

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Office of Legislative Information
G01 South Office Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Tom Rathbun (717) 787-7895

HARRISBURG, Jan. 3 -- Thomas A. Tangretti was sworn into office today for his first term in the state House of Representatives.

Tangretti, the former Westmoreland County Controller, will represent the 57th Legislative District through 1990.

The Greensburg lawmaker joined his colleagues as state Supreme Court Justice Stephen Zappala administered the oath of office in ceremonies at the Capitol on Tuesday, officially opening the 173rd Session of the state's General Assembly.

Tangretti also participated in the nomination of former Majority Leader James J. Mandarino, D-Monessen, as the new Speaker of the House.

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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CONTACT: Tom Rathbun (717) 787-7895

HARRISBURG, Jan. 5 -- State Rep. Thomas Tangretti, D-Greensburg, is inviting residents of the 57th Legislative District to attend an open house at his new district office on Thurs., Jan. 19, from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Tangretti, who was sworn into office on January 3, is conducting the open house to give constituents an opportunity to meet his staff and become familiar with the services his office provides.

"My office can assist area residents with a variety of state government services, including applications for vehicle registrations and licenses, student grants and loans, and senior citizens benefit programs," said Tangretti. "A state representative is the intermediary between the people and what can often be perceived as a cold, impersonal government. I invite the people of my district to familiarize themselves with the services available to them."

Tangretti's new district office is located at 327 South Main Street in Greensburg, phone 834-6400. Office hours are from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, and 9 am to 12 on Saturdays.

Tangretti's legislative assistant at his Greensburg office is Romaine Truxell, who provided constituent services as a member of Congressman John Dent's staff for 15 years.

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1989

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HARRISBURG, Jan. 12 -- House Speaker James J. Manderino, D-Monessen, today announced the appointment of State Rep. Thomas Tangretti, D-Greensburg, to three standing House committees.

Tangretti has been appointed to the Labor Relations, Health and Welfare, and Federal-State Relations Committees.

"I am very pleased with my committee assignments," said Tangretti. "As the former Westmoreland County Controller and former Director of Administration for Mark Lines Inc., my experience in labor/management relations prepares me to serve on the Labor Relations Committee. My experience as a legislative assistant to former Congressman John Dent has prepared me for my appointment to the Federal-State Relations Committee, and I am especially pleased with my appointment to the Health and Welfare Committee. Governor Casey has announced his intent to gear this year's budget toward human services needs, giving me the opportunity to get in on the formation of a new human services policy for the Commonwealth."

Tangretti was sworn in to his 1st term in the House on January 3.

The Jeannette native holds a bachelors degree from IUP and a masters degree in public administration from the University of Pittsburgh.

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op11/1/12/89/tangretti/comm

1989

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CONTACT: Tom Rathbun (717) 787-7895

HARRISBURG, March 2 -- State Rep. Thomas Tangretti, D-Greensburg will be conducting office hours in the Youngwood area on Thurs., March 9.

Tangretti explained he is performing this service for his constituents who may have difficulties traveling to his district office in Greensburg to take care of state government related business. Tangretti intends to establish temporary office hours in a different community each month to make his office more accessible to residents of the 57th Legislative District.

"I will be bringing my office and staff to the Youngwood Municipal Building to meet with residents and give them the opportunity to conduct their business without having to travel to Greensburg," said Tangretti. "This is a great opportunity for me to meet my constituents in Youngwood and the surrounding area, and become more familiar with their community. I hope residents of the entire area will take the time to familiarize themselves with the services my office can provide."

Tangretti will conduct office hours from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the Youngwood Municipal Building.

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op11/3/1/89/tangretti/youngwood

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CONTACT: Bill Patton (717) 787-7895

HARRISBURG, April 6 -- State Rep. Thomas Tangretti, D-Greensburg, will establish a temporary satellite office in the community of Claridge from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Thursday, April 13, at the Bushy Run American Legion.

Tangretti explained this is one of a series of informal visits to municipalities throughout the 57th district to meet personally with constituents and municipal officials.

"I am bringing my office and staff to the Bushy Run American Legion to meet with residents and hear, firsthand, the problems and issues facing the people of the Claridge area," Tangretti said.

"This is a great opportunity for me to meet my constituents and become more familiar with their community. I hope residents of the area will take the time to familiarize themselves with the services my office can provide," said Tangretti.

###bp

op11/4/6/89/tangretti/office

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CONTACT: Bill Patton (717) 787-7895

HARRISBURG, Aug. 23 -- The Borough of Youngwood will receive a \$275,000 state loan to improve its sewage treatment facilities, according to Rep. Thomas Tangretti, D-Westmoreland.

The loan will enable the borough to make improvements to its wastewater facilities, including construction of a 50,000-gallon aerated sludge tank, replacement of an undersized grit chamber, construction of a new flow splitter to the final settling tanks, and the procurement of a new blower, new valves, and new flow meter.

The money for Youngwood was approved at Tuesday's board meeting of the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority, better known as Pennvest. The Pennvest program is designed to provide \$2.5 billion over the next 25 years to improve water and sewer systems statewide.

The loan is for a term of 20 years, with a 1 percent interest rate over the first five years and a 1.686 percent rate for the next 15 years.

"The town would have a lot of trouble paying for this project on its own, yet it is something that must be completed to ensure the public health and facilitate economic development," Tangretti said. "I am pleased the state decided to provide this loan on such favorable terms, because it lets Youngwood finish the project without mortgaging its future."

###bp

op11/8/23/89/tangretti/penvest

1989

*This was
in last Sunday's
Tribune*

*Published
Alleg. T-R
1-14-90*

January 10, 1989

Editor
Greensburg Tribune-Review
P.O. Box 17
Greensburg, PA 15601

To the Editor:

I read with interest a letter in last Sunday's Tribune-Review taking me to task for supporting Rep. Ron Gamble's measure to put warning labels on records which contain offensive lyrics. The legislation, in the form of an amendment to another bill, passed the House in December by a 149-61 vote.

Obviously, the majority of the state House did not feel this bill to be unconstitutional or an infringement of the right of record sellers to do business in Pennsylvania. The legislation will merely give parents a tool to know what their kids are buying and listening to.

The bill would require warning labels be placed on records, tapes and compact discs which describe, advocate or encourage suicide, sodomy, incest, bestiality, sadomasochism, adultery, sexual activity in a violent context, murder and the use of illegal drugs or alcohol.

There have always been songs written about some of these activities, most notably adultery and the use of alcohol, and there always will be such songs. However, the last several years have seen a marked increase in the number of songs which talk explicitly about drug use, suicide and sadomasochism.

(MORE)

1990

(continued from previous page)

Any reasonable person who sees these lyrics written or hears them sung would agree that they are unsuitable for children. But at present, there is no way for parents to know what their kids listen to. Some parents try listening to the records and find them incomprehensible. Their children, however, know what each song is about.

The bill we passed last month does not infringe on anyone's First Amendment rights. It does not ban the sale of records with offensive lyrics, and does not even prohibit their sale to minors. It merely calls attention to the records with such lyrics so that parents can take steps to address the problem at home.

