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**CONTACT: Beth Horne-Beachy (717) 787-7895**

### **Financial aid questions answered**

HARRISBURG, Jan. 5 -- A financial aid hotline has been established to assist college-bound students and their families in understanding and applying for the myriad of state programs, according to state Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie.

"By making one phone call, students and their families can obtain financial aid information and have their questions answered. And best of all, the call is free," Cappabianca said.

The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency set up the Financial Aid Hotline, which will be available for two weeks in January -- Jan. 17 through Jan. 21 and Jan. 24 through Jan. 28. The number is 1-877-9-PASFAA or 1-877-972-7322. Hotline hours are 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. weekdays.

Members of the Pennsylvania Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators and financial aid professionals from state colleges and universities will man the line to answer questions about grants, loans, scholarships and work-study jobs.

Additional information about financial aid programs and opportunities is available at PHEAA's Web site at [www.pheaa.org](http://www.pheaa.org).

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**You are invited to join in the fun**

HARRISBURG, Jan 6 -- A celebration of youth, family and one of the state's top industries -- agriculture -- is planned during the 84<sup>th</sup> annual Pennsylvania Farm Show which begins Saturday, according to state Rep. Italo Cappabianca, Democratic chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee.

"There truly is something for everyone at this weeklong event, whether you enjoy dancing, cooking, horse-pulling contests or looking at award-winning animals," said Cappabianca, D-Erie. "Everything represented at the show is a shining example of Pennsylvania pride and best of all, admission for all events during Farm Show Week is free."

Farm Show hours are 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 8 through Wednesday, Jan. 12, and 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 13, with the main floor exhibits opening at 9 a.m. each day.

The Farm Show is held in the Farm Show Complex along Cameron Street in Harrisburg, off Exit 23 of Interstate 81. A complete schedule of Farm Show events can be found on the Internet at [www.pda.state.pa.us](http://www.pda.state.pa.us).

"As we prepare to enter a new millennium, we should pause to reflect on the heart of Pennsylvania and its number one industry, agriculture," Cappabianca said. "Despite a devastating drought in 1999, Pennsylvania's agriculture professionals continue to positively impact the state's economy and put high-quality food products on our table."

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The 2000 Farm Show will highlight the accomplishments of the agricultural community and look toward the future. As always, attendees will enjoy a large dairy show and a variety of livestock competitions, as well as poultry exhibits. The Sheep-to-Shawl contest is back by popular demand, along with the Family Living and Agricultural Learning Center.

Being introduced for the first time this year is a cheese sculpture to complement an even bigger butter sculpture.

Also new in 2000 is an agricultural biotechnology program sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and the Pennsylvania Biotechnology Association. The daylong program will be held Tuesday at the Agriculture Building and is for non-specialists.

Family Day will be observed Sunday; Agricultural Heritage Day, Monday; Dairy Day, Tuesday; Youth Day, Wednesday; and Sale of Champions Day, Thursday. Kicking off the event on Saturday is an address by the governor at 11:30 a.m.

"The annual Farm Show is a wonderful time for the agricultural community to shine. I encourage everyone to visit and sample a taste of Pennsylvania," Cappabianca said.

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### **New program to aid farmers and environment**

HARRISBURG, Jan. 26 -- Pennsylvania farmers in a 20-county area are encouraged to participate in the most ambitious environmental program in Pennsylvania's history, according to state Rep. Italo Cappabianca, Democratic Chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee.

"This new program is designed to improve water quality in the Susquehanna River and improve habitat for wildlife, all while providing financial incentives for farmers who enroll voluntarily," Cappabianca said.

In the near future, it is expected an agreement will be signed between Pennsylvania and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to participate in a new program called the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

The program compensates farmers and landowners who allow their cropland or pastureland to be used for certain conservation practices, like planting warm-season grasses or creating wetlands.

"This is an exciting initiative that will bring an estimated \$17 million in new federal funds to the state over the next 15 years," said Cappabianca, an Erie County Democrat.

The program is a partnership between the USDA and states to expand participation in the Conservation Reserve Program. CREP is targeted to address state and nationally significant problems. A voluntary program, it was authorized by the Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act of 1996.

CREP uses financial incentives to encourage farmers and other landowners to sign 10- to 15-year contracts to remove land from agricultural production and grow habitat. The harvest is shared by everyone in the state, in the form of cleaner streams, more abundant game and wildlife and a host of economic benefits.

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The program will affect less than 2 percent of the cropland in the state, but when fully implemented, CREP is expected to prevent 33,000 tons of sediment and more than 2 million pounds of nitrogen and phosphorous from entering the Susquehanna and Potomac river basins.

"In addition to the important environmental benefits of the program, CREP will help offset pressure on farmers to sell their land for development and insulate producers against future drought," Cappabianca said.

In Pennsylvania, up to 100,000 acres of cropland and marginal pastureland will be eligible for enrollment in CREP. The 20-county area chosen covers more than 12,000 square miles and represents the most intensively cultivated areas of the state. Only highly erodible cropland and buffers along streams will be eligible.

Landowners in the following counties are encouraged to call their county USDA-Farm Service Agency for more information on how they can enroll: Adams, Bedford, Berks, Chester, Columbia, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Montour, Northumberland, Perry, Schuylkill, Snyder, Somerset, Union and York.

If the program proves successful in this first phase, there is a possibility the program will be expanded, allowing the state to partner with the federal government on other vital issues, like farmland preservation and acid mine drainage.

