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**CONTACT: Barbara Fajt (717) 787-7895**

**Web site offers legislative information**

HARRISBURG, Jan. 11 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, today said residents with Internet capabilities are now able to access the text of state laws and proposed bills on a special legislative Web site.

The Web address is <http://www.legis.state.pa.us>.

According to Scrimenti, the Web site offers users a wide variety of information on bills, including current legislation and other measures dating back to the 1993-94 session. It also contains a list of standing committees, House and Senate session calendars, the Senate executive nominations calendar and committee meeting schedules.

"Apart from legislative information, the site offers residents a guide to state government, an exploration of Pennsylvania history and information on reserving a tour of the state Capitol," said Scrimenti. "This site is a convenient and useful tool for anyone interested in Pennsylvania's legislative process."

Scrimenti said the system is updated as information becomes available, including changes to bills when amended in committee or on the House and Senate floors.

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### **Gateway officials failed in public information responsibility**

HARRISBURG, Jan. 12 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, last night expressed his disapproval over Gateway Rehabilitation Center's disregard for public concerns during its pursuit to open a prisoner drug and alcohol treatment center in Harborcreek.

At a public information meeting sponsored by Gateway, Scrimenti said company officials waited far too long to present community residents with information about the facility and how it would affect them.

Scrimenti met with Gateway officials in November and urged them to address community concerns over security and the lack of available transportation for clients who will have to walk the streets of Harborcreek to reach a bus stop or go to work.

"For months, this company clearly has shown a disregard for affected residents and their concerns regarding facility operations and the safety of their families and neighbors," Scrimenti said. "These facilities do have importance in our society, but Harborcreek residents vehemently oppose this and should not be forced to live with it."

In a letter sent to state Department of Corrections Secretary Martin Horn, Scrimenti expressed his opposition to the placement of inmates at the proposed facility in the former St. John Kanty Prep complex on East 38<sup>th</sup> Street.

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Scrimenti wrote, "When the placement of a resident treatment program is being considered, it is crucial that the community be informed of decisions that are going to affect their neighborhood. As a member of the General Assembly, I am extremely concerned about the lack of local involvement in the placement of the Gateway facility."

Scrimenti said the Gateway situation has brought to the forefront the importance of informing local communities of upcoming changes and developments that may impact the safety of residents.

"Contracts to house convicted criminals must include standards for community involvement," said Scrimenti. "Because Gateway has failed to take the time to involve this community, I will continue to stand opposed to the facility."

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**Property tax/rent rebate forms available**

HARRISBURG, Jan. 13 -- Residents who qualify for Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program can find the 1998 rebate application forms in state Rep. Tom Scrimenti's district offices.

Scrimenti said qualified individuals can receive rebates up to \$500 based on property taxes or rent paid in 1998. Pennsylvanians eligible for the rebate are seniors 65 and older; widows and widowers 50 and older; and people with disabilities 18 and older. Household incomes must not exceed \$15,000.

"Property taxes and rent can take a sizable chunk out of the budgets of people living on fixed incomes," Scrimenti said. "This program helped more than 300,000 households with property tax and rent assistance last year and has provided more than \$2.2 billion in assistance since its inception."

According to Scrimenti, a few changes were made to the program for 1998 rebates. Renters who are unable to obtain their landlords' signatures on the rent certificate must complete the new Rental Occupancy Affidavit. Applicants must also provide proof of income, with either a copy of their federal or Pennsylvania income tax return or the SSA-1099 form from the Social Security Administration.

"Residents who submit their applications now will be among the first group of people who receive a rebate check when the Department of Revenue starts mailing them in July," said Scrimenti.

Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program is funded through proceeds from the Pennsylvania Lottery.

Rebate forms are available through Scrimenti's district offices at 9 W. Main St. in North East, 814-725-8664, and 202 N. Center St. in Corry, 814-664-9126.

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**Erie Delegation on Inaugural Escort Committee**

HARRISBURG, Jan. 19 -- Members of the Erie County Democratic Delegation were among the 20 House members appointed to the Inaugural Escort Committee during today's swearing-in ceremonies for Erie native Gov. Thomas Ridge at the state Capitol.

State Reps. Linda Bebko-Jones, Italo Cappabianca and Tom Scrimenti were joined on the committee by two fellow Democrats and 15 House Republicans.

