.

After the resolution passed the House and Senate, some of my colleagues noted that the declaration is a fix for businesses, but that’s simply not true. The orders affecting nursing homes must be lifted by the Department of Health and would not change if the declaration were lifted.

Article III, Section 9 of the Pennsylvania Constitution clearly states that the legislature’s role is to make laws, and the governor’s role is to execute laws. The relevant decision rests with the governor for his signature or disapproval. I would argue that this task force line to the data from the Department of Health and would not change if the declaration were lifted.

The Health and Human Services Consolidation Act was enacted in 2018, creating the Department of Health, which is responsible for the health and safety of all Pennsylvanians. The Pennsylvania Department of Health’s primary function is to protect and improve the health and safety of the people of Pennsylvania and its environment. The Department of Health is responsible for the health and safety of all Pennsylvanians, including the health of nurses and other health care workers.

By working together, we can protect the health and safety of all Pennsylvanians. Let’s work together to keep each other healthy!

Update on COVID-19 and nursing homes
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Passing a budget – but not a complete one
This year, the House and Senate, along with the Governor’s administration, spent the month of June negotiating and debating the state budget for the next fiscal year.

This year we were done for more – but we were able to pull together a complete budget for the 2021-2022 fiscal year.

With reduced and uncertain revenue estimates, and uncertainty over additional federal relief to the state, the legislature sent the governor a $25 billion plan, which he signed, that only funds critical programs and services for five months. Come November, we’ll have to determine how to fund services for the rest of the year.

The only exception to the temporary, short-term budget, is education, which was funded at the last minute. The general fund was also among the last year’s funding. For our schools facing increased costs and challenges brought on by the pandemic, that is simply not sustainable.

While I did not support the full cuts in the budget package, there were areas where I worked with my colleagues to support what will help our communities get through this challenging time. We passed a plan that ensures federal CARES Act money will go to work for our children, students, and families. I’ll be pushing to put your needs first and we will do our best to support what will help our communities get through this challenging time.

We opened a new line to the data from the Department of Health and would not change if the declaration were lifted.

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By working together, we can protect the health and safety of all Pennsylvanians. Let’s work together to keep each other healthy!

11th annual “There Ought to be a Law” contest
This was the 11th year of my annual “There Ought to be a Law” essay contest, which drew around 500 entries from area fifth-grade students.

I host this contest in an attempt to spark an interest in government and public service. The contest challenges them to write a persuasive essay about a law or a change they think would make our school, community or state a better place.

I am always inspired by the creativity and thoughtfulness of our students. We are lucky to have such compassionate and intelligent students in our community.

This year’s winner was Bella McPherson from Upper Merion Area Middle School. Bella wrote about how Pennsylvania will spend federal relief to the states, the legislature sent the governor a $25 billion plan, which he signed, that only funds critical programs and services for five months. Come November, we’ll have to determine how to fund services for the rest of the year.

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Real ID, PennDOT extensions
The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has posted a position for Real ID by October 1, 2021, in response to Congress extending the national emergency declaration. PennDOT has already extended limitations on Real IDs due to COVID-19, but pre-registered customers can still visit their local facilities.

For driver licenses, photo ID cards and learner’s permits, renewal deadlines have already been extended until July 31, 2020. Driver licenses and photo ID cards expired on or before March 1, 2020, the expiration date is now extended to July 31, 2020. If you do not renew regularly, you will lose your privileges.

The King of Prussia Driver License Center at 143 Lower Macungie Road, is also closed until July 31, 2020. Driver licenses and photo ID cards expired on or before March 1, 2020, the expiration date is now extended to July 31, 2020. For driver licenses, photo ID cards and learner’s permit, renewal deadlines have already been extended until July 31, 2020. Driver licenses and photo ID cards expired on or before March 1, 2020, the expiration date is now extended to July 31, 2020. If you do not renew regularly, you will lose your privileges.

Information about Real ID can be found on PennDOT’s website, which is the State of Pennsylvania’s website.

Task force to examine racial disparity of COVID-19
Reports from around the country show that black and minority communities have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

In Pennsylvania, we’re struggling for data on demographic COVID-19 outcomes. Governor Wolf and his administration created the COVID-19 Task Force in March to help understand how the pandemic has affected the state’s minority and vulnerable populations. I am looking forward to seeing any recommendations that task force makes.

The task force reinforced the requirement that race and ethnicity be reported for patients for treatment, and compliance has risen. The group has also highlighted the need for accessible testing and contact tracing.

The PA House Democrats are pushing for a “Just Recovery” movement to ensure that black and Latinx communities get through this challenging time. For everyone. This means addressing some issues that were already there, such as the racial wealth gap, access to quality education, affordable and accessible healthcare, but also recognizing the way the pandemic has introduced, and I’ll keep you posted on your progress.
Emergency declaration remains critical to recovery

Without a strong federal response to the global pandemic, our governors filled the void. Governor Wolf issued and then renewed his declaration of a disaster emergency on March 6th. This action was critical to creating safe industry-specific protocols while we reopened and safeguards for our workers as well as our community, and put in place the right to fight a virus that we still don't know enough about. For most of us, wearing a mask is a small inconvenience, and it could help save the lives of our more vulnerable community members. Let's work together to keep each other healthy.