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**Filing deadline for home heating program extended**

HARRISBURG, Jan. 28 -- The filing deadline for the state's energy assistance program has been extended, according to state Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie, who encourages qualified residents to apply.

"If you missed the earlier deadline, you still have time to apply," Cappabianca said. "The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program has received more federal dollars and the deadline for applications has been extended until the end of February. While this doesn't solve the problem of high home heating oil prices, it can be an extra help to families or individuals who qualify."

The federally funded program, run by the Department of Public Welfare, helps low-income families pay for home-heating fuel sources in the winter. Applications have been accepted since Nov. 15 and will be accepted until Feb. 29.

"You do not have to own a home or qualify for public assistance to be eligible for energy assistance," Cappabianca said.

Grants are based on income, family size, type of heating fuel and regional cost of living. This year, a family of four with an annual income of up to \$18,370 may qualify for the program. Last winter, the average grant was \$230.

The crisis grant portion of the program, which helps families with heating emergencies, including mechanical breakdown or fuel shortages, runs through March 15. Crisis grants of up to \$250 are awarded to families who qualify. Last winter, the average grant was \$193.

For additional information or an application, contact Cappabianca's office at 453-7639. Information also may be obtained by calling DPW's toll-free information line at 800-692-7462, between 8:30 a.m. and 4:45 p.m. weekdays.

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### **A helping hand or election-year rhetoric?**

HARRISBURG, Feb. 8 -- A tax break for property owners, more funding for education and expansion of health-care coverage are all included in the 2000-01 General Fund budget -- all Democratic agenda items touted for the past four or more years -- all potential election-year rhetoric, according to state Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie.

"I am genuinely pleased to see the governor come on board with so many of our ideas," Cappabianca said. "However, until I see the final budget, I'm going to remain cautious and will continue to work for the issues that affect every family in Pennsylvania -- education and property tax reform and containing health-care costs."

Cappabianca, who's participated in the budget process long enough to know the many obstacles that must be overcome from budget introduction to final passage, pointed to the need for real long-term property tax relief.

"A \$100 refund is a step, but it certainly is not the answer to the problem of reforming the property tax system in the state," Cappabianca said. "Sure \$100 is good, but what will property owners receive next year? For the past four years, I have been pushing for a plan that would reform the system and reduce property taxes substantially over five years. While property taxes are lowered, the state will look at new ways to fund education."

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Cappabianca also lent his support to a plan to more evenly distribute special education dollars.

"The current system distributes state money unevenly to school districts, because it is based on a formula that reflects an assumed incidence rate of special-needs children in school districts, rather than accounting for the real difference in school district needs," Cappabianca said. "Our plan would guarantee that every district would be reimbursed for at least one-half of what it spent on special education the previous year."

Cappabianca also supports an initiative that would use the state's tobacco settlement money to provide health insurance coverage for the state's uninsured and another proposal that would expand the state's Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly program, eliminating the Needs Enhancement Tier or PACENET, portion of the program.

"It is wrong that health care should be relegated to the role of a luxury because prescription drug costs and medical service charges are skyrocketing," Cappabianca said.

"We must do something to help seniors and the working poor and it can't be a Band-Aid that only sticks for one year -- an election year. With a budget surplus nearing the \$1 billion point, we have the ability to enact meaningful reforms and changes."

The 2000-01 spending plan includes a record \$643.5 million in tax cuts and rebates for homeowners and businesses.

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### **Bringing agriculture into the classroom**

HARRISBURG, Feb. 10 -- What do you get when you cross 100 teachers with training that provides firsthand information on how to implement agriculture in the classroom? A new appreciation of the how the agricultural industry impacts every segment of life and creative lesson plans for students, according to state Rep. Italo Cappabianca, Democratic chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee.

"Each year, the Agriculture Awareness Foundation of Pennsylvania provides 'Agriculture in the Classroom' teachers workshops," said Cappabianca. "These six-day workshops train teachers from across the state in the art of agricultural learning, which many workshop alumni have incorporated in new and innovative ways in the classroom."

Some of the projects developed by alumni include classroom units based on the agricultural inputs that go into making pizza, composting in an aquarium and a barnyard animal identification project to teach urban school children about rural Pennsylvania.

"This is a wonderful program that promotes education and a broader understanding of the agricultural industry and how it has advanced over the years," Cappabianca said. "If we begin early to talk about this exciting industry, we may be able to interest more young people in pursuing careers in agriculture."

Workshops will be held July 16-21 this year on the main campus of Penn State University. Teachers interested in participating should make reservations by April 15.

For additional information, teachers should call Pat Sueck at 717-862-3486 or Carol Ann Gregg at 724-458-6108.

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**Honored for caring about others**

HARRISBURG, Feb. 10 -- The Pennsylvania Chapter of the National Social Workers recognized the achievements of state Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie, by naming him Legislator of the Month.

"This is a great honor and one that I know I always will cherish," Cappabianca said. "The organization comprises professionals who dedicate their lives to helping others. I'm pleased that I have been able to make a contribution to their efforts through the legislative process."

Rick Ferko, chairman of the Northwestern Division, nominated Cappabianca as the Millennium Legislator of the Month, noting that 1999 was a year marked by hardship for Cappabianca, who was asked to face great physical challenges.

"His determination, perseverance and courage through this ordeal made him a class act," Ferko said in nominating the legislator. "Representative Cappabianca is an outstanding legislator and a distinguished gentleman."