As an Erie native herself, Bebko-Jones said she was honored to participate in the ceremony surrounding the governor's inauguration. She hopes to work with the Ridge administration to make the quality of life a good one for **all** Pennsylvanians.

Scrimenti said he was happy to join the Erie Delegation in escorting the governor and looks forward to working with Ridge toward the common goal of passing beneficial legislation for his constituents and all Commonwealth residents.

Cappabianca, who represents the city of Erie, said he enjoyed his role in the inaugural events.

Today's events marked the start of Ridge's second term in office.

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**Scrimenti gets committee assignments for 1999-2000 session**

HARRISBURG, Jan. 20 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, today was re-assigned to the Aging and Youth, Agriculture and Rural Affairs and Professional Licensure committees for the 1999-2000 legislative session in the House of Representatives.

Scrimenti also retained his position as Democratic Chairman of the Subcommittee on Aging for the Aging and Youth Committee.

"I again am delighted to have such an important position in helping to shape legislation to benefit the senior citizens in my district and throughout Pennsylvania," Scrimenti said. "Last session, the committee worked together to enact two new laws that will help protect Pennsylvania nursing home residents from abuse, and I was proud to be a part of it."

Scrimenti also has played an active role in the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, which deals with legislation ranging from food products and domestic animals to family and commercial farms.

Last year, he introduced legislation to assist Pennsylvania dairy farmers with financial difficulties caused by the nation's deflating milk prices. The main provision of the bill would make Pennsylvania a participating member of the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact, which is an interstate agreement among the six New England states to set the farm price of milk.

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"Pennsylvania farmers work tirelessly to make our state a top producer of quality agricultural products, and I believe we should do everything we can to see that all Pennsylvania farmers are not forced out of business because they cannot meet their operating needs or make a profit," said Scrimenti.

Scrimenti plans to reintroduce his legislation to help Pennsylvania dairy farmers and said he will use his assignment on the committee to work toward the passage of legislation to help support agriculture, Pennsylvania's No. 1 industry.

The Professional Licensure Committee address issues dealing with state certification and licensure. Last year, the committee helped to enact legislation that provides requirements for the licensing of marriage and family therapists and professional counselors in Pennsylvania.

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### **Scrimenti legislation would aid dairy farmers**

HARRISBURG, Jan. 29 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, has reintroduced legislation to assist Pennsylvania dairy farmers with financial difficulties caused by the nation's deflating milk prices.

"And now that New York has enacted its own legislation to help dairy farmers recover from financial loss, there is nothing to stop Pennsylvania from signing on," Scrimenti said.

Scrimenti referred to New York's recent enactment of legislation to join the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact, which is an interstate agreement begun among the six New England states to set the farm price of fluid milk above the federal order price established by U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Scrimenti's bill (H.B. 193) would make Pennsylvania a participating member.

When Congress established the NIDC in 1996, it authorized six other contiguous states, including Pennsylvania, to join. Pennsylvania's enrollment in the compact was conditional upon New York entering, because each new state must either border a New England state or border a state that borders a New England state and is a participating member of the compact.

New York Gov. George Pataki signed the legislation to join the compact into law in December.

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"Pennsylvania dairy farmers work tirelessly to make our state a top producer of agricultural products," Scrimenti said. "Agriculture is Pennsylvania's No.1 industry and dairy production alone contributes significantly to that distinction, generating about \$1.6 billion in annual sales."

According to Scrimenti, milk pricing has historically been a federal issue with limited state involvement. The 1995 farm bill, however, moved milk pricing toward a more market-driven system and caused an increase in the need for state involvement, especially the states with high stakes in the dairy industry.

"Our state's dairy farmers should not be forced out of business because they cannot meet their operating needs or make a profit," said Scrimenti. "This interstate compact is the best news our dairy farmers have had since milk prices began falling more than four years ago. We should act now for the good of our farmers, as well as our economy."

Scrimenti's bill to make Pennsylvania a member of the NIDC is under review in the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee.

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**Scrimenti urges Ridge to provide water relief for local residents**

HARRISBURG, Feb. 1 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, today called on Gov. Thomas Ridge to call in the Pennsylvania National Guard to help residents of his legislative district deal with persisting drought conditions that have left them with little or no water.

