

March 22, 2002

## **National Guard Troops Preparing for Overseas Assignment**

*By Rep. Paul Semmel (R-187)*

A few weeks ago I had the privilege of joining Gov. Mark Schweiker as we visited 500 troops from the Pennsylvania National Guard's 28<sup>th</sup> Division at Fort Indiantown Gap. The soldiers are scheduled to deploy in September on an historic six-month peacekeeping mission in war-torn Bosnia.

We visited the division's training compound at the Gap where we were briefed on the upcoming mission by Maj. Gen. Walter Pudlowski, the Commanding General of the 28<sup>th</sup> Division.

The troops were in the midst of a week-long training exercise centered in a secure compound of 18 buildings designed to replicate living and working conditions on "Eagle Base" in Bosnia.

During the training session, soldiers assigned to division headquarters – along with other attached units from across the state – conducted round-the-clock exercises to refine their planning, communication and decision-making skills.

Members of the Commonwealth's National Guard units certainly have and continue to demonstrate their spirit of patriotism and service to country in these troubled times of the War on Terrorism, as the 28<sup>th</sup>'s deployment to Bosnia represents their largest mobilization since the Korean War era.

Pennsylvania's Guard members – officers and troops alike – are considered by the regular Army as among the most highly trained and skilled volunteers in the country. That is certainly obvious because as the command element, the 28<sup>th</sup> Division will oversee a force of about 2,900 active Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve troops, as well as multinational contingents from Russia, Turkey, Poland and Scandinavia.

Among others who joined us during the visit to meet with the troops and observe the training maneuvers were Cong. George Gekas, state Sens. David Brightbill and Robert Tomlinson, Reps. Ron Marsico and Peter Zug.

In addition to Maj. General Pudlowski, we met with Maj. Gen. William Lynch, who is the Pennsylvania National Guard Adjutant General; Maj. Gen. James Skiff, Deputy Adjutant General for the Air National Guard; and Brig. Gen. Jessica Wright, Deputy Adjutant General for the Army National Guard.

As the chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I was very impressed with the knowledge, experience, skills and enthusiasm of the troops – particularly as they are volunteer reservists who will be leaving their families and their full-time jobs for several months, and will be facing daily dangers in rather harsh conditions.

However, their abilities are sorely needed to help Bosnian people rebuild their country into a peaceful, economically viable nation in which the people can feel safe and lead normal lives for the first time in many years.

As their deployment date approaches, Gov. Schweiker, the General Assembly and the military will be planning several public send-off festivities so that Pennsylvanians everywhere will have an opportunity to wish our fellow residents God's Speed in their overseas assignment.

When these activities are finalized, I'll be sure to keep area residents informed.

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February 8, 2002

**Gov. Proposes Committing \$75 Million+  
For Anti-Terrorism Initiative**

*By Rep. Paul Semmel (R-187)*

In presenting his 2002-03 state budget proposal to the General Assembly last week, Gov. Mark Schweiker reaffirmed his concern for the safety and security of Pennsylvania residents by suggesting spending more than \$75 million to bring the state's anti-terrorism initiative to the highest level.

As chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I was pleased the governor has picked up on the committee's recommendation to establish a second Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team for deployment in the state. Our current USAR team – known as Pennsylvania Task Force 1 – was heavily used at Ground Zero in New York.

One of the most skilled and dedicated USAR teams in the world, the fact that the team can be deployed at short notice for any emergency around the globe leaves Pennsylvania without a team in its absence – a situation that could have been disastrous results following the attacks on New York and the Pentagon and the Flight 93 crash in Somerset County.

To fund, equip, train and deploy a second team for use strictly within the Commonwealth, Gov. Schweiker proposes appropriating \$4.3 million. That way, we can still stand ready to help others throughout the world, but will also be ready and able to help our own citizens in the face of any crisis – be it natural, accidental or terrorist.

Another appropriation in the proposed budget that pleases me is nearly \$11 million for emergency preparedness training and planning assistance in our 67 counties, including statewide security for emergency communications and warning systems.

Schweiker calls for spending nearly \$2 million for the formation and training of Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTS). These teams – similar to a proposal outlined by President Bush in his State of the Union address – would serve as our first line of defense and response in a time of crisis.

The program also would provide extra resources to communities located near potential terrorist targets, such as nuclear power plants and airports, and aid in county-conducted drills that put emergency preparedness into practice. Additionally, Gov. Schweiker said funds would be available to broaden training of ordinary citizens in basic rescue and emergency tactics.

The governor wants to spend \$20 million to fund two critical state communications projects: security upgrades for the Commonwealth Technology Center (CTC) and completion of the Statewide Public Safety Radio System. With these funds, this radio system could be completed on schedule, giving our emergency responders decidedly better intelligence and response capabilities.

The 2002-03 budget proposal also includes \$3.5 million to continue the development of the National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NEDDS) in Pennsylvania. This system provides a two-way communication network across the Commonwealth that enables physicians, hospitals and laboratories to securely report unusual diseases or symptoms, including anthrax and other possible terrorist-planned scourges upon our land. The funding would enable statewide implementation by all state, county and municipal health departments, labs, hospitals and physicians.

