



Rep. Paul W. Semmel

# Semmel's 187th District Legislative Report



March 2002

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House of Representatives

COMMITTEES:

VETERANS AFFAIRS & EMERGENCY  
PREPAREDNESS, CHAIRMAN  
COMMERCE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
CONSUMER AFFAIRS  
HOUSE MAJORITY POLICY COMMITTEE

DESIGNATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND  
VETERANS AFFAIRS  
STATE ARMORY BOARD  
PENNSYLVANIA EMERGENCY  
MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Dear Upper Macungie Neighbor:

**Welcome to the newly re-apportioned 187<sup>th</sup> Legislative District.**

As you may know, every 10 years in conjunction with the U.S. Census, Pennsylvania's state House and Senate district lines are redrawn to reflect shifts in the population. A recent ruling by the state Supreme Court made the new districts final, placing districts 1 and 2 of Upper Macungie Township – in other words, your community – into the 187<sup>th</sup> Legislative District. I have had the honor of representing this legislative district for the past 18 years. The district includes portions of Berks County and Heidelberg, Lowhill, Lynn, North Whitehall and Weisenberg townships in addition to districts 3 and 4 of Upper Macungie Township in Lehigh County.

I look forward to serving the people of Upper Macungie district 1 and 2 and want to take this opportunity to introduce myself and tell you about the services available at my local offices. Also enclosed is a copy of my fall 2001 general newsletter and a special report of interest to district veterans for your review.

I currently serve as chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Management Committee, and have made issues concerning Pennsylvania's veterans, especially our older vets who served in WW II, Korea and Vietnam, one of my top priorities. However, now that America is at war, the committee is working to ensure that our National Guard members and reservists called to active duty obtain the help they need for themselves and their families left at home.

In addition, following the horrific events of Sept. 11, our committee has stepped to the forefront in ensuring Pennsylvania's security. At the direction of the House, late last year the committee held a public hearing to glean suggestions to further anti-terrorism security within the Commonwealth through enhanced training and the provision of additional equipment for emergency responders.

This means we need to make sure our emergency responders – including, among others, emergency medical personnel, firefighters, state and local law enforcement agencies, special bomb detection squads, search and rescue units, and hazardous materials squads – have the training and equipment they need to answer the call in the battle against terrorism. We will be working on these proposals as we formulate the 2002-03 state budget in the months to come.

Additionally, I serve on the Consumer Affairs Committee, the Commerce and Economic Development Committee and the Committee on Committees that has the responsibility of assigning House members to the committees on which they will serve during the legislative session.

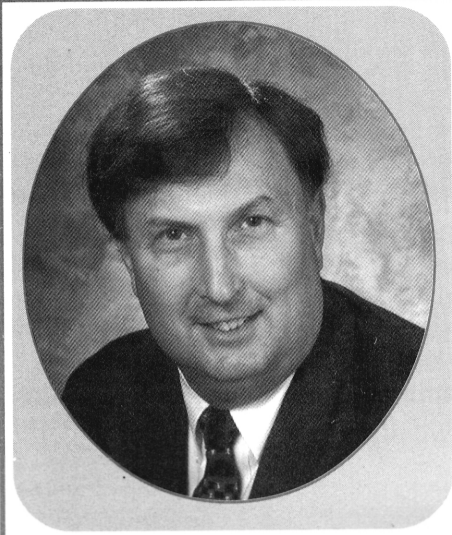
Please share any thoughts or concerns you may have on these issues or any other state-related matters. You are also welcome to call or stop by my local offices to obtain: certified copies of birth certificates, PACE/PACENET applications, Property Tax/Rent Rebate applications, driver's license or vehicle registrations, or copies of various state publications.

In addition to the main office at 4525 Spring Hill Dr. in Schnecksville, telephone (610) 799-0187, my staff and I operate satellite offices in the Upper Macungie Township Building, 8330 Schantz Rd., Breinigsville, phone (610) 395-8180, and at the Macungie Borough Hall, 21 Locust St. in Macungie, phone (610) 966-0187.

Thank you, and I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Paul W. Semmel



State Representative  
**Paul Semmel**  
187<sup>th</sup> Legislative District

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# CELEBRATING PENNSYLVANIA Families

Summer – 2002

Dear Neighbor,

This edition of my newsletter contains information on programs available through various state agencies that benefit women and children. Over the last several years in Pennsylvania we've devoted a lot of time and energy to making Pennsylvania a better place for all our families.

I hope you find this newsletter informative. Please contact my district office if you need more information on any of the programs mentioned.

As always if you have any questions or if I can be of assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

## Insurance Standards for Mastectomy Improved

The General Assembly recently approved legislation—Senate Bill 1417—bringing Pennsylvania's Insurance Company Law of 1921 into compliance with three very important federal guidelines of the federal Women's Health & Cancer Rights Act of 1998 that pertain to mastectomy.

Pennsylvania has a six-year deadline on reconstructive surgery following a mastectomy. Since federal law includes no such deadline, Senate Bill 1417 removes this deadline from Pennsylvania law. Pennsylvania law fails to meet both the enrollment and annual notification requirements included in the federal law, which is fixed with Senate Bill 1417. Finally, it is unclear whether Pennsylvania law requires coverage for all physical complications – those where treatment would not restore symmetry or function – that might follow a mastectomy. Senate Bill 1417 requires such coverage.