In a letter to Gov. Ridge, Scrimenti said the situation for residents without water in his district, especially rural residents in Harborcreek and Summit townships, has become unbearable. Scrimenti called on Ridge to call up the Pennsylvania National Guard have water trucked to area families in need.

"Many residents have called my district offices in desperation because they've been forced to live under these conditions for months," Scrimenti said. "We've reached the critical level here and I am asking our governor to step in and help us find another way to supply our residents with sufficient amounts of water for bathing, cooking and washing clothes."

According to reports from the Erie County Emergency Management Agency, more than 609 families in the county are without water, and an equal number of residents are experiencing water problems or shortages. Many families are having water brought in by private companies or are relying on family and friends to get their water.

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Right now, Scrimenti said Harborcreek Township residents can fill water jugs from a spigot inside the township building and Summit residents can access water tanks set up by the township.

Because Erie County was placed on the list of counties declared "drought emergencies" by the governor, Scrimenti said a drought task force for Erie County is being established. The task force will implement water-rationing plans for residents and look for ways to obtain emergency water resources for communities in need.

In the meantime, Scrimenti urges residents who have not reported their water shortages to their township authorities should do so immediately.

"If Pennsylvania's Emergency Management Agency can get a more accurate assessment of how widespread this problem is for our residents, perhaps we may get more state help in securing water," said Scrimenti.

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**Area senior citizens can display artwork**

HARRISBURG, March 11 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, said Erie County senior citizens who are interested in showing their artwork at the state Capitol this spring may contact any of his district offices for an entry form and instructions.

According to Scrimenti, the Pennsylvania Council on Aging is sponsoring its 13<sup>th</sup> annual Senior Arts Festival to honor older Pennsylvania artists. Artwork will be displayed in the Capitol from May 17 to June 18.

"The art exhibition is open to all Pennsylvania residents who have completed artwork past their 60<sup>th</sup> birthday," said Scrimenti. "I encourage all of our area's talented older artists to enter a piece of their work for display."

Scrimenti said artwork may be submitted to the Department of Aging beginning April 1. All artwork must be in by April 16.

Entry forms and instructions are available through Scrimenti's district offices located at 9 W. Main St. in North East, 814-725-8664, and 202 N. Center St. in Corry, 814-664-9126.

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### **Senior centers can apply for state grant assistance**

HARRISBURG, March 19 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, said area senior citizen centers may apply for state grant assistance that can be used to purchase equipment or make improvements.

According to Scrimenti, applications for Pennsylvania's Senior Community Center Capital Assistance Grant Program are available in his district offices. Under the program, community senior citizen centers can apply for funding to help pay for construction, acquisition and renovations and furnishings and equipment used in local centers.

"Senior community centers are invaluable to many of our older residents, and are often the first place many senior citizens look to for help," said Scrimenti.

"Even if a center is not in need of renovation, I'm sure there are instances where new equipment and furnishings are badly needed. I encourage all centers in our region to look into the program."

Scrimenti said \$2 million has been set aside for the program's 1999-2000 fiscal year, and all applications must be completed and returned by May 21. Grants will be awarded between July 1, 1999 and June 30, 2000.

Applications and information on qualifying for the program, is available through Scrimenti's district offices at 9 W. Main St. in North East, 814-725-8664, and 202 N. Center St. in Corry, 814-664-9126.

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### **Pennsylvania Lottery benefits Erie County residents**

HARRISBURG, March 25 -- The Pennsylvania Lottery sent more than \$33.3 million to Erie County residents in the form of cash prizes and benefits to senior citizens in the 1997-98 fiscal year, according to state Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie.

Scrimenti said more than \$12.5 million of that figure directly benefited Erie County senior citizens through the Greater Erie Community Action Committee's aging services, the state's Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly, or PACE/PACENET, the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program and local transportation assistance.

"Pennsylvania runs the only state lottery that exclusively uses its proceeds to benefit older citizens," Scrimenti said. "I'm proud of that fact and I'm pleased that our successful lottery can make life better for many of our older residents who are struggling to maintain their homes and get the medication they need.

"I encourage all senior citizens in our area to see if they qualify for any of these important programs."