Cappabianca, who serves as Democratic chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, is dedicated and devoted to residents of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legislative District and all Pennsylvanians.

In public office since 1978, he has served as the chairman of the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee, state federal coordinator of the National Conference on Committees, state federal coordinator of the National Conference of State Legislators and vice chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

In addition to the recent honor, he was awarded the Giuseppe Massini Association Man of the Year Award in 1987 and is a proud member of the Son's of Italy, East Erie Turners, Saint Paul's Holy Name Society, Erie Club and the Giuseppe Massini Civic Association.

Cappabianca said he looks upon his privilege of representing citizens of Erie as an honor and will continue to support and fight for programs that strengthen the education and health-care systems available to residents. Additionally, he said he would look for new opportunities to promote economic development in the region.

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**Call to action on falling milk prices**

HARRISBURG, March 6 -- Pennsylvania's dairy farmers, still reeling from last year's drought, may be facing a larger battle -- eking out a living on ever-falling milk prices, according to state Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie.

Cappabianca, Democratic chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, is calling for hearings on falling milk prices. Several other members of the committee joined Cappabianca in requesting a hearing. They signed a letter sent to committee Chairman Raymond Bunt, R-Montgomery.

"The budgets of family dairy farmers in our state are bleeding badly," Cappabianca said. "Over the past year our farmers suffered low commodity prices and devastating drought conditions. Now they are encountering yet another obstacle: extremely low prices for their milk."

Milk prices today are equivalent to those offered in the 1970s, yet production costs continue to rise. The problem is compounded by increased fuel prices.

"Farmers want to know why the prices are falling and so do we," Cappabianca said. "Farmers are concerned that price gouging may be occurring. Pennsylvania farmers deserve answers and they deserve help."

According to news reports, in January farmers received \$12 for every 100 pounds of milk, despite the fact that it cost about \$19 to produce. Milk prices paid to farmers are the lowest in 22 years.

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Industry experts point to swings in milk production as the driving force behind the volatile prices. Milk production grew 3.8 percent in 1999, which is greater than the demand for dairy products.

As a result of the disparity in supply and demand, the Basic Formula Price dropped from \$16.27 per ton in January 1999 to \$11.26 in May. It rose in September, due to concern about dry weather, to \$16.26. Prices then declined to \$9.63 in December.

"Dealing with yet another economic blow can be very frustrating to dairy farmers," Cappabianca said.

"We tried to take a proactive approach to the issue by way of authorizing entry into the Northeast Dairy Compact. Unfortunately, despite our action, that legislation may never bear fruit because of inaction on the federal level. We tried to help farmers through drought relief, yet the final package was inadequate to sustain this kind of one-two punch. It's time for the House of Representatives step up to the plate and take a hard look at the issue.

"The 1999 drought, the lack of a compact and now seriously depressed prices could prove to be a deadly combination for our dairy industry -- the largest sector of the agricultural economy," he said.

Cappabianca pointed out that while some believe the solution should rest in the hands of federal government, it is Pennsylvania family farmers that are hurting. It will be the state's problem if their businesses fail.

"A thorough review at the state level is not only necessary, it is overdue," Cappabianca said.

In the meantime, some Pennsylvania dairy farmers have talked about filing a class action lawsuit.

"Farmers contribute greatly to the economic stability of Pennsylvania's economy. They provide food and fiber products to the state and the nation," Cappabianca said. "If our farmers suffer, so do consumers."

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### **Calling for aid to dairy farmers**

HARRISBURG, March 15 -- State Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie, called a recent increase in the milk premium a necessary step but cautioned that while it offers a short-term fix for farmers dealing with rising fuel costs, it is not the answer to the underlying problem.

"Earlier this month I called for hearings on falling milk prices. While I anticipate these will be scheduled, yesterday's move by the Milk Marketing Board to increase the premium by 21 percent may provide a safety net that will help farmers through the current crisis," said Cappabianca, who is the Democratic chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee.

"However, this doesn't answer the question of why milk prices today are equivalent to those offered in the 1970s. Farmers faced a drought last year and now falling milk prices and rising production costs. Something has to be done to protect this important segment of our economy."

In January, farmers received \$12 for every 100 pounds of milk, despite the fact that it cost about \$19 to produce. Milk prices paid to farmers are the lowest in 22 years.

The dairy premium increase is the largest in Pennsylvania's history but is not the first. Because of the change, consumers will likely notice a 3-cent to 4-cent increase per gallon of milk, to take effect April 1.

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"I hope that consumers will understand the need for this slight increase in milk prices," Cappabianca said. "If we want to continue to produce wholesome and fresh milk and dairy products in Pennsylvania, we must lend a helping hand to the farmers."

Additionally, Cappabianca is co-sponsor of a House resolution urging Congress to move forward with the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact, providing Pennsylvania the opportunity to participate. The resolution is expected to be introduced later this month.

"Last year, following much debate and several public hearings, Pennsylvania legislators voted to participate in the compact. This was a proactive approach to helping Pennsylvania's farmers," Cappabianca said.

"Despite our efforts, Pennsylvania may not benefit from the compact because of inaction on the federal level. Through this resolution we hope to again pave the way for Pennsylvania's inclusion."

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### **Funding a cure for cancer**

HARRISBURG, March 22 -- State Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie, said he would not give up his quest to set aside a portion of the state's share of the national tobacco settlement to further cancer research and provide funding assistance for free clinics around the state.

