

# SENATOR JOHN PIPPY



# Reports

TO THE 37TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT

Summer 2005

## A LETTER FROM SENATOR JOHN PIPPY

Dear Friend,

I hope your summer is going well. This newsletter is designed to keep you updated on recent legislative activity in the state Capitol.

This year, many of our efforts have focused on reducing the tax burden and controlling state spending. I have outlined some of these initiatives in this newsletter.

Please feel free to visit my website at [www.senatorpippy.com](http://www.senatorpippy.com) or contact any of my offices listed on the back for more information on any legislative proposals or state programs.

Sincerely,

*John Pippy*  
John Pippy



*Senator Pippy joined Rep. Mark Mustio (R-44) in May to announce legislation to protect Allegheny County taxpayers from being hit with extreme tax hikes following countywide reassessment.*

## Pippy Bill Would Prevent Windfall Tax Hikes

With local plans to reform Allegheny County's property assessment system temporarily stalled as a result of the May 12 Commonwealth Court ruling on County Chief Executive Dan Onorato's relief plan, Representative Mark Mustio and I have introduced companion bills (Senate Bill 726 and House Bill 1743) in the Senate and House of Representatives to protect taxpayers from extreme tax hikes following reassessment.

Generally, when properties in a political subdivision are reassessed, the net property value of the school district or municipality increases as a result of the rising market prices for homes, businesses and land. This allows these political subdivisions to generate a significant amount of additional revenue without having to face the political pressures of increasing millage.

The legislation I introduced with Representative Mustio would prevent this from happening by requiring school districts and municipalities to set millage rates that are **revenue neutral**, meaning that they cannot take in more revenue than they did the year before, solely as a result of a reassessment. If school districts or municipalities would like to increase their revenue for the upcoming year, they must do so through a **vote in a public meeting** in the same manner in which they currently raise millage rates. A municipality or school district that violates the limitations of the law would have to refund, with interest, any excess taxes.

This proposal has an advantage over many in that it is legal, does not require a Constitutional amendment, and has bipartisan support. Senate Bill 726 has already passed the Senate and has been sent to the House for consideration.

## Tax Relief for Seniors

Many of you may already be aware of the Senior Citizen Property Tax Relief Program, offered by Allegheny County, which effectively reduces the county tax burden on many older residents.

I recently introduced legislation that would allow more seniors to take advantage of the program's flat **30 percent discount on county property taxes**. If passed, Senate Bill 405 would increase the income limit for eligibility from \$30,000 to \$31,500. The program would still be open to those 60 and over (widows 50 and over) who have owned a primary residence in Allegheny County for at least 10 years. Through the expansion of this program, I hope that more of our older residents will be able to find some relief from the rising cost of living and accompanying tax burden.

## Installment Payments for School Property Taxes

Paying school taxes in a lump sum annually can be difficult on those on tight budgets. Allowing taxpayers to make smaller payments periodically may help to **make the tax burden more manageable**, which is why I've co-sponsored Senate Bill 709. If passed, this legislation would require school districts statewide to initiate installment payment plans by the 2006-07 school year. School districts would have the option to offer either quarterly, bimonthly or monthly payments to their residents. Discounts on taxes paid early would also continue to be offered.

## Bipartisan Effort to Save Local Military Bases

The last few months have been difficult for the men and women who work at our area military bases, as well as for the communities supported by those bases.

The Pentagon has recommended closing three bases that directly provide 845 jobs and support more than 570 private sector jobs in the airport region. Targeted for closure are the 911th Airlift Wing in Moon Township and the Charles E. Kelly Support Facility in Collier. Additionally, the

Defense Department has recommended moving the Army Reserve's 99th Regional Readiness Command from Moon to Fort Dix, New Jersey.

These changes, if they receive final approval, would have a severe impact on our local economy. Elected officials at the local, state and federal level have joined with retired military officials to form the Pit-BRAC task force, **a coordinated effort to send a clear message** that we as a region are committed to taking whatever actions necessary to keep those bases

and those jobs here in Pennsylvania.