Gov. Mark Schweiker signed Senate Bill 1417 into law in June.

## Legislation Creates Specialty License Plate for Breast Cancer Research

The House Transportation Committee is reviewing legislation – House Bill 988 – that permits PENNDOT to design and issue a breast cancer awareness registration plate.

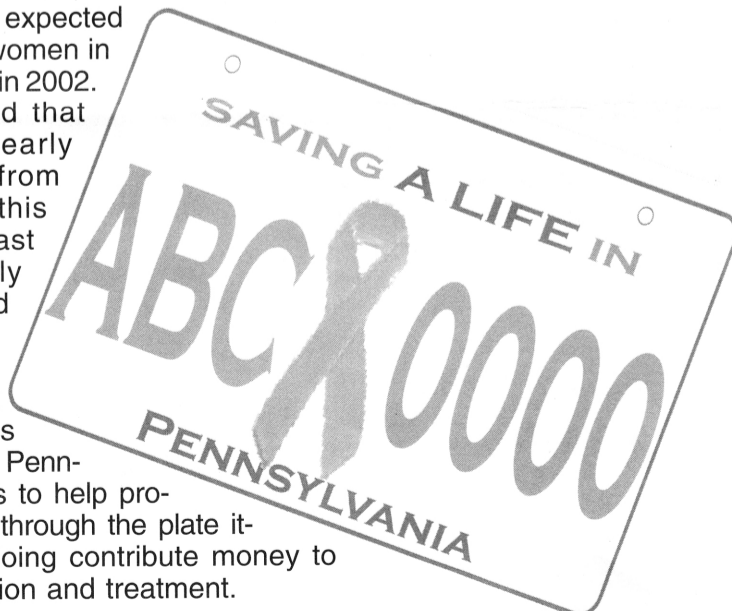
The plate would bear a \$35 fee in addition to the annual registration fee, and \$15 of that fee would be deposited into the Susan G. Komen Foundation for breast cancer research, education, screening, and treatment.

It's critically important that we not only garner greater public attention toward this dreaded disease, but also that we create an efficient, effective, and practical funding mechanism for people to donate more money to research, education and treatment.

An estimated 180,000 new cases of breast cancer are expected to occur among women in the United States in 2002.

It's estimated that there will be nearly 50,000 deaths from breast cancer this year alone. Breast cancer currently ranks second among cancer deaths in women.

The Breast Cancer Awareness Plate would allow Pennsylvania motorists to help promote awareness through the plate itself, and in so doing contribute money to research, education and treatment.



## Fighting Child Pornography on the Internet

Sexual abuse of children is a heinous crime and now Internet service providers can be held responsible for not doing their job. Under the new law, an Internet service provider (ISP) would be held criminally liable for any child pornography not blocked by the provider. The ISP would have five business days after receiving written notification from the state Attorney General to remove child pornography posted by a customer on their service.

A first offense would be a third-degree misdemeanor carrying a penalty of \$5,000. A second offense would be a second-degree misdemeanor with a \$20,000 price tag. The penalties escalate sharply on the third offense, which would be a third-degree felony with a \$30,000 fine and prison time of up to seven years.

## Keeping Pennsylvania's Children Healthy

Pennsylvania offers free and reduced-cost health care through the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

Funding for this valuable program has increased each year in the Ridge/Schweiker Administration, boosting enrollment from 42,500 children statewide to more than 119,000.

Free coverage is available to uninsured children whose families earn up to 200 percent of the poverty limit. A family of four may earn up to \$35,300 annually and qualify.

Reduced-cost coverage is available to uninsured children in families of four earning up to \$41,478 or 235 percent of the poverty level.

CHIP coverage includes visits to the doctor or dentist, immunizations, prescriptions, vision and hearing care, diagnostics, emergency care and up to 90 days of hospital care. It also includes drug and alcohol abuse treatment, partial hospitalization for mental health services, home health care, rehabilitation therapy, hearing aids and durable medical equipment such as wheelchairs.

Through CHIP, we're helping to ensure that every child in Pennsylvania has access to quality health care. If you think your children may be eligible for free or low-cost health insurance, call the CHIP toll-free hotline at 1-800-986-KIDS.

## Program Provides Immunizations For Children

To help children fight disease, the state Department of Health offers the Vaccines for Children Program available to all children under the age of 19. Through this program, vaccines are provided free of charge to children with Medicaid, without health insurance or with insurance where vaccines are not covered, or those who are American Indian or Alaskan native through their family physician.

Children, regardless of insurance coverage, may receive vaccines at no cost at state health centers. For more information contact the Pennsylvania Department of Health Immunization Program at (717) 787-5681.

## 'I Am Your Child' Videos Available for Parents, Child Care Providers

"I Am Your Child" is a national campaign that Pennsylvania joined last fall to raise public awareness and educate parents and caregivers about the importance of the early years in a child's development.

Within the Pennsylvania portion of the program, all parents of newborns in the state, including adoptive parents, will be able to order, free of charge, educational videos, a resource guide for families, and a book for their child. The materials are also available at more than 7,000 sites in the state, including family centers, libraries and nurse home visitation programs.

Parents and caregivers can call 1-800-986-BABY for more information about ordering the materials.

The six videos include topics on the importance of the first years; health and nutrition; safety precautions at home and child care centers; reading and communication; discipline; and quality child care.

More information is available at the program's Internet Web site at: [www.iamyourchild.org](http://www.iamyourchild.org).