Earlier this week, the legislator had prepared amendments to a bill (H.B. 445) that would have accomplished those goals, but because of a parliamentary ruling, he was unable to offer those amendments.

"I am not giving up on either of these amendments, which I know are important to saving the lives of so many," Cappabianca said. "As someone who is fighting cancer, I know what challenges people face as they strive to beat the odds. With a permanent funding stream, perhaps the medical community could find a cure."

Cappabianca pointed to the fact that tobacco has long been known to contribute to the incidence of cancer. His amendment would have established the Pennsylvania Cancer Research Fund, using 25 percent of all money the state receives annually from the tobacco settlement. The fund would be used to provide grants to support efforts to find a cure.

A second amendment would have set up an appropriation of up to \$1 million annually for 25 years for use by nonprofit, free clinics.

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"This is critical to ensuring that every Pennsylvanian has access to quality health care. Not everyone can afford to pay for health insurance and without some type of coverage, out-of-pocket expenses can become exorbitant," Cappabianca said. "No one should have to go without seeking treatment, but sadly this is happening. Some people seek medical treatment only as a last resort, when their condition has worsened."

A number of free clinics currently operate throughout the state, but a great deal of energy is devoted to finding the funds to keep the doors of the clinic open and purchase proper supplies. Under Cappabianca's amendment, clinics that provide free medical and dental care through the use of volunteer health-care professionals would be eligible to apply for grants to finance their activities. One particular free clinic, St. Pauls, is located in Erie and has assisted more than 18,000 patients free of charge since November 1993.

"I may not have been able to offer these amendments this time, but I will look to include them in future proposals dealing with distributing the state's share of the tobacco settlement," Cappabianca said. "If we act in a fiscally responsible manner and both save and allocate portions of the estimated \$11 billion the state is expected to receive over the next 25 years, we can make a difference in so many lives."

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### **Legislator hopes to help others**

HARRISBURG, March 31 -- State Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie, hopes to further cancer research and help other patients as he works to overcome the latest obstacle in his path -- a new mass found on his brain.

Cappabianca met with his physician, Dr. Elio DeMeira, this afternoon to talk about the results of a brain scan earlier this week. The scan showed a mass, but a biopsy to determine if the mass is scar tissue from earlier surgery or cancer has not been done. Cappabianca remains optimistic and is confident.

"I decided to have the scan done when my wife and brother noticed that my equilibrium seemed off," Cappabianca said. "I feel strong and healthy and have complete trust and faith in the doctors that handle brain tumors in patients."

Cappabianca underwent surgery to remove a cancerous tumor last July at St. Vincent's Medical Center. Following a brief convalescence, he returned to his duties representing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legislative District.

Cappabianca is running in the April 4 primary for re-election to a 12<sup>th</sup> term in the House and expects to lead a normal life. He continues to work full-time.

"I haven't allowed this to interfere with my ability to represent residents or with my schedule and I want to assure everyone that the current situation won't keep me from performing my duties as state representative," Cappabianca said. "The needs of Erie residents still remain my top concern."

Cappabianca hopes that his own experience will help other cancer patients.

"My goal is to assist other patients with the latest technology to control the disease," Cappabianca said.

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**Want to be a farmer when you grow up?**

HARRISBURG, March 31 -- Children dream of becoming astronauts, doctors and firefighters when they grow up, but how many dream of becoming farmers? State Rep. Italo Cappabianca, Democratic chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, would like to increase interest in farming careers by educating youth.

The Erie legislator's vehicle is an age-old program that has been modernized to meet the needs of today's agricultural community -- the Future Farmers of America. Earlier this week he sent a letter to Gov. Thomas Ridge and the Appropriations Committee chairmen in both the House and Senate, asking them to increase the budget line item for FFA to \$100,000 for the next fiscal year.

"This national organization is dedicated to preparing members for leadership and careers in the science, business and technology of agriculture," Cappabianca said. "In my opinion, the FFA has done an extraordinary job with limited resources. The programs supported by this appropriation go a long way toward encouraging the kind of character development and commitment to agriculture that we look for in public policy initiatives coming from this General Assembly."

In the letter, Cappabianca stated that an increase in the FFA appropriation would be "further evidence of the commitment that we maintain for the development of young leaders for this new century." It was the General Assembly that created the Agriculture and Rural Youth Development Act, which was designed to provide operating and capital assistance grants to 4-H and FFA chapters across the state.

Additionally, Cappabianca pointed to a funding shortfall in vocational education programs in many small rural high schools.

"An increase in the Future Farmers line item would further allow young people to engage in leadership programs that can only enhance the positive life experiences that a quality FFA program has to offer," Cappabianca said.

Pennsylvania's FFA currently has more than 8,500 members and membership increased over the past several years. The organization is the largest intercurricular youth organization in the country and Pennsylvania is home to the largest FFA chapter in the country (W.B. Saul in Philadelphia).

The current funding level of \$63,000 allows FFA to support activities such as the Legislative Leadership Conference, Made for Excellence (a personal development conference) and career development team competitions in over 20 skill areas. Additionally, funds are used to recognize outstanding agriculture leadership and accomplishments of tomorrow's agricultural leaders. Less than 5 percent of all funding is used for administrative costs.

"Pennsylvania continues to be a leader in the agriculture industry," Cappabianca said. "This didn't happen by accident. It happened because the state took a genuine interest in agriculture as an industry. If we want to continue to be a leader, however, we need to begin educating our youth about the possibility of careers in the science, business and technology of agriculture. We need bright, well-educated young people to look at agriculture as a career option that ranks right up there with careers in education, engineering or medicine."

