

SENATOR JOHN PIPPY



Reports

TO THE 37TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT

Spring 2007

Reforming State Government: A More Open, Smaller Legislature

One of the state Senate's first official acts of the 2007-08 legislative session was to adopt seven reform proposals designed to make the legislative process more open and accessible to the public.

The rules changes were developed with bipartisan input and are a good first step in the push for greater transparency in the Senate.

Session will now be limited to the hours between 8 a.m. and 11 p.m. The Senate will be required to wait at least six hours before voting on an amended bill or a conference committee report and **amendments** will be posted to the Internet before being

offered on the Senate floor.

All **roll call votes** will be posted on the Internet no later than 24 hours after a vote and **committee votes** on bills will be posted within 48 hours of the vote.

The Senate's *Legislative Journal* – which includes the full **text of all floor debates** – will be posted on the Internet upon Senate approval of the Journal or within 45 days, whichever is earlier. Finally, an updated **fiscal note** will be prepared if a bill is amended after consideration by the Senate Appropriations Committee and if the amendment is expected to have a financial impact.

Pippy Bill Would Reduce Size of Legislature

In the previous legislative session, I worked with Representative Mark Mustio on legislation to reduce the size of the General Assembly as a way to streamline government and save tax dollars.

While the bill did not pass, it did generate enough thoughtful discussion that we are introducing it again this session.

Under the new bill, the legislature would be reduced from **50 to 40**

senatorial districts and from **203 to 161 representative districts**, (rather than my original proposal of 30 senatorial districts and 121 representative districts). The result would be a 20 percent reduction in the size of both chambers.

In order to ensure that the change would result in savings for taxpayers, a new provision in the bill will require a corresponding **reduction in the legislature's budget by 20 percent**.

A LETTER FROM SENATOR JOHN PIPPY

Dear Friend,

The 2007-08 legislative session began with a push for reform, and I am pleased to report that several improvements have been implemented.

These changes will make for a more open, efficient government, as the General Assembly addresses issues such as property tax relief, fiscal restraint, and funding for important initiatives such as education and roads.

Information on these issues can be found in this newsletter. As always, you can find out more at www.senatorpippy.com, or contact any of my offices listed on back.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Pippy".

John Pippy

Because it amends the Constitution, the bill must be passed by the General Assembly in two consecutive sessions and then be submitted to voters as a ballot question. The changes would be effective after the 2010 reapportionment.

Pippy Named Chairman of Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee

I was pleased to be appointed chairman of the Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee for the 2007-08 legislative session. This committee considers matters that are important to the Pittsburgh region and municipalities across Pennsylvania.

In an era of regional economies and commuting workforces, there really isn't such a thing as an "urban issue." The issues in urban

and suburban communities are intertwined like never before. The Urban Affairs and Housing Committee will work to ensure that policies and legislation reflect the reality that strong urban communities benefit entire regions.

I will also continue to serve as vice chairman of the **Senate Law and Justice Committee** and sit on the **Senate Appropriations Committee**. My other committee assignments are

the **Transportation, Game and Fisheries, Banking and Insurance, Legislative Budget and Finance, and Policy** committees.

Committees play an important role in the legislative process. It's where legislation is reviewed, debated and, if necessary, amended for improvement. These particular appointments will allow me to have input on many important pieces of legislation.

Landmark Lobbyist Disclosure Law Enacted

The Senate passed landmark legislation requiring lobbyists to file regular reports detailing **who is lobbying the Legislature and the Governor's Office and which**

issues they are supporting.

Act 134 of 2006, as amended by the Senate, states that every lobbyist, lobbying firm and the groups that hired them are required to register and disclose their spending each

quarter. The reports must include a total of all lobbying costs for the quarter, along with three subtotals detailing funds spent on direct communication; indirect communication; and gifts, hospitality, transportation and lodging. These reports must then be filed with the Department of State, which will provide a directory to the public of all registered lobbyists by May 1 of each odd-numbered year. Random audits will be conducted on the registrations every two years.

Lobbyists who violate the law will be subject to civil fines of up to \$2,000 and the possibility of being prohibited from paid lobbying for up to five years. Groups that retain lobbyists and intentionally violate the law could receive a fine of up to \$25,000.

Citizens are now able to see online who is lobbying, who individual lobbyists are representing, and how they are spending their money. They will be able to also see the number of clients each lobbyist has and what each one is spending per client. The lobbyist disclosure reports can be found under "Topics of Special Interest" at www.pasen.gov.

