



Senator Elder Vogel Jr.



Happy Holidays!

REPORT to the PEOPLE

47TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT • DECEMBER 2011

Impact Fee for Drillers Would Help Communities

As many of you know, drilling for natural gas in the Marcellus and Utica Shale regions has grown exponentially over the last few years. As we continue to adjust Pennsylvania's rules regarding drilling, we must also realize that retrieving natural gas has impacted our local communities. Last May, Senator Joe Scarnati introduced Senate Bill 1100, a bill that I co-sponsored, to assess an impact fee on natural gas drillers.

I support job growth and economic development, but

we cannot ignore the impact the industry is having in our communities. We must en-



sure clean water. Police are frequently needed to direct traffic. Firefighters and EMS professionals need training on accident response, and we must plan so that our roads and infrastructure needs are met well into the future. The revenue from a fee under this proposal would be used to protect water supplies, improve transportation infrastructure, complete water and sewer improvements, and develop training and planning for first responders. This funding should also be used for grants to mitigate acid mine

drainage, to plug abandoned oil and gas wells and complete other critical environmental projects.

I had hoped that this bill would be passed before the state budget was completed in June. We cannot afford to wait any longer as each day means more time before we can limit the impacts on our communities. I understand that government can be frustratingly slow to act at times, but I am hopeful that the legislature will pass an impact fee bill in the next few weeks.

Serving as Agriculture Committee Chairman

This year I was honored to be named Chairman of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee.

The Committee considers legislation and holds hearings pertaining to agriculture and rural issues in Pennsylvania and provides review and oversight on regulations proposed by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

This is an important committee as 72 percent of our state is considered rural and agriculture remains the number one industry in Pennsylvania. I am confident that my experience as a fourth generation dairy farmer will allow me to work with the other members of the Committee, across the partisan lines, on the diverse issues facing the agricultural community.



Senator Vogel helps plant the Hunger Garden at the State Capitol to grow vegetables for local food banks.

Bill Reducing Size of Legislature Reintroduced

This year I reintroduced my bill from last session that would reduce the size of the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

We continue to struggle to meet our budgetary obligations and we have asked many agencies to tighten their belts. The Legislature should follow suit by reduc-

ing our numbers by 40 percent, as my legislation recommends. Everywhere I go I hear my constituents call for cutting the size of government. Not only would this legislation save the taxpayers millions of dollars, I think it would also make the Legislature more accountable to the people.

Under Senate Bill 457, the

Senate would be reduced from 50 seats to 30 seats, and the House of Representatives would be reduced from 203 seats to 121 seats. Estimates are this legislation would save the citizens of the Commonwealth approximately \$117.5 million.

One only has to look at the size of government, whether it is state, local, or

federal, to realize we need less government, not more.

I previously introduced this bill last session as Senate Bill 684 and I was pleased by the support it received, especially during a public hearing held by the Senate State Government Committee last April at the Penn State-Beaver Campus.

Working to Improve Transparency in Government

The state Senate has taken a number of steps over the past few years to make government more open to public scrutiny. I am encouraged by these reforms. I am pleased to report that steps are underway to implement a recently enacted law that I strongly supported which will make state government spending more open to public review. As your Senator, I fought to make this a leg-

islative priority and as someone that believes firmly in reforming state government, it is satisfying to see this law enacted.

Act 18 of 2011, which is also known as the Pennsylvania Web Accountability and Transparency or PennWatch Act, directs the state to create and maintain a searchable website to expand the public's access to state spending records.

The database created by

this legislation will provide transparency to state spending and is another important and essential move in our on-going efforts to increase accountability in state government.

The "PennWatch" website, which must be up and running by the end of 2012, will provide annual appropriation and expenditure information for all Commonwealth agencies. The website will also identify vendors, the amount

of funds they receive, and the state agency initiating the funding action or expenditure.

In addition, the website will list the name, position title and current annual salary for every Commonwealth agency employee.

This is a long overdue development in our ongoing effort to make state government more accessible and to ensure that your tax dollars are spent appropriately and wisely.

Saluting Our Veterans

This year I teamed up with the Community College of Beaver County to honor the men and women that have worn our country's uniform. I was able to meet and talk with veterans and their families as we enjoyed breakfast. Hundreds of people were on hand to celebrate Veterans Day. At night, The United States Air Force Band of Flight performed. We hope to continue this partnership for years to come.