An amendment to increase the FFA appropriation will likely be offered when the House considers the state budget the week of April 10.

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**State budget takes on Erie cast**

HARRISBURG, April 11 -- Two amendments that will support Erie projects and that were penned by state Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie, were included in the state's General Fund budget proposal. State Rep. Linda Bebko-Jones, D-Erie, offered the amendments in his absence.

One of Cappabianca's amendments would appropriate \$200,000 for health-care services at St. Paul's Free Clinic in Erie.

"These funds will help save lives," Cappabianca said. "St. Paul's Free Clinic provides an important service in the community, offering health care to those who may not be able to afford health-care insurance or are unable to pay out-of-pocket medical costs."

Cappabianca's second amendment would promote Erie's economy by appropriating \$1.55 million for PennPorts. PennPorts focuses on economic enhancement of ports in Philadelphia, Erie and Pittsburgh. The amendment would restore funding to the 1999-2000 level. In the governor's proposal, funds had been reduced for the line item.

"These funds are used to generate port and shipping-related jobs, as well as to assist Pennsylvania firms in exporting their products," Cappabianca said.

The House added more than 100 amendments to the state's proposed \$19.7 billion General Fund budget. The House passed the budget bill (S.B. 1) Monday night. It now goes to the Senate for consideration.

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### **Cappabianca out of surgery**

HARRISBURG, April 11 -- State Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie, remains a candidate for a new gene therapy procedure that could change the future of cancer treatment.

Cappabianca underwent surgery to remove a recurrent brain tumor this morning at University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. By noon he was out of surgery and in recovery. He is now resting comfortably and is listed in fair condition.

According to a hospital spokeswoman, the surgery went as expected and Cappabianca did well. The spokeswoman said he was joking throughout Monday evening and today before the procedure.

Cappabianca cautioned surgeons that if they removed any more of his brain he would become Republican.

Ian Pollack, M.D., performed the surgery. Cappabianca is expected to remain in the hospital for about a week.

The tumor was taken to the lab, where a portion is to be processed and its cells exposed to a virus. Later the cells will be combined with genes to create an experimental vaccine, which when injected will recognize and attack tumor cells.

Cappabianca could begin the therapy in about a month. This will mark the first phase of a clinical study using genetically engineered anti-tumor vaccine to treat brain tumors. Cappabianca will be the first human to participate in the study. His one request is that the gene be named the "Italo" gene.

According to researchers at the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, who are conducting the study, the experimental therapy has proven to be effective in animals.

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**Cappabianca to students: 'You can attain your goals'**

HARRISBURG, May 8 -- As thousands of students prepare to graduate from high school, state Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie, reminds students interested in pursuing higher education goals that now is the time to begin thinking about financial aid.

"Pennsylvania students are very fortunate to have the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency to help them meet the financial obligations that come with pursuing higher education," Cappabianca said. "Through PHEAA, a student's financial status need not be an obstacle in meeting educational goals."

Because of a change in the formula for awarding state grants, the maximum grant will be increased by \$100 and more students will qualify for state assistance. The formula change will allow full-time students to receive up to \$3,200 and part-time students up to \$1,600.

Additionally, the state grant application period has been extended from May 1 to Aug. 1 for first-time applications and those with circumstances that warrant special consideration.

Cappabianca has information about various PHEAA financial aid programs available in his office, which is located at 1216 W. 26<sup>th</sup> St., Erie. Students and their parents also can obtain information by visiting the PHEAA Web site at [www.pheaa.org](http://www.pheaa.org).

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### **Lending a hand to farmers**

HARRISBURG, May 11 -- Residual effects from the 1999 drought continue to reach into the pockets of farmers. State Rep. Italo Cappabianca, Democratic chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, is supporting efforts to lift a cap on assistance to farmers so the bleeding can be stopped and the financial impacts of the drought can finally end for family farmers.

"Several farmers have been forced to sell out, while others have been left waiting with outstretched hands for payments. Still others have little recourse but to call the Department of Agriculture and ask them to placate suppliers and lenders," Cappabianca said. "This is a horrible injustice for these self-made men and women, who continue to follow the rules only to learn that another obstacle has been placed between them and recovery from last year's devastating drought."

At a committee meeting this week, Cappabianca made a motion to report a bill (S.B. 1417) out of committee and is supporting the efforts of other Democratic legislators who wrote to Republican Leader John Perzel asking that a vote be scheduled on the bill. The bill would remove the 75 percent cap on assistance for farmers.

"This was an arbitrary cap that was set by the state and then tied to federal relief," Cappabianca said. "By not removing that cap we are shortchanging farmers of state assistance. I simply don't understand why we need to punish the farmers this way. Haven't they been through enough with last year's drought?"

Cappabianca feels the removal of the assistance cap is vitally important to the financial health and viability of many family farmers across the state.

"Family farmers contribute greatly to the state's economy. They work hard and their product helps to feed thousands," Cappabianca said. "We must do everything we can to give them the helping hand they need and this includes helping them to put the drought of 1999 behind them."

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### **Budget has an eye for Erie**

HARRISBURG, May 18 -- Although he couldn't be in Harrisburg to vote for the 2000-01 state budget, state Rep. Italo Cappabianca said he felt the budget was a good start and held promise for providing more state dollars to Erie.

