

Rep. Paul Semmel
187th District
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
(610) 799-0187
(717) 787-3017
www.PaulSemmel.com
Contact: Shonna Clark
House Republican Public Relations
(717) 772-3632
www.pahousegop.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 30, 2006

Semmel's Final Bill Before Leaving Office Signed into Law

Act temporarily waives continuing education course requirements for deployed military personnel, enhances veteran's property tax exemption program

HARRISBURG State Rep. Paul Semmel (R-Lehigh/Berks) received a warm send-off on Wednesday, Nov. 29, when the governor signed his final piece of legislation, House Bill 2296, into law.

The new law allows professionally licensed individuals and law enforcement officials to retain their license and temporarily waive their continuing education course requirements while activated for military service.

"During this time of war, many of our everyday citizens are being called upon to serve their country," Semmel said. "Upon returning home, these brave men and women are being penalized because they have not been able to obtain the necessary training required for licensed professionals due to circumstances beyond their control."

Anyone licensed by the Departments of State, Labor and Industry, Education, Insurance or Banking will qualify for this exemption. In addition, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has the ability to extend the same license retention and continuing education waivers to those licensed to practice law in Pennsylvania.

The new law also extends the disabled veteran Real Estate Tax Exemption review period from every two years to every five years beginning on Jan. 1, 2009.

To qualify for the program, a veteran must:

- Be an honorably discharged member of the armed forces who served during a period of war or conflict.
- Be blind, paraplegic, have sustained the loss of two or more limbs, have a service-connected disability declared by the United States Veterans' Administration or its successors to be a total or 100 percent permanent disability.
- Own the dwelling solely or with his or her spouse.
- Have an annual income of \$75,000 or less.
- Submit proof of need to the State Veteran's Commission.

The law is effective immediately.

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Discover PA Agriculture with the Blue Ribbon Passport

By Rep. Paul Semmel (R-Lehigh/Berks)

Pennsylvania's number one industry is agriculture, contributing billions of dollars to our economy. As a farmer, I understand and appreciate the role that agriculture plays in our daily lives from the food that we eat to the milk that we drink to the lumber used to build our houses.

Lehigh and Berks counties are especially rich in agriculture. It shapes our families and our history; however, with the fast-paced lives of our families, we do not slow down to enjoy our heritage. Now, you can discover and experience Pennsylvania's agricultural heritage with the Blue Ribbon Passport.

Agricultural tourism, more commonly referred to as "agritourism," is a growing national trend, and the Blue Ribbon Passport initiative unites two of the state's largest economic forces: agriculture and tourism. The passport brings the state's top two industries together by encouraging people to visit the I-78 and I-79 corridors – two of the state's richest agricultural regions.

First launched in 2004 by the Department of Agriculture, the passport encourages people to visit a variety of sites during the summer and early fall, each time submitting a passport ticket that gives people a chance to win \$500 at the end of the season. Some participating businesses also have their own giveaways.

The Blue Ribbon Passport brochure is available from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. Inside you will find information on county fairs, farmers markets, farm stays, bed and breakfasts, and wineries. It is a comprehensive guide to dozens of agritourism attractions and includes money-saving discounts at select stops.

With the foliage soon to be coloring our mountain landscape, fall is the perfect time to take a day or weekend trip with your family or a loved one. Start a Saturday morning with a trip to one of Dutch country farmers markets where you can pick up fresh produce from many of our local farms, warm baked goods and sip on hot cider.

Next, enjoy the afternoon by shopping for antiques at Renninger's Antique Market in Kutztown or visit Roadside America in Shartlesville for insight into rural America over 200 years ago.

No matter your interests, there is something for everyone. For more information about the Blue Ribbon Passport, or to download a copy of the passport brochure that includes attraction information and passport tickets, visit www.blueribbonpassport.com.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns about this or another state-government related issue, please contact my district office. We are here for you and will help you in any way we can.

