



Summer, 2000

State Representative

**Paul Semmel**

187th Legislative District

## Senior Spotlight

# Taking A Closer Look at Pharmaceutical Costs

### *House Forms Select Committee*

In response to skyrocketing prescription drug costs, the Pennsylvania House passed House Resolution 358, which established a select committee to study this important issue. Representative Vance, the sponsor of the resolution, is chairing the eleven member task force which is currently holding public hearings throughout the Commonwealth.

The first of these public hearings was held on March 30 in Harrisburg. Several people and organizations testified about their views on the

12% increase in prescription drug costs. After hearing testimony from senior citizens with various levels of health care and prescription drug insurance, state legislators had a question and answer session to help clarify the problems of senior citizens and pharmaceutical affordability.

Two organizations discussed the effects of drug costs on senior citizens and the need for legislation to curb the excesses in drug expenditures. The AARP testified on the percentage of senior citizen's in-

come that goes to health care costs and the eligibility rates for PACE.

The Select Committee on Pharmaceuticals also held a public hearing on April 27 at Westminster Village in Allentown. The committee intends to complete their work and offer recommendations by the end of the year.

If you would like more information about this committee and how you can provide testimony, please contact my office.

## Targeting Home Improvement Fraud

Home improvement repair complaints rank within the top five complaints tracked within the state's Bureau of Consumer Protection. These complaints average over 2,400 per year and have been increasing steadily. In fact, over the past six years, home improvement complaints ranked number one among senior citizens in Pennsylvania.

Currently, under the Unfair Trade Practices and Consumer Protection Act, home improvement contracts signed in the home are subject to a three-day right of rescission. The contract can also be canceled if the proper three-day right notice is not given to the consumer. Although this right is in place, the Bureau of Consumer Protection can only mediate home improvement complaints unless a pattern of misconduct is proven. The legislature is currently working on bills that would resolve these problems. **House Bill 608** and **Senate Bill 295** both provide for a "Home Improvement Consumer

Protection Act."

The legislation would require every home improvement contractor to obtain a certificate of registration from the Department of Labor and Industry. Unregistered contractors would have no standing to sue or raise a defense of nonpayment in any home improvement dispute. Registration would be denied to any contractor who lost a civil judgment relating to a home improvement transaction.

The department would also establish a toll-free telephone number for consumers to receive information concerning registrations of a contractor.

The bills prohibit certain activities such as abandoning or failing to perform a home improvement without justification and deviating from plans without verifiable consent of owner. Any prohibited action would be considered a violation of the Unfair Trade Practices and Consumer Protection Law. The criminal offenses range from a first de-

gree misdemeanor to a second degree felony. If a victim of an offense is 60 years of age or older, the grading of the offense would be one grade higher than the grade specified in the law.

Currently, House Bill 608 is awaiting consideration on the House floor. Senate Bill 295 has been referred to the Senate Appropriations Committee. Both bills are supported by the PA Office of the Attorney General, AARP, the Philadelphia Police Department, and

**C A R E**  
(Crimes  
Against  
the Re-  
tired and  
Elderly)  
Unit.



# New Standards Proposed for Assisted Living Residences

Assisted living residences are a combination of housing and services that allow senior citizens to maintain independence, respect, dignity, and exercise decision making and personal choice. Assisted living residences are rapidly growing as a long-term care alternative. These residences provide the opportunity for people in need of some assistance to remain in control of their lives.

Assisted living, a fairly new concept developed by the private market, has no uniform definition. While many are licensed as personal care homes, the residences have no standard of living nor licensing requirements as assisted living residences. **House Bill 1930**, introduced by Representative Schuler (R-Lancaster), Chairman of the House Aging and Youth Committee, attempts to rectify this problem. The proposed legislation establishes a system of licensure and regulation for assisted living residences to ensure not only availability, but accountability as well.

House Bill 1930 requires the Department of Public Welfare to develop and implement a state plan for regulating and licensing

assisted living residences and service providers with the coordination and help of other state and local agencies. The plans would include:

- ◆ Standards for licensing
- ◆ Rules of conduct for owners and employees of assisted living residences and service providers
- ◆ Recommendations to resolve inconsistencies and promote cost efficiency
- ◆ Recommendations for fire and safety assurance
- ◆ Process for relocating consumers whose health and safety are in danger

The proposed legislation would also require residences to identify and appoint an assisted living residence administrator who must meet several qualifications. Service providers, outside of the assisted living residence staff, will also need licensure and will have a set of regulations to abide by under the proposed legislation.

Admissions would also be regulated through House Bill 1930. Prior to a resident's admission, a standardized screening must be taken along with a medical examination. If

an applicant's needs cannot be met through assisted living, the facility would be required to refer the applicant to an appropriate agency. If assisted living can serve an applicant, a comprehensive service plan must be written for the applicant's unique physical and mental needs.

The bill also provides for an information packet to be given to all residents of assisted living facilities. The packet would include a copy of residence policy, information regarding licensure status, telephone number of local long-term care ombudsman program and the local area agency on aging, and a copy of the contract and rates for the resident. The residents must also be notified of any violations uncorrected within five days.

House Bill 1930 was reported out of the House Aging and Youth Committee and has been referred to the House Appropriations Committee.

If you would like more information on this bill, or a copy of the legislation, please contact my office.

## Shortening the Waiting Lines for Home and Community Based Long Term Care Services

Area Agencies on Aging (AAA's) have been faced with growing waiting lists as they strive to provide the home and community based services for seniors who wish to remain in their homes. Waiting lists have skyrocketed to a high of 10,315 people in Pennsylvania and are continuing to increase steadily. In response to the growth in waiting lists for long term care services, **Act 20 of 2000** has been signed into law.

This law is known as the Area Agency on Aging Services Waiting List Act. The law directs the PA Department of Aging to conduct a study concerning waiting lists for persons in need of home and community based long term care services. The study will:

- ◆ Evaluate accuracy of the AAA waiting lists
- ◆ Identify services older persons are seeking
- ◆ Estimate time it takes the AAA to provide the services
- ◆ List partial services that are currently provided
- ◆ Review community services available to individuals on AAA waiting lists and to private pay individuals
- ◆ Analyze cost of providing services to individuals on the waiting list by category of need

The study will be completed within a year.