It is a sensible, even-handed approach that I was delighted to lend my support to.

Thomas A. Tangretti

State Representative

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CONTACT: Jim Barnes (717) 787-7895

HARRISBURG, March 28 -- By a vote of 192-0, the House approved a bill authored by state Rep. Tom Tangretti to prohibit possession of a firearm or other dangerous weapon in a courtroom or other court facility.

According to Tangretti, the legislation was prompted by requests from Westmoreland County court officials for a state law to reinforce the county court's ban on concealed weapons.

"There've been far too many tragic occurrences in Pennsylvania courthouses over the years because of concealed weapons," said Tangretti.

"With hundreds of visitors every day, our county courts must take appropriate security measures to protect the public. But they need the authorization of a state statute to carry out those measures in a way that does not conflict with citizens' rights."

The bill, which now goes to the Senate, would make it a criminal offense to bring a dangerous weapon into a court facility for the purpose of committing a crime. Simple possession of such a weapon would constitute a lesser offense. Police, bailiffs and other security and law enforcement personnel would be exempt from the act's prohibitions.

The list of prohibited weapons would include firearms, bombs, grenades, blackjacks, metal knuckles, knives, switchblades, razors and other cutting instruments which serve no common lawful purpose.

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op3/3/28/90/Tangretti/court

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HARRISBURG

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CONTACT: REP. TOM TANGRETTI
(412) 834-6400

TANGRETTI SUPPORTS MOVE TO BLOCK LEGISLATIVE PENSION HIKE;
CALLS FOR MANDATE ON LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Greensburg, April 14 -- State Rep. Tom Tangretti today announced his support for a legal action aimed at blocking a court decision that could substantially raise retirement incomes for lawmakers at considerable cost to taxpayers.

The action was taken recently by House Speaker Robert W. O'Donnell and five first-term members of the House Democratic Caucus.

Tangretti released copies of a letter written to O'Donnell offering his assistance in furthering the action the speaker has taken and asking to join in any additional legal steps that may arise in connection with the pension issue.

At a news conference in Greensburg, Tangretti explained his support by saying, "For my part, I knew what the pension, the salary and the other terms and conditions were when I took this job. At that time, I said I would not participate in any effort to raise legislative salaries or benefits. I meant it then, and I mean it now."

The lawmakers have asked the Commonwealth Court to delay any decision on the pension increase while they prepare further challenges to a lawsuit that seeks to overturn what is now a two-tiered pension system.

-more-

1992

Under the system, legislators who were elected before 1974 are entitled to more generous pensions than those who were elected afterward. The lawsuit that would overturn the split system was filed by two current members and one former member of the House who are asking the court to make the pension rules uniform.

Tangretti said the pension issue is one of a series of legislative reforms that are gathering force in response to what he called a "growing crisis of confidence" and a loss of public faith in political and government processes.

He observed, however, that "the opposition to this action and to the other nascent reforms is formidable and determined. That opposition is further emboldened by the public's lack of awareness of these actions and the limited attention they've received from the media in many parts of the state."

In his letter to O'Donnell, the 57th District legislator stated, "In order to achieve the goal of reform and encourage your efforts, I believe that public expressions of support are necessary at this time."

Tangretti also disclosed the contents of a letter he wrote to Majority Leader H. William DeWeese in March 1991 calling for the legislature to voluntarily cut its expenses in salary and benefits across the board.

The lawmaker, who in three years has turned back to the House almost \$15,000 in unused expenses, said, "I believe I've done in my personal accounts what I've asked the House to do as a body."

Tangretti also disclosed he has claimed a total of only \$780 in mileage reimbursements for travel within his district in all of the past three years. The figure, he said, is one that could be claimed in only three months by a legislator taking the standard mileage allowance.

Tangretti, who also has proposed a major overhaul of the state budget process and is a co-sponsor of lobbying reform, said he made the disclosures to bring the pension issue and his response to the issue to the forefront of the current state elections and to help make legislative reform a central issue of this year's campaigns.

"Unless we do a better job of communicating these reform issues to the public, those issues are dead," he declared.

"As the public becomes more fully aware of these developments, I'm confident the voters will provide the mandate and the momentum to break the current legislative gridlock and propel the movement for reform to a successful conclusion."

###jb

R:newsconf.057

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Office of Democratic Legislative Information

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Jim Barnes (717) 787-7895

HARRISBURG, March 25 -- State Rep. Tom Tangretti has been named by House Speaker H. William DeWeese to serve as his representative on the Joint State Government Commission, a research arm of the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

The commission was created by Act 459 of 1937 and is the longest established research agency of the legislature. Its executive committee consists of seven members of the House and a like number of senators and is chaired by Sen. Roger Madigan of Bradford County.

The commission was created to conduct legislative studies, propose legislation and furnish technical staff assistance to the General Assembly.

In recent years, the commission has completed studies of Pennsylvania's defense-related industries and of the proposed bonus plan for state veterans of the Persian Gulf War. It is currently working on a report for the Legislative Task Force on Government Efficiency and is reviewing the Commonwealth's decedents estate law.

###jb

R:joint.057

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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT

April 5, 1993

Paul J. Koloski
Editorial Editor
Tribune-Review
Cabin Hill Drive
Greensburg, PA 15601

Dear Mr. Koloski:

Over the course of the past several weeks, I've been contacted by a number of persons in the 57th Legislative District calling to tell me of their complaints to County Commissioner Vidmer's office about the recent 46.6% increase in the County millage rates.

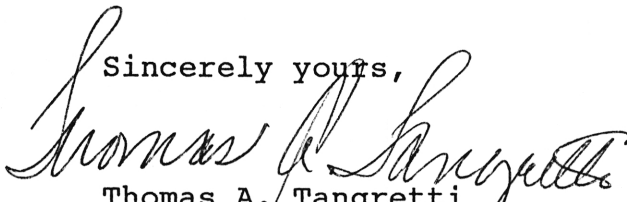
These individuals were told by a member of Mr. Vidmer's staff the tax increase was not the fault of the commissioner but rather that of myself and my legislative colleagues because we didn't pass a tax reform law.

However, it is unlikely that any tax reform proposal could offset or prevent a millage increase the magnitude about which the voters were calling to complain. For that to occur I think Mr. Vidmer and his staff need to examine some of the management practices of the County Administration which includes wrongful discharge suits filed by eight county employees in four different incidents that cost \$238,211 in out of court settlements; a substantial increase in county employment, 334 people since 1985; a prison architectural plan costing \$560,261 thrown out because the total estimated cost for the prison was too high at \$23 million but then awarding subsequent contracts to four additional architectural and consulting firms totalling \$3,890,098.00 for a prison that now will cost in excess of \$30 million. (This does not count a \$33,000.00 expenditure to buy a parcel of land from the Commonwealth that was the original site for the first set of plans that were discarded and therefore useless.)