In June, a universal testing order went into effect for nursing homes, requiring all nursing homes to complete initial testing before July 24th. The requirement should have been made much sooner, but my understanding is that the lack of testing supplies available made a requirement like this impossible.

This has been very difficult for those with loved ones in facilities. The health and Human Services departments recently issued updated guidelines for facilities to meet several prerequisites, move into a 3-step reopening process and receipt of federal reimbursement. The reopening process includes specific criteria for dining, assisted living, personal protective equipment into the hands of health care providers, and related to planning and testing, before facilities can move into a 3-step reopening process. The department recently issued updated guidance requiring long-term care facilities to meet several prerequisites, including funds for health care and assisted living programs and long-term living programs, including funds for health care, nursing, and personal care and assisted living programs and long-term care.

As our communities continue to recover, we need to pay special attention to our nursing homes and long-term care facilities and ensure they have the necessary protocols and procedures in place to protect our most vulnerable residents.

Passing a budget – but not a complete one

Spending and the health of the state are always linked. Money is needed to continue the response to the pandemic and aid those who are affected. The group has also highlighted the need for accessible testing and worked to support community outreach. This year we were done far more quickly – but we were unable to put together a complete, sound budget for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

With reduced and uncertain revenue estimates, and uncertainty over additional funds, we need to continue the response to the pandemic and support our state’s public health and safety. The group has also highlighted the need for accessible testing and worked to support community outreach. This year we were done far more quickly – but we were unable to put together a complete, sound budget for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

CARES Act relief funds included $75 billion for health care and assisted living programs and $130 billion for state and local governments. The group has also highlighted the need for accessible testing and worked to support community outreach. This year we were done far more quickly – but we were unable to put together a complete, sound budget for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

For driver licenses, photo ID cards and learner’s permits scheduled to expire between March 16, 2020, and July 31, 2020, the expiration date is now extended to October 1, 2021, in response to COVID-19 and postponed the enforcement date for Real ID by one year to October 1, 2024, due to COVID-19, but pre-verified customers can still use their permit. For more information, visit https://www.dmv.pa.gov/Services/Pages/Real-Id.aspx.
Unemployment Compensation claims surge

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a historic surge in the number of people seeking unemployment compensation in Pennsylvania.

Since mid-March, nearly 3 million Pennsylvanians filed for unemployment benefits. Unfortunately, a decade of Republican legislative leadership left our unemployment system woefully underfunded for handling such crises and the department continues to struggle through these challenges. The department’s staffing was cut by more than half by June 30, 2019, at the end of the previous fiscal year.

The department worked to hire and train new workers and bring back retirees, but backlogs have lasted.

The department currently receives an average of 100,000 claim submissions per week, and it is taking between 4 and 6 weeks to process a claim.

In addition to regular unemployment, the CARES Act expanded unemployment benefits through new programs, including:

• Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, an additional $600 per week for unemployment recipients for up to 16 weeks
• Additional weeks for claims filed after July 6
• Pandemic Unemployment Assistance for gig workers, self-employed workers, and independent contractors.
• Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, an additional $600 per week for unemployment recipients through July 25.
• Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation, which provides an additional 13 weeks of benefits for those who have exhausted their regular 26 weeks.

For the latest updates, visit the state’s Unemployment Compensation website at www.unemployment.pa.gov to find out if you are eligible for benefits. This site has been updated regularly so that you can get the answers to your questions quickly and efficiently.

If you are having difficulty with the process, please feel free to reach out to my office and my staff will attempt to assist you.

Working for you!

My staff and I have worked remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic to assist you.

To better serve our constituents, we will be phasing in a safe and responsible reopening of the district office.

For more information on voting in Pennsylvania, visit www.votespa.com/runsmoothly, and every vote is counted.

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In the weeks after the primary, the General Assembly passed H.B. 3102, which the Governor signed as Act 35 of 2020, requiring the Department of Labor and Industry to publish a report on the June 2, 2020, primary election. This will help us identify the many issues that we need to try to address before the November election. I will continue to work with the county Election Board. We simply must do better so our elections run smoothly, and every vote is counted.

For the latest updates, visit the state’s Unemployment Compensation website at www.uc.pa.gov.

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The COVID-19 pandemic forced our community to make sacrifices we never imagined, as we all worked together to stay home and slow the spread of the virus. As you know, the work required to prevent our hospitals from being overwhelmed, scale up our testing capabilities, obtain medical supplies and to put in place appropriate health and safety measures.

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Unemployment Compensation claims surge

Making sure voters can make their voices heard - safely

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