*If you need assistance in applying for the \$100 Property Tax Rebate, please contact my office.*

## General Assembly Continues Examination of Long Term Care Issues

With 20 percent of Pennsylvania's population 65 years of age or older, long term care is a growing necessity in our state. With continuous advances in medical technology, the population of individuals who are over 85 is estimated to double or triple. These individuals will most likely need long term care services, making the issue a high priority on the General Assembly.

The two problems associated with long term care are easily identified; however, not easily solved. Individuals generally have not pro-

ected themselves against long term care costs. Mistakenly, some believe that Medicare will cover these expenses. Therefore, they do not see a need to purchase long-term care insurance. The second problem is a direct result of the first: the cost of long term insurance. Because the pool of individuals purchasing long term care insurance is minimal, the cost of the product remains extremely high.

The House Insurance Committee and Aging and Youth Committee jointly held two public hearings this past summer focusing on insurance

products and incentives for the purchase of long term care insurance. The need to motivate Congress to repeal the Waxman amendment (an amendment which requires the Medicaid program to recover assets upon the death of a recipient of Medicaid services) and state Representative Roy Reinard's long-term care partnership bill, House Bill 488, were the center of the discussion. However, no single solution was evident. A multi-dimensional approach may be needed to address this issue. Here are a list of bills currently under consideration:

<b>HB 488</b>	<b>Representative Reinard</b>	<b>Long-term care partnership bill</b>
<b>SB 26</b>	<b>Senator Holl</b>	<b>Long-term care partnership bill (similar to Reinard')</b>
<b>SB 1035</b>	<b>Senator O'Pake</b>	<b>Provides waivers to Medicaid program to create incentives for the purchase of long-term care insurance</b>
<b>HB 1334</b>	<b>Representative Godshall</b>	<b>Provides a tax credit against the personal income tax for the purchase of long-term care insurance</b>
<b>SB 186</b>	<b>Senator Hart</b>	<b>Exempts long-term care premiums from inheritance taxes for a period of up to ten years prior to death</b>
<b>HB 481</b>	<b>Representative E. Taylor</b>	<b>Provides tax credit against the personal income tax for a percentage of the premiums for long-term care insurance</b>
<b>HB 1714</b>	<b>Representative Browne</b>	<b>Provides an exception to the tax on premature distributions of retirement benefits if the distribution is made for the purpose of purchasing long term care insurance.</b>

## Tobacco Settlement Proposal Includes Funding for Long Term Care

Governor Ridge has proposed to limit the proceeds of the \$11 billion tobacco settlement to initiatives for improving the health status of its citizens. We are a national leader in this decision. More than 500 groups and individuals contributed in five public hearings held to analyze the distribution of funds. These hearings along with House and Senate discussions resulted in the "Health Investment Plan" priorities and fund-

ing allocation percentages.

One of the major themes derived from public input was to allocate a portion of the tobacco settlement funding for long-term care. The Governor has proposed a 15% allocation toward home and community-based care. Using the Tobacco Settlement Funds, the Commonwealth could help up to 10,000 older Pennsylvanians get care at home within four years.

The remaining allocations are Insurance for the Uninsured (40%); Health Research (15%); Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Programs (15%); Uncompensated Care for Hospitals (10%); and Future Endowment (5%).

The House and Senate are expected to consider the Governor's tobacco settlement proposal this fall.

# Driver Improvement Courses Scheduled in Lehigh Valley

Two organizations in the Lehigh Valley are again offering driver improvement courses for older Pennsylvanians. Seniors who complete one of the following driver improvement courses will receive a discount on their auto insurance.

## "55 Alive Mature Driving Courses"

Sponsored by the AARP, the 55 Alive/Mature Driving course is, as the title suggests, open to individuals 55 years of age and older. Successful completion of the course will result in a 5 percent reduction in your auto insurance policy premium, provided your insurance company is located within Pennsylvania.

For information on course cost, time, dates, and locations offered, call the 55 Alive Locator toll-free number at 1-888-227-7669.

## Useful Phone Numbers:

**1-888-PA-PARKS**, state park information and reservations

**1-800-VISIT-PA**, for free copies of Pennsylvania Visitors Guide, highway maps, and fall and winter event guides

**1-800-FALL-IN-PA**, when autumn rolls around, call this toll-free number for weekly updates on statewide fall foliage

**1-800-932-4600**, PennDOT's 24-hour, 7-day-a-week Customer Call Center

## "Safe Driving For Mature Operators"

AAA sponsors this course which provides information on visual scanning techniques and driver knowledge requirements.

The cost of this course is \$10 for AAA members and \$20 for non-members. All classes are held from 9:15 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. in AAA East Penn's office at 1020 Hamilton Street in Allentown.

The "Safe Driving for Mature Operators" course will be held in two four-hour sessions on the following dates:

**July 18 & 19; August 1 & 2;  
and August 21 & 22.**

For more information, contact East Penn AAA at (610) 434-5141.

All insurance companies in Pennsylvania must provide a minimum 5% premium reduction for each motor vehicle on a policy under which all insureds are 55 or over and have successfully completed a driver improvement course which meets the standards of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

## Enjoy Summer Travel, Please Drive Safely

Whether traveling by roadway to one of Pennsylvania's many scenic picnic grounds, amusement parks, swimming or fishing areas, or simply out for an old-fashioned Sunday drive, you want your experience to be enjoyable.

We in the House of Representatives want you to enjoy our state's many natural and man-made treasures also. Equally important, however, is that we want you to arrive and return from your trip safely. Please drive carefully, watch out for the other guy, and obey all traffic laws.

## Increased Support Proposed for Family Caregivers

Representative Baker (R-Tioga) has recently introduced **House Bill 2465** which would raise reimbursements within the "Family Caregiver Support Program." The reimbursements, which are used for building ramps, purchasing assistive tools and home medical devices are on an income-based, sliding scale. The reimbursement rates for this program have not been changed since the early 1990's.

The proposed legislation would increase the minimum reimbursement from \$200 to \$600. The maximum amount would also increase from \$2,000 to \$6,000. House Bill 2465 is currently in the House Aging and Youth Committee.

If you think you may be eligible for the program, please contact the local Area Agency on Aging.