Senator Vogel meets with the Air Force Band of Flight following a special concert for local veterans.

Bill Banning Synthetic Drugs Signed into Law

In June, Governor Corbett signed into law Senate Bill 1006, legislation that I introduced to ban synthetically produced drugs designed to mimic the effects of narcotic street drugs. The bill was supported by law enforcement officials and the District Attorneys Association.

Salvia Divinorum, Salvinorin A, Divinorin A, synthetic marijuana, a hallucinogenic compound called 2C, and synthetic amphetamine/heroin, more commonly referred to as concentrated bath salts, are now added to the list of Schedule I controlled substances.

Despite the innocuous sounding name, these “bath salts” are powerful hallucinogens that have sent people to hospitals and psychiatric wards, and are



Senator Vogel watches as Governor Corbett Signs into law Senate Bill 1006 which bans synthetically-created street drugs.

responsible for attacks on police officers and private citizens. Chemicals found within these drugs are very powerful and can have life threatening consequences

for users and those around them.

These drugs were having a devastating impact on families and communities across the Commonwealth. The ease in which the drugs can be attained exponentially adds to their lethality. They were readily available over the internet or at local

shops where anyone – even kids – could get their hands on these substances.

These drugs have already ruined too many lives across the Commonwealth. I’m glad the governor wasted no time in signing this bill into law. It was imperative that we got these drugs off the streets.

Castle Doctrine Expansion Signed into Law

On June 20, the Senate voted 45-5 to send the Castle Doctrine legislation to Governor Corbett. He signed the bill into law eight days later.

Act 10 of 2011 protects gun owners who act in self-defense by removing the “duty to retreat” when an individual is threatened by an attacker in any place that individual has a right to be. The new law provides important protections against criminal prosecution or civil litigation for those who act in self-defense.

I voted in favor of the Castle Doctrine legislation because law abiding citizens should not be prosecuted for protecting themselves and their families. The last thing someone in a life or death situation needs to be thinking about is whether or not he is going to be sued by the criminal’s family.

LIHEAP Applications Available

Pennsylvania’s Low-Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEAP) grant program is now open for the 2011-12 heating season. Grants are based on income, family size, type of heating fuel and region.

Rising fuel costs have taken a toll on all of us, especially those who rely on oil to heat their homes. This burden has been especially heavy on low-income families and those people on fixed incomes. I urge everyone who may be eligible for LIHEAP to apply.

Additional information, such as specific income limits, and applications for LIHEAP grants are available online via the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Access to Social Serv-

ices (COMPASS) Web site at www.compass.state.pa.us. Applications are also available at county assistance offices, local utility companies and community service agencies, such as Area Agencies on Aging or community action agencies. Applicants may also call toll-free (866) 857-7095.



Hundreds of Local Residents Turn Out for Senior Expo

In October, I held my third annual Senior Expo. More than 70 local agencies and non-profit groups were on hand to provide valuable information for seniors and caregivers. The best thing about the Expo is that it gives me an opportunity to hear from members of the community on issues affecting them.

More than 500 people enjoyed the Western PA Button Box Band and the refreshments. If you have not attended a Senior Expo in the past, please consider attending my event next year.



Senator Vogel talks with Constituents at his Third Annual Senior Expo.

PHEAA's Student Aid Guide Available Online at PHEAA.org

The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) recently announced the availability of its annual Pennsylvania Student Aid Guide. The Guide can be found under the College Planning section of www.PHEAA.org.

The Student Aid Guide is

Pennsylvania's most comprehensive financial aid publication and is available at no cost. The Guide offers in-depth information on the federal student aid process and includes details on Pennsylvania's aid programs, including the need-based State Grant Program.

The Guide is a great re-

source for finding everything students and families need to know about paying for higher education.

The Pennsylvania Student Aid Guide includes a complete overview of the financial aid process with information on most of Pennsylvania's financial aid programs and services. Stu-

dents may qualify for free money, like grants and scholarships, or work-study programs that allow them to earn money to help cover their education costs. And, for those who need additional help paying for their education, there are loans available for both students and parents.

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