Another item that I could support is a proposed \$1 million to enable the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to provide mobile and portable radios at armories and for Air and Army National Guard units at Fort Indiantown Gap in Lebanon County.



Now that we are calling on our Guard units to provide more in-state security, we certainly should provide them with an up-to-date communications systems.

Finally, I was pleased the governor is planning to maintain the current level of spending for the Pennsylvania wing of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP). But I still want to see us consider a budget increase in subsequent years in accordance with anticipated increases in CAP mission tasks. The Civil Air Patrol is a vital player in air and sea search and rescue operations, jumping into action when a private plane or boat has been lost or crashed. The state needs to make a stronger commitment to CAP in response to the help it routinely gives to our citizens.

However, I must caution 187<sup>th</sup> District residents that this budget is a thrifty proposal in the face of an anticipated \$677 million revenue deficit. As budget hearings progress, we will be scrutinizing Gov. Schweiker's proposal very carefully – looking for every unnecessary tax dollar.

The one thing the Legislature does not intend to do is raise taxes to cover any revenue shortfalls and finance any unnecessary or frivolous spending. Just as your own household cuts back on spending when facing a money crunch, our state government will tighten its belt – will determine what programs are absolutely needed to help our citizens. Then we will either hold the line or reduce spending on other programs.

Therefore, although the governor has listed anti-terrorism initiatives as one of his highest priorities, as the Legislature reviews the plan and studies anticipated tax revenues, we will make our own priority list. This list may not include all of the Gov. Schweiker's current proposals. Compromises will have to be made and the final product for 2002-03 may not look exactly like the present plan.

As negotiations progress, I will certainly keep 187<sup>th</sup> District residents updated.

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**COLUMN FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**December 6, 2002**

**Counter-Terrorism Legislation Awaits Governor's Signature**

*By Rep. Paul Semmel (R-187)*

During the last week of the 2001-02 legislative session, the House and Senate approved legislation providing for counter-terrorism planning, preparedness and response within Pennsylvania. Senate Bill 1569 – identical to House Bill 2928, the proposal I introduced in the House – now awaits Gov. Mark Schweiker's signature into law.

As chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, the responsibility of negotiating the final version of the proposal with Senate leaders and shepherding the bill through the House to final passage fell to me. Just as in Congress, in the waning hours of our state legislative session, it was imperative that the Commonwealth enact a proposal laying the groundwork for counter-terrorism response by state and local government officials.

The legislation requires the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) to work with other state agencies and the Office of Homeland Security to establish, develop and maintain counter-terrorism goals promoting and protecting the health, safety and welfare of emergency responders, public officials and the general public from either potential or actual acts of terrorism in Pennsylvania.

The bill specifically calls for:

- Establishing a counter-terrorism planning, preparedness and response program in which PEMA is to provide training and technical assistance to various state and local agencies, and disperse grant monies when available. PEMA will also establish certification standards for regional counter-terrorism response teams.
- Creating nine regional terrorism task forces that will be required to prepare response plans.
- Creating a statewide mutual aid program through the establishment of Regional Counter-terrorism Response and Preparedness Zones.

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- Codifying into law the existence of the Pennsylvania Urban Search and Rescue Task Force and establishing workers' compensation and death benefits for task force members.
- Establishing specialized statewide response teams to assist the regional counter-terrorism task forces.
- Establishing a grant program for county and local emergency preparedness programs.
- Providing civil immunity for members of a Regional Counter-terrorism Task Force, Urban Search and Rescue Task Force or other specialized statewide response team.
- Providing Commonwealth indemnity for regional emergency response groups in regard to certain types of property damage incurred during regional response emergencies.
- Authorizing the governor, in consultation with the Secretary of Health and via a written order, to temporarily isolate or quarantine groups or individuals to prevent the transmission of a contagious or possibly contagious disease.
- Providing for Good Samaritan liability for persons or groups of people who render assistance during a state of public health emergency.

Additionally, Senate Bill 1569 creates a second state-based Urban Search and Rescue Team – a request included in Pennsylvania's 2002-03 state budget. The current Urban Search and Rescue Team played a very significant role in helping rescue and retrieval efforts in the wake of Sept. 11 at Ground Zero in New York.

The legislation was drafted from recommendations put forth by the Governor's Task Force on Security report and the House and Senate Emergency Preparedness committees, as well as input from PEMA and the state Health Department.

For fiscal year 2002-03, Pennsylvania is initially to receive approximately \$150 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as funding for counter-terrorism efforts.

However, as a condition to receive the funds, FEMA wants us to develop a statewide mutual aid program. That's why it was imperative that before the conclusion of the session on Nov. 30, the House and Senate agree on the counter-terrorism legislation now on the governor's desk.

I anticipate the governor will sign the bill into law within the next few weeks.