"As a long-time legislator, I always look upon election year budgets with a slightly critical eye. After all, this is the year we all want to grab the attention of voters," Cappabianca said. "I must say, though, this spending plan is reflective of many of the local needs I've identified in the way of increased funding for important projects, like PennPorts, higher education and tourism promotion, as well as some movement toward property tax relief and a positive business climate in Pennsylvania."

The \$20.24 billion General Fund budget includes \$774 million in tax cuts, of which \$330 million will be returned directly to homeowners in the form of a one-time \$100 rebate.

One of the most important line items for Erie is an additional \$3 million above the governor's original request for PennPorts, or \$14.29 million.

"I hope to see some of these additional funds directed to Erie, which currently is in the midst of a positive economic growth spurt," Cappabianca said. "Our ports are an important facet of our economy's success."

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Additional tourist promotion funding has been earmarked for accredited zoos, of which Erie is one of eight in the state.

Finally, the budget includes increases for state system colleges and universities, including the Pennsylvania State University, and a \$500,000 increase over the current year for the Osteopathic Hospital of Erie.

"This budget is reflective of many of the needs I've worked for during the last several years," Cappabianca said.

For 2000-01, the budget calls for a 3 percent increase in the basic education subsidy and a 9 percent increase in special education funding.

Noticeably absent is funding for Head Start, class size reduction and full-day kindergarten.

Also missing is funding for the Women, Infants and Children program, or WIC, and an expansion of the Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly, or PACE.

"When I return to Harrisburg, I hope to address the WIC issue, which is so critical to the healthy development of many children, through the use of tobacco settlement funds and look for ways to make prescription drugs more affordable to seniors," Cappabianca said. "If you look at the budget, you will notice there is no tobacco settlement appropriation. This is a healthy source of funding, which I feel should be used to fund important health care programs, as well as cancer research."

Another plus for families is a reduction in the state's inheritance tax.

The new budget calls for the elimination of the tax on assets transferred from a child to a parent (currently 6 percent); a 3 percent decrease for transfers between brothers and sisters (currently 15 percent); and a 1.5 percent decrease on any transfer from parents to children, or grandparents to grandchildren (currently 6 percent).

On the economic growth front, the budget includes a 2 percent drop in the state's Capital Stock and Franchise Tax, which will save businesses more than \$270 million.

"By dropping the Capital Stock and Franchise Tax, we are opening the doors to economic growth in Pennsylvania," Cappabianca said. "We will be a business-friendly state, attracting new business and industry, as well as providing the impetus for many of our businesses to grow. All of this means a stronger economic base for communities and more living wage jobs today and into the future."

Cappabianca said that despite the rosy picture painted by the budget, his fight isn't over.

"We still have much to do to provide high-quality, affordable health care for everyone and ensure a quality education for all of our students, no matter where they live.

"Additionally, we need to find a way to permanently reduce property taxes and target tax cuts to industries that create jobs," Cappabianca said. "We have a bright future and with state surpluses nearing the \$1 billion mark, we have the means to make that future work for every family."

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**Cappabianca opposes elimination of federal tax exemption for ethanol production**

HARRISBURG, June 2 -- State Rep. Italo Cappabianca, Democratic chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, has come out in strong opposition to federal legislation that would increase America's dependence on foreign oil by discouraging production of ethanol, a gasoline additive made from corn.

The anti-ethanol legislation, introduced in Congress by U.S. Rep. Phil English, R-Erie, would eliminate a 10-year tax incentive program enacted by Congress.

"In 1995, Pennsylvanians used 65 million gallons of ethanol blended into 654 million gallons of gasoline," Cappabianca said.

"Ethanol reduces our dependence on foreign oil, reduces carbon monoxide emissions and ozone levels, and safely replaces toxic octane enhancers in gasoline, such as benzene, toluene and xylene.

"Reducing the partial federal tax exemption for ethanol not only will increase the price of gas for all Americans, but will also hurt this nation's farmers," Cappabianca said. "Pennsylvania alone produces between 100 million to 300 million bushels of corn a year that could be used for ethanol production."

The Government Accounting Office reports that without the tax exemption on ethanol, the price of reformulated gasoline could increase by 3 cents to 5 cents per gallon. This increase would cost Pennsylvania consumers as much as an additional \$85 million annually for motor fuel.

Further, Cappabianca noted, removing the partial excise tax exemption on ethanol would reduce prices for grains, oilseeds, meat, poultry and dairy products and would affect the state's economy by reducing the value of all agricultural output, which could result in lost jobs and lower state tax revenues.

Ethanol reduces the demand for imported gasoline by 98,000 barrels a day, and ethanol production is by far the most efficient method of producing liquid transportation fuels.

Industrial corn use, which includes ethanol and sweetener production, now is the second largest consumer use of corn in America. The demand for corn created by the ethanol industry increases crop values -- accounting for approximately 14 cents on every bushel of corn sold last year, or \$1.4 billion.

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### **Local farmers to get boost**

HARRISBURG, June 9 -- State Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie, is declaring victory for local farmers.

Through his efforts and the efforts of other state and regional agricultural leaders, Congress passed a bold new crop insurance program that will make it easier for farmers to get federal assistance and will provide much needed coverage to protect specialty crops.

"Agriculture continues to be the top industry in Pennsylvania and we owe it to our farmers to make sure they have the help they need when times are tough," said Cappabianca, Democratic chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee. "This federal legislation will expand the number of farmers that are eligible for crop insurance and enable them to get crucial assistance from the federal government."