## Learn About Lupus

- ◆ 90 percent of people with Lupus are women between the ages of 15-45, particularly Asians, Latinos, and African and Native Americans.
- ◆ Lupus is a chronic, inflammatory autoimmune disease.
- ◆ Lupus is not contagious, rare or cancerous.
- ◆ One out of every 185 Americans and 66,000 Pennsylvanians have Lupus.
- ◆ Lupus is more prevalent than AIDS, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, sickle cell anemia and cystic fibrosis combined.
- ◆ Lupus is difficult to diagnose (can take up to 5 years) and often mimics many other illnesses.
- ◆ It is unknown what causes Lupus and there is no cure.
- ◆ The Lupus Foundation of Pennsylvania has allocated over \$100,000 this year to state and local Lupus research.

For more information about lupus, or to locate the branch office nearest you, visit [www.lupuspa.org](http://www.lupuspa.org) or call 1-888-215-8787.

# AY Health Care Update

## Pennsylvania Protection and Advocacy, Inc. (PP&A)

PP&A is an independent, federally funded, nonprofit private agency responsible for providing protection and advocacy services to people with disabilities as described in federal statutes. These statutes authorize the organization to investigate abuse, neglect and rights violations. PP&A provides intake and referral, technical assistance and case advocacy, as appropriate.

PP&A can also provide training about disability rights and printed materials about disability rights legislation, state laws and regulations. The mission of PP&A is to provide advocacy in a culturally competent manner for eligible individuals to obtain the rights and benefits to which they are entitled and to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect. PP&A has Eastern, Central and Western regional teams, an advocate in each of the State Centers, a forensic advocate who works with individuals and families in the criminal justice system and a children's team.

PP&A has a Transition to Employment (TEP) project that provides services in Philadelphia, Bucks, Delaware and Montgomery Counties. In addition, PP&A contracts with the Disability Law Center and the Education Law Center for systemic litigation issues. If you are a person with a disability and think that your rights have been violated, PP&A may be able to help. The organization can be contacted by phone at 1-800-692-7443, by email at [ppa@ppainc.org](mailto:ppa@ppainc.org), or through their Web site at: [www.ppainc.org](http://www.ppainc.org)

## State-Funded Health Insurance Coverage Available for Qualified Adults

Pennsylvania will use its entire share of the national Tobacco Settlement — \$340 million annually over the next 25 years — for health care and related services. In addition to funding for prescription medication for seniors, tobacco use prevention and cessation programs, research, and community-based health care assistance programs, some of the settlement will be used for health insurance for uninsured adults through the "adultBasic" program.

AdultBasic promotes access to health care by providing basic insurance to citizens age 19-64 who need it but cannot afford it. Coverage began on July 1, and as many as 40,000 Pennsylvanians could benefit from this program.

Benefits offered include preventive care; physician services; diagnosis and treatment of illness or injury; inpatient hospitalization/outpatient services; and emergency accident and emergency medical care. The cost to an individual will be about \$30 per month. For more information and an application, call 1-800-GO-BASIC or access the PA PowerPort at [www.state.pa.us](http://www.state.pa.us), with the PA Keyword: "adultBasic." More information is also available at my district office.

### **Eligibility Criteria for adultBasic:**

- ◆ Individuals with incomes below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines or approximately \$17,000 for a single adult.
- ◆ Individuals who may have jobs that do not include health benefits.
- ◆ Individuals who are between jobs.

## Medicaid Expanded to Cover Breast and Cervical Cancer

The Medicaid program has recently been expanded to cover treatment for low-income women who have breast or cervical cancer and certain pre-cancerous conditions. The new program guidelines are now in effect and will serve approximately 1,000 additional women each year who currently are not eligible for Medicaid coverage.

Breast cancer is the leading type of cancer in women and the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women in Pennsylvania. The federal Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention and Treatment Act of 2000 permits states to use Medicaid funds to provide breast and cervical cancer treatment to women who participate in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) free breast and cervical cancer screening program. In Pennsylvania, the Department of Health administers this program under the Healthy Woman Project.

Women screened by the Healthy Woman Project who need treatment for either breast or cervical cancer or a pre-cancerous condition will qualify for Medicaid if they are uninsured or have insurance that does not cover breast or cervical cancer treatment.

They also must be a Pennsylvania resident under age 65 and have an income below 250 percent of the poverty line (\$21,475 for a single-person household or \$44,125 for a family of four).

The Healthy Woman Project has 166 sites and 149 mammography facilities that provide free breast and cervical cancer screenings under the CDC program. Eligible women who are screened by another provider and diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer or a pre-cancerous condition can enroll in the Healthy Woman Project and receive Medicaid if they provide their test results and have at least one screening or diagnostic test provided by the Healthy Woman Project. There is no waiting period from the time a woman is diagnosed to become eligible for Medicaid. Local County Assistance Offices will expedite the application process to allow prompt access to treatment services. Pennsylvania's nationally recognized Medicaid program is administered by the Department of Public Welfare and provides free health benefits to 1.4 million low-income Pennsylvanians, most of who are not on cash assistance.

More information about the Healthy Woman Project is available by calling **1-877-PA-HEALTH** or by logging on to the PA PowerPort at [www.state.pa.us](http://www.state.pa.us), keyword "health."