1993

No Mr. Vidmer, perhaps you should inform your staff when taxpayers call to complain about your recent tax increase vote they should explain that with those kinds of administrative practices all the tax reform in the world won't help.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Thomas A. Tangretti". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Thomas A. Tangretti
State Representative
57th Legislative District

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Jim Barnes (717) 787-7895

HARRISBURG, April 11 -- The House today passed a bill sponsored by Rep. Tom Tangretti giving counties the option to reduce their payroll costs by offering periodic early "retirement windows" to workers who've not yet reached full retirement age.

"This will allow counties to offer voluntary retirement at reduced pension levels as an alternative to furloughs and layoffs and thereby lower their overall payroll expenses," said Tangretti, D-Westmoreland.

"It will give counties greater flexibility and options to balance their budgets besides the harsh alternatives of raising taxes or putting people out of work with no pension income at all."

Tangretti said it's important to note the legislation doesn't mandate an early retirement policy, it merely offers it to counties as an option to employ after studying whether it meets their particular needs. The authorization for early retirement would require approval by the county retirement board and could not be given more than once in any five-year period.

When so authorized, the bill offers county employees who are neither elected officials nor appointees to elected office the opportunity to retire at age 55 with 10 years or service or at any age with 30 years of service.

As an inducement to take early retirement, workers would receive additional credit for 10 percent to 30 percent of their years of service. Most of those who accept the offer would receive reduced pensions except those who were very close to full retirement under the standard pension arrangement.

The bill (H.B. 358) passed the House 126 to 70 and now goes to the state Senate for further consideration. The measure excludes the counties of Allegheny and Philadelphia.

###jb/k

R:pensions.057

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FYI - this
will be sent
to all newspapers.



House of Representatives
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ON COUNTIES
POLICY

Concludes With 40 Laws Passed,
Enforcement Needs Are Overlooked

by Thomas A. Tangretti
Member, Pennsylvania House of Representatives

While in past years, we have allocated increased funding for building more prisons, hiring more corrections staff, and in the year's Special Session on Crime, stiffer penalties, it is now time for us to turn our attention to our first line of defense against crime." - - Report of the House Democratic Policy Committee Task Force on Law Enforcement and Public Safety.

The legislature's special session on crime came to an end in October after a 10-month period that produced 40 laws aimed at curbing criminal behavior.

Only time will tell whether the stiffer penalties, new prisons and streamlined court procedures designed to put convicted criminals on a fast tack to jail really work as long-term crime solutions.

Most legislators, including myself, agree these remedies are needed and voted for them given the criminal violence that is becoming epidemic in today's society. But I believe a fundamental force in the fight against crime is being neglected even though it's as close at hand as the nearest police station.

Until a fuller evaluation of the crime session's effectiveness emerges, what is known is that the front line in the war on crime - the local police departments we depend on most for crime protection - - got nothing in the way of funding and resources, or even much respectful attention, from the special legislative session.

While stiffer punishments were enacted to curb crime, criminals must first be captured. And the alarming fact is that arrests are steadily declining to the point where suspects are apprehended in only about half the cases of serious crime. Successful closures, where the crime is solved, are even less frequent.

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ON COUNTIES
POLICY

House of Representatives

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

HARRISBURG

Crime Session Concludes With 40 Laws Passed,
But Local Law Enforcement Needs Are Overlooked

by Thomas A. Tangretti
Member, Pennsylvania House of Representatives

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Law Enforcement is Key Factor

Longer sentences may deter some criminal conduct, but the decision to commit a crime is still a crap-shoot with odds that appeal to the perpetrator who is determined to take the risk in addition, more and more violent crimes are being committed by strangers who are unknown to their victims, this making the task of apprehension all the more difficult.

An effective police force, along with the preventing crime by its visible presence, is still the only means of apprehending criminals and putting teeth into the law's deterrence. The special session dealt almost entirely with sentencing and incarceration, events that come only after apprehension, arrest and conviction have occurred.

Police Task Force

During the special session, I was privileged to head a legislative task force dealing with the needs of local law enforcement. It completed the first and only examination of local police resources undertaken by the legislature in recent times and the most thorough study of the issue in the state's history. The task force issued a report calling for a stronger state commitment to local law enforcement and sought to continue the legislature's crime session until these needs have been addressed.

The state provides substantial support for a variety of local services including education, roads and streets, mass transit, sewer and water authorities, and parks and recreation. Meanwhile, local police forces - - relying almost entirely on locally generated revenues - - are too often underfunded, understaffed and underequipped for the increasing severity of the tasks we demand of them.

Hearings conducted by the task force across the state demonstrated that local police departments are increasingly caught in a vise of rapidly rising workloads and declining resources. Crime is a statewide problem, so why doesn't the Commonwealth provide them some help?

Crime Up, Cops Down

While all crime increased by 27 percent and violent crime by 52 percent over the past two decades, the number of full-time police officers in the state actually decreased by 7 percent.

During the same period, the legislature enacted only two programs of direct assistance to local law enforcement: the Municipal Police Training Act in 1974 and a program allowing piggyback purchases on state contracts.

The task force hearings covered police funding and operational needs, the status of the federal COPS program, state police enforcement and community crime prevention efforts.

Its findings present a series of recommendations the legislature can perform to support the crime-fighting efforts of local police at minimal cost to state taxpayers.

Legislation Needed

The main recommendations include:

- * enacting a proposed Police Agency Loan program of low-interest financing for police purchases of buildings and facilities, vehicles, equipment and technology. Similar to the highly successful state program for community fire series, local police could obtain two percent loans for up to \$300,000 from a proposed \$20 million bond issue that would cost only 25 cents per state resident per year to service.

As prime sponsor of the bill to create the program, I've received tremendous support for it from police forces throughout Pennsylvania and even from other states as well as from the U.S. Justice Department. Although it has been passed twice by the state House, partisan resistance has kept it locked up in the state Senate.

- * the return by the state of all law enforcement fines currently collected at the municipal level which could be used for local police personnel, training and equipment needs. The revenues to municipalities would amount to \$15 million annually.

- * assessment of a \$25 fee on all criminal convictions, exclusive of minor traffic violations and lesser misdemeanors. Seventy percent of the revenues would be used for municipal police departments and the remainder distributed among the state's 25 regional departments, including start-up costs as an incentive to regionalization.

- * providing that all unspent, lapsed funds appropriated to the Municipal Police Officers Education and Training Commission be used by local police departments for training costs, including overtime pay for officers who are filling in for those being trained. Also, the package would increase reimbursements for local police training costs from 60 percent to 80 percent of an officer's salary while in training and provide management training for police chiefs.

- * requesting the Public Employees Retirement Commission to study the means of establishing a statewide police pension system as an incentive to police recruitment, retention and mobility.

* requesting the legislature's Local Government Commission to study the feasibility of establishing centralized law enforcement record systems at the county level as well as improved police communications coordinated by the counties.