In addition to benefiting local senior citizens, Scrimenti said Erie County residents enjoyed nearly \$18.6 million in lottery cash prizes. The remaining \$2 million was paid to local merchants in retail commissions.

Additional information about the Pennsylvania Lottery, as well as information and applications for the services and programs the lottery supports, are available through Scrimenti's district offices located at 9 W. Main St. in North East, 814-725-8664, and 202 N. Center St. in Corry, 814-664-9126.

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**State budget bill includes property tax cut**

HARRISBURG, April 13 -- The state House of Representatives today passed the 1999-2000 General Fund state budget, which includes an amendment that would provide direct property tax relief to local taxpayers, said state Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie.

According to Scrimenti, the \$18.6 billion spending plan includes a provision that would send \$100 million this year to the school property tax reduction fund for the sole purpose of cutting local residential property taxes throughout the Commonwealth.

"This amendment is a significant step in reforming Pennsylvania's unfair system of property taxes, a system that weighs most heavily on senior citizens living on fixed incomes and young families struggling to make ends meet," Scrimenti said.

"I am delighted that my colleagues overwhelmingly supported this plan, and I hope that we can add more to this fund to achieve the long-standing goal of reducing residential property taxes by 50 percent over the next five years."

The House also unanimously adopted amendments sponsored by Scrimenti that would boost programs for pregnant and parenting teens and assist Pennsylvania's judicial establishments in developing innovative programs to accelerate the handling of misdemeanor cases. Another provision would establish a competitive grant program to target law enforcement activities in areas that show increases in crime.

The budget bill (H.B. 980) now heads to the state Senate for debate and passage. State law requires the final budget to be passed by June 30.

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**Deadline to apply for PHEAA grants approaching**

HARRISBURG, April 19 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, is reminding area students who plan to attend college in the 1999-2000 academic year that they have until May 1 to apply for state grants through the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency.

PHEAA grants are open to eligible students who will enroll in an undergraduate baccalaureate degree program at a PHEAA-approved college or university, and students in college transfer programs at two-year public or junior colleges.

According to Scrimenti, new students and students who received a state grant in the 1998-99 academic year must file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, which is the only application form PHEAA uses for all grant and loan programs. Students must attend school on at least a halftime basis and show academic development for continued financial aid.

Scrimenti, who is a member of Pennsylvania's Tuition Account Program advisory board, said state grants work hand and hand with other financial programs designed to keep to a minimum the increasing burden of higher education costs.

"TAP ensures that working families have access to higher education by allowing parents to buy college tuition credits for their children's future education at today's rates," Scrimenti said. "Students who still are in need of financial assistance when they begin college can rely on PHEAA grant and loan programs to help them through to graduation."

FAFSA application forms are available through Scrimenti's district offices located at 9 W. Main St. in North East, 814-725-8664, and 202 N. Center St. in Corry, 814-664-9126.

First-time applicants who plan to enroll in a business, trade or technical school, hospital school of nursing, or nontransferable two-year degree programs at a community, junior or four-year college program have until Aug. 1 to file a FAFSA.

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**Legislation would ensure group health plans for small businesses**

HARRISBURG, April 20 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, has introduced legislation that would ensure affordable group health insurance options for small-business employers in the Commonwealth.

Scrimenti said roughly two-thirds of people who have no health insurance are employed or are dependents of an employed person, and those working uninsured tend to be employed by small businesses.

"Factors such as cost shifting, high premium costs and underwriting and rating practices have made health insurance coverage too expensive for small employer groups," Scrimenti said.

"The people who contribute significantly to Pennsylvania's economy by working for small and localized businesses should not be forced into paying exorbitant fees for private health insurance. My bill seeks to remedy that dilemma."

Scrimenti's legislation would require insurers to offer basic small group insurance plans to small businesses that do not already provide health insurance options to their employees. Insurers would be encouraged to offer a basic level of primary care, as well as preventative care.

The bill (H.B. 1165) has been referred to the House Insurance Committee for consideration.

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### **House to consider bill to aid dairy farmers**

HARRISBURG, May 11 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, said the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee today approved a bill, sending it to the full House for consideration, that would assist Pennsylvania dairy farmers with financial difficulties caused by the nation's deflating milk prices.

