



State Representative

**Paul W. Semmel (R-187)**

## Special Report for Berks County

March 1999

### Expanded Berks Hours To Begin March 16

In an effort to provide Berks County constituents with access to a variety of state government services, I plan to hold expanded office hours in Berks County each Tuesday starting March 16. District office staff member Jerry Faust will be available during those hours to assist residents with state-related services, such as: vehicle renewal and driver's license forms; help in obtaining birth and death certificates; property tax and rent rebate applications; and state agency referrals.

Tuesday office hours and locations are as follows:

**8:15 a.m. - 10 a.m.** at Topton Borough Hall, 44 West Keller St., Topton; **10:15 a.m. - noon** at Longswamp Township Building, 1112 State St., Mertztown; and

**1 - 3:30 p.m.** at Kutztown Borough Hall, 45 Railroad St., Kutztown. (For your convenience, this schedule is listed on an enclosed card that can be posted on a refrigerator or near a phone for easy reference.)

Summer months are popular vacation times. Therefore, in July and August, office hours will be held the first Tuesday of the month only. (If we find that public use is marginal, we will discontinue the expanded Berks County office hours.)

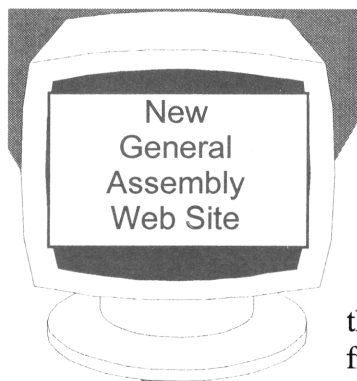
Constituents in Berks and Lehigh counties always can reach us through our existing district offices, which are listed on the back of this publication.

### Legislative Information At Your Fingertips

I am pleased to report that Berks County and citizens statewide now have access to legislative information online. Unveiled late in December, a new General Assembly Web site provides a convenient and fast means of staying abreast of legislative issues. To access the site, simply key in the Web site address: [www.legis.state.pa.us](http://www.legis.state.pa.us).

Tapping these keys allows Pennsylvanians access to much of the same legislative information used by lawmakers and their staffs. The information is updated automatically by the Legislative Data Processing Center, which provides com-

puter support to the General Assembly. The legislative data available includes: House and Senate committee schedules; texts and history of bills for current and prior sessions back to 1993-94; a topic index of bills for current and prior sessions to 1993-94; and a listing of the Senate executive calendar.



[www.legis.state.pa.us](http://www.legis.state.pa.us)

Additional information includes facts about state government such as tour information, Pennsylvania history from the Pennsylvania Manual, a resource guide from the Office of the Parliamentarian, and a state trivia quiz.

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# Semmel Appointed Chairman of The House Veterans Affairs And Emergency Preparedness Committee

(A Press Release of Jan. 22, 1999)

Serving the residents of the 187<sup>th</sup> District is nothing new for lawmaker Paul W. Semmel (R-Berks and Lehigh counties) – after all, he has been representing folks back home since first elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in 1982.

Now, Semmel will take on the additional and prestigious task of chairing the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee. The appointment was made by House Speaker Matthew J. Ryan during swearing-in ceremonies held Jan. 5 and marking the start of the new 1999-2000 Legislative Session.

“As Majority Chairman, I look forward to working with Pennsylvania’s community of veterans who, through their honored military service, have made our great commonwealth and country what it is today,” Semmel said. “I am also eager to assist Pennsylvania’s many fire departments and the emergency services community with the many new challenges facing them.”

Semmel, with his 16 years’ experience in the Legislature and the wealth of knowledge that comes with that experience, expressed a deep interest in further familiarizing himself with Pennsylvania’s existing emergency preparedness programs and polices.

“Whether the issue is 911, flood disasters or drought emergencies, I will work hard to ensure that the

commonwealth is prepared to respond to Mother Nature’s fury as well as any other emergencies we could encounter in today’s volatile world,” said Semmel, now serving his ninth term as the 187<sup>th</sup> District’s state representative.

The Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee is responsible for legislative initiatives which effect veterans, the Pennsylvania National Guard, fire and emergency medical services (EMS) departments, and emergency management issues.

The committee also provides legislative oversight for the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), the state Armory Board, and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA).

During the 1997-98 Session, Semmel served as Majority Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications.

This will be his first term as Chairman of a standing committee. The House has 22 standing committees, which are permanent committees organized by topic. Representatives in the 203-member House earn the coveted standing committee chairmanships through seniority.

Semmel’s extensive membership in state and community groups includes membership with the Neffs and Schnecksville Fire companies.

## DISTRICT OFFICES:

Schnecksville  
4525 Spring Hill Drive  
P.O. Box 235  
Schnecksville, PA 18078  
Phone: (610) 799-0187

Macungie Borough Hall  
Phone: (610) 966-0187

Kutztown Borough Hall  
Phone: (610) 683-9199

Upper Macungie Twp. Bldg.  
Phone: (610) 395-8180





*Rep. Paul W. Semmel*

# ***Semmel's*** ***187th District*** ***Legislative*** ***Report***



FALL 1999

## **Families Win Big In 1999-2000 Budget**

This year's \$19 billion spending plan continues our record of controlling expenditures, while at the same time, providing for the largest tax cut package in modern Pennsylvania history.

Families and businesses will see their tax burden reduced by over \$400 million dollars under this budget – marking the sixth consecutive year for tax cuts for Pennsylvania citizens. Major highlights follow.

### **Tax Relief for Working Families** **— \$7.5 million**

To help working families, the budget raises the personal income tax exemption from \$25,000 to \$26,000 annually for a family of four, saving each family about \$728 a year.

### **Tax Relief for Natural Gas Customers** — \$82 million

We've now repealed the 5 percent gross receipts tax on natural gas,

which will save the state's estimated 2 million natural gas customers about \$55 a year on their gas bills.

### **Tax Relief for Older Pennsylvanians** — \$97 Million

Because local property taxes are draining the limited incomes of our senior citizens, we expanded the Property Tax/ Rent Rebate program.

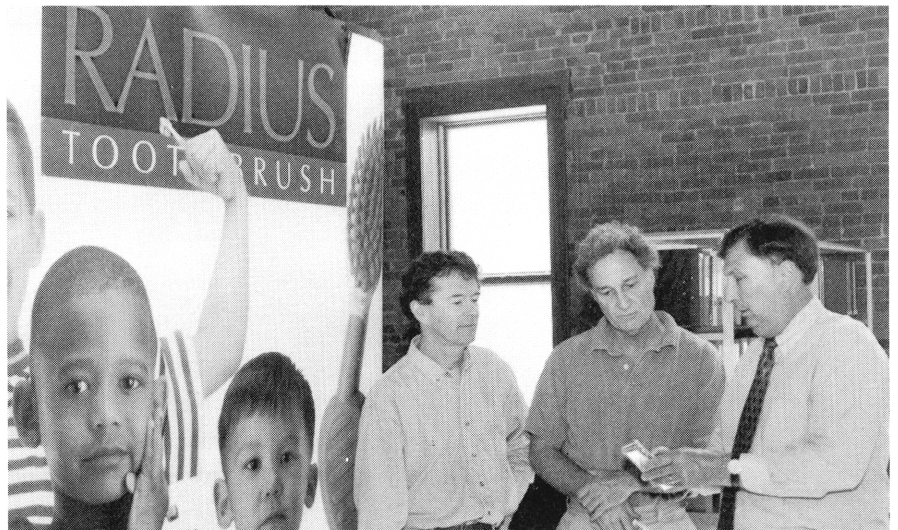
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## **Semmel And Staff Tour 4 Area Facilities**

Last month, my staff and I took a daylong district tour that included stops at Radius Toothbrush, East Penn Manufacturing Co. Inc., Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, and Lutheran Services Northeast, Topton.