# Pennsylvania Women's Health Alliance

The Pennsylvania Women's Health Alliance is a new statewide coalition promoting postmenopausal women's health.

In less than a year, the Alliance has gone from an exciting concept to an effective coalition with more than 40 active member organizations from across the Commonwealth. The Alliance encourages postmenopausal women to take full advantage of medical advancements and make positive lifestyle changes to prevent illness and promote continued health. Opening and improving access to today's cutting-edge medical treatments is an Alliance priority.

More than ever, this effort is critical because, on average, women now live one-third of their lives after menopause. And, while once unthinkable, today, many women over 50 are enjoying the best years of their lives.

Comprised of caring individuals from public, private, and non-profit organizations, the Alliance focuses on areas of greatest risk to women over 50, including osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and depression.

The Alliance has a special commitment to reaching women in underserved populations. In February of 2001, the Alliance officially made its mission public through a

high profile launch event at the Hershey Medical Center. The event, which included remarks by Dr. Wanda K. Jones of the U.S. Public Health Service Office of Women's Health, received extensive statewide media coverage.

Since its launch, the Alliance has prepared comprehensive brochures and other educational materials. These materials will be used to spread the word about postmenopausal wellness throughout Pennsylvania. Additionally, members are pursuing ongoing media opportunities and planning for future Alliance events and programs. For more information call the PA Women's Health Alliance at (888) 295-8347.

## Project Provides Health Care Access to Women

In an effort to provide access to health care for all women, the state Department of Health's Healthy Woman Project makes screenings and treatment for breast and/or cervical cancer accessible to Pennsylvania residents who have trouble paying for such services.

Women ages 50-64 who have low to moderate incomes and no or limited insurance qualify for the program. Additionally, a limited number of women age 40-49 can be served if they meet the same eligibility guidelines as women age 50-64.

Services are free for those meeting the eligibility standards, and those services include:

- ◆ Clinical breast examination.
- ◆ Mammogram.
- ◆ Pelvic examination and Pap smear.
- ◆ Education on breast self-exam.
- ◆ Follow-up diagnostic care for an abnormal result.

For information, contact my district office or the Pennsylvania Department of Health at 1-877-PA-HEALTH.

## What My Office Can Do For You

### GENERAL SERVICES:

- ◆ Obtaining PA birth and death certificates
- ◆ Providing copies of PA legislation and laws
- ◆ Senior citizen program information and application forms
- ◆ Information on veterans outreach services
- ◆ Serving as a liaison between local and state officials
- ◆ Obtaining higher education grant/loan applications
- ◆ Quick access to state tax forms
- ◆ State pamphlets, brochures and publications
- ◆ Streamlining consumer complaints to the proper agencies
- ◆ General assistance in cutting through red tape

### TRANSPORTATION SERVICES:

- ◆ Zeroing in on "pothole" problems for repair
- ◆ Processing permit and license applications and renewals
- ◆ Assistance in replacing lost licenses, titles and registrations
- ◆ Making changes in license classifications

### STATE REPRESENTATIVE Paul Semmel

#### 187<sup>th</sup> District

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

UPPER MACUNGIE  
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8330 SCHANTZ ROAD  
BREINIGSVILLE, PA 18031  
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KUTZTOWN BOROUGH HALL  
PHONE (610) 683-9199

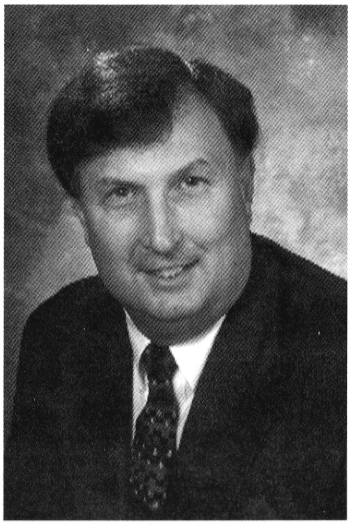
MATT MOYER,  
LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT

#### TUESDAY SCHEDULE

8:15 - 10AM  
Topton Borough Hall

10:15 - 12PM  
Longswamp Township Bldg.

1:30 - 3:30PM  
Kutztown Borough Hall



Rep. Paul W. Semmel

# Semmel's 187th District Legislative Report



Summer/Fall 2002

## District Offices

### Lehigh County

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

Upper Macungie  
Township Building  
8330 Schantz Road  
Breinigsville, PA 18062  
(610) 395-8180

### Berks County\*

Kutztown Borough Hall  
45 Railroad St.  
Kutztown, PA 19530  
(610) 683-9199

Topton Borough Hall  
205 S. Callow Hill St.  
Topton, PA 19562

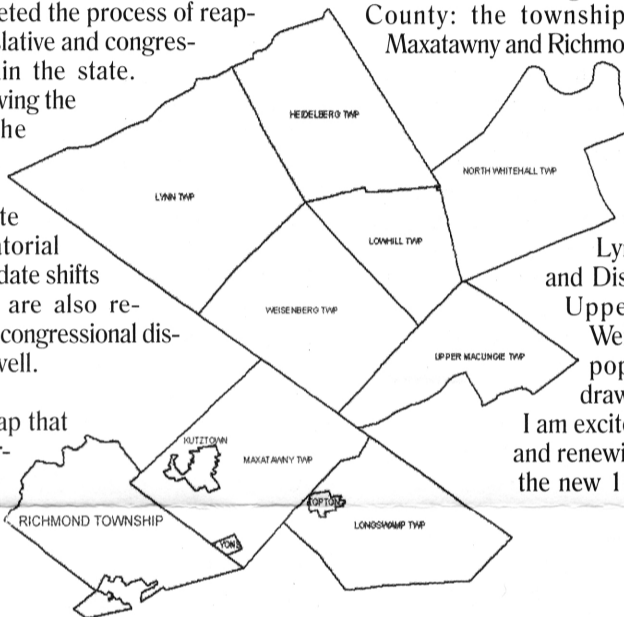
Longswamp Twp. Bldg.  
1112 State Street  
Mertztown, PA 19539

\*If you need an appointment at  
Kutztown, Topton,  
or Longswamp offices,  
call the Kutztown number.

