

HARRISBURG REPORT



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AUTO INSURANCE REFORM BILL APPROVED

After months of debate and discussion, the General Assembly and the governor have reached agreement on a plan to reduce automobile insurance rates.

Proponents of the compromise claim the law will:

- cut premiums by 10 percent for all motorists, or up to 22 percent for those agreeing to give up the right to sue in all but the most severe cases;
- freeze rates for one year, and then allow a rise in premiums based on increases in items relating to coverage such as auto repairs or medical costs;
- make coverage for funeral costs, loss of wages, and underinsured and uninsured motorists optional;
- have drivers carry \$500 deductible for collision;
- cap medical costs at 110 percent of levels paid by Medicare;
- toughen drunk driving standards for commercial drivers from the present .10 percent blood-alcohol to .04 percent.

- and provide discounts for anti-theft and safety devices.

While the plan mandates a 10 percent across-the-board premium reduction, and up to 22 percent for those waiving their right to sue, true cuts will be up to the Casey Administration. Provisions in the bill allow insurance companies to avoid reducing premiums if they convince the state insurance commissioner that their present rates are inadequate. Under the plan, companies have the right to petition the commissioner for a rate increase before the mandatory cuts go into effect on July 1.

By forcing healthcare providers to charge automobile accident victims at a lower rate, other patients in need of healthcare benefits will face higher costs.

And finally, without any guarantee of territorial rates, lower-risk rural areas, such as Lancaster, will shoulder the burden of higher-risk urban regions, such as Philadelphia.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY APPROVES ANTI-DRUG EFFORTS

The war on drugs intensified as the governor signed into law a 16-bill package which passed swiftly through the two houses of the General Assembly.

Among the legislation enacted are requirements for health insurance coverage for drug and alcohol abuse treatment, reclassifying steroids as a controlled substance and banning its use by high school athletes, prohibiting pupils from carrying beepers on school property, suspending driver's licenses of persons convicted of drug law violations, requiring inmates seeking parole to pass a drug-screening test, establishing state penalties for money laundering, and adding innovative methods for law enforcement officials to win the war.

Other proposals, such as targeting drug education and regulating the sale of certain chemicals used to manufacture synthetic drugs, could be approved in the remainder of this session.

PRISON REFORM MEASURES CONSIDERED

Members of the Judiciary Committee have approved a series of initiatives to improve Pennsylvania's overcrowded and antiquated prison system.

According to current statistics, the Commonwealth's state correctional facilities are 37 percent over capacity, and inmate population has more than doubled in the past seven years. Overcrowding has made it more difficult to impose tough mandatory sentences or keep violent prisoners behind bars.

Following is a brief description of the major proposals the General Assembly is considering:

Boot Camps – Similar to a military training camp, this plan would require 17-to-25 year old, non-violent, first-time offenders to complete 180 days of rigorous physical activity and strict discipline. Extensive educational and vocational training, counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, as well as other rehabilitative programs would be included to motivate prisoners and teach them self-respect.

Earned Time – Inmates serving time for non-violent

crimes could volunteer for this plan and earn time off their original sentence. By agreeing to follow all prison rules while participating in educational and other rehabilitative programs the institution offers, a prisoner could earn up to 52 days a year towards early parole. Those who violate any of the regulations would lose up to 104 days for each violation, or all of their earned time if they attempt to escape.

Prison Impact Statement – Before the House considers legislation creating a mandatory jail sentence, the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing would be ordered to review the proposal for its possible effects on state and county prison populations. The resolution, which would amend House rules, is awaiting further consideration.

Other measures, including house arrest, authorizing construction of new prison space, and increasing state subsidies to county jails for DUI offenders, will be considered as the Legislature continues to examine the problem of prison overcrowding.

BILL GRANTS IMMUNITY TO DAY CARE VOLUNTEERS

Pennsylvania's day-care volunteers would be granted immunity from civil liability if a measure I introduced in mid-December is enacted.

This bill would provide that a person who assists in evacuating children from a day-care center during an emergency, such as a fire or a bomb scare, would not be liable for civil damages for any injury that would occur during the emergency. However, if a volunteer's conduct is proven to have been grossly negligent, he or she could be held liable.

After reviewing state laws which provide immunity to certain volunteers, it was noted that day-care volunteers do not fit into any of the established categories.

We must provide the best care and protection available for our children, but we also must protect our volunteers who act in good faith and conscience from being subject to unnecessary liability suits.