I recently traveled with Representative Mark Mustio, Allegheny County Chief Executive Dan Onorato, Governor Ed Rendell and the BRAC task force to Washington D.C. to attend the Base Realignment and Closure Commission hearing in order to give evidence proving that several errors were made in the evaluation of our area bases.

In the case of the 911th, the closure justification was based in part on erroneous assumptions that the site

was both too small and too expensive to maintain. More importantly, however, is Pennsylvania's unmatched legacy of commitment to the military, as enlistment rates have long shown. Western Pennsylvania in particular has first class facilities, a ready supply of skilled citizens and the ability to accommodate expansions and many other future military needs.

The men and women at these bases have done a magnificent job defending and protecting our great country, and it's time for us to fight for them.

*Senator Pippy joined Rep. Mark Mustio and Allegheny County Executive Dan Onorato (left), Governor Rendell and other officials to rally support for saving military bases in the region targeted by the Pentagon for closure.*



## Pippy Student Government Seminar

Area high school students recently demonstrated that they have what it takes to be tomorrow's leaders at the Student Government Seminar I hosted in April.

Held at Robert Morris University in Moon Township, the seminar gave students a chance to serve on a Senate Committee, amend and pass legislation, debate issues with students from other schools and learn more about the process of government in general.

The morning began with a brief overview of the legislative process. Students then reported to one of four

committees: Education, Environment, Health and Human Services, and Transportation. Local legislators and lobbyists led the meetings, providing students with a **first hand learning experience on the foundation of government operations**.

Bill topics included the expansion of ATV trails in state parks, the installation of safety belts in school buses, mandatory CPR and Heimlich maneuver training for restaurant and hospitality workers, and the sale of junk food in school vending machines. The students read and dis-

cussed bills that had been introduced in the General Assembly.

The all-day seminar continued in the afternoon with a mock Session in which all of the students met together to vote on bills that had been passed earlier by their Committees. In closing, I had the opportunity to answer students' questions about the duties and responsibilities of a Senator and to listen to their comments and concerns about state government.



*Above, Senator Pippy speaks with students at his Student Government Seminar, held in April at Robert Morris University. At left, on hand for the seminar were (from left) Scott Baker, Rep. Tom Stevenson, Senator Pippy and Rep. Mark Mustio.*



## Eliminate the Double-Tax on Cell Phones

In 2004, Pennsylvania began to levy a 5 percent gross receipts tax on wireless phone service in addition to the state's 6 percent sales tax. At 19.05%, Pennsylvania has the eighth-highest cell phone taxes in the nation.

**This double-taxation hurts the state's economy** and hinders eco-

nom ic development efforts across the Commonwealth.

I'm co-sponsoring Senate Bill 691 to eliminate the gross receipts tax on cell phones. We want to send the message that Pennsylvania welcomes jobs in the field of technology, and eliminating the double-tax on cell phones is one way to get the word out.



*Senator Pippy and friends get up close and personal with a lizard at the Senator's Family Fun Fest in May. Held at Upper St. Clair High School, Family Fun Fest featured educational games and entertainment for children and parents.*

## Do You Have Flood Insurance?

Last year's flood season was one of the most destructive in history. By the end of 2004, nearly 40,000 Pennsylvanian's had applied for Federal relief. Despite aid from governments and generous donations from local charitable organizations, businesses and individuals, many still lost their homes and businesses or face permanent damage that can never be restored to pre-flood conditions.

The National Weather Service is predicting another difficult flood season in Pennsylvania. Before another disaster strikes, I would like to encourage you to take preemptive measures to protect yourself, your family and your property by contacting the National Flood Insurance Program at **1-800-427-2419** or online at **www.floodsmart.gov**. This program provides critical information to property owners about what to do before, during and after a flood, in addition to guidance for those interested in purchasing flood insurance.

### **PIPPY PROPOSES NEW DISASTER AID**

A flood or other disaster can cripple a business, throwing employees out of work and disrupting the community.

To help these employers get back on their feet, I've introduced legislation to allow businesses paying state Personal Income Tax to deduct their

## Legislation Regulates State Spending

Pennsylvania is one of only a few states that do not have a law to restrict spending or control revenues. That would change with a measure I am co-sponsoring: Senate Bill 4, the Taxpayer Fairness Act.