Cappabianca's work to ensure passage of the improved crop insurance bill was part of a coordinated lobbying effort by the Northeast States Association for Agriculture Stewardship. The association, formed last year, advocates regional agricultural interests on the federal level. It is composed of state commissioners of agriculture and legislative agriculture chairs from Maine to Delaware.

The legislation authorizes \$8.2 billion in federal crop insurance premiums, which will increase the premium share paid by the federal government from 40 percent to 59 percent. Additionally, it includes \$7.1 billion in market loss assistance.

"I believe that by presenting our issues within a regional context, we can be effective and present our arguments in a unified way," Cappabianca said. "Our efforts sent a clear and strong message to Washington about the needs of local farmers. I look forward to working with the association in the future on other regional issues."

Changes to the federal crop insurance program were approved by Congress on May 25. The House of Representatives passed the measure by a voice vote and it cleared the Senate, 91-4. President Bill Clinton is expected to sign the measure into law within the next few weeks.

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### **Numerous Erie projects in Capital Budget**

HARRISBURG, June 14 -- Erie was a big winner in this year's capital budget bill, which came before the House of Representatives Tuesday night and was approved by Senate members today. State Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie, and the entire Erie delegation ensured that Erie's needs were met.

"This is, of course, a wish list of projects, many of which require local funding to draw down state monies," Cappabianca said. "Still, this is a positive first step in obtaining the state monies needed to get these important projects off the drawing board."

Among the capital budget line items for Erie is a \$50 million request for the development of a recreational complex on the shores of Lake Erie.

The funding would be used to create public parks, a promenade, wildlife habitat, as well as access roads, a marina and other public facilities.

"Erie's economic picture is intrinsically tied to tourism and the waterfront," Cappabianca said. "Why should we keep the beauty of Erie a secret? Through these projects, we will be opening the shores to even more possibilities."

Cappabianca also saw to it that the Erie Civic Complex (\$5 million) was included in the capital budget. The complex consists of the Tullio Convention Center, the Warner Theatre and the Jerry Uht Park. Funding would be used for general maintenance, operations and upgrades to the complex.

Additional Erie projects include infrastructure improvements, as well as funding to make renovations and repairs to several historic buildings.

"All of these projects are important to the overall health of Erie and its future," Cappabianca said. "Each one is integral to tourism, industrial development and growth. I am pleased that local leaders are willing to take on these projects."

Highlighted Erie projects include:

- Erie City Hall Renovations -- \$1.25 million -- for repairs to the electrical system, heating and ventilation and other mechanical and plumbing systems.

- Erie City Public Works/Parks Consolidation -- \$1.8 million -- for consolidation of operations within the city Bureau of Parks and for maintenance and repairs to the property.
- Erie Public Safety Building/Communication Center -- \$9 million -- for relocation and construction of a new public safety facility for the Police Bureau and the Public Works repair garage.
- City of Erie Historic Building -- \$550,000 -- for renovations and repairs to the Erie Land Lighthouse, the Firefighters Historical Museum and the Dickson Tavern.
- Erie City Golf Course -- \$2.7 million -- for improvement of golf course and playability of three different municipal golf courses owned by Erie.
- Cascade Street Storm Sewer -- \$750,000 -- for replacement of storm sewer and other measures to prevent infiltration and to protect the environment of the Cascade Creek and Presque Isle Bay.
- Bayfront Convention Center -- \$12 million -- for capital costs, including land acquisition, construction of a parking facility and three pedestrian walkways.
- Discovery Square Historic Building -- \$5 million -- for restoration of the Customs House and the Cashier's House and to acquire additional properties to enhance the cultural complex in downtown Erie.
- Watson-Curtze Mansion Land Acquisition -- \$500,000 -- for land acquisition along 5<sup>th</sup> Street in Erie to be used for parking and visitor access to the mansion.
- Erie Zoo -- \$5 million -- for expansion, including space for parking, repair and maintenance and storage facilities, as well as a new indoor and outdoor zoo exhibit space for animals, botanical gardens and historical gardens.
- East 12<sup>th</sup> Street Industrial Park -- \$3 million -- for acquisition of vacant property on East 12<sup>th</sup> Street and to remediate the site and construct a new complex to service smaller manufacturer needs.
- Erie City Brownfield/KOZ projects -- \$1.9 million -- for recycling of three inner-city brownfields industrial projects, which will bring over 65 acres of marketable scarce industrial land on to the tax rolls.

The bill now goes to the governor for consideration.

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### **Enhancing opportunities in agriculture**

HARRISBURG, Aug. 11 -- State Rep. Italo Cappabianca, Democratic chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, is pleased with the state's \$90 million investment in agriculture infrastructure announced this week. He hopes this is the beginning of a larger state investment in agriculture.

"There is little doubt that farmers are a major driving force in Pennsylvania's economy," Cappabianca said. "So when the news of the state's investment in agricultural infrastructure was made, I was elated. We are sending a message to farmers and future farmers that Pennsylvania will make a larger investment in the industry -- we value the efforts of farmers and we want to see the industry prosper."

According to Cappabianca, D-Erie, the \$90 million commitment from the state will be used to fund worthwhile projects. Projects include renovations to the Farm Show Complex, funding for teaching and research at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Veterinary Medicine and construction of a new livestock center in Centre County.

"The Farm Show Complex, although aging, continues to be an integral part of ongoing efforts to market Pennsylvania's agricultural industry," Cappabianca said. "Unless we have a way to get the word out and say 'look everyone, Pennsylvania farmers are still the best,' we will not be helping farmers realize their economic goals."