Pippy Proposes Paper Record of Electronic Votes

In response to the federal Help America Vote Act, Pennsylvania introduced electronic voting machines statewide in 2006.

While this has brought more reliability and uniformity to the voting process, its downside is that it produces no paper record of votes.

This inability to verify the accuracy of votes undermines public confidence in the most basic of democratic processes and therefore must be addressed.

I have introduced Senate Bill 247 that will require voting systems to produce an individual, **voter-verified paper record** of each citizen's vote in order to safeguard against tampering and software failure. Voters will be

able to use the paper verification to ensure that their vote has been recorded correctly before it is counted finally by the machine.

In addition, the bill will require each county to conduct a mandatory hand-count of the voter-verified paper records in at least five percent of its precincts, which will be randomly selected. Counties will have to **compare the paper records with the initial vote count** recorded electronically in these precincts and announce their findings in a timely manner.

In recent years, Pennsylvania has already taken steps to ensure the integrity of the voting process, but further improvements can be made.



Property Tax Reform Recap

In 2006, I was pleased that the General Assembly passed legislation to make more senior citizens eligible for Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate program by increasing the income limit of the program to \$35,000. However, I feel that **this legislation did not do enough** to help the many individuals and families in my district who continue to be burdened with high property taxes. I hope to revisit a number of proposals related to this issue in the coming weeks and months.

One proposal from last year, Senate Bills 717 and 718, would have replaced property taxes for homeowners entirely by raising the personal income tax by 1 percentage point and the sales tax by 2 percentage points. A study conducted by the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee

revealed that the revenue that could be raised through these methods would be sufficient to completely eliminate property taxes on homesteads.

Several bills introduced in the last Session suggested expanding the sales tax to include food, clothing, and/or other services that are currently not taxed in order to reduce or eliminate property taxes. Under the various proposals, taxable items may include some combination of legal, financial, and accounting services, doctor's visits, and gym memberships.

Other proposals sought to make changes to the local tax structure, increasing the earned income tax in exchange for a dollar for dollar reduction in property taxes. The bill that passed last year, Act 1 of 2006, allows school districts and municipalities to provide additional tax

relief for residents in addition to what will be available from gambling revenue by increasing their current earned income tax rate or by instituting a new personal income tax at the local level. Proponents of these bills suggest that this will allow local governments to adopt the tax system that is appropriate for the homeowners in their communities.

It is important to note that the adoption of any of these proposals will result in a tax shift, which means that some people will be paying less under the new system while others will be paying more. It has always been my opinion that, in light of this, legislation must be carefully constructed and evaluated in order to ensure that any changes result in a fairer, more equitable system for all.

New Law Lets Military Families Grieve in Peace

Gov. Ed Rendell signs into law a bill sponsored by Senator Pippy to limit the scope of demonstrations at funerals and memorial services. The senator drafted Act 63 of 2006 in response to incidents of pickets and abusive chants targeting Pennsylvania military funerals.



In the ultimate display of disrespect, a group has been traveling the country picketing military funerals and harassing grieving family members with vulgar language in protest of social,

not military, issues.

In response to this callous invasion of privacy, I introduced legislation to **limit the scope of demonstrations at funerals and memorial services**. The bill was approved

and signed into law, requiring demonstrators to remain 500 feet from any funeral, memorial service or memorial procession beginning one hour before and ending one hour after the event. Violators can be charged with a third-degree misdemeanor.

The legislation was supported by the American Legion, the Pennsylvania Fraternal Order of Police, the Pennsylvania War

Veterans Council, and other organizations. The law is very limited in its scope in order to maintain the proper balance between an individual or a group's right to protest and the right to mourn in peace.

Please fill in the circle completely with a black pen or marker.
You can also fill out this questionnaire at www.senatorpippy.com.

Constituent Questionnaire

- 1.** Listed below are summaries of several prominent property tax proposals that have been put forth in the past few Sessions. Assume that gambling revenue will be directed to property tax reduction regardless of which option is chosen. Please select the one best response that explains your opinion.

Given the choice, I would support:

- Increasing both the sales tax and the state personal income tax to eliminate property taxes.
- Expanding the sales tax to include food, clothing, and some other services to eliminate property taxes.
- Expanding the sales tax to include some services but not food or clothing to reduce property taxes.
- Increasing the state personal income tax to reduce property taxes.
- Increasing the local earned income tax to reduce property taxes.
- Creating a new local personal income tax to reduce property taxes.
- Maintaining the current tax structure.
- None of the above.

- 2. a.** Do you utilize public transportation in Allegheny County at least...

- once per year once per month once per week do not use

- b.** Do you support increased funding of public transportation?