**HARRISBURG OFFICE:** ROOM 47, EAST WING/HOUSE BOX 202020/HARRISBURG, PA 17120-2020  
PHONE: (717) 787-3017

**DISTRICT OFFICES:** 4525 SPRING HILL DRIVE/P.O. BOX 235/SCHNECKSVILLE, PA 18078/PHONE (610) 799-0187

MACUNGIE BOROUGH HALL/21 LOCUST STREET/MACUNGIE, PA 18062/PHONE (610) 966-0187

KUTZTOWN/PHONE (610) 683-9199



*Rep. Paul W. Semmel*

# ***Semmel's***

## ***187th District***

### ***Legislative***

#### ***Report***



FALL 2000

## **Helping Parents Make Better Decisions Regarding Their Children's Education**

Making sure that all Pennsylvania children get the best education possible is a top priority of mine and my General Assembly colleagues.

Building upon an unprecedented record of increased public school funding, quality education and school safety initiatives, House members in June passed a bill calling for the creation of a statewide "School Report Card" system.

The purpose of the bill is to empower parents with information to help make informed decisions regarding the quality of their children's education.

Under House Bill 2336, the Department of Education would compile statistical data collected from each school entity – public schools, charter schools, vocational-technical schools, including each individual school building – and make

the results available to parents, students, educators and taxpayers in the form of "school report cards."

Information would include such items as class size, percentage of students who graduate, and truancy rates.

This proposal is yet another in a long list of educational initiatives acted on to improve our public schools.

Since 1995, the Pennsylvania General Assembly, along with the Ridge administration, has invested \$157 million in state and federal funds to make our schools safe.

Last year, we enacted important alternative education and teacher professional development legislation. This year, we passed a 2000-2001 state budget that invests more than \$6.2 billion in



our public schools.

School report cards would ensure that schools are more accountable to parents, taxpayers and the communities they serve as to how that money is spent. They also would provide parents with information to help make better decisions about their children's education.

## **\$100 Rebate: Your Money Back To You**

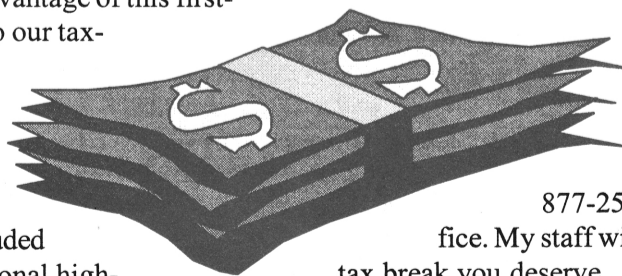
Homeowners in the 187<sup>th</sup> District as well as homeowners statewide who still haven't applied for the \$100 tax rebate now have until Oct. 20 to do so.

As you might recall, the original deadline was July 7, and then extended until Aug. 1. As of Aug. 1, an estimated 2.38 million people, or 75 percent, of the estimated 3.3 million homeowners eligible for the rebate had applied. To afford everyone the opportunity to take advantage of this first-time opportunity to return money to our taxpayers, state officials moved the deadline again – this time to Oct. 20.

The rebate program is part of the \$774 million tax-relief package included in the 2000-01 state budget. Additional high-

lights of the budget and the record-setting tax-break package can be found inside on Page 3.

Financially responsible budgeting of the last five years has enabled Pennsylvania to set aside nearly \$1 billion in the state's Rainy Day Fund, similar to a household emergency fund. The Rainy Day Fund helps ensure that the Commonwealth can weather economic downturns without having to raise taxes.



If you haven't yet filed for your \$100 tax rebate, contact the Homeowners' Century Tax Rebate toll-free number at 1-

877-255-1775, or contact my district of-

fice. My staff will be happy to help you file for the tax break you deserve.

**District Office Hours/ Phone Numbers Listed Inside**

## Civil War Walk

**Students from District-Topton Elementary School raised \$4,082.35 in a fund-raising walk to help the Civil War Monument Restoration Project at Gettysburg. Pictured, l-r, are School Librarian Jane McAndrew; Head Teacher Sandra Meck; Principal Amanda Moyer; and Rep. Semmel.**



## \$25 Million Grant Program To Help Volunteer Fire/Ambulance Companies

As chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I worked hard to help push what was an original \$15 million proposal to the \$25 million proposal enacted as part of the 2000-2001 state budget.

Signed into law June 22, the Volunteer Fire Company and Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Act is the first of its kind in Pennsylvania – and

in the nation. Under the program, which will be administered by the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, \$22 million will be available in grants to volunteer fire companies, and another \$3 million for volunteer, chartered, non-profit ambulance squads.

Grant applications were mailed in July, with grant awards to be announced in October.

Funds may be used for equipment purchase or repair, building maintenance or improvements, or loan repayments.

This year, we penned a new chapter in the state's history book with the first ever direct grant program. I was proud to support this legislation on behalf of our district's volunteer fire companies as well as volunteer firefighters statewide.

## \$6.2 Billion For Our Public Schools

The 2000-2001 budget invests more than \$6.2 billion to help make quality education accessible to all children. Highlights of our children-first educational budget items include:

- an additional \$116 million in basic education funding;
- \$64 million, almost nine percent, more for special education for a total of \$783 million;
- \$33.5 million, a 100 percent increase, for school performance incentives;
- \$123.5 million investment in literacy - \$25 million to continue the Read-to-Succeed program; \$80.6 million for libraries; and \$17.9 million for adult and children's literacy programs;
- \$37.5 million to continue Link-to-Learn, a program designed to ensure that there is a computer in every classroom;
- \$28 million, or 6.3 percent increase, for the State System of Higher Education

### Local Basic Funding

**Berks County** - Brandywine Heights \$2,990,609 (up 3.6%); Fleetwood \$2,452,708 (up 5.8%); Kutztown \$2,528,198 (up 2.9%)

**Lehigh County** - East Penn \$7,704,647 (up 3.1%); Northwestern Lehigh \$4,363,792 (up 2.5%); Parkland \$4,607,665 (up 4.2%)

### Lehigh County District Office Hours

#### 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.

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 Among Big Budget Winners

I was proud to support the 2000-01 budget, which calls for the largest tax cut package in Pennsylvania history. The \$774 million tax relief package represents the seventh consecutive year we have reduced taxes for families and businesses.