Regional Police

Some observers contend the key to improving police protection in Pennsylvania lies in regionalizing all of the police departments under certain size, apparently in the belief that bigger is necessarily better. That may be so, and the task force provides for incentives to regionalization. However, it must be understood that the choice to combine police forces is essentially a local decision, that it does not guarantee reductions in the cost of police coverage, and that during the 20 years or so that the state has actively promoted regional coverage only 25 of the state's 1,200 departments have chosen to consolidate.

The task force did not set out to restructure Pennsylvania's local police services but to deal with the local law enforcement structure as it currently exists. Besides, when there's a fire in the house, it's usually prudent to call the fire department first. The architects can come later.

Violence Spreading

Throughout the hearings, the task force heard of how violent criminals and drug gangs are operating beyond their usual territories because of increased mobility and a perception that law enforcement capabilities are less formidable in lower-populated areas. Crime experts grimly predict a continuing epidemic of crime as family disintegration, drug addiction, and adverse cultural and economic influences continue to work their ill effects on new generations of youth.

Although the books have been closed on the special crime session, I and others who were involved in the work of the task force will continue to press for effective crime prevention and for attention to the needs of local law enforcement which have been too long neglected by the state.

Representative Tangretti represents the 57th Legislative District of Westmoreland County. He chaired the House Democratic Policy Committee Task Force on Law Enforcement and Public Safety and is a member of the House Local Government Committee and Democratic Chairman of its Subcommittee on Counties.

Crime Session
Box Score

Some 40 Bills were enacted during the special crime session. While they are valuable in their intent, almost all of the bills depend on local police agencies abilities to apprehend and arrest criminals in order to be effective.

Some of the new laws:

- * Require the Governor to act on execution warrants within 90 days.

- * Recognize a "no means no" standard for commission of rape.

- * Provide for limited community notification of sex offenders residing in the neighborhood.

- * Provide "three strike" penalty of 25 - year minimum sentence for third violent felony.

- * Permit use of juvenile records in setting bail and in future trials for adult crime in certain cases.

- * Expand the number of charges for violent crimes in which juveniles may be tried as adults. Currently limited to murder.

- * Authorize a \$146 million bond issue for prison construction projects to handle 2,600 inmates.

- * Give tenant organizations, landlords and prosecutors the ability to evict tenants involved in drug-related activities.

- * Extend the maximum penalty for attempted murder and third-degree murder to 40 years.

- * Require criminals to pay restitution to victims and prohibit criminals from profiting from their crimes.

- * Allow victims' families to testify during the sentencing phase of a first degree murder trial.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Office of Democratic Legislative Information

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Jim Barnes (717) 787-7895

HARRISBURG, Jan. 24 -- State Rep. Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, today sent the following letter to Gov. Thomas Ridge and leaders of the governor's party in the legislature. The letter encourages Republicans to move forward with a bipartisan effort to support and strengthen local law enforcement in Pennsylvania, fulfilling their stated intentions at the close of the Special Session on Crime in October.

Hon. Tom Ridge
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Gov. Ridge,

As we begin the process of adopting a state budget for the coming year, I would again like to call your attention to the need for fiscal policies and strategies that will put Pennsylvania in the forefront of state efforts to support local law enforcement. This approach would be a natural and valuable adjunct to the Special Session on Crime which concluded in October.

Having chaired the hearings of the House Democratic Task Force on Law Enforcement and Public Safety last year, I am convinced that local police effectiveness is critical to achieving further reductions in violent crime. That conviction has been strengthened by recent news reports attributing a nationwide decline in serious crime since 1993 largely to improvements in police methods and capabilities. Appearing in Time and the Philadelphia Inquirer among other media, these reports underscore a point I have made repeatedly in the past year: That for much too long, local police resources and capabilities have been neglected by public policymakers as an important force in the fight against crime.

As Time put it, in its Jan. 15 report on crime reduction, "...the experts are returning to an explanation (for the drop in serious crime) they would have played down in the past: more effective policing strategies. It is respectable once again to believe that cops can have a real impact on crime rates, an opinion that has been seriously out of fashion among professional students of crime."

Thanks to the publicity efforts of the National Institute of Justice, Pennsylvania has already received nationwide recognition for local police agency funding through the Police Agency Loan Program I proposed in House Bill 14. Unfortunately, as I have responded to inquiries from other states like New Jersey, Florida, California and Missouri, I have had to tell them this program still lacks the approval of our own state Senate where it has remained in the Local Government Committee since last April.

-more-

I would welcome a provision in the budget for a modest appropriation to service the interest on a \$20 million state bond issue that would begin a program of low-interest loans to municipal police departments as proposed in H.B. 14. In addition to providing direct funding for purchases of vehicles, structures and equipment, the loans would also serve as a source of matching funds for local police agencies to draw upon the 1994 federal crime bill which expires in the next three years. Timeliness is an important factor, also, in our ability to take advantage of the low interest rates financial markets are expected to offer in the year ahead.

Other recommendations proposed by the Task Force on Law Enforcement and Public Safety include more effective use of current state funding for municipal police training and an expansion of funding for police training, equipment and technological support.

At the close of the special crime session in October, leaders of the House majority made clear an intention to address the needs of local law enforcement during the remainder of the regular session rather than extend the crime session to deal with this matter.

As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, I welcome the prospect of a bipartisan effort to achieve that goal and hope it may begin with the budget proposal you will be presenting to the General Assembly in February.

Sincerely,

Thomas A. Tangretti
Member, House of Representatives

cc: Senate Majority Leader Joseph Loeper
House Republican Leader John Perzel

###jb/b
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Ted W. Hanson (717) 787-7895

HARRISBURG, April 2 -- Among the amendments attached to the state budget during lengthy debate were measures authored by state Rep. Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, intended to aid local law enforcement agencies and provide support services for those suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

The Police Agency Loan Program would establish a low-interest, revolving loan program to help local law enforcement agencies purchase buildings, vehicles and equipment.

Authored by Tangretti, PAL is fashioned after a highly successful state loan program geared toward volunteer emergency companies.

Over the past 20 years, the lawmaker said, the Volunteer Loan Assistance Program has "advanced more than \$170 million to volunteer fire and ambulance companies, making them among the best equipped in the nation."

The unanimous House vote represents startup funding for PAL, which has enjoyed broad-based support in the General Assembly and won the endorsement of law enforcement officials statewide.

Since its introduction in Pennsylvania by Tangretti, PAL has been adopted by the U.S. Justice Department's National Institute of Justice as model legislation for state assistance to local police departments.

The Tangretti amendment, which also must be approved by the Senate, would earmark \$568,000 in startup funding for the program. Tangretti noted legislation is pending which would call for the issuance of a \$20 million state bond to finance the revolving loan fund. The bond issue would require approval in a statewide referendum.

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Alzheimer's support services would receive \$250,000 under another Tangretti amendment which received a unanimous nod from the House.

"Alzheimer's is an insidious disease that has created tremendous hardship for our state's senior citizens and their families," Tangretti said in floor remarks. Adding that resources are spread thinly across the state, Tangretti noted that one support agency in his district has an 11-county service area.