Day-care centers are becoming more commonplace in today's business community. It's important that we provide accommodations to encourage, rather than discourage, day-care volunteers in our workplace.

With the bipartisan support of 32 cosponsors, I foresee speedy consideration by the House Judiciary Committee.



FARMLAND PRESERVATION HELPS SAVE LANCASTER FARMS

Preserving Lancaster County's precious farmland is a high priority on my legislative agenda. As Republican Chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and a member of the state's Agricultural Land Preservation Board, I have monitored the allotment of nearly \$15 million to purchase land development rights from farmers.

By allowing the state to purchase development rights, farmers will receive money that could be used to continue farming their land. Under the program, the price for each acre is based on the difference between appraisals as farmland and as development land.

Residents of the 98th Legislative District that have received funds from the Board are **Dale Frank** of Elizabethtown, **Dennis and Linda Umbrell** of Elizabethtown, **Larry and Jane Garber** of Marietta, and **Wilmer and Lois Kreider** of Elizabethtown. I congratulate these Lancaster countians for taking the initiative and interest in trying to protect this farmland.

In February, the Board approved an additional \$20 million to enable more counties to purchase agricultural conservation easements. Of that amount, \$5.2 million should be available for Lancaster County's Farmland Preservation Board. It is my hope that more farming residents of the 98th District will seek to preserve their farms.

The State Board was established by Act 149 of 1988 to oversee the use of proceeds from a \$100 million bond issue approved by the voters in 1987.



Rep. Brandt and Agriculture Secretary Boyd Wolff discuss issues related to the farming community. As Republican Chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and a member of various agriculture-related boards and commissions, Brandt works closely with the Department of Agriculture to insure that the interests of Lancaster County's farming community are addressed.

COMMISSION CONTINUES ANIMAL HEALTH RESEARCH

The Animal Health and Diagnostic Commission, on which I serve, met at the University of Pennsylvania Veterinary School's New Bolton Center in Kennett Square, Chester County, to discuss several upcoming matters.

We examined the Commission's budgetary figures for 1990-91 and reviewed an update on last fall's bovine tuberculosis outbreak in Dauphin County. Additionally, a report on salmonella enteritidis, which affects the poultry and egg markets, led to new regulations on handling and refrigerating eggs for shipment, resale and restaurant consumption.

These regulations, which are being reviewed by the state Department of Agriculture, resulted in the introduction of a bill to prevent the further spreading of avian influenza. In supporting the proposal, I noted that increasing efforts to combat future outbreaks will help save the poultry and livestock industry millions of dollars in losses to such diseases.

The Commission also looked at the availability of facilities in Pennsylvania to identify, investigate and update the necessary research and education of diseases effecting livestock and poultry.

Created 1988, the Commission was charged with overseeing animal health problems, directing research dollars, and advising the Agriculture Department on animal health policy.

HOUSE CONSIDERS PRODUCT LIABILITY REFORM

America's product liability laws are crippling companies in their ability to compete in the world marketplace. Because manufacturers bear a much higher liability risk here than in other countries, they must pay excessive insurance premiums which are reflected in the cost of their products and services. This costs American individuals, businesses, and government bodies at least \$80 billion a year.

Consumers suffer by paying higher prices and having fewer products to choose from. American workers suffer through lost jobs, as companies go out of business, end product lines, or fail to introduce new products. The public suffers from a decline in the production of life-saving drugs, devices and vaccines.

Consumers have every right to demand protection against shoddy, unsafe products and against manufacturers' deliberate neglect. But our product liability laws go far beyond this sensible approach.

Recognizing these inadequacies, last year the House introduced legislation to reform Pennsylvania's product liability system. House Bill 916 would leave intact the manufacturer's liability for defective products, but would more strictly define what "defective" means. It would also limit the time and circumstances under

which suits could be filed. Main provisions of the bill would:

- Relieve companies of liability if an injury resulted from a consumer's misuse of a product.
- Relieve companies of liability if there was no safer design available when the product was made.
- Prevent retailers and suppliers from being sued unless they were in some way directly responsible for an injury.
- Reduce companies' liability in cases where consumers are found to be partly responsible for an injury.
- Prevent a product from being declared defective, just because of an inherent or unavoidable safety problem (such as the sharp blade of a knife or a lawn mower).
- Require that product-liability lawsuits be filed within 15 years of the product's sale.