- Yes – even if taxes need to be increased
- Yes – but do not increase taxes; redirect existing tax revenue
- No

- 3.** Would you support legislation that would prohibit smoking in all public places, including bars and restaurants?

- Yes No

- 4.** Which of the following issues should be the top priority for the General Assembly in the coming Session? Select only one of the following:

- Education
- Expanding state-sponsored healthcare coverage
- Property tax reform
- Economic development/Job creation
- State government reform
- Environmental protection
- Transportation (highways and public transit)
- Reducing state spending
- Reducing crime
- None of the above

- 5.** Legislation to reduce the size of Pennsylvania's General Assembly has also been proposed. Please indicate your preference regarding the number of members each chamber should have. The district sizes that would result have been included after each option.

- No change: 203 representatives and 50 senators (House: 61,000 residents; Senate: 248,000 residents)
- 161 representatives and 40 senators (House: 76,500 residents; Senate: 310,000 residents)
- 121 representatives and 40 senators (House: 102,500 residents; Senate: 310,000 residents)
- 121 representatives and 30 senators (House: 102,500 residents; Senate: 413,300 residents)
- 103 representatives and 26 senators (House: 120,400 residents; Senate: 476,900 residents)
- None of the above

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO RESPOND.
YOUR INPUT IS A VALUABLE PART OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS.**

Pippy Bill Enacted to Give Communities More Information on Sex Offenders

Legislation I sponsored to provide additional information about registered sex offenders on the state Megan's Law website was recently signed into law.

Under the old law, only offenders designated as a "sexually violent predator" had their addresses listed on the website. The vast majority of listings included only county, hometown and zip code. Under Act 179 of 2006, **complete addresses for all convicted sex offenders will be posted.**

In addition, the law also authorizes the Pennsylvania State Police to include the following information on its Megan's Law website:

- **Description** of the offense
- Special designation when the **victim is a minor**
- **Physical description** of the registrant

Act 179 of 2006, sponsored by Senator Pippy to enhance the state Megan's Law website, was signed into law in November.

- Municipality and **name of school** where the offender is enrolled as a student
- Municipality of any **employer** of the offender
- **Date** of the offense and date of the conviction
- Whether the registrant is in **compliance** with Megan's Law requirements

The bill also increases the statute of limitations for sexual criminal offenses when committed against a victim under the age of 18. Victims

of child-sex crimes will now have until their 50th birthday to file a criminal complaint. Previously, the law allowed victims under 18 to file complaints until they reached the age of 30.

The address for the Pennsylvania Megan's Law site is **www.pameganslaw.state.pa.us.**

The rate of recidivism among these offenders is so high that in many cases the best way to provide real protection is to know where they are after they are released from prison. Act 179 allows parents and communities to be better informed when it comes to the safety of their children.



PLEASE REMOVE THIS PAGE, FOLD SO THAT THE ADDRESS BELOW IS SHOWN, STAMP AND MAIL.

SENATOR JOHN PIPPY
Senate Box 203037
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3037

PLACE
PROPER
POSTAGE HERE
U.S. Postal Service Will
Not Deliver Without
Postage

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED
(Please Print Clearly)

Tape along this edge.

Student Aid Applications Available

The 2007-08 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is now available, and families can apply by paper or online.

The FAFSA is used to determine eligibility for almost all types of student aid, including state grants, Pell Grants, Stafford Loans and other federal and institutional programs.

Paper applications are available through my offices or school guidance counselors. Those looking for more information about the FAFSA or interested in filing an electronic application can do so by accessing either www.fafsa.ed.gov or the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency's college planning website: www.EducationPlanner.org.

Constituent Services: How Can We Help You?

While it's an honor to represent you in Harrisburg, some of the most important work is done right here in the 37th Senatorial District.

Below is a list of some of the services offered by my district offices.

My staff and I can provide the following:

- Information on **legislation, regulations, and laws**
- Assistance dealing with state **government agencies**
- Help with **PENNDOT** paperwork and other transportation issues
- Help obtaining copies of Pennsylvania **Birth and Death Certificates**

- Pennsylvania **Tax Forms**
- Assistance with **unemployment compensation** problems
- Guidance on state **senior citizen** programs
- **Absentee ballot** applications and voter registration forms
- **Student financial aid** information
- **Notary** Applications
- **Senate Citations** for accomplishments and family milestones
- Help arranging **tours of the Capitol in Harrisburg**

For additional information, please call the numbers listed on this newsletter or visit my website at www.senatorpippy.com.

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