Tangretti said as the population ages, the need for support services for those afflicted with Alzheimer's disease will certainly increase. He cited statistics that indicate "by age 65, one in 10 Pennsylvanians will suffer from Alzheimer's." By age 75, one in five will be diagnosed with the disease, increasing to one in two by age 85.

"Until science discovers a cure, this represents an important step in bringing support services to those who are dealing with the ravages of Alzheimer's," said Tangretti.

A third Tangretti proposal would raise the income threshold to qualify for state pensions to the blind and add \$1.5 million to the program.

The amended budget legislation (H.B. 847) also must be passed by the Senate.

###th/b

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Tangretti introduces consumer protection bill

HARRISBURG, April 29 -- In an effort to aid consumers, state Rep. Tom Tangretti has introduced legislation to prohibit the automatic renewal of retail service contracts without the buyer's consent.

The Westmoreland County Democrat also is warning local residents of an illegal scheme involving the sale of magazine subscriptions and advising them on what to do should they become victims.

Extended service contracts prolong the manufacturer's warranty on large ticket consumer goods.

"What many consumers don't realize is that many contracts can be automatically extended for a longer period at an additional cost," Tangretti explained.

The marketing technique to extract additional terms for service contracts relies on a negative response. Customers are sent notification that their service contract is approaching its expiration.

"If they fail to read the notification carefully, they will not realize that to prevent charges they must respond by telling the company that they do not want to extend the contract," Tangretti said.

"Otherwise, the company will charge them for an additional service contract period."

Tangretti's legislation (H.B. 84) seeks to prohibit automatic renewals of service contracts unless the consumer specifically authorizes it.

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The legislator noted that if the contract originally was paid for with a credit card, consumers may not even realize they have been charged for a renewal period until their credit card bill arrives.

Speaking from personal experience, Tangretti described a scam for selling magazine subscriptions that relies on people's fears about protecting their personal credit rating.

Tangretti said he received a sample copy of a magazine from an out-of-state firm and didn't read the accompanying letter that indicated a subscription would automatically be entered in his name unless he refused it.

Soon after, Tangretti began receiving demands for payment.

"And not so subtle threats regarding my personal credit rating. This is a magazine I didn't want and didn't order," Tangretti said.

Such marketing methods are illegal and the lawmaker immediately filed a complaint with the state's Bureau of Consumer Protection.

"This scam depends on consumers not knowing their rights and paying an illegal bill in fear of an empty threat to their credit rating," Tangretti said.

Consumers who are victimized by the marketing scam can file a complaint with the Bureau of Consumer Protection at the Office of Attorney General, Tangretti said. The state has established a toll-free number for consumer complaints at: 800-441-2555.

###th/k

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HARRISBURG, June 24 -- State Reps. Phyllis Mundy, D-Luzerne, and Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, today said an audit of the state's Community Revitalization Program substantiates their charges that the grant program is not competitive and is being used by Gov. Thomas Ridge to buy legislative support for his proposals.

Mundy and Tangretti both serve on the House Appropriations Committee and during budget hearings this spring were sharply critical of the \$24 million discretionary grant controlled by the governor and administered by the Department of Community and Economic Development.

The controversial program came under fire by Auditor General Robert P. Casey Jr., who was forced to subpoena Ridge administration officials to obtain CRP records to conduct a performance audit.

Casey found that, contrary to the Ridge administration's claim that "complete applications are evaluated competitively against all submitted applications," no such evaluation procedure exists and DCED has given no indication it will establish criteria in the future.

"This comes as no surprise," Mundy said. "Governor Ridge has been blatantly trading grants for votes and by all indications he intends to continue."

"When Ridge was running for governor, he was highly critical of so-called WAMs which were grants controlled by the General Assembly," Tangretti said. "He promised WAMs would have no place in his administration, but what he did was simply move them upstairs to the governor's office."

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Mundy noted that, under pointed questioning during budget hearings, administration officials admitted the main difference between the CRP program and the discredited WAMs are that the grants are now controlled by the governor, not by the General Assembly. Instead of the grants distributed among the general operating funds of several departments, it is listed as a single line item in the state budget.

"I can understand why the governor did this," Tangretti said. "It's helpful to have a little treat to pass out when asking legislators for an affirmative vote on proposals to increase the gas tax and allow monster trucks on Pennsylvania highways."

"This is still public money," Mundy said. "The larger question is whether these funds are being used for projects that have the greatest public benefit for Pennsylvanians or those that have the greatest political benefit for Tom Ridge."

###th/b

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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

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May 19, 1997

Paul J. Koloski
Editorial Editor
Tribune-Review
Cabin Hill Drive
Greensburg, PA 15601

Dear Paul:

"Brevity is the soul of wit" according to Shakespeare. As a longtime reader of "Whispers", I understand how brevity serves to make the column witty and entertaining. On the other hand, accuracy might spoil the effect so why let facts stand in the way of a good story?

Fact is, the one phone conversation I had with a member of the county commission was for information purposes only. I wanted to inquire what information the commission was receiving from the Regional Renaissance Partnership since the referendum proposal had been evolving from its original concept as is often the case with a project of this magnitude. No pressure was applied, subtle or otherwise, to get on a nonexistent bandwagon. Had I been asked, I would have told (Whispered?) that to "Whispers".

As of now, I am still attempting to gather input and information on the proposal, including that which I can learn from the county commissioners. Unless it can deliver more benefits to the people of the 57th District than I have seen in the proposal so far, it is not a plan I can support in its present form let alone "apply pressure" for it. That's not the spicy stuff that makes its way into the "Whispers" column which is why I'm submitting it to the "Letters" page instead.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas A. Tangretti".

Thomas A. Tangretti
State Representative
57th Legislative District

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HARRISBURG, Sept. 4 -- State Rep. Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, will be honored for outstanding achievements in the field of government by the Italian Heritage Society at the society's annual awards banquet in Pittsburgh next month.

Proceeds from the \$50 a plate banquet at the Pittsburgh Hilton and Towers will benefit the Clelian Heights School for Exceptional Children in Greensburg. Over the past 12 years, the IHS has been able to provide 80 scholarships to the school's students.

Since his election to the legislature in 1988, the Westmoreland County legislator has distinguished himself as a leading legislative advocate on behalf of senior citizens, public safety services, education, highway safety and economic development, among other legislative issues he has championed.

Tangretti is one of 16 honorees who will be recognized at the IHS awards ceremony on Oct. 11 for their contributions to the fields of music, medicine, law, education, humanities, religion, sports and other endeavors.

"I am deeply honored to receive this award," Tangretti said. "It's humbling and a little surprising to be honored for simply doing the thing most people rightly expect from their legislature."

Reservations for the banquet may be obtained by contacting the IHS at 276-1266 or 941-1848.

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GOP jury trial referendum concerns Tangretti

HARRISBURG, June 11 -- House Republicans in early June pushed through fiscally irresponsible legislation that will appear as a referendum for voters in the fall, according to state Rep. Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland.

The measure (S.B. 555), which passed the House 111-82, would amend the Pennsylvania Constitution to give prosecutors the right to demand jury trials. Currently, only defenders have that option.