According to Scrimenti, the bill (S.B. 365) would allow Pennsylvania to become a member of the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact, which is an interstate agreement among the six New England states to set the farm price of fluid milk above the federal order price established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"Pennsylvania dairy farmers work tirelessly to make our state a top producer of agricultural products," Scrimenti said. "Agriculture is Pennsylvania's No.1 industry and dairy production alone contributes significantly to that distinction, generating about \$1.6 billion in annual sales."

Scrimenti introduced a similar version of the Senate bill in the 1997-98 legislative session, and again this legislative session.

"Although it would have been nice to have my bill considered, I'm delighted that we finally acted on legislation that would make Pennsylvania a participating member of the compact," Scrimenti said.

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"Our state's dairy farmers should not be forced out of business because they cannot meet their operating needs or make a profit," said Scrimenti. "This interstate compact is the best news our dairy farmers have had since milk prices began falling more than four years ago."

When Congress established the NIDC in 1996, it authorized six other contiguous states, including Pennsylvania, to join.

Pennsylvania's enrollment in the compact was conditional upon New York entering, because each new state must either border a New England state or border a state that borders a New England state and is a participating member of the compact.

New York Gov. George Pataki signed the legislation to join the compact into law in December.

The legislation now moves to the House Appropriations Committee for fiscal consideration and will likely be voted by the full House in June.

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### **House passes dairy compact bill**

HARRISBURG, June 9 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, today voted for legislation that would help Pennsylvania dairy farmers cope with financial difficulties caused by deflating milk prices.

According to Scrimenti, the House passed a bill (S.B. 365) that would allow Pennsylvania to become a member of the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact, which is an agreement among the six New England states to set the farm price of fluid milk above the federal order price established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"Since 1997, I've worked to see this legislation through and I'm glad House members finally had an opportunity to cast their vote for our dairy farmers," said Scrimenti.

According to the Pennsylvania Agricultural Statistics Service, Erie County is home to 190 dairy farms and commercial dairies. In 1997, Erie farmers produced nearly 172 million pounds of milk, contributing more than \$25.4 million to Pennsylvania's economy.

"Pennsylvania dairy farmers work tirelessly to make the state a top producer of agricultural products and contribute significantly to our economy," Scrimenti added. "Our state's dairy farmers, especially our Erie farmers, should not be forced out of business because they cannot meet their operating needs or make a profit. This interstate compact is the best news dairy farmers have had since milk prices began falling more than four years ago."

When Congress established the NIDC in 1996, it authorized six other contiguous states, including Pennsylvania, to join.

Pennsylvania's enrollment in the compact was conditional upon New York entering. New York Gov. George Pataki signed the legislation to join the compact in December.

The bill, approved by a vote of 183-18, now goes to the Senate for concurrence in House amendments.

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### **Erie County libraries to receive additional state funds**

HARRISBURG, June 9 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, this week voted for legislation that would assist public libraries across the state in improving services to local residents.

Scrimenti said the bill (H.B. 17) would send an additional \$17 million to public libraries by next year, including the Corry, Erie County, McCord Memorial and Union City public libraries. It also would change the current library funding formula so libraries can target funds to areas most in need of additional resources.

"Public libraries continue to be the most valuable resource for local residents and are continually changing and upgrading their services to keep pace with new technology," Scrimenti said. "I've always believed that the state should take a greater role in investing in our libraries. This legislation will move us in the right direction."

Scrimenti said Corry Public Library would receive a total of \$39,614 for the 1999-2000 fiscal year, which represents a \$22,089 increase over the 1998-99 appropriation. McCord would see an additional \$21,090 over last year's payment for a total of \$34,932, and Union City would receive \$17,701, an \$8,648 increase.

Scrimenti said the House included a provision in the bill he co-sponsored that would require public libraries seeking state funds to establish protections for children using the Internet prior to receiving any money.

"We should do everything we can to protect children from explicit and offensive material that can be found on the Internet," said Scrimenti. "I'm glad we added this provision to ensure that libraries adopt policies and procedures to ensure quality resources."

The bill is now under consideration in the Senate.

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**Small business pollution prevention assistance available**

HARRISBURG, June 11 -- Local small businesses that are looking for ways to pay for the implementation of pollution prevention techniques and energy efficiency programs should apply for low-interest loan assistance through the state, said state Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie.