## The New 187<sup>th</sup> District

As you no doubt already realize, the General Assembly has completed the process of reapportioning state legislative and congressional districts within the state. Every ten years following the national census, the General Assembly is required to re-draw the lines of the state legislative and senatorial districts to accommodate shifts in population. We are also required to re-draw the congressional district boundaries as well.

Please note the map that depicts the reapportioned 187<sup>th</sup> Legislative District. It con-



sists of the following communities in Berks County: the townships of Longswamp, Maxatawny and Richmond, and the boroughs of Kutztown, Lyons and Topton. In Lehigh County, the district includes the townships of Heidelberg, Lowhill, Lynn, North Whitehall, and Districts 1, 2 and 3 in Upper Macungie, and Weisenberg. The total population of the re-drawn district is 61,399.

I am excited to be making new and renewing old friendships in the new 187<sup>th</sup> district.

## 2002-03 State Budget Meets the Challenges Facing PA

*Investments in education, public safety,  
health care boost quality of life*

In one of the toughest budget years in a decade, the General Assembly approved a responsible fiscal plan that keeps a tight rein on spending while making important investments in our children's schools, our families' health care and our communities' safety and security.

Pennsylvania, like most of its neighboring states and many of its citizens, faced a drop in revenue this past year as a result of the economic slowdown and the impact of Sept. 11. Despite these tight times, House Republicans remained focused on their top priorities: improving educational opportunities for young people and enhancing quality of life for all Pennsylvanians by investing in health care, our communities and our environment.

The \$20.69 billion budget was signed into law by Gov. Mark Schweiker on June 29 and took effect July 1.

### *Educating Our Children*

Once again, nearly a third of the state budget is dedicated to education. This year's direct aid to public schools totals \$6.8 billion, an increase of nearly 3.5 percent over last year.

Under this plan, each and every school district in the Commonwealth is guaranteed at least a 2 percent increase in basic education funding over last year's levels. House Republicans were steadfast in their commitment to providing added funding after Gov. Schweiker proposed just a 1 percent increase in basic education subsidies to all school districts. Statewide basic education funding now nears \$4.1 billion.

Districts will also see an increase in funds for special education, up \$13 million over last year. With nearly \$875 million available, each school district receives a 1.5 percent increase.

For the first time, the state is stepping in to provide school districts with additional reimbursements for those students who live in a particular district but who are enrolled in charter or cyber-charter schools. The 30 percent reimbursement comes in addition to the basic education per pupil funding

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Rep. Semmel's

# Legislative Update

## General Assembly Approves Landmark Legal Reform

***Fair Share Act will help restore balance and fairness to the judicial system***

In June the General Assembly passed, and the governor signed into law, the most significant reform to Pennsylvania's civil justice system in more than two decades. The Fair Share Act partially repeals the legal doctrine of joint and several liability and implements a system of comparative responsibility in which defendants in civil cases are required to pay only a share of the award equal to their responsibility for damages caused.

Under the prior law, if a court determined that you were even one percent at fault for someone's injury then you could have been responsible for paying the entire sum of the award if the other defendants were financially unable to do so. Civil cases often turned into a hunt for defendants with the greatest financial resources, even if they were only remotely connected to the case or minimally responsible. If a plaintiff's attorney could prove that person was even one percent at fault they could have been forced to pay the total judgment.

The Fair Share Act eliminates the joint and several principle entirely for defendants in civil cases found to be less than 60 percent liable and requires that a defendant be held responsible for only his or her share of the liability. So if a court deems someone responsible for 10 per-

cent of the fault, that defendant will be responsible for only 10 percent of the total award.

Individuals or businesses should not be exempt from paying retribution for pain or suffering they may have caused. There should be a proportional penalty, however. The Fair Share Act is based upon the principle that compensation is fair when it is paid in accordance with one's relative fault, not one's ability to pay. It is a common sense solution that will restore balance and fairness to the judicial system, while at the same time, maintaining a person's right to seek legal recourse for injuries wrongfully incurred.

The new law exempts cases involving drunken drivers and environmental damage, such as a toxic spill or a leak from an underground storage tank. The environmental exemption was necessary to address the often-significant time gap between when the damage occurred and when it is discovered. In those cases, injured persons will still be able to collect damages if the responsible parties are no longer in business or bankrupt. In the case of drunken drivers, it was especially important not to diminish in any way a person's ability to recover losses from all responsible parties.

The problem with the concept of joint and several liability in most other cases is that it

not only exceeds the bounds of basic fairness, but it also creates a destructive atmosphere in the business and health care communities. Frivolous lawsuits and nuisance settlements invariably lead to higher health care costs and exorbitant medical malpractice insurance premiums. They also stifle ingenuity in the business world by discouraging risk-taking and inhibiting the introduction of new technology.