"I opposed Senate Bill 555, not on the basis of its merits, but on the basis of its questionable costs," said Tangretti. "Those of us in the House Appropriations Committee were deliberately misled by the majority chairman concerning the financial aspects of this measure."

Tangretti explained how, after asking about the ultimate costs involved if this bill was added to the constitution, he and other committee members were deceived into thinking that additional legislation would be necessary before a fiscal note on the costs would be undertaken.

"In essence, the Republican-controlled legislature pushed through a measure that could very well result in an unmanageable increase in jury trials," Tangretti said. "We have no idea what this increase will cost in terms of money or time. I asked to delay voting on this bill until a fiscal note could be completed, but I was ignored by the majority leader."

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Tangretti called upon Appropriations Chairman John Barley, R-Lancaster, to fully disclose and provide information on the costs associated with this legislation before the voters must make a decision on it in November.

"This measure, by allowing prosecutors to demand jury trials, can only result in more trials being conducted by our judicial system," Tangretti said. "Therefore, we will need more public defenders, more judges and more prosecutors -- and more money and time.

"I feel that it is not only necessary, it is absolutely essential, that the voters of Pennsylvania be aware of the monetary costs involved with this referendum before they decide whether or not to alter the state constitution."

The provisions of S.B. 555 will appear on the ballot during the General Election in November 1998.

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HARRISBURG, Feb. 26 -- State Rep. Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, was disappointed in the confessions of the Insurance commissioner concerning funding of the Children's Health Insurance Program during Wednesday's House Appropriations Committee budget hearing.

The Children's Health Insurance Program, which is overseen by the Insurance Department, provides health insurance for children whose families cannot afford private insurance but whose income is too high to qualify them for Medicaid.

"The Insurance Department's budget proposal will only draw down a portion of the federal funding available for CHIP. I am dumbfounded that the Ridge administration refuses to draw down all of the federal money it can," said Tangretti. "It is not possible to put a price on the health of Pennsylvania's children, but that is exactly what the governor is trying to do."

The governor's proposed 1998-99 budget would provide \$15 million in state funds to draw down only \$80.3 million of the \$118 million of available federal funds.

"We can enhance this program immeasurably if we use all the money available," Tangretti said. "In fact, CHIP could receive another \$38 million, but the governor is more concerned with providing big businesses with tax breaks than with insuring our children."

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HARRISBURG, Feb. 24 -- State Rep. Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, Monday blasted the Ridge administration and Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency Chairman Thomas Corbett for again declining to take part in the federal Police Corps program which offers college scholarships to young men and women in return for four years of service with a municipal police department.

The state's refusal to participate in the federally funded program was disclosed at Monday's House Appropriations Committee hearing on the administration's state police budget for the coming fiscal year. Under questioning from Tangretti, state police Commissioner Paul Evanko said the state would inform the U.S. Justice Department next month of its intention not to participate in the program in reply to the federal government's offer of funds which expires on March 31. Seventeen states participate in the Police Corps program which is budgeted at \$30 million.

"The Ridge administration's much vaunted crime strategy is fundamentally flawed by its failure to put more resources into the front lines of crime at the local police level," Tangretti said. "The rest of the nation has come to the conclusion that better, smarter policing is the key to crime prevention. In most of the United States, rates of serious crime are decreasing, but our governor and his advisers somehow haven't gotten the message that policing strategies cut crime."

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In his response to Tangretti's questions, Evanko said Police Corps recruiting and training standards geared to municipal police operations are not wholly applicable to the needs of the state police. While the program is strongly oriented to municipal police services, the Ridge administration would have to approve Pennsylvania's participation in the program for the state's local police departments to qualify for its benefits. Evanko said Corbett has consistently stated the administration's reluctance to involve Pennsylvania in the program, a position that has remained unchanged even though in November the House of Representatives unanimously passed a resolution sponsored by Tangretti urging the state's participation.

The administration has twice previously declined the federal government's Police Corps funding offer. The program provides \$7,500 annual scholarships to college students who agree to serve as police officers for at least four years. The federal government trains the program's recruits and provides a stipend of \$250 a week during the six-week training period. Police departments that hire corps' graduates receive an annual payment of \$10,000 for each of a participant's first four years of service. In addition, participating states may offer federally funded education grants of \$7,500 a year to dependent children of any police officer killed in the line of duty while serving in the state.

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Tangretti discusses electric choice on cable show

HARRISBURG, Aug. 20 -- In order to provide constituents with more insight into the new Electric Choice Program in Pennsylvania, state Rep. Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, will be presenting a special edition of his monthly public affairs program, "Legislative Journal."

On the program, former Public Utility Commission member John Hanger, who served on the PUC when the new law was written, and state Rep. Mike Veon, D-Beaver, who drafted the first electric competition bill in Pennsylvania, provide the answers to commonly asked consumer questions about electric choice.

Tangretti's "Legislative Journal," a 30-minute public affairs program intended to keep viewers apprised of state government affairs, airs at 6:30 p.m. every Tuesday on TCI of Greensburg, Channel 5. The program on electric choice will be broadcast throughout September.

For additional information, brochures on Pennsylvania's Electric Choice Program can be picked up at Tangretti's district office, 327 South Main St., Greensburg. Information about electric choice also is available by calling the Public Utility Commission at its toll-free hotline, 1-888-PUC-FACT (888-782-3228), or by visiting the PUC Web site at <http://www.electrichoice.com>.

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Health care protections supported by Tangretti

HARRISBURG, Oct. 7 - State Rep. Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, today joined other House Democrats in a news conference supporting a package of bills designed to give consumers more protection and more information about their health care.

The Put Patients First legislative package is a Democratic response to the weak managed care reform bill passed by the General Assembly in June.

"While the passage of Senate Bill 91 in June was a start to reforming managed health care, we need to push stronger measures to make sure health care consumers are protected and are receiving the treatments that are needed," said Tangretti.

The objectives of this legislative package are to give consumers more control over health care decisions by arming them with more information, to provide patients with more protections and safeguards, and to hold providers and insurers accountable for the care that they render.

"I am especially interested in making sure that a 'mental health parity' provision is included in this package," Tangretti said. "There is no viable reason that patients in need of psychological services should be treated any differently for their illnesses than are people with purely physical illnesses."

The measures will be taken up when the House resumes session after the general election in November, or, if shelved by the majority party, will be pushed by Democrats again in the next session of the General Assembly, which begins in January.

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Tangretti named to statewide historic preservation advisory committee

HARRISBURG, Oct. 21 -- State Rep. Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, has been appointed to the Commonwealth's Historic Preservation Plan Advisory Committee, which will form a comprehensive plan for preserving Pennsylvania's historical structures and neighborhoods.

"Over the next year, this committee will be working along with the Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission and the nonprofit group Preservation Pennsylvania to improve Pennsylvania's efforts at restoring and maintaining its historical resources," Tangretti said. "Other states with even fewer historical resources than we have are way ahead of us in this area. It's time that we make this a priority, not just for preservation's sake, but for Pennsylvania's economic and social viability, as well."