### \$100 School Tax Rebate

The largest piece of our historic tax cuts is \$330 million to be distributed to 3.3 million homeowners this fall in the form of a \$100 tax rebate refund.

### One Less Business Tax

The budget passed in May sounds the death-knell for the job-crushing Capital Stock and Franchise (CS&F) tax. The phase-out will start by immediately shaving two mills off the current 10.99 mill levy. Next year, 1.5 mills will be eliminated. After that, one mill per year will be cut until the tax is totally eliminated.

### Tax Forgiveness

This budget expands our Tax Forgiveness Program by raising the dependent exemption from \$6,500 to \$7,500, meaning that a two-parent family of four earning \$28,000 or less will pay no state income tax, saving that family about \$687. That is almost \$700 families can put back into the yearly household budget.

## \$774 Million In Tax Cuts

- **\$330 million in tax rebates of \$100 each to be mailed this fall to 3.3 million homeowners;**
- **\$16.2 million in tax forgiveness, meaning a two-parent family of four earning \$28,000 or less will pay no state income tax;**
- **\$78 million to lower the state inheritance tax from 6 to 4.5 percent for direct descendants and from 15 to 12 percent for siblings. Eliminates tax on transfers to parents from children age 21 or under;**
- **\$303 million to begin the phase-out of the 10.99 mill capital stock and franchise business tax.**

### Computer Tax Break

To help make the age of information technology accessible to all Pennsylvanians, we will exempt the purchase of personal computers from the 6 percent state sales tax during two weeks. The first week was August 6-13, just before the start of the new school year. If you missed out on this week, you can take advantage of the second holiday, which will be held Feb. 18-25, 2001.

### Agriculture Assistance

Over the last five years, we have increased state funds for agriculture and related programs by \$51 million, or 66 percent. This year's budget includes \$4.1 million for the Animal Health Commission; \$3.5 million for Agricultural Research; \$3.6 million for planning and prevention of nutrient discharge; and \$2.1 million to further develop and expand domestic and international markets.

## PA Now Part of Compact

Legislation I introduced this session and signed into law paved the way for Pennsylvania's participation in the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, ratified by Congress in 1996. Twenty-eight states, including the Commonwealth, are members of the Compact.

More and more, emergencies and disasters such as hurricanes and floods hit with a vengeance that impacts more than one state. By joining the Compact, Pennsylvania now can call upon neighboring states for assistance, and can reciprocate.



*Governor Ridge signs Semmel's compact bill.*

### Berks County Office Hours - Tuesdays Only

*(Berks County Hours Will Resume Sept. 12)*

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

Topton Borough Hall  
205 South Callow Hill Street  
Topton, PA 19562

**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)*

## Semmel Serving The 187th District

### \$125,000 Grant Helps Valley Test For Virus

Lehigh County is one of nine eastern Pennsylvania counties to receive \$125,000 to help monitor and prevent the spread of the West Nile virus.

The virus is spread through the Northern house mosquito. Last summer, in New York, 61 people were infected with the virus; seven of those infected died.

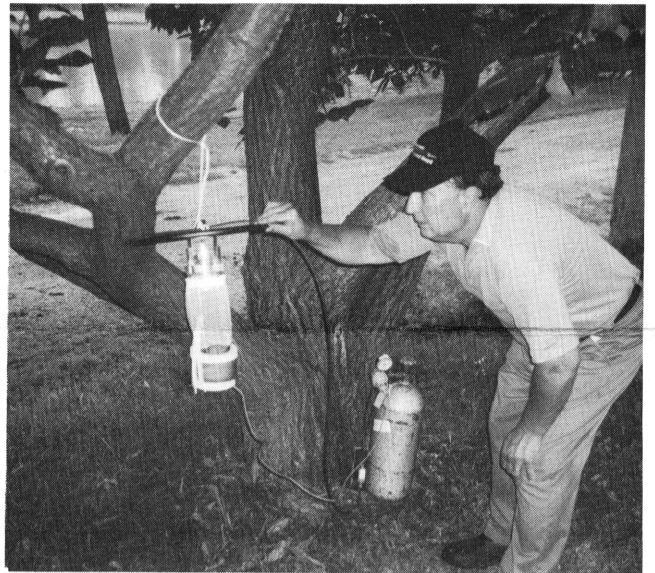
The virus has not been found in Pennsylvania. Aggressive initiatives to protect the citizens of this Commonwealth include a \$9.8 million appropriation in the 2000-2001 state budget, one million of which has already been distributed to nine counties, including Lehigh, that are close to the Delaware River.

You can help by eliminating stagnant water areas around your home.

To learn more about the West Nile virus, visit the Internet Web site at [www.westnile.state.pa.us](http://www.westnile.state.pa.us).

### Monitoring West Nile Virus Equipment

*Rep. Semmel checks the equipment used to help monitor for mosquitoes that might be carrying the West Nile virus.*



## Thousands More Qualify For Rebate, Are You Among Them?

Effective Jan. 1 of this year, an additional 200,000 individuals (including thousands here in Lehigh and Berks counties) became eligible to participate in Pennsylvania's expanded Property Tax and Rent Rebate (PTRR) program.

You might be among the now nearly half million individuals statewide eligible for a rebate of up to \$500, thanks to legislation enacted last year that expanded the program.

Participation in the program is open to individuals whose total household income does not exceed \$15,000 and who meet one of the following criteria: age 65 or older; widow and widowers age 50 or older; or permanently disabled persons 18 or older.

Applicants now can deduct 50 percent of Social Security or railroad retirement pension benefits when calculating "total household income." For example, if you receive \$16,000 a year in Social Security you would have been ineligible under the old guidelines. Now, however, you report only half of that, or \$8,000, which makes you eligible for a rebate.

Created in 1971, the lottery-funded program has distributed more than \$2 billion since its inception. For more information, an application, or assistance in filling out an application, contact my district office

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Effective this year, only 50%  
of your Social Security must  
be reported.