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History, Beauty of the State Capitol

By Rep. Paul Semmel (R-Lehigh/Berks)

In less than a month, the Pennsylvania's current Capitol building will celebrate the 100-year anniversary of its dedication by then President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906. Since 1787, when Pennsylvania officially became a state, there have been four "official" capitol buildings, including Independence Hall in Philadelphia, each with their own significance.

These four buildings have had their share of historical highs and lows, and as homage to the 100 years of fortitude of our current standing structure, I wanted to highlight the Capitol's history and current structure.

After the Pennsylvania Constitution was ratified and the state House of Representatives and Senate were officially created in 1790, officials began to see the need to move the capital from the city of Philadelphia, to a more central location.

At this time, settlers were steadily moving into the western portions of the Commonwealth, where traveling from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia was more than just a few hours drive across a turnpike. Locations in Lancaster and Reading, Centre and Northumberland counties, and many more were considered as possible new locations for the site of the state capital. In 1810, Harrisburg was formally named as the capital city.

For many years, the General Assembly gathered at the Dauphin County courthouse until construction of the Colonial or "Redbrick" Capitol was completed in 1922 at a total cost of only \$135,000! The building was designed by English-born Stephen Hills and stood strong for 75 until Feb. 2, 1897.

As records indicate, a fire broke out shortly after noon during a typical winter session day. In the matter of a few short hours, the entire building had collapsed and lay in ruins. Luckily, everyone escaped fatal injuries. The cause of the fire remains unknown, although many believe a faulty fireplace duct was to blame.

In one year a new building was constructed for \$550,000 by Chicago-based architect Henry Ives Cobb. Unfortunately for Cobb, critics of the building regarded it as "undignified and unattractive." In order to find a new designer for the incomplete building, the House and Senate held a design competition to find a new blueprint.

Joseph Huston of Philadelphia won by including the existing Cobb Capitol outer-walls in his design. By the fall of 1904, the currently standing state Capitol was completed.

Built for a much higher price tag than the previous two buildings combined, the Renaissance-style Capitol was designed as a "Palace of Art," according to Huston. Paintings, stained glass and ornate sculptures adorn the walls, ceiling and exterior and reflect Pennsylvania's many achievements. The most spectacular piece of architecture in the building is

the 272-foot, 52 million pound dome inspired by Michelangelo's dome at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

President Theodore Roosevelt called it "the handsomest building I ever saw" and "the most beautiful state capitol in the nation" when he dedicated it 100 years ago. In 1989, the New York Times called the Capitol "grand, even awesome at moments, but it is also a working building, accessible to citizens...a building that connects with the reality of daily life."

Those who have seen this marvel of architectural design understand the beauty and awe that the building inspires. Those who have not had the opportunity to see the Capitol first-hand will have the opportunity to celebrate its centennial beginning on Sept. 30 and ending on Oct. 4, during "Centennial Days."

For more information on "Centennial Days," visit my Web site at www.PaulSemmel.com. Those unable to attend the celebration can call my Harrisburg office at (717) 787-3017 to schedule a guided tour at their convenience.

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Paula Hand - Semmel Honors Local, State Emergency Medical Providers in House Ceremony

From: "Ashleigh Clabaugh" <aclabaug@pahousegop.com>
To: <phand@pahousegop.com>
Date: 4/26/2006 11:53 AM
Subject: Semmel Honors Local, State Emergency Medical Providers in House Ceremony

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**April 26, 2006****Semmel Honors Local, State Emergency Medical Providers
in House Ceremony**

HARRISBURG - When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita savagely ripped through the Gulf Coast, hundreds of Pennsylvania's highly-skilled emergency medical responders traveled south to aide in the massive relief efforts. More than 150 of those emergency workers who answered the call of duty were honored at the state Capitol on Monday in a special ceremony on the House floor, said the event's host, Rep. Paul Semmel (R-Lehigh/Berks).