Advancing veterinary science and providing the facilities to promote healthier animals, according to Cappabianca, is a positive benefit for everyone.

"Pennsylvania has fallen behind other states in funding agricultural research," Cappabianca said. "As the industry continues to evolve and change due to global competition, strict environmental standards, food safety concerns and technological advances, Pennsylvania farmers must be prepared to meet the new standards and future demands for production. This is a key in enhancing opportunities in agriculture."

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**Preparing future agricultural professionals**

HARRISBURG, Aug. 31 -- Students planning to enter an agriculture-related field can apply for loan forgiveness, according to state Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie.

"Since 1992, the Agriculture Education Loan Forgiveness Program has helped to create a new generation of agricultural professionals," Cappabianca said. "Agriculture and agriculture-related fields are not always the most glamorous jobs, but they are essential to the people and the economy of Pennsylvania. These are viable professions that help to nourish millions of people in Pennsylvania and around the country."

Cappabianca is the Democratic chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee.

Through the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency program, students can receive loan forgiveness of up to \$2,500 on PHEAA-guaranteed student loans. Applications must be received by Nov. 15.

The program is available to students who have received degrees in agricultural fields or veterinary medicine, who remain in Pennsylvania and return to work on a family farm or practice veterinary medicine that includes large agricultural animals.

Veterinarians must be certified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to sign health certificates required for the interstate commerce of agricultural animals and animal products. They also must be able to certify regulatory testing for contagious diseases.

For more information or an application, call Cappabianca's office at 814-453-7639, or visit PHEAA's Web site at [www.pheaa.org](http://www.pheaa.org).

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### **Funding for innovative ideas**

HARRISBURG, Sept. 6 -- Farm safety, occupational health issues and emergency response programs are the focus of a state grant program available to farm organizations, volunteer fire companies, ambulance services and rescue squads, according to state Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie.

Organizations have until Oct. 30 to apply for a Farm Safety and Occupational Health Grant of up to \$2,500. Funds must be used to develop and deliver farm safety, occupational health or emergency response programs as they pertain to agriculture.

"If your organization has an innovative or new way of approaching education and safety on farms, then this could be your chance to obtain financial assistance from the state in making the idea a reality," Cappabianca said. "Special emphasis is being placed on how these issues relate to the youth of rural Pennsylvania. If we begin to educate our youth about the importance of agriculture, we can begin to build a new generation of agriculture professionals."

Cappabianca, who is the Democratic chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, has information and applications for the Farm Safety and Occupational Health Grant Program available through his office. For more information, call 453-7639.

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### **A closer look at the voting system**

HARRISBURG, Nov. 21 - State Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie, would like to make every vote count in Pennsylvania.

In an effort to avoid a repeat of the conflict and controversy surrounding the Florida presidential vote re-count, Cappabianca introduced a resolution (H.R. 642) asking the Joint State Government Commission to study Pennsylvania's election procedures and report its findings and recommendations.

"This is a serious issue," Cappabianca said. "Each year we are faced with heightened voter apathy. People don't believe their vote counts and with the recent happenings in the presidential election, we will be hard pressed to convince people that their vote does matter."

Cappabianca's resolution would require commission members to look at Pennsylvania's system of voting, including absentee ballots, voting machines and the potential to implement new technology. The commission will then have six months to report its findings and make recommendations to the General Assembly.

"It is important to all citizens, as well as the legislature and other state and local government officials, to be informed of any flaws in or possible improvements to Pennsylvania's election procedures," Cappabianca said. "By doing so, we will be better prepared to meet the challenges of the next presidential election, as well as municipal and state elections."

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### **A driving force behind transportation**

HARRISBURG, Dec. 22 - State Rep. Italo Cappabianca, D-Erie, has turned his attention to the highways, byways, railways and airways, as he takes the helm as Democratic chairman of the House Transportation Committee.

"House Democratic leadership has made a strong statement about the importance of roads, bridges and other transportation needs in western Pennsylvania and Erie by naming me chairman of the Transportation Committee," Cappabianca said. "I will put my energy behind finding solutions to the transportation needs of people, business and industry, helping to ensure that Pennsylvania has a strong transportation network, which is so critical to building a strong economy."

Cappabianca said that he enjoyed serving as Democratic chairman of the House Agriculture Committee and recognizes how important agriculture is to Pennsylvania's economy and to its people.

"Agriculture continues to be the top industry in Pennsylvania, annually feeding millions in this state and around the country," Cappabianca said. "My time with the committee was well spent. Now I look forward to devoting the same energy to transportation issues."

In Erie, Cappabianca said he would turn his attention to moving forward the Bayfront Highway and roads around the Erie Zoo.

"An area survives by its roads and bridges," Cappabianca said. "As chairman, I will strive to see many of these and other important projects in Erie, Erie County and around the state, advanced."

As part of his duties as chairman, Cappabianca also will serve as a member of the State Transportation Commission, which prioritizes road projects in the state; the Rail Freight Advisory Committee; the Pennsylvania Pedacycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee; and the Motor Carrier Advisory Committee.

"The Transportation Committee addresses every form and mode of transportation in Pennsylvania," Cappabianca said. "With two major interstates bisecting the state, as well as a host of rail, air and bicycle byways, there is much to be done. I look forward to returning to Harrisburg in January, rolling up my sleeves and getting to work."