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### *Rep Paul W. Semmel*

House Box 202020  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2020

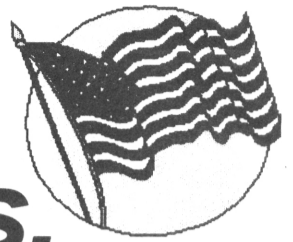
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**State Rep. Paul W. Semmel (R-187)**

# Special Report: **PA Veterans, Fire And EMS**



Rep. Paul W. Semmel

Winter 2000

## State Budget Underscores Pa.'s Military/Veteran Commitment

Dear Friend:

Thanks to your continued support, I began the 1999-2000 Session with almost two decades of service in the PA House of Representatives. That seniority brought with it the honor of being named chairman of the Veterans' Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

As Chairman, I review issues that affect the estimated 1.3 million PA veterans and the Commonwealth's fire and emergency services. I also serve on the Council of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA).

It is an important and challenging responsibility. That responsibility includes keeping my constituents informed about committee-related legislation, which is the goal of this Special Report. If you have questions about anything in this report, or any other state-related matter, please contact my district office at (610) 799-0187. Also, feel free to pass along this report and the insert to any veteran you might know - family member, friend, or neighbor.

Sincerely,

*Paul Semmel*

Rep. Paul W. Semmel  
187<sup>th</sup> Legislative District

P.S. May you have a healthy and prosperous New Year.

Demonstrating the General Assembly's continued strong support of Pennsylvania's military personnel and over 1.3 million veterans, the 1999-2000 state budget signed into law last May, increases spending in the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs by nearly \$3.4 million. Highlights include:

- Overall department increase from \$82.1 million to \$85.5 million.
- A \$582,000 boost for National Guard education funding.
- State veterans' pensions increased - \$122,000 for paralyzed veterans, \$80,000 for blind veterans.
- Increased funding for state veterans nursing homes, including \$1.4 million more for the Southwestern Veterans Home

- A total of \$6.8 million in state funding for the Scotland School for Veterans Children.

I was proud to support this budget, and will continue to work hard on behalf of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs in future state budgets.



*more stories inside ...*

## Firefighters Job Made Safer

Entering burning buildings is a dangerous job, made even more dangerous when structural guidelines vary or are unknown. On Nov. 10, Pennsylvania took a major step that helps firefighter as well as public safety in general. Joining the majority of states, we enactment legislation

that establishes a uniform statewide building code. Under the new law, all new construction and all major renovations to existing structures will be required to meet the most recent version of the national standards set forth by the Building Officials and Code Administrators (BOCA).



**Pictured (l-r): Rep. Semmel, Sen. Robert Robbins (R-Mercer) and Pennsylvania Adjutant General William B. Lynch.**

## Semmel Sees PA Troops Off To Kosovo

Earlier this year, I joined Sen. Robert Robbins (R-Mercer) and Pennsylvania Adjutant General William B. Lynch in seeing off troops to Kosovo. As chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I presented a State Flag to the Pittsburgh-based 171<sup>st</sup> Air Refueling Wing and its estimated 470 members affected by the Pentagon-announced reserve activation.

A unit of the PA Air National Guard, the 171<sup>st</sup> was one of several units tapped nationwide for an initial call-up of 2,000 air-refueling personnel. The 171<sup>st</sup> Guard members joined 100 volunteers already in Kosovo from the PaANG's 193<sup>rd</sup> Special Operations Wing, based in Middletown, Pa.

## State Kicks In \$2 Million For Memorial

My colleagues and I worked hard this year to secure a \$2 million appropriation in the 1999-2000 budget that will at long last pave the way for construction of a Pennsylvania Veterans' Memorial.

The project dates back to 1988, when the Pennsylvania Veterans' Memorial Commission was created to oversee funding and construction of a memorial honoring all Pennsylvania veterans. True to their spirit and selflessness, veteran groups statewide raised \$1.5 million through fund-raising efforts.

The memorial will be constructed at Indiantown Gap National Cemetery, the only fully active national veterans' cemetery in Pennsylvania and one of 114 located nationwide.

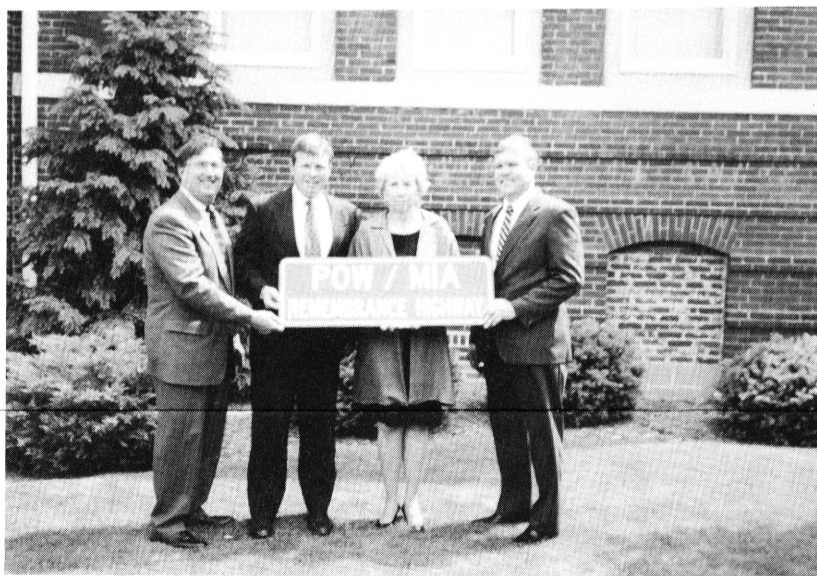
# Legislative Update - Veterans

**Keystone Paralyzed Veterans to Vote** – Act 33 of 1999 (House Bill 314) establishes the Keystone Paralyzed Veterans Association as a voting member of the State Veterans Commission, bringing the number of commission member organizations to 15. The inclusion of the Paralyzed Veterans provides for a more diverse membership, which represents the needs of all Pennsylvania veterans.

**Pensions Increased** – Act 14 of 1999 (Senate Bill 813) increases the monthly pension amounts for the Blind Veterans Pension Program and the Paralyzed Veterans Pension Program to \$150. This is a 50 percent increase in the pension level for both groups. The Blind Veterans Pension Program was established in 1963. Act 14 represents the first increase in the pension since 1980, and the first pension level increase for the Paralyzed Veterans Pension program, which was established in 1986.

**Remembering World War II Veterans** – Act 44 of 1999 (Senate Bill 1050) enabled Pennsylvania to make a \$2 million contribution toward the construction of the National World War II Memorial to be located in Washington, D.C. Governor Ridge presented the check to the chairman of the Memorial Fund Raising Committee, Bob Dole, on Nov. 11, Veterans' Day.