This legislation is designed to hold state spending increases to the rate of inflation and **make state government live within its means** just like a family must. Unregulated spending needs to be controlled.

The Taxpayer Fairness Act also protects the Commonwealth's economic future by placing 100 percent of surplus revenues into the state's Rainy Day Fund to be used in the event of an economic downturn.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 30 states already have laws in place that moderate state spending based upon revenues. By not taking action, Pennsylvania will be lagging behind other states in economic stability.

losses in times of disaster. Senate Bill 683 would apply to disasters in which the governor calls on the president to declare a state of emergency.

The revenue the state would receive from these employers in personal income taxes would be much better spent getting the companies up and running and people back to work.

## Public Officials Should Not Have Gaming Investments

When a law allowing expanded gaming in Pennsylvania was passed last year, it included a provision that has been justifiably criticized.

It allows public officials to be part owners (up to one-percent ownership) in gaming-related companies. Such a provision could create conflicts of interest and undermines public confidence in government.

The General Assembly passed legislation that I sponsored last year to fix the law. Senate Bill 1209 would have barred any ownership by state, coun-

ty, municipal and party officials, executive-level state employees and their immediate families of gaming venues, their holding companies, affiliates or associated businesses. It would also ban having a financial interest in businesses that manufacture or supply gaming venues.

Unfortunately, the governor vetoed the bill.

I'm working on new legislation to **reform the gaming law**. The goal is to resolve beyond question the concerns raised about public officials holding any ownership interest in gaming venues or suppliers.



*Senator Pippy welcomed the Bethel Park High School varsity ice hockey team and Coach Jim McVay to the Capitol. Bethel Park won the 2005 Penguins Cup Class AAA Championship and the 2005 Pennsylvania Cup Class AAA Championship.*

## Senator John Pippy 37TH DISTRICT LEGISLATIVE OFFICES

Senate Box 203037  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3037  
717-787-5839  
FAX 717-772-4437

937 Beaver Grade Road  
Moon Township, PA 15108  
412-262-2260  
FAX 412-262-6394

650 Washington Road  
Suite 102  
Mt. Lebanon, PA 15228  
412-571-3822  
FAX 412-571-3828

Peters Township  
Municipal Building  
610 East McMurray Road  
Suite 105  
McMurray, PA 15317  
724-942-7210  
FAX 724-942-7211

605 Beaver Street  
Sewickley, PA 15143  
412-749-4722  
FAX 412-749-4725

jpippy@pasen.gov  
www.senatorpippy.com  
Toll Free 1-866-SenPippy

## Senator Pippy On the Web

**M**y website [www.senatorpippy.com](http://www.senatorpippy.com) is a good way for people to access state services and legislation at their convenience. The site includes information about bills that are pending before the Senate and House and the wide variety of services that Pennsylvania offers to its citizens.

The site also provides links to a number of state and county agencies.

In addition you can always e-mail me at [jpippy@pasen.gov](mailto:jpippy@pasen.gov) to pass on comments or questions about state government.

## New Education Funding

**T**he state budget for 2005-06 provides substantial funding for Pennsylvania schools.

The budget allocates an additional \$131.7 million (3 percent) over last year for **basic education** for a total of \$4.49 billion – an unprecedented amount. **Community college** funding is increased by \$21 million (9.1 percent) to a total of more than \$252 million. **Head Start** funding will double, with an increase of \$15 million for a total of \$30 million for the program.

### **SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING**

An additional \$21.1 million (2.5 percent) over last year is allocated for special education for a total of \$875.6 million. I've also introduced

*legislation that would reimburse a special category of schools that provide psychological treatment and behavioral management to students who are too disruptive for traditional schools.*



**Pippy Senior Expos Coming Oct. 27 and 28**  
*The Expos provide free information and services for area senior citizens. Senator Pippy will announce locations and other details soon.*

SENATOR PIPPY  
*Reports*

Senate Box 203037  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3037

*Or Current Resident*

PRSR STD  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
HARRISBURG, PA  
PERMIT NO. 603