According to Scrimenti, Pennsylvania's Small Business Pollution Prevention Loan Program offers companies with 100 or fewer employees assistance in complying with environmental regulations through loans of up to \$50,000, but no more than 75 percent of the total project cost at a 2 percent interest rate.

"Most small business owners in our community want to take the steps that are necessary to provide a clean environment for residents, but they cannot afford some of the new and costly techniques to make it happen," Scrimenti said. "This program provides the money that is needed, as well as peace of mind for residents and business owners who are concerned about the harmful effects of hazardous or toxic substances in our environment."

Scrimenti said loan funds may be used to purchase equipment or make process changes that reduce or reuse raw materials, reduce the production of waste at the source or significantly reduce energy consumption.

The Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Community and Economic Development administer the program.

Interested business owners can obtain loan applications and additional information, including details on the process changes and equipment that qualify under the program, by calling the Small Business Prevention Loan Program through DCED at 1-800-379-7448 or by visiting DEP's Web site at [www.dep.state.pa.us](http://www.dep.state.pa.us).

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JUN 18 A.M.

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**House makes great strides in late-night session**

HARRISBURG, June 17 -- During a late-night session of the state House of Representatives that began Wednesday and ran into Thursday morning, Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, voted for legislation that would enhance programs for senior citizens and help Pennsylvania dairy farmers preserve their farms.

According to Scrimenti, bills to expand the state's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program for senior citizens (S.B. 773) and to allow Pennsylvania to become a member of the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact (S.B. 365) are on their way to the governor for his signature.

"This is a major victory for our senior citizens and our dairy farmers," Scrimenti said. "The legislature has worked for months to see both bills through and I'm delighted that we were able to agree on the legislation before breaking for the summer."

Scrimenti said expansions to the Property/Tax Rent Rebate Program would allow senior citizens to exclude half of their Social Security income and half of their Railroad Retirement Pension from consideration when applying for the program.

"This provision would open the door for some additional 180,000 Pennsylvania senior citizens, widows and widowers, and permanently disabled residents who are struggling to pay their property taxes or keep up with their rent," Scrimenti said.

The program rebates up to \$500 of property taxes or rent paid in a given year if annual household income is \$15,000 or less. It is open to people 65 and older, surviving spouses 50 and older, and people with disabilities 18 and older.

The Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact, which is an agreement among the six New England states to set the farm price of fluid milk above the federal order price established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, also won overwhelming support from legislators.

"Pennsylvania dairy farmers work hard to make the state a top producer of agricultural products and they contribute significantly to our economy," said Scrimenti. "The dairy farmers in Erie County have voiced their support for this legislation and I was delighted to vote for it."

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**Scrimenti urges municipalities to report water shortages**

HARRISBURG, July 30 -- As Erie officials keep a close watch on water supplies and drought conditions throughout the county, state Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, said municipalities that already are experiencing water supply problems should consider declaring a water emergency for their area.

According to local emergency management officials, Pennsylvania's emergency management law allows municipalities to declare a water emergency if they've done what they can to help residents and have no further resources.

"By declaring a water emergency, municipalities that are facing significant water problems and that have exhausted their resources and funds may be eligible for some assistance in getting temporary clean and drinkable water supplies for residents," Scrimenti said.

"Even though Erie County still is under a drought watch, the situation for hundreds of residents, especially our rural residents, has become unbearable as persisting drought conditions continue to leave families with little or no water. We cannot expect our residents to wait much longer to get the water they so desperately need."

Scrimenti encourages residents to assist in the effort by reporting water shortages to their township or borough officials. Municipalities can use those numbers to apply for emergency water supplies through the Erie County Emergency Management Agency.

Scrimenti and his legislative staff are working closely with emergency management officials in assessing the impact of current drought conditions and formulating actions if water shortages persist. A drought task force has been established to address the problem.

Local government officials are encouraged to complete an Erie County Municipality Weekly Drought Report available through the Erie County Emergency Management Agency at 814-970-9920. The address is 1714 French St., Erie, PA 16501.

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AUG 25 A.M.

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**Scrimenti appointed to review professional licensing boards**

HARRISBURG, Aug. 24 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, has been appointed to serve on a special legislative committee designed to review whether the state's professional licensing and occupational boards and commissions are acting within their rights and responsibilities.