**Celebrating 100 Years of VFWs** – House Resolution 53, which I sponsored and the House unanimously approved earlier this year, observes the 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Recognizing the historical importance of the VFW and its positive impact during both times of war and peace, House members wished to congratulate every member of the organization and thank them for their services.



## POW/MIA Highway Dedication

**On the Saturday before Memorial Day, Rep. Semmel joined House and Senate colleagues in the dedication of Rout 248 as the POW/MIA Remembrance Highway. Pictured, l-r, are: Rep. Semmel, Sen. Charles Dent (R-Lehigh), Rep. Julie Harhart (R-Northampton and Lehigh), and Rep. Don Snyder (R-Lehigh).**

# Legislative Update

## - Fire/EMS

**VLAP Expanded** — Act 32 of 1999 allows volunteer fire departments to purchase used fire trucks, using the Volunteer Loan Assistance Program (VLAP), that meet at least the 1991 NFPA safety standards. Until now, used trucks had to meet “current” NFPA standards, which had the inadvertent effect of eliminating many fine used vehicles from purchase eligibility through the VLAP Program. Act 32 also allows Pennsylvania Fire Information Reporting System (PennFIRS) hardware and software to be eligible items for 2 percent loans under the VLAP Program. Each company is eligible for a one-time loan of not more than \$2,000 or 75 percent of the acquisition, whichever is less, for a term not exceeding five years.

**Good Samaritan Act Amended** — Act 126 of 1998 amended the Good Samaritan Act by extending civil immunity for the use of an automated external defibrillator (AED), the portable device that uses electric shock to restore a stable heart rhythm to an individual in cardiac arrest. Under the provisions of this new law, any person who is trained to use an AED and who uses an AED in good faith will not be liable for civil damages as a result of any acts taken or omitted while using the AED.

**Free Tuition** — Act 129 of 1998 enables the children of fire and emergency services responders, police officers, corrections employees and national Guard members who are killed in the line of duty to attend a state-related university for free. The death must be certified in accordance with the “Emergency and Law Enforcement Death Benefits Act.” This program is retroactive to January 1, 1976. Brochures explaining the program are available by calling toll-free at 1-800-692-7435.

**Obstructing EMS** — Act 157 of 1998 provides that a person commits a third-degree misdemeanor if he knowingly impedes, obstructs or interferes with emergency medical services personnel performing a rescue, providing emergency medical services of fire fighting activities. A third-degree misdemeanor is punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment of one year and a fine of up to \$2,500.00.

**Curfew Extended for Young Volunteers** — Act 158 of 1998 amended the Child Labor Law by allowing minors (age 14-15) who are volunteer firefighters to perform their duties until 10:00 p.m. on a school night, provided they have written parental permission. Previously, they were allowed to help only until 7 p.m.



*During a “Fire Prevention Week” program held at the Capitol, Rep. Semmel receives a demonstration from Greg Jakubowski on the “Carmody Fire Training Kit.”*

## Semmel's Compact Bill On Gov.'s Desk

As this report went to press, legislation I sponsored to enable Pennsylvania's participation in an interstate mutual assistance pact was on the Governor's desk, awaiting his signature. House Bill 739 amends Title 35 (Health and Safety) to provide for the Commonwealth's participation in the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, ratified by Congress in 1996. Currently, 27 states are members of the Compact.

More and more we are recognizing that emergencies and disasters such as hurricanes and other natural destructive forces require resources beyond those available in the state affected. With this measure, Pennsylvania can call upon participating neighboring states for assistance, and can reciprocate in kind.

The bill was expected to be signed into law prior to or on Dec. 18



*Members of the West Shore Bureau of Fire Safety and the PA Safe Kids Coalition participated in the “Fire Prevention Week” event. Pictured, l-r, are: Bob Timko, Rep. Semmel, Justine Hoyer, Dave Beasley, Lauren Briner, Mike Whitzel, and House Research Analyst Rick O’Leary.*

## Legislation Currently Pending

### Reduced CDL Fee —

House Bill 1220 would cut in half the \$10 annual fee for a commercial driver's license (CDL) for firefighters and other emergency service personnel. New laws and liability factors have led many fire and rescue chiefs to require people who operate certain emergency response vehicles to obtain a CDL.

The proposal is now before the House Transportation Committee.

### Employment Protection —

House Bill 578 would offer tax incentives to employers of emergency services volunteers. A tax break would be given to employers to compensate for the time employees are away from work responding to an emergency call.

The proposal is before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness.

### Tuition Assistance —

House Bill 895 would provide higher education tuition assistance to emergency services volunteers. The state would reimburse students for the cost of tuition at any state-owned or state-related university or community college.

The proposal is before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness.



### New Pumper Dedication

*Rep. Semmel congratulates Lynnport Community Fire Company No. 1 during its "Open House and Dedication" of a newly purchased 1998 Pierce Quantum Pumper. He also has the privilege of meeting the company's only living charter member, Preston (Pete) Billig. Pictured, l-r, are: Chief Clark Mantz, Billig, and Rep. Semmel.*



### PEMA Tour

*Committee Chairman Rep. Semmel and members of the House Veterans' Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee tour the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). Rep. Semmel is a member of the PEMA Council.*

## Semmel Goes On Whistle Stop Tour

I had the distinct honor of joining Lt. Gov. Mark Schweiker last month in the Harrisburg leg of the 1999 TransCAER Whistle Stop Tour. The event provided a great opportunity to educate those along the tour route about private and public efforts to ensure the safe transportation of hazardous materials. TransCAER, which stands for Transportation Community Awareness and Emergency Response, is a nationwide community outreach program. The inter-industry group represents a partnership between private industry and public agencies committed to improving public and community awareness of hazmat transportation.

## 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)

**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)*



*Rep. Paul W. Semmel*

# 1999-2000 Mid Session Report

Winter 2000

## Building A Better PA For You And Your Family

Here we are, now across the threshold of a new millennium. In a world where results count, House colleagues and I successfully gained passage of several key new laws that will prepare Pennsylvania and its citizens for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Below are highlights from a long list of legislative accomplishments achieved during the first half of the 1999-2000 session. Look for more hard work and progress in the coming year, as we continue our ongoing task of building a better Pennsylvania for you and your family.