In the photo at right, Radius President Kevin Foley (third from right), and company Chairman James O'Halloran (center) met with us to discuss the company and its product.

Additional tour photos are located throughout the newsletter.



### **Office Hours/ Phone Numbers**

#### **Schnecksville**

4525 Spring Hill Drive  
P.O. Box 235

Schnecksville, PA 18078

**Mon - Thurs: 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.**

**Fridays: 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.**

#### **Macungie Borough Hall**

21 Locust Street

Macungie, PA 18062

**Thursdays: 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.**

#### **Upper Macungie Twp. Bldg.**

8330 Schantz Road  
Breinigsville, PA 18031

**Tue - Fri: 7:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.**

#### **Berks County Office Hours**

**(Tuesdays resuming Oct. 5)**

**8:15 a.m. - 10 a.m.**

Topton Borough Hall

205 South Callow Hill Street

Topton, PA 19562

#### **Berks County (continued)**

**(Tuesdays)**

**10:15 a.m. - noon**

Longswamp Twp. Bldg.

1112 State Street

Mertztown, PA 19539

**1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.**

Kutztown Borough Hall

45 Railroad Street

Kutztown, PA 19530

**Phone Numbers (all 610 area code): 799-0187 966-0187 395-8180 683-9199**

*(you can leave a message after normal hours or any time ... day or night)*

# Families Win Big

(continued from Front Page)

Effective January 2000, claimants can exempt 50 percent of their Social Security benefits and railroad retirement pension income from the program's "total household income," which is capped at \$15,000.

## Investing In Public Education

As a parent and a lawmaker, I know the importance of education and the critical role it plays in our children's future. This budget prepares our children for the challenges of the next millennium.

We are now investing \$5.8 billion (over one-third of the total budget) to educate Pennsylvania children attending public schools. Increases include:

- Basic education subsidy funding increased by more than \$107 million to \$3.5 billion;
- Special education funding increase of 6 percent to \$719 million;
- \$34 million more for the "Link-to-Learn" computer program;
- \$35 million for a new "Read to Succeed" program;
- \$17 million more for public libraries, a whopping 56 percent jump in state support; and,
- \$22 million in safe school grants.

## Investing In Job Creation

We've garnered national attention by creating 250,000 new jobs and reducing our unemployment to record

### Local School Funding

The budget bolsters education funding almost a quarter billion dollars, an average of about \$500,000 in new money for each of our 501 school districts – including Lehigh and Berks County districts. Local funding increases are:

Brandywine Heights	\$2,888,424 (3.4 %)
East Penn	\$7,476,573 (1.0 %)
Fleetwood	\$2,322,932 (6.5 %)
Kutztown	\$2,454,927 (2.8 %)
Northwestern Lehigh	\$4,245,236 (2.5 %)
Parkland	\$4,444,360 (2.6 %)

lows.

We've made Pennsylvania a place where businesses want to locate by unshackling entrepreneurs and small business owners from crippling taxes that deter economic growth and expansion.

Job-creating tax relief highlights from this year's budget include:

- Reduction in the Capital Stock and Franchise Tax (CSFT) rate from 11.99 mills to 10.99, saving businesses \$100 million. The minimum payment also has been reduced from \$300 to \$200; helping small and

family-owned businesses.

- \$66 million savings through increasing the net operating loss carry forward cap from \$1 million to \$2 million, and increasing the corporate net income sales factor from 50 to 60 percent.

- Eliminate the "S" corporation passive income test, saving businesses another \$11.2 million.

This is a budget that prepares Pennsylvania for the many challenges of the next century. It is a budget of which we – lawmakers and taxpayers alike – can all be proud.

## Semmel Named Committee Chairman



Semmel joins Sen. Robert Robbins (R-Mercer) and PA Adjutant General William B. Lynch in seeing off members of the 171<sup>st</sup> Air Refueling Wing to Kosovo.

