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It gives me great pleasure to extend Governor Thomas Ridge's greetings to Fern Hill Elementary School's fourth grade students in celebration of "Pennsylvania Day."

I know you visited the Capitol last month, and I was disappointed I was unable to meet with you. I hope your visit was educational and fun.

More than three centuries ago, when William Penn founded Pennsylvania, he created a society built on the ideas of community, individual freedom and representative self-government.

The site of the signing of the Declaration of

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Independence and the birth place of the United States

Constitution, our Commonwealth embodies the

principles that founded, guided and progressed this

nation for more than two centuries.

As a Commonwealth, Pennsylvania cherishes the

historical, social and cultural arts of our people and

communities as emblems of enduring significance and

influential character to the entire nation.

Chester County was created by Penn in 1682 as one of Pennsylvania's three original counties. It was named for Cheshire, England, from which many of the early settlers came.

In 1786 West Chester became the county seat, replacing Chester, which is now in Delaware County. Today Chester County is one of the fastest growing counties in the nation and among the top 15 percent in per capital wealth.

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It is very inspiring to see students express an interest in learning more about our Commonwealth and all that it has to offer.

As our Commonwealth's young people, you have the opportunity to learn what we have done, and shape what we will do. I am confident that you will continue the great tradition upon which we as a state have succeeded.

With aspiring citizens such as yourselves, the world anticipates the promise of the future you represent and your many accomplishments yet to come.

On behalf of all Pennsylvanians, I would like to thank you for your interest in the goals and achievements of our great Commonwealth. Best wishes in all your future endeavors.

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desphulabom - lya