*Paul Semmel*

### Giving All Children A Chance To Learn

Teachers say it is not unusual to spend up to 25 percent of their time in trying to deal with unruly students. When this happens, everyone loses – the teachers, the students there to learn, and the disruptive students who need specialized attention. Now, schools have a new option, not a mandate, but an option to contract with private companies as well as not-for-profit companies for alternative education services. The law is modeled after a highly successful, privately run alternative education program in Houston, Texas, that turns disruptive children into high achievers. Equally impressive, since the program's inception, incidents of school violence in Houston have dropped 25 percent. The act also contains a "professional development" provision, requiring public school educators to complete six credits or 180 hours of professional training every five years to maintain state certification. This new law definitely represents one of the most important pieces of safe and quality school legislation coming before the General Assembly this session. (Act 48 of 1999).

### Making PA Schools Safer

Sending children off to school should be a routine and worry-free part of daily life. Shocking news reports serve

notice, however, that this is not always the case. Here in Pennsylvania, we continue to build upon our existing school safety laws, which are some of the strongest school safety laws in the nation. Passed last year, the Safe and Secure Schools Act provides \$22 million in school safety grants, \$18.1 million of which has already been awarded to 396 schools statewide. Schools in the 187<sup>th</sup> District receiving safe school grants include: Berks County - Brandywine Heights, \$23,099; Fleetwood, \$39,600; Kutztown, \$39,600; Lehigh County - Northwestern Lehigh, \$37,296. We are committed to continue our efforts to take the worry out of seeing children off to school everyday. (Act 36 of 1999)

### Helping Drought-Stricken Farmers

When you sit down to dinner tonight, some of the food you eat can probably be attributed to the hard work of Pennsylvania's 50,000 farming families – families who collectively suffered more than \$500 million in crop losses during this summer's drought, one of the worst droughts in Pennsylvania history. To help ensure our farmers can continue to put food on our tables, we enacted drought-assistance legislation that provides \$60 million in direct crop loss grants and \$5.6 million in crop insurance incentives for next year. This funding will supplement the estimated \$75 million in federal grants. The package also includes \$15 million in emergency aid for victims of hurricanes Floyd and Dennis, and \$2 million to help fruit growers deal with the plum pox virus. For more information, contact your nearest Farm Service Agency, or visit the USDA Web site at [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov). (Act 57 of 1999)

### Preparing PA For More Than E-Bay

Whether you will be pulled into it screaming and kicking, or are eager to embrace it, electronic commerce is fast becoming the way to do business in today's modern world. According to a 1998 Wall Street Journal article, electronic commerce, better known as "e-commerce," is expected to grow by \$7 billion in the year 2000. With an estimated 40 million adults in the United States, and approximately 1.5

*(continued on Page Two)*

### For Assistance With Any State-Related Matter ....

Call Rep. Semmel's district offices (all 610 area code) at: 799-0187 (Schnecksville); 966-0187 (Macungie); 395-8180 (Upper Macungie); or 683-9199 (Kutztown).

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

# Building A Better PA

(continued from Front Page)

million Pennsylvanians connected to the Internet, we enacted the Uniform Electronic Transaction Act. The law establishes standards for electronic transactions, and provides for the use of electronic signatures needed to enter into legally binding contracts via a computer. In the not too distant future, when you are buying life insurance, applying for loans or selling your car over the Internet, you can do it from the comfort of your own home, safely and legally. (Act 69 of 1999).

## Preserving The Environment

What kind of environment do we want to leave our children and grandchildren? That question was the driving force behind a \$646 million package enacted to preserve our environment for generations to come. The Environmental Stewardship Act, or Growing Greener, establishes a fund that will pump millions of dollars over the next five years into environmental programs aimed at a common goal – to leave our children an environment they can safely enjoy. Funds will be directed to corrective environmental initiatives such as cleaning up abandoned mine sites, relieving river and stream pollution, capping abandoned oil and natural gas wells, and maintaining state parks. It will also direct funds toward the “greener” part of the package, which includes farmland preservation, restoring watersheds, securing open space, developing recreational trails, and upgrading water and sewer systems for communities. (Act 68 of 1999).

## Making Buildings Safer

Most of us don't think twice about walking into a house or a public-access building such as a shopping mall, theater, or school. Is it structurally safe? Is the roof intact? How about the stairway, is it safe? Pennsylvanians can rest easier about these questions thanks to a uniform state building code enacted this session. Prior to the new law, building codes varied from locality to locality, with about 1,400 of our 2,535 municipalities having no building code whatsoever. Now, a statewide building code will be in effect and will be based on national standards set forth by the Building Officials and Code Administrators (BOCA). Under this consumer-protection law, all new construction and all major renovations must meet the most recent version of BOCA's national standards. (Act 45 of 1999).

## Cracking Down On Illegal Gun Use

Aptly dubbed “Operation Hard Time,” the message to convicted felons is loud and clear: carry a gun in Pennsylvania, which is already illegal, and the penalty imposed will be even more severe. The new law ups the grading of the offense from a first-degree misdemeanor to a second-degree felony, which guarantees the offender will do some “hard time” behind prison bars. The new law also requires gun makers, dealers, and importers to provide trigger locks to Pennsylvania handgun buyers. To protect the legal sale of firearms as well as the constitutional rights of law-abiding citizens, the act restricts Commonwealth munic-

ipalities' ability to bring or maintain a lawsuit against firearm or ammunition manufacturers. Thirteen other states prohibit lawsuits against gunmakers. Pennsylvania's law represents a rational and reasoned approach to gun safety and gun rights. (Act 59 of 1999).

## Helping Seniors, Disabled Pay Taxes

Your parents, grandparents, neighbors, or perhaps even you might be among the more than half a million income-qualifying seniors and disabled persons who will be eligible for a rebate of up to \$500 under an expanded Property Tax and Rent Rebate program. Since 1971, we have been helping older citizens and the disabled through this Lottery-funded program. Effective January 2000, individuals can exempt 50 percent of Social Security or railroad retirement pension income when calculating the program's \$15,000 total household income cap. This change adds almost a quarter million individuals to the program's eligibility list. In Lehigh County, an estimated 3,464 additional people will qualify for a rebate; in Berks County, 4,577 more individuals will qualify. Applications can be obtained through my district office at (610) 799-0187. (Act 30 of 1999).