Local responders who attended the ceremony included John Kloss, Everitt Binns, Joseph Casciotti and Frank Bartholomew.

"It was a great honor to recognize these courageous men and women in the hall of the House," said Semmel, chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

"Our local and state EMTs and Paramedics provide a selfless and lifesaving service to our community but often do not receive the proper recognition for their work. These men and women give their time and energy and bring inspiration to people in need. They are true heroes and I thank them for their unwavering service."

According to Semmel, Pennsylvania had one of the nation's largest emergency medical responses to the 2005 hurricanes and the only fully coordinated response.

According to the Pennsylvania Emergency Health Services Council, the Commonwealth was able to respond so well to the emergency because of pre-established "surge teams" that are specifically trained and equipped to respond in overwhelming or extraordinary situations. Approximately 264 providers, 59 ambulances and 12 support units provided more than five and one-half weeks total response.

(MORE)

Page 2 - House Ceremony

In addition to being recognized on the floor of the state House and in a press conference attended by the Governor and Secretary of Health, the EMTs and Paramedics were presented with certificates of appreciation from the House of Representatives in honor of their service.

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Pictured in the photo from left to right:

Rep. Paul Semmel (R-Lehigh/Berks); Everitt Binns Ph. D., Executive Director of the Eastern Pennsylvania EMS Council; Frank Bartholomew, Cetrionia Ambulance Corps; Joe Casciotti, Northampton Regional EMS; John Kloss, Director of Operations for the Eastern Pennsylvania EMS Council; and Steve Martin, Director of Education Services for the Eastern Pennsylvania EMS Council.

SC/aec



Paula Hand - Governor Vetoes Bill Aimed at Protecting the Vote of Pennsylvanians and Overseas Military, Semmel Says

From: "Amanda Arnold" <aarnold@pahousegop.com>
To: <phand@pahousegop.com>
Date: 3/16/2006 3:58 PM
Subject: Governor Vetoes Bill Aimed at Protecting the Vote of Pennsylvanians and Overseas Military, Semmel Says

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 16, 2006

Governor Vetoes Bill Aimed at Protecting the Vote of Pennsylvanians and Overseas Military, Semmel Says

HARRISBURG - The integrity of the vote in Pennsylvania took a step backward Wednesday as the governor vetoed legislation aimed at reducing voter fraud and ensuring the vote of overseas military personnel is counted, announced Rep. Paul Semmel (R-Lehigh/Berks).

"It is a shame that our governor does not feel that voter fraud is a serious issue in Pennsylvania," Semmel said. "Meanwhile, Philadelphia, the governor's home city, is listed as one of the nation's hotbeds for voter fraud.

"What is even more disappointing is that our military men and women, who are serving overseas risking their lives so that every American has the opportunity and freedom to vote, will not be guaranteed this same civil liberty."

House Bill 1318 would have ensured fair and honest elections. It would have safeguarded Pennsylvania citizens' access to the ballot; protected the rights of the elderly, the disabled and the military to have access to the polls; and that every voter had the right to vote in a polling location free from intimidation and harassment.

Additionally, voters would have been required to present an acceptable form of identification each time they vote - photo or non-photo. If the voter did not have a valid form of identification, the state would have been required to provide a free photo ID to any voter who requested it. If for some reason a voter was unable to produce one of the required forms of ID on Election Day, they would have been allowed to vote via a provisional ballot.

The legislation would have also given soldiers fighting overseas more time to return their absentee ballots; ensured polling places were located in buildings that are easily accessible to senior citizens and people with disabilities, as well as prohibit polling places from bars, private residences of the politically connected or in any other location where voter intimidation could occur; and made certain a statement of voters' rights are posted at each polling place on Election Day.

"The bill was not introduced to prevent people from exercising their constitutional right to vote as some critics have argued," Semmel said. "It was established to end the serious issue of voter fraud and to restore faith in the voting process."

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