When new businesses look to locate and existing businesses look to expand, a state's civil litigation climate plays a prominent role in the decision making process. The new law will have an immediate and profound effect on the state's economic climate by helping to preserve, create and even attract new jobs. Eventually it will also help to lower the cost of some consumer products.

It will ultimately benefit health care providers burdened by frivolous lawsuits and skyrocketing insurance premiums, and help to ensure that every Pennsylvanian continues to have access to the best health care services available.

This reform was long overdue, and it sends a clear and strong message that we're serious about making Pennsylvania a more attractive place to do business.

## 2002-03 Budget Continues Funding for DAV Transportation Network Program

Following on the heels of a Disabled American Veterans (DAV) ceremony dedicating new vans purchased with state funds from last year's budget, I'm very pleased to report the inclusion of \$250,000 in the recently enacted 2002-03 state budget to help the DAV continue to operate its Transportation Network program.

Although I was able to have funding included in last year's budget – which provided money for 10 new vans for the transportation program – this year's tight budget presented the possibility of limited or no funding. The continued funding of this program is essential in making sure veterans have access to needed transportation for health care visits. That's why I fought for funding in this year's budget as a priority item.

The DAV has operated a transportation program for veterans traveling between the eight VA medical centers across Pennsylvania and their homes or designated pick-up and drop-off locations since 1988. This service is provided free of charge to veterans, many of whom are using the program for service-related disabilities and have limited incomes and health care resources.

Due to a decrease in funding by the national headquarters of the DAV this program is in danger of being severely limited. Fortunately, this funding from the state will help keep this program up and running. As a result of Sept. 11, I think people are really beginning to recognize the contributions and sacrifices of our military personnel. Continuing our respect, gratitude and services to them is the least we can do.

The DAV Transportation Network program has approximately 270 volunteer drivers logging more than 1.5 million miles per year while transporting 55,000 veterans to centers for medical care and services.

*New Van Ready to Help Veterans . . . (L to R) One of several volunteer drivers, legislative chairman of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Tom McDole and I officially "launch" one of 10 new vans purchased with state funds that will allow the DAV to transport more veterans to the VA hospitals around the state.*



# What Rep. Semmel Can Do for You!

- ◆ Assistance with PENNDOT problems such as registrations and driver license renewals
- ◆ Assistance in completing PACE and Property Tax/Rent Rebate applications
- ◆ Voter registration forms and absentee ballot applications
- ◆ Pennsylvania maps and other publications such as the Pennsylvania Vacation Guide
- ◆ Birth and death certificate applications
- ◆ Schedules and tours of the state Capitol and Governor's Residence
- ◆ Directing consumer complaints to the proper agencies
- ◆ Obtaining higher education grant/loan applications
- ◆ Quick access to state tax forms
- ◆ General assistance in any other state government matter.

## Project Provides Health Care Access to Women

Health care is also important for individuals at any age. In an effort to provide access to healthcare for all women, the state Department of Health's Healthy Woman Project makes screenings and treatment for breast and/or cervical cancer accessible to Pennsylvania residents who have trouble paying for such services.

Women ages 50-64 who have low to moderate incomes and have no or limited insurance qualify for the program. Additionally, a limited number of women age 40-49 can be served if they meet the same eligibility guidelines as women age 50-64.

Services are free for those meeting the eligibility standards, and those services include:

- ◆ Clinical breast examination.
- ◆ Mammogram.
- ◆ Pelvic examination and Pap smear.
- ◆ Education on breast self-exam.
- ◆ Follow-up diagnostic care for an abnormal result.

For information, contact the Pennsylvania Department of Health at 1-877-PA-HEALTH.

## Farmers Encouraged to Investigate Benefits of State's Crop Insurance Assistance Program

Farming is a high-risk profession. I know because in addition to being a state representative, I am also a farmer. That is why I encourage every farmer to take a close look at their crop insurance and investigate the benefits of the state's Crop Insurance Assistance Program. The program is designed to help offset the cost of purchasing crop insurance.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA), the program has helped to double the participation in crop insurance, which is reaching an estimated 1 million acres across the entire state.

To be eligible, Pennsylvania farmers must purchase a crop insurance policy and complete the required forms. The program covers up to 10 percent of the cost of the gross premium plus the total amount of all related fees, such as the administrative fee and crop Buy-up coverage. This amounts to nearly 20 percent of the net premium. The Crop Insurance Assistance Program is in addition to any federal premium assistance.

The application deadline for the program is Sept. 30 for most fall seedings, and Nov. 20 for tree and vine crops.

For more information on the state's Crop Insurance Assistance Program, contact PDA at (717) 787-2376 or check out the Web site at [www.pda.state.pa.us](http://www.pda.state.pa.us).

## Plan Unveiled To Provide Health Insurance Coverage to Adults

With funds from the national Tobacco Settlement, Pennsylvania will use its entire share – \$340 million annually over the next 25 years – for health care and related services.

In addition to funding for prescription medication for seniors, tobacco use prevention and cessation programs, research and community-based health care assistance programs, some the settlement will be used for health insurance for uninsured adults through the "adultBasic" program.

AdultBasic promotes access to health care by providing basic insurance to citizens age 19-64 who need it but cannot afford it. Approximately 40,000 Pennsylvanians can benefit from this program, which went into effect on July 1.