## Budgeting For Now And The Future

Everyone benefits from the 1999-2000 state budget passed last May. The \$19 billion financial blueprint keeps the lid on spending while, at the same time, gives families and businesses over \$400 million in tax breaks – the largest tax-relief package in modern state history as well as the sixth consecutive year of tax relief for Pennsylvania citizens. An expanded tax forgiveness program means a family of four earning \$26,000 or less will owe -0- dollars in state income tax. Elimination of the natural gas gross receipts tax, means over 2 million households will see lower annual heating bills. Nearly \$200 million in business tax cuts means more jobs, and a 5.8 million dollar education commitment (a one-third-plus slice of the total budget pie) ensures our children will be well prepared for those jobs. This is a state budget that will serve us well in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (Act 4 and Act 6 of 1999).

## A Victory For Our Children

Another new law protects children at high risk of abuse from being further abused or neglected when returned to the home where the abuse occurred. Nationally, 1,077 children died as a result of child abuse or neglect in 1996. In 1998, Pennsylvania had about 5,400 confirmed cases of child abuse, and 52 abuse-related deaths. The law will help end the tragedies. This important law, introduced by Rep. Katie True of Lancaster County, requires County Children and Youth agencies to have weekly face-to-face contact until children are no longer assessed high risk. This is one of several proposals introduced by Rep. True in her role as the chair of a House select subcommittee that investigated child abuse deaths, including the tragic case of Maxwell Fisher, a young child murdered by his mother's boyfriend in Berks County in 1996. (Act 50 of 1999).

### District Offices: (Lehigh County)

**Schnecksville**  
4525 Spring Hill Drive  
Schnecksville, PA 18078

**Macungie Borough Hall**  
21 Locust St.  
Macungie, PA 18062

**Upper Macungie Twp. Bldg.**  
8330 Schantz Road  
Breinigsville, PA 18031

### District Offices: (Berks County)

**Topton Borough Hall**  
205 South Callow Hill St.  
Topton, PA 19562

**Kutztown Borough Hall**  
45 Railroad St.  
Kutztown, PA 19530

**Longswamp Twp. Bldg.**  
1112 State St.  
Mertztown, PA 19539

# Year 2000 Constituent Survey

It is a new day ... and a new century. Let's embrace it with excitement and a mutual commitment to meet the many challenges it is sure to bring. You can help now by taking a few minutes to answer and return this questionnaire, designed to accommodate answers from two persons per household. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on these important upcoming issues.

*Paul Semmel*

## Quality Education

The 1999-2000 state budget provides more than \$5 billion (almost one-third of the total budget) in funding for Pennsylvania's public schools. We realize, however, that money alone cannot resolve all educational issues. Nonetheless, we remain committed to providing every child in every community with a quality education.

1. Should the state provide additional funding to help districts implement smaller class sizes in kindergarten through grade three?

Yes        No

2. Would you favor holding schools more accountable by compiling and making available to the public performance-based "school report cards"?

Yes        No

3. Would you encourage your school district to use a new state law that allows schools to contract with private companies to provide alternative education for those students who disrupt learning in the classroom?

Yes        No

If your answer is "no," what do you suggest be done with disruptive students?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## School Safety

School safety remains a top priority. Enacted last year, the Safe and Secure Schools Act provided an additional \$20 million in "safe school" grants. Several other proposals are still under consideration.

4. Would you support legislation to allow civil suits to be filed against parents who fail to take reasonable safeguards to keep guns in the home out of the hands of children?

Yes        No

5. Do you favor getting tougher on those who commit violent acts in school by trying them as adults and imposing mandatory minimum sentences?

Yes        No

## Land Use

Several "land use" proposals have come before the General Assembly. Key considerations in all of the measures include the environment; smart growth versus no growth; private versus government land rights; and local versus regional land-use planning.

6. Would you support a proposal that allows local governments to designate specific areas for development, disallowing development to occur in areas not designated as such?

Yes        No

*(continued on back)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
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# Survey \_\_\_\_\_ (continued from previous page)

7. Would you favor state enticements such as grants to encourage local officials to work with neighboring localities to plan land use on a regional basis as opposed to each locality having its own set of land-use rules as is currently the case in Pennsylvania?

Yes        No

8. Do you believe developers should be required to work with local officials to ensure that infrastructure upgrades (such as roads, sewer system, and school district student population-size capabilities) are in place before the development proceeds?

Yes        No

## Tobacco Settlement

Pennsylvania stands to receive \$11.3 billion over the next 25 years as part of a \$206 billion settlement reached in 1998 between tobacco companies and 46 states. A great deal of discussion has already taken place on how the money should be spent, with additional review expected to continue for some time.

9. Please indicate where you think the majority of funds should be directed.

- cancer research and anti-smoking initiatives
- health care insurance for uninsured adults
- long-term and home health care
- health care in general
- public education
- other \_\_\_\_\_

10. Would you favor using some of the settlement money to help Pennsylvania's volunteer fire companies and volunteer emergency service providers?

Yes        No

## State Budget Surplus

Fiscally responsible budgeting coupled with innovative business and job-creating tools have given momentum to an already good economy in Pennsylvania. That, in turn, has led to a budget surplus of nearly \$1 billion, a large portion of which goes into the Rainy Day Fund, money set aside to protect against future tax increases during economic downturns.

11. What do you think should be done with the surplus?

- continue to safeguard against bad times through Rainy Day Fund deposits
- give it back to taxpayers in the form of rebates or tax credits
- direct it toward environmental and land-use issues
- increase state funding to public education
- other \_\_\_\_\_

## Prioritizing Issues

The issues that confront us today are often the same issues that will confront us tomorrow – health care, education, crime, the environment, the economy. Changes in our daily lives, however, often call for changes in priorities.

12. Using "1" to indicate the highest priority, please rank the following issues in what you believe is the order of importance they should be given in the General Assembly.

- health care
- public education
- public safety and crime
- the environment
- job creation
- tax relief
- other \_\_\_\_\_

**When finished, cut along dashed line, fold so that the return mailing area on the other side is showing, affix postage, and drop in the mail.**

**Rep. Paul W. Semmel**

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**187th Legislative District**

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