Tangretti said preservation activities help to attract tourism to the state and help to stabilize and renew older neighborhoods and communities that might otherwise start to deteriorate.

He said some of the committee's most important functions will be to construct a comprehensive vision for historical preservation in Pennsylvania, formulate ways to incorporate public input in the state's historical preservation plans and recommend strategies for implementing those plans.

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Tangretti was appointed to the committee after being recommended by Preservation Pennsylvania, the state's only statewide, private, nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection of historically and architecturally significant properties. Preservation Pennsylvania cited Tangretti's long-standing commitment to and legislative work on behalf of historical preservation. He will be joined on the committee by fellow state Rep. David Argall, a Schuylkill County Republican who also is well known for his efforts on behalf of preservation.

Both lawmakers have introduced legislation this session aimed at spurring preservation in Pennsylvania. Argall's bill would require state agencies to locate their facilities in existing buildings in downtown business districts where possible, and would make the state rebuild or restore the building's façade to match the streetscape.

In June, Tangretti introduced a bill that would promote rehabilitation and preservation of older, historical homes and neighborhoods using a system of tax incentives. Incentives to preserve historical homes and neighborhoods would be provided through the state income tax on capital gains, the state sales tax on materials used for rehabilitation and waivers on the state's share of the realty transfer tax.

"One of the things that makes Pennsylvania truly unique is its very rich and very diverse historical and architectural heritage," Tangretti said. "I am excited to have the opportunity to be actively involved in planning and carrying out the preservation of this heritage. The future quality of life in our state is going to be related directly to how successful we are in rescuing the most precious elements of our past."

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CONTACT: Debbie Foster (717) 787-7895

Tangretti will serve on three House committees

HARRISBURG, Jan. 21 -- State Rep. Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, this week was appointed to three committees by Democratic Leader H. William DeWeese.

Tangretti was appointed to the Commerce and Economic Development Committee, where he will serve as Democratic chairman of the Subcommittee on Housing. He also was assigned to the Local Government and Insurance committees.

"I'm looking forward to serving on the Commerce and Economic Development Committee, as well as the others," Tangretti said. "I wanted to be on that committee in particular because it will allow me to continue emphasis on several of my initiatives that involve housing and community development. It will also provide direct involvement in promoting job growth and economic expansion in the Commonwealth."

Tangretti's initiatives include the Historic Home and Neighborhood Preservation project, as well as several others that promote economic development or community improvements.

"Serving on the Insurance Committee will give me the opportunity to work toward improving issues that are related to health insurance and managed care," Tangretti said. "There are also many ancillary issues under the committee's jurisdiction."

The former Westmoreland County controller brings his experience at the county level to his appointment to the Local Government Committee.

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Tangretti announces Web site link to government

HARRISBURG, Jan. 21 - State Rep. Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, wants constituents to know about the new Internet site that helps users to get information on state legislation.

The site can be accessed at <http://www.legis.state.pa.us> and will be updated as new information becomes available from the Legislative Data Processing Center, Tangretti said. Visitors can read the text and history of bills, as well as conduct searches for bills using a topic index.

A list of House and Senate calendars and session dates is also included.

"Learning about state government has never been easier," Tangretti said. "Everyone can benefit from this site and anyone who has access to the Internet should look to see what your state government has to offer."

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Tangretti presents public safety package

HARRISBURG, Feb. 11 - State Rep. Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, has introduced a three-part legislative package aimed at bettering services for law enforcement and other civil service employees.

"The Public Safety Initiative package would provide legislation to give back something to the men and women who give of themselves daily to ensure the public's safety," Tangretti said. "It includes a grant program for volunteer fire companies and a low-interest loan program available for municipal police departments."

As part of the Public Safety Initiative, grants made available through H.B. 540 would enable volunteer fire companies to improve and enhance the capabilities of the volunteer fire company, Tangretti said.

"Grants of between \$1,000 and \$10,000 per fiscal year to eligible fire companies would certainly allow them to keep up with the latest equipment and training without putting too much additional strain on already-strapped municipal budgets," Tangretti said. "Many municipalities rely on volunteerism to ensure residents' fire protection. Because of the high cost of firefighting equipment, it's often hard to keep these organizations afloat."

The second part of the package (H.B. 541) would offer low-interest loans to police agencies for upkeep and modernization of facilities, as well as to purchase and maintain necessary equipment, including vehicles, Tangretti said.

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"Police agencies could borrow between \$5,000 and \$200,000 at a rate of 2 percent for buildings and between \$5,000 and \$100,000 at the same rate for vehicles and equipment," Tangretti said.

A ceiling of \$300,000 over a five-year period would be established as part of the legislation.

Added into the package is reintroduction of legislation asking the state to participate in the federally funded Police Corps Program.

During the 1997-98 session, the House of Representatives unanimously adopted Tangretti's resolution calling for participation in this program, which is already in use in 17 states. It provides police departments that hire corps members with an annual \$10,000 payment for the first four years of each member's service, along with offering higher education grants of up to \$7,500 per year to college students who exchange their education and police training for four years of service on a municipal police force.

As an added incentive, the federal government provides a fully funded college grant of up to \$30,000 to each dependent child of a Pennsylvania police officer who is killed in the line of duty.

"We should take advantage of these federal monies to further ensure safer communities," Tangretti said. "We should also want to give back something to the families of these men and women for the years of service they give to us."

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Tangretti proposes tax incentives to revitalize urban communities

HARRISBURG, March 17 -- Calling it "the missing piece" in the legislature's approach to urban sprawl, state Rep. Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, today introduced legislation to revitalize the state's core communities using tax incentives to improve older neighborhoods and make existing, but neglected, residential areas more attractive places to live.

Called the Historic Home and Neighborhood Preservation Bill, Tangretti's legislation would offer a menu of state tax credits and exemptions to individuals who agree to purchase and restore homes in traditional neighborhoods and reside in them for five years. Current owner-occupants of qualifying properties also could obtain tax incentives for specified improvements completed over a five-year period.

Citing a recent governor's task force report that identified sprawl as the state's top environmental problem and the introduction of bills to control haphazard growth, Tangretti called on the legislature to adopt a balanced approach to sprawl.

"While we need to protect open space and farmland, we also need to focus our efforts and resources on towns and neighborhoods that have been neglected in the long rush of post-war development," Tangretti said.

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"We must attract families and investment back to places where much of the civic infrastructure already exists to serve a growing number of people who are drawn to the qualities that close-knit communities and neighborhoods have to offer."

Tangretti's bill, reintroduced from the previous session, would offer a 20 percent state income tax credit for rehabilitation of older residential properties in historic districts or neighborhoods designated by municipalities as residential conservation districts. Owner-occupants also could obtain a waiver of the sales tax on materials and services used to restore these properties.

In addition, the seller of a qualified property that is being used for commercial purposes such as apartments would be exempt from the state share of the realty transfer tax and from capital gains on the state income tax if the buyer agrees to restore the property and live in it.