"I look forward to the challenges of this new appointment," said Scrimenti, who joins six other House legislators on the Special Subcommittee on Regulatory Review and Legislative Intent.

"Professional licensing protects the health, safety and welfare of the public from fraudulent and unethical practitioners. As a member of both this special subcommittee and the House Professional Licensure Committee, I want to make sure the boards and commissions are keeping the public's best interest in mind when doing their jobs."

According to Scrimenti, Pennsylvania has 27 business- and health-related licensing boards and commissions, each with their own statute governing powers and functions. The boards and commissions, whose members are appointed by the governor, also publish regulations that govern their respective professions.

The special subcommittee, which was approved by the full House in March, is looking into allegations that the licensing boards and commissions have been untimely in submitting regulations for review and continue to submit regulations as final without first seeking public comment and input from the Professional Licensure Committee.

The subcommittee also will review whether regulations published by the boards and commissions reflect the intent of legislation enacted by the General Assembly relating to professional licensing.

The subcommittee currently is conducting public hearings on the issue. The next hearing will be held from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sept. 14-15 in Room 461, Main Capitol, Harrisburg.

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**Scrimenti offers free office space to keep Corry assistance office open**

HARRISBURG, Sept. 21 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, has secured free office space for the Department of Public Welfare to keep the Corry branch of the Erie County Assistance Office open for rural residents in need.

Scrimenti secured space at the Corry Community Center on First Avenue with the cooperation of Corry Mayor Ken Nichols.

Scrimenti said the department's reasons for closing the office, which include the centralized implementation of its electronic benefit transfer system and the declining number of cash assistance cases brought on by welfare reform, do not make for good, responsive government.

"The centralization of these services may be cost-effective, but it certainly is not people-effective," said Scrimenti.

"I fear that rural residents who are most in need and who depend on the accessibility of a local office will end up without needed assistance. If the department needs to cut costs, we should be looking at other ways to handle it instead of modernizing our residents out of the critical services they need."

Scrimenti said the department is foolish for using the diminishing number of people on cash assistance as a reason for closing an office that has served an area of the county with a history of economic depression and suppression.

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"The purpose of government is to be there when people need help the most," said Scrimenti. "The people of Corry and Union City have suffered more in economic terms than residents in other areas of the county. I don't believe the department considered the ramifications in the event of an economic downturn."

Along with offering the Public Welfare Department free office space to serve Corry's rural residents, Scrimenti is proposing a House resolution which would require the State Government Committee to review government services to rural residents and determine if state costs can be reduced without having to close offices.

Scrimenti said the protection of localized state offices that serve rural residents continues to be one of his top priorities. Several years ago, he fought the proposed closing of the Corry employment office. Ultimately, a compromise was reached that kept services available to local residents seeking employment.

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**Scrimenti appeals to governor, Welfare secretary to keep Corry office open**

HARRISBURG, Sept. 27 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, is urging Gov. Thomas Ridge and Department of Public Welfare Secretary Feather Houstoun to consider other alternatives to closing the Corry branch of the Erie County Assistance Office.

In letters sent today to Ridge and Houstoun, Scrimenti questioned the administration's decision to make the process of obtaining government services more difficult for Corry residents in need.

"This decision, to me, shows a side of government that I find diametrically opposed to one of its primary charges, which is making government services properly available to those needing them most," Scrimenti wrote.

"Ultimately, I fear the department's intent to modernize its services will leave those who are unable to access services in the city of Erie without needed assistance."

Last week, Scrimenti notified DPW about free office space he secured at the Corry Community Center with the cooperation of Corry Mayor Ken Nichols. Scrimenti asked Houston and Ridge to meet with him to discuss that option and other alternatives to taking needed services out of the Corry area.

DPW officials have charged that keeping state assistance services in Corry would be an ineffective use of staff time and money.

Scrimenti said, in addition to free office space, other alternatives could include reducing the number of days services are available in Corry, revising staff responsibilities to maximize the number of services one staff person could provide, and installing or transporting electronic benefit transfer equipment to the local office.

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### **Two former Erie legislators honored in House bill**

HARRISBURG, Dec. 7 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, said the House passed legislation today that would honor former Erie state legislators Forest Hopkins and Harry Bowser.