These reforms, similar to ones already enacted in Ohio and New Jersey, won't pose an insurmountable barrier to consumers with legitimate cases, nor would they shield poor product design. They would, however, restore some sanity to product liability laws by establishing rules all parties can live by.

Representative Brandt visited students at the Landisville Learning Center to discuss his role in state government, the legislative process and the state capitol. Brandt's trip came about after a student, **Candi Jo Hower** (at left), wrote him a letter requesting that he come and visit the class.



Representative Ken Brandt joins the celebration to honor **Mr. Paul Myers** on his retirement from the Columbia Borough Council where he has been a member since 1955 and President since 1966. Pictured from left to right are **Paul Myers**, Representative Brandt, and Lancaster County Commissioners **Brad Fischer**, **Bob Brenneman**, and **Jim Huber**.

LEGISLATURE TO CONSIDER EDUCATION'S BUDGET

One of the most important responsibilities of state government is to oversee the basic education system within the Commonwealth. More than 50 percent of the 1989-90 General Fund Budget was allocated for education and education-related programs.

Funds from the state are used to purchase necessary items ranging from traditional school supplies, to advanced chemistry equipment to building construction projects.

In order to improve the state's present education system, the General Assembly must continue its efforts to provide the full amount of state aid as established by the Equalized Subsidy for Basic Education (ESBE) formula. However, when a school district's student population forces administrators to consider expanding present facilities, the state must provide its fair share.

During the upcoming budget negotiations, I will seek to have the necessary funding level allocated to the Department of Education so that Pennsylvania's schools can continue to progress and provide our children with the quality of education they deserve.

ENVIRONMENTAL HOTLINE NUMBERS

Emergency Hotline – 1-800-541-2050

A 24-hour hotline available for reports of pollution incidents to the state Department of Environmental Resources (DER).

Radon Testing – 1-800-23-RADON

DER information about radon problems and required testing.

Recycling – 1-800-346-4242

Information on recycling waste by the Pennsylvania Resources Council

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – 1-800-438-2474

The federal EPA's 24-hour hotline to report accidents of illegal hazardous waste dumping or other violations of environmental law.

EPA - Toxic Substances – 1-800-424-9065

"Industry Assistance" information on federal Toxic Substances Act.

TOLL-FREE NUMBERS FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly (PACE) – a program to help senior citizens with their prescription payments – 1-800-225-7223

Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program – Administered by the Department of Revenue, this program offers eligible citizens a percentage rebate of their property taxes or rent – 1-800-772-5246

Fraud Hot Line for PACE and Rent Rebate Program – 1-800-992-2433

Alzheimer's Disease Help Line – offers assistance and answers questions dealing with Alzheimer's – 1-800-367-5115

Senior Citizens Dental Care Program – 1-800-692-7258

National Eye Care Project – 1-800-222-EYES

BRANDT'S OFFICE PROVIDES VETERANS ASSISTANCE

One day a month, Rep. Brandt's District Offices offers local veterans the chance to meet with government officials to help resolve their problems related to benefits.

Working with the Governor's Veterans Outreach and assistance Center, Brandt visits with veterans each second Thursday of the month, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. in the Elizabethtown, Office, and from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the Columbia Office.

These meetings enable veterans to receive information, referral and follow-up services concerning benefits with the government or private agencies.

VETERAN'S BENEFIT HOTLINES

U.S. Department of Defense – for inquiries regarding:

Army benefits – 1-800-336-4909

Marine benefits – 1-800-336-4649

Navy benefits – 1-800-255-8950

Coast Guard benefits – 1-800-424-7950

Air Force benefits – 1-800-531-7502



REP. BRANDT'S DISTRICT OFFICE CAN:

- Assist with car registrations, titles, special tags, driver license problems, handicapped parking privileges.
- Obtain birth and death certificates.
- Provide voter registration and absentee ballot applications.
- Provide applications for Senior Citizens' Property Tax and Rent Rebate Program and PACE (Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly.)
- Provide Pennsylvania state maps, seasonal travel guides and various other state publication.
- Provide PHEAA applications and literature regarding financial aid to students.
- Provide applications and job assistance with Civil Services.
- Enlist the services of local, county and state health and welfare assistance programs.
- Obtain copies of House and Senate legislation.
- Follow-up on licensing applications, unemployment compensation problems, welfare applications, income tax rebates.
- Provide federal and state income tax forms.