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission would oversee the restoration work subject to federally established preservation standards.

Some 50 legislators from both parties have signed the bill as co-sponsors. Tangretti soon plans to introduce a companion measure that would give municipalities the option to freeze assessments on improved historic homes for two years and waive building permit fees for the structural improvements.

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Tangretti helps open Pennsylvania historic preservation forums

GREENSBURG, May 18 - Officials from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and Preservation Pennsylvania joined state Rep. Thomas Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, today to discuss a comprehensive plan for historic preservation in Pennsylvania and to open a series of public forums designed to gather input on the plan.

The news conference was held at historic Huff Mansion, which is part of the Academy Hill Historic District in Greensburg.

Tangretti presented members of the Academy Hill Neighborhood Association with a certificate designating their neighborhood as a National Historic District and talked about legislation he has introduced in the House of Representatives that would provide tax incentives for restoring older neighborhoods and neglected residential neighborhoods in Pennsylvania.

"Today, I am proud to be joined by members of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and Preservation Pennsylvania in their effort to put together a plan of action for restoring, preserving and making sure the public has access to Pennsylvania's most important cultural, architectural, archeological and natural treasures," Tangretti said.

"The end result will be the first comprehensive, long-range plan that Pennsylvania has ever produced for involving the public, government, private groups and businesses on a local, regional and state level in the effort to preserve our history and heritage."

Tangretti is serving on the committee that is advising the PHMC and Preservation Pennsylvania on the public outreach process and development of the historic preservation plan. The advisory committee contains experts in the fields of economic development, historic preservation, architecture, planning, archaeology and other related disciplines.

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"When completed, this plan will provide a framework for making preservation an integral component of economic policy, growth policy and funding policy for the next century," Tangretti said.

"Historic preservation is not a hindrance to economic development. In fact, it can be an important component of development, and this plan will clarify that relationship," he said.

Tangretti's interest in historic preservation and its link to Pennsylvania's future was first piqued by the efforts of the Academy Hill Neighborhood Association.

In 1994, members of the neighborhood formed the association and began efforts to have the district added to the National Register of Historic Places. The neighborhood is significant because most of its present structures were built between 1890 and 1930. Through the efforts of the association, more than 95 percent of those structures have been maintained or returned to their historical condition.

"The effort to have Academy Hill added to the National Register of Historic Places was truly a grassroots effort," Tangretti explained. "Members of the community got together, formed the association and did all of the work themselves.

"They did it not because government told them to, but because they loved their neighborhood and wanted to make sure that the historical treasure they found when they arrived here is still here for others to enjoy long after they are gone," he said.

"This was a true labor of love, and very inspiring to those of us who would like to see this kind of effort replicated across Pennsylvania."

To that end, Tangretti reintroduced legislation in the state House of Representatives that would help revitalize the state's core communities by using tax incentives to improve older neighborhoods and make existing, but neglected, residential areas more attractive places to live.

Called the Historic Home and Neighborhood Preservation Bill, Tangretti's legislation would offer a menu of state tax credits and exemptions to individuals who agree to purchase and restore homes in traditional neighborhoods and reside in them for five years.

Current owner-occupants of qualifying properties also could obtain tax incentives for certain improvements completed over a five-year period.

"Protecting open space and farmland should not be the only component to controlling sprawl," Tangretti said. "We also need to focus our efforts and resources on towns and neighborhoods that have been neglected in the long rush of post-war development.

"Making the revitalization of older neighborhoods and business districts one of the keys to Pennsylvania's historic preservation plan will bring focus back to the social and economic resources we already have available, and would go a long way toward solving some of the growth problems like sprawl that many places in Pennsylvania are now dealing with."

Tangretti's bill would offer a 20 percent state income tax credit for rehabilitation of older residential properties in historic districts or neighborhoods designated by municipalities as residential conservation districts. Owner-occupants also could obtain a waiver of the sales tax on materials and services used to restore these properties.

In addition, the seller of a qualified property that is being used for commercial purposes such as apartments would be exempt from the state share of the realty transfer tax and from capital gains on the state income tax if the buyer agrees to restore the property and live in it.

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission would oversee the restoration work subject to federally established preservation standards.

More than 50 legislators from both parties co-sponsored the bill.

The public forum scheduled for today at the University of Pittsburgh is the first of several that will take place across the state this summer. All forums will be informal and citizens are encouraged to give as much input on historic preservation efforts and the state's preservation plan as they can.

Today's forum will be held from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. in Room 115, Powers Hall at the University of Pittsburgh's Greensburg Campus off Route 30 in Greensburg.

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Tangretti helps Pitt student experience a day in the life of a lawmaker

HARRISBURG, March 23 -- Melanie Wolfe, a freshman at the University of Pittsburgh, came away from her day shadowing state Rep. Tom Tangretti surprised at just how different lawmaking actually is from the process that is taught in civics text books.

"I was surprised by how many amendments get added to bills," she said, "and by the fact that politics affects not just what goes on, but how it goes on."

Wolfe was one of nine University of Pittsburgh students who shadowed area legislators Tuesday at the state Capitol. The program is called Legislator for a Day and sponsored by the university's Institute of Politics. Students enrolled in any undergraduate school at the university are eligible for the program, and participants are selected through a competitive application process.

Tangretti, a Democrat who represents portions of Westmoreland County, said he agreed to host one of the students because he believes the program gives participating students a great opportunity to experience the realities of government.

"Learning about politics and how laws are made in the classroom is one thing," Tangretti said. "But actually being able to experience it in person and get a real feel for what goes on in Harrisburg can be an eye-opening experience. I believe it makes these students more aware of and excited about what their government is doing and why."

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Tangretti said Wolfe's experience Tuesday was particularly beneficial because not only did she get to sit on the House floor during regular session, but she also was able to attend several caucus meetings and other activities that Tangretti is involved in.

During a meeting of the Southwest Caucus, which is chaired by Tangretti, lawmakers from the Pittsburgh area were briefed on the progress of maglev technology in the region. During a meeting of Sportsmen's Caucus members, deer management issues were discussed.

"I wasn't aware of how many issues legislators have to keep track of," Wolfe said. "They have to know what issues are important statewide, and at the same time keep on top of the issues that are important to the people they represent.

"All the while, they have to be able to coordinate their Harrisburg office with their district office and make sure they are taking care of their constituent service responsibilities," she said. "It's a very hectic schedule where three or four things can be going on at the same time."

Wolfe said she first got interested in politics during her junior year in high school when, despite an earlier agreement with students, a newly elected school board decided to raise student parking fees in order to give seniors in the district a tax cut.

Wolfe said the experience taught her that "politicians listen to the people who vote," and it piqued her interest in the political process. Wolfe, who is from Erie, is studying international affairs.

"I wish more students like Melanie had the opportunity to take part in a program like this," Tangretti said. "So many people today are uninvolved in their communities and unaware of what their government does. It is refreshing to see a young person with a real interest in the process and a true desire to get involved firsthand and learn more."