The bill (H.B. 1268), which is on its way to Gov. Tom Ridge for his signature, would designate an eight-mile section of the Southern Tier Expressway in Erie County as the Hopkins-Bowser Highway.

"Forest Hopkins served in the House from 1967 until his untimely death in 1978 as state representative in the seat I now hold," Scrimenti said. "Harry Bowser followed in his footsteps and served the people of my legislative district for nearly 10 years.

"I believe that this official designation would be a fitting and lasting tribute to two gentleman who served this state and the people of our district with honor and distinction. Forrie Hopkins' friends and family have waited a long time for this designation, and I am delighted that it has finally come to fruition."

Road signs displaying the two former representatives' names will be erected at the beginning and end of the eight-mile section of highway that runs from Greenfield to the New York state line. The official designation ceremony will be announced at a later date.

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**Legislation would allow prisoners to donate organs**

HARRISBURG, Dec. 23 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, this week introduced legislation that would allow state and county prisoners to donate organs.

Under the bill (H.B. 2166), prisoners in state and county correctional facilities would be allowed to donate organs to relatives, organizations that accept organs for distribution or any other individual in need of an organ transplant.

"Under current law, inmates at state and county correctional facilities are prohibited from donating their organs," Scrimenti said. "At a time when there is such a need for organs and willing donors, I believe we should open that opportunity to any person who is willing to become a donor."

Scrimenti said his bill would not give prisoners an incentive to donate for a potential reduced sentence, but would give them an opportunity to fill a great need in their communities and throughout Pennsylvania.

The legislation also would not increase costs for state or county corrections departments.

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**Scrimenti urges Ridge to back heating assistance program**

HARRISBURG, Dec. 23 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, is seeking a commitment from Gov. Thomas Ridge to ensure that low-income residents in Erie County and across Pennsylvania can sufficiently heat their homes this winter.

In recent letters to Ridge and state Public Welfare Secretary Feather Houstoun, Scrimenti urged the administration to provide \$7 million in state funding needed to ensure the financial stability of the Low-Income Heating Assistance Program. The program, created by the federal government in 1981, helps needy families and the elderly pay their winter heating bills and provides grants for unexpected heating emergencies.

Right now, neither the state nor federal government wants to take responsibility for LIHEAP's funding needs. Last year, the U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee voted to eliminate the \$1.1 billion program. This year's funding came from federal emergency budget funds. The Ridge administration has said LIHEAP is a federal and not a state responsibility.

"For nearly 20 years, Pennsylvania's poorest residents have come to rely on this assistance for hope, warmth and survival," Scrimenti said. "While I can understand the disagreements between the Ridge administration and federal government over who should properly fund the program, we must keep in mind that the lives of so many citizens of this state may be seriously affected if they do not receive this vital assistance.

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"With the budget surpluses we've seen over the past several years -- \$600 million on average -- the state could hardly fund a more worthwhile initiative that provides real assistance to real people in potentially deadly situations."

Scrimenti said he agrees with the Pennsylvania Energy Assistance and Weatherization Coalition, which called on the administration to provide \$7 million in state funding to help cover the program's overall costs to assist needy residents. That figure represents what the state is entitled to take out of its federal LIHEAP allocation to cover administration and planning costs.

Scrimenti said federal funds for LIHEAP peaked in 1986 at \$2.1 billion, but declined to slightly more than \$1 billion in 1995 and in each subsequent year.

"The impact of these budget cuts has been severe," Scrimenti said. "But we shouldn't be taking these cuts out on the people who are most in need of assistance. It only makes sense for Pennsylvania to allow all of the federal funds to go directly to help poor people pay their bills, while the state picks up the administrative costs. Helping people survive through the winter should be our top priority."

Federal dollars for LIHEAP are allocated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to the states as a block grant and are disbursed under programs designed by each state. Pennsylvania's program is administered by the Department of Public Welfare.

Residents with questions about LIHEAP should contact the Erie County Assistance Office at 814-461-2002 or toll free at 1-800-635-1014. Additional information about the program is available from Scrimenti's district offices located at 9 W. Main St. in North East, 814-725-8664, and at 202 N. Center St. in Corry, 814-664-9126.