This year, I had the distinct honor of being named Majority Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee. By virtue of the appointment, I also am a member of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) Council.

Last session, I chaired the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications. Now, I am equally delighted to take on the prestigious task of chairing the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

As Majority Chairman, I look forward to working with our veterans who, through their honored military service, have made our great commonwealth and country what it is today. I am also eager to work with

the Commonwealth's fire departments and emergency services community and the many challenges they face.

The Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee is responsible for legislative initiatives which effect veterans, the Pennsylvania National Guard, fire and emergency medical services (EMS) departments, and emergency management issues. The committee also provides legislative oversight for the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), the state Armory Board, and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA).

The PEMA Council, chaired by the Lt. Governor, is responsible for overall policy and direction of state-wide disaster response programs.



# PA Declared 'Agriculture Disaster Area'

Despite much-needed rainfalls that arrived in late August, the drought is not over. As of Aug. 26, the Berks/Lehigh Valley area was still almost 9 inches below average rain levels for this time of year.

On Aug. 13, the U.S. Department of Agriculture declared Pennsylvania an agricultural disaster area, paving the way for many of the state's 50,000 farmers to qualify for low-interest federal loans. The loans would be used to help offset crop loss damages brought about by what could be the worst drought in Pennsylvania history. Preliminary estimates puts the loss to our state's farmers at about \$500 million.

This announcement came on the heels of the Governor's declaration of a "drought emergency" in 55 counties—including Lehigh and Berks. As chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, and a member of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) Council, I am actively involved in monitoring the state's drought conditions, and fully supported the Governor's request to declare Pennsylvania an agricultural disaster. Many farm families are staring at crop losses

ranging from 10 to 90 percent.

To be eligible for federal disaster assistance, farmers must have realized at least a 30 percent loss for a single crop. Those who believe they are eligible have eight months to apply at a local Farm Service Agency office. Noting that many of our farmers already are operating under a heavy debt load, the Governor also has asked Congress to approve grants (money that would not have to be paid back).



*Prior to the drought emergency, Semmel and Lehigh area colleagues, including House Majority Whip Don Snyder, outlined this session's agenda at an Allentown news conference.*

For updates on drought conditions and for detailed information on water-use restrictions, visit the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Web site at [www.dep.state.pa.us](http://www.dep.state.pa.us); or PEMA's Web site at [www.pema.state.pa.us](http://www.pema.state.pa.us).

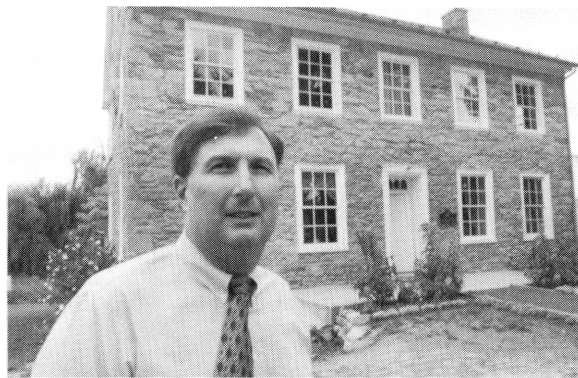
**For the latest drought information, call the toll-free Drought Emergency Hotline at 1-888-457-6653**

## Natural Gas Deregulation

Signed into law June 22, Act 21 of 1999 makes Pennsylvania the first state to allow residents to choose their natural gas providers.

In addition to repealing the gross receipt tax, the new law will provide residential, small commercial and industrial customers the option of selecting their own natural gas supplier; structure a framework to ensure natural gas service reliability is maintained and that natural gas marketers uphold responsibilities to their customers; and maintain existing consumer protections and assistance policies for payment-troubled customers.

Under the new law, local natural gas distribution companies have until Oct. 31 to file restructuring plans with the Public Utility Commission, which means customer choice could be available as early as Nov. 1.