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**November 21, 2002**

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**Semmel's Wireless Emergency 911 Legislation Fast-Track**

*House moves bill to Senate*

HARRISBURG – Legislation sponsored by Rep. Paul Semmel (R-187) that would create a statewide wireless emergency telephone system similar to the current landline 911 system has been fast-tracked through the state House and now awaits Senate action.

House Bill 2926 amends Act 78 of 1990 by creating the E-911 wireless system that would be funded by a monthly \$1 surcharge on all wireless telephones registered in Pennsylvania. The fee would be collected by wireless carriers, and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) would reimburse county 911 centers and wireless providers for eligible costs incurred in the build-out and operation of the system.

“Such an enhanced system will allow our county 911 centers to accurately pinpoint the location – via global positioning systems (GPS) technology – and phone number of a person who is calling 911 for emergency assistance,” Semmel said.

“It’s a life-saving system that is now technologically feasible and – with approximately 4.8 million wireless telephones in use in the state – should be initiated as quickly as possible throughout all of Pennsylvania,” he added.

In accordance with a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) order that the wireless industry have its E-911 technology in place by 2005, 35 states already have enacted similar legislation providing for a wireless E-911 system funded by a surcharge or similar funding.

“Although the average surcharges range from 50 to 75 cents, some states are currently considering increasing fees to cover expenses involved in expanding the system as wireless carriers become more developed – known as Phase II service,” the lawmaker said.

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New York recently raised the E-911 wireless phone fee to \$1.20 per phone, per month.

House Bill 2926 establishes reimbursement eligibility criteria that is based on a geographic area's ability to offer Phase I and Phase II services. "In other words," Semmel said, "the cost reimbursement scale ranges from 25 to 50 percent of cost recoupment for Phase I costs, and 75 to 100 percent cost recoupment for Phase II costs."

Semmel, chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, said House Bill 2926 is the product of numerous public hearings and informational meetings conducted by the committee over the past three years.

"Representatives from PEMA, the County Commissioners Association, County 911 Centers, the Association of Public Communications Officials (APCO), the Pennsylvania Chapters of the National Emergency Number Association (NENA) and the wireless industry assisted with the drafting of this legislation and support the proposal," he said.

Semmel said that he is hopeful the Senate leadership will take up the bill next week and continue its fast pace through the legislative process so that it can be enacted before the end of the year.

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## **District 4<sup>th</sup> Grader Concerned About Kids' Safety**

*Wins 1<sup>st</sup> Place in "There Ought to be a Law" Contest*

*By Rep. Paul Semmel (R-187)*

As teachers, parents and kids busily prepare for the start of the 2002-03 school year in a few weeks, I thought it would be a good time to talk about the "There Ought to be a Law" contest that I sponsor yearly for district-wide fourth-grade students.

As the 2001-02 school year came to an end last spring, I was pleased to name Joshua Campbell, a Kernsville Elementary School fourth-grader, as the first-prize winner in the contest that is fast becoming a hands-on learning experience for students studying Pennsylvania civics and government.

Joshua thinks there ought to be a law that would better protect kids who play community sports from possible abuse or harm by youth association coaches.

The idea of requiring background checks of persons who coach youth athletic teams earned the Kernsville student first place in my second annual "There Ought to Be a Law" contest.

In making his proposal, Joshua explained that many children are abused by people who have a known history of child abuse or a criminal record.

In his own words Joshua said, "We can stop many of these incidents if we just take the time to do a little research. I propose that youth associations require that all coaches have a background check done before allowing them to work with children. It will help adults feel safe about leaving their child at sports' practices or games without having to stay and watch over their child."

It sure sounds like a responsible idea to me, and to the other judges of the contest. That's why I was happy to have the idea drafted into bill form and invited Joshua and his family to the Capitol to be presented with a House of Representatives recognition citation.

This was the second year I've held the contest as a way to help our young people learn more about civics and government. It's important to get kids thinking about laws and why they are important.

Fourth-grade students from both public and private schools throughout the 187<sup>th</sup> Legislative District were eligible to enter the contest. Participation increased dramatically from last year with about 300 students submitting entries that were judged by Kathryn Moyer, Gerald Faust and myself. Last year about 120 students participated. I hope to have fourth graders from every elementary school in the district enter the 2002-03 academic year's competition.

Runner-up winners were Andrew Szewczak from Fogelsville Elementary School; Jonathan Brannan from Kernsville; Richard Lynch Kutztown Elementary; and Samuel Pany of Ironton Elementary School.

I encourage fourth grade teachers in every elementary school – private and public – in the 187<sup>th</sup> District to adapt my "There Ought to be a Law" contest into their lesson plans for the study of Pennsylvania's government and civics.

It's a fun way for our young students to learn about the importance of laws and how ideas are formed and legislation is drafted and enacted. In addition, the contest allows teachers, parents and lawmakers to better understand the concerns our children have about life in America in this fast-paced, sometimes violent and certainly confusing world in which we live today.

I'll be contacting elementary school teachers and administrators about the 2003 contest later in the upcoming school year.

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