**More About The Tour**

**At the Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Semmel and his staff tour the recently completed museum.**

**Pictured above, the museum is housed in a restored stone farmhouse built in the 1800s.**

**Pictured at right are Semmel and his staff: Paula Hand and Carol Abraham, of his Harrisburg office; and Kate Hofherr, Kathy McQuilken, and Jerry Faust, of his district office.**



# New Laws, And News You Can Use

## Senior Tax Cuts

Signed into law June 25, Act 30 of 1999 expands the state Property Tax and Rent Rebate program.

Under Act 30, claimants can exempt 50 percent of their Social Security income or railroad retirement pensions when calculating the "total household income."

In Lehigh County, the change will add an estimated 3,464 people to the number of county residents eligible. In Berks County, an additional 4,577 people will qualify.

The new law takes effect January 2000. Please note, application forms will not be available until January.

## Teen Driving Reform

From 1997 to 1998, teen driving fatalities in Pennsylvania increased by 12.8 percent. Signed into law June 25, Act 23 of 1999 will help reverse that trend. Key elements include:

- \* prohibiting junior drivers from being on the road between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. (effective Aug. 24);
- \* requiring young drivers with learner's permits to wait 6 months before taking their driver's exam (effective Dec. 22);
- \* requiring 50 hours of adult-supervised, behind-the-wheel training. The adult must be 21 or older (also effective Dec. 22).

Pennsylvania's new law is expected to reduce young driver accidents by 25 percent.

## Chip Enrollment Up 90%

July enrollment figures for the state's Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) show that more than 80,000 children are now receiving free or low-cost health care through CHIP.

The 1999-2000 state budget increased the state funding by \$20 million. This is in addition to a major program expansion announced in April. Changes made then include additional benefit coverage and a new "net income" eligibility formula that allows certain work and day-care deductions.

For more information, call the toll-free hotline 1-800-986-KIDS.

## Reduced Vehicle Fee

More senior citizens are now eligible for the \$10 reduced vehicle registration fee. Effective June 30, 1999, the income limit to qualify increased from \$14,999 to \$19,200.

## New License Plate

PennDOT will replace the state's roughly 9 million old license plates over a three-year period.

Motorists with yellow plates will receive the new plate in the mail between September 1999 and February 2000. For more information, call PennDOT's new license plate hotline at 1-877-PA-NU-TAG (1-877-726-8824).

## One More Tour Stop ....



*Corry Moyer, an engineer with East Penn Manufacturing Co., Inc. shows Rep. Semmel a line of products.*

## The Governor's **Action Team** OF PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania continues to build its reputation as a business-friendly state – and has gained much national recognition in the process. In the last four years, we have slashed the cost of doing business in the Commonwealth by more than \$3.6 billion. We climbed from 47<sup>th</sup> in the nation to 16<sup>th</sup> in terms of job growth. And I am proud to say that we are staying the course.

Just this summer, *Site Selection* magazine ranked the Governor's Action Team (GAT) as one of the top 10 economic development groups in the country. Making up the team is a group of seasoned professionals who work directly with businesses to see that they get all the help they need in locating to the Commonwealth or expanding existing facilities.

Factoring into *Site Selection* magazine's decision was

GAT's 1998 top 10 projects, two of which were right here in Lehigh County. The companies and jobs created and retained were as follows: Lucent Technologies, Inc., jobs created 1,625, jobs retained 1,070; and Hartford Financial Services, 650 jobs created.

A one-stop economic development shop, GAT also was cited as the main reason Schmalbach Lubeca Plastics Container USA selected Lehigh Valley for a new plant facility – which will add another 160 new jobs to the area.

The GAT regional office closest is: Northeast Regional Satellite Office, 3405 Airport Road, Suite 219, Allentown, PA 18103 Phone: (610) 266-5762.

You also can learn more by visiting the state Department of Commerce and Economic Development's Web site at [www.dced.state.pa.us](http://www.dced.state.pa.us).

**Semmel Serving The 187th District**