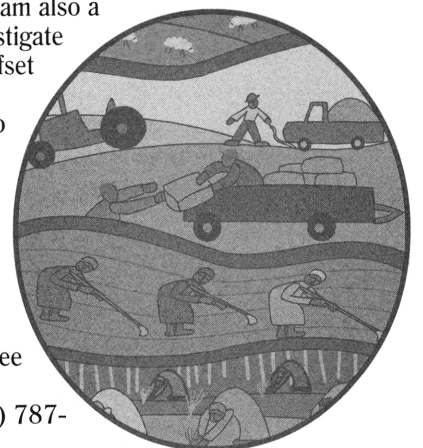
Benefits offered include preventive care; physician services; diagnosis and treatment of illness or injury; inpatient hospitalization/outpatient services; and emergency accident and emergency medical care. The cost to an individual will be about \$30 per month.

For more information and an application, call 1-800-GO-BASIC or access the PA PowerPort at [www.state.pa.us](http://www.state.pa.us), with the PA Keyword: "adultBasic."

More information is also available at my district office at 4525 Spring Hill Dr., P.O. Box 235, Schneeksville, 18078 or phone 610-799-0187.

### Eligibility Criteria for AdultBasic

- ◆ Individuals with incomes below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines or approximately \$17,000 for a single adult.
- ◆ Individuals who may have jobs that do not include health benefits.
- ◆ Individuals who are in between jobs.





## Program Provides Immunizations For Adults, Children

To help children fight disease, the state Department of Health offers the Vaccines for Children Program available to all children under the age of 19.

Through this program, vaccines are provided free of charge to children with Medicaid, without health insurance or with insurance where vaccines are not covered, or those who are American Indian or Alaskan native.

Children, regardless of insurance coverage, may receive vaccines at no cost at state health centers. In Lehigh County, contact the Allentown office at (610) 437-7760 for more information, and those in Berks County should contact the Southeast regional district office at 610-378-4352, or the Pennsylvania Department of Health Immunization Program at (717) 787-5681.

## Winning Team ...



*I was very proud to welcome members of the Kutztown High School Girls Softball Team to the House of Representatives. The women cougars – pictured with me on the Rotunda stairs – captured the 2002 PIAA Class AA State Championship in June. Team members and coaches were presented with a congratulatory House of Representatives citation.*

## District 4<sup>th</sup> Grader Concerned About Kids' Safety ... Wins 1<sup>st</sup> Place in "There Ought to be a Law" Contest

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

The idea of requiring background checks of persons who coach youth athletic teams earned the Kernsville Elementary School student first place in my second annual "There Ought to Be a Law" contest for fourth-grade classes in the 187<sup>th</sup> Legislative District.

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

I was happy to have the idea drafted into bill form and invited Joshua and his family to the Capitol to be presented with a House of Representatives recognition citation.

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

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

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



### Students Visit Capitol...

*This past spring I welcomed 135 7<sup>th</sup> graders from Orefield Middle School to tour the state Capitol and observe a session of the House. My staff and I are always pleased to arrange Capitol tours for school classes.*



already provided to those districts. On average, the state is now funding 77 percent of the total cost of a child enrolled in a charter school.

The budget also includes an additional \$100 per pupil to school districts for non-public and charter school student transportation.

*Here's how our school districts in the 187<sup>th</sup> Legislative District fared.*

School District	State Funding	Dollar Increase/Percentage Increase
Brandywine Area	\$3,308,740	\$110,152 or 3.3 percent over last fiscal year
Fleetwood Area	\$2,754,814	\$155,695 or 5.7 percent over last fiscal year
Kutztown Area	\$2,698,462	\$65,664 or 2.4 percent over last fiscal year
Northwestern Lehigh	\$4,686,111	\$139,976 or 3 percent over last fiscal year
Parkland	\$5,588,605	\$424,931 or 7.6 percent over last fiscal year

## Protecting Our Communities

The ongoing threat of terrorist attacks on our nation has raised awareness among many people about the need to boost homeland security by strengthening law enforcement and emergency response capabilities.

As chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I'm pleased to report that this year's budget includes \$200 million in state and federal funds for Pennsylvania's homeland security. The funding supports the hiring of 100 new State Police troopers and the development of nuclear and biological security, cyber security, and public health emergency preparedness.

Law enforcement will also get a boost from the \$22.7 million dedicated to the CLEAN system. CLEAN offers mobile computing for enhanced officer safety and faster reporting and follow-up capabilities. Additional funding will support an automated fingerprint ID system that benefits all police departments.

We are dedicating \$5.6 million to support municipal police training, and we have asked the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) to study possible funding sources for a program to help local volunteer fire companies. We have also called on the Secretary of the Commonwealth to place a referendum on the ballot this fall asking voters if the state should borrow up to \$100 million to support local fire and emergency service responders.

Many of these volunteer organizations are struggling to balance the time it takes to obtain the appropriate training to respond to a growing list of emergencies and raise enough money to keep firehouses and equipment in good shape.

## Keeping PA Healthy

The General Assembly made a major commitment to maintaining and improving the health of all Pennsylvanians last year when it dedicated 100 percent of funds collected from the national tobacco settlement to health care and related initiatives.

This year, we continue that trend by taking steps to ensure people of all ages and income levels have access to the quality health care they need and deserve.

Funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) is increased slightly this year to \$32.75 million to ensure children continue to have access to free and reduced-cost health care. Currently, more than 120,000 children are enrolled in the program. Children with disabilities will also benefit from the successful effort to restore \$1.2 million in funding for support services.

New this year is the **adultBasic** program, which provides low-cost health insurance to uninsured adults age 19-64 who meet income eligibility requirements. Benefits include preventive care, physician services, diagnosis and treatment of illness or injury, inpatient hospitalization/outpatient services, and emergency accident and emergency medical care. An estimated \$76 million is dedicated to the program this year, most of which comes from the national tobacco settlement. (See

additional article for further details).

Older Pennsylvanians will continue to have access to one of the best prescription drug assistance programs in the nation, as more than \$425 million is invested in PACE and PACENET. Vital funding also continues for free and shared rides (\$137 million), family caregivers support (\$11.4 million) and home and community-based care services (\$35 million).

## Improving Quality of Life

In 1999, the General Assembly made the largest investment ever in protecting our environment and preserving our natural resources. Growing Greener, the five-year, \$650 million initiative, has helped restore watersheds, reclaim abandoned mine lands, and preserve farmland and open space.

The program was facing a massive cut in its budget this year, and funding was set to expire after the 2003-04 fiscal year. The General Assembly, however, took an important step to ensure this vital program will be adequately supported for at least the next 10 years by approving a \$4 increase on the state's tipping fee. The tipping fee is assessed on landfill operators for every ton of trash processed.

This year, Growing Greener will receive half of the fee increase, about \$50 million, while the remaining money will be used to support the state's general fund and balance the budget. Starting next year, Growing Greener should receive the full \$92 million from the tipping fee increase.

# Telemarketers Must Abide by New State Law

As a way to help consumers fight back against telemarketers, a new law will provide for a telemarketer "Do-Not-Call" list.

Act 24 of 2002 directs the Office of Attorney General to contract with a nonprofit organization to maintain the list of consumers who want to avoid telemarketing calls. The list administrator will be responsible for updating the list and providing the list to telemarketers on a quarterly basis. Telemarketers then have 30 days to remove from their calling lists any names that appear on the "Do-Not-Call" list. A violation of the law carries a civil penalty up to \$1,000, or \$3,000 if the person is age 60 or older.

Once the list administrator is established, consumers will be invited to provide their name, address and telephone number to enroll. The consumer's name and number will remain on the list for five years, or until that telephone number is no longer valid.

Information about how to enroll will be provided in consumers' monthly telephone bills. The address to enroll is: Bureau of Consumer Protection; 14th Floor Strawberry Square, Harrisburg, PA 17120 or call (717) 787-9707. The fax number is (717) 787-1190. Interested persons can also e-mail at: [consumers@attorneygeneral.gov](mailto:consumers@attorneygeneral.gov). This information also will be published in local telephone directories.



# Medical Malpractice Reform Protects PA Patients, Doctors and Hospitals

Although the end result was indeed a compromise, I am pleased to report that the House stood firm in the effort to reform Pennsylvania's medical malpractice insurance system, while also guaranteeing victims' rights. We have a very real crisis in Pennsylvania that is threatening health care across the state – the skyrocketing cost of medical malpractice that is driving our doctors to other states or early retirement. It was imperative that the legislature enact some kind of insurance reform so that our citizens continue to have full access to the highest quality health care. However, it was also imperative to enact legislation that protects the rights of victims of medical malpractice to seek all legal ramifications at their disposal. This legislation – Act 13 of 2002 – does just that, and also implements patients' safety measures to further protect them from possible medical errors.

As I said, Act 13 is a compromise – doctors were given some relief from soaring insurance premiums and victims of medical errors continue to have the right to seek compensation for their injuries. In the end, it was supported by organizations representing doctors, hospitals, insurers and attorneys. Hopefully, patient safety will increase while doctors will see a reduction in their malpractice insurance premiums.

The increase in the cost of premiums and surcharges for physicians and hospitals have been caused by the inefficiencies and the problems inherent within the administration of Pennsylvania's Malpractice Professional Liability Catastrophe Fund (CAT Fund) along with its \$2.4 billion unfunded liability (lawsuits that have been

adjudicated but not been awarded in the current year), the lack of meaningful and effective reform of tort (a wrongful act other than a breach of contract for which relief may be obtained in the form of damages or an injunction) and patient safety laws.

The new law will protect every patient's right to sue. It will add new checks and balances to reduce medical errors and increase accountability. It takes significant steps forward to resolve the Medical CAT Fund crisis and reduce the cost of medical malpractice insurance. The Medical CAT Fund will be phased out while increasing private liability insurance requirements.

This approach will create real savings for those who are required to purchase medical malpractice insurance.

## Taking Steps Toward Medical Malpractice Lawsuit Reform

Act 13 takes a number of steps in the effort to deal with outrageous lawsuits. It gives plaintiffs a new forum for relief from excessive verdicts and more clearly defines those who may be subjected to legal actions. These are important principles that will help doctors and hospitals.

Periodic payments will help control costs to the health care system and provide some level of predictability in the cost to the insurance system. Most importantly, the patient will receive the compensation he or she deserves in a fair and timely fashion.

While the issue of joint and several liability is not part of this final compromise, it is part of the larger lawsuit reform package included in the Fair Share Act that I've previously discussed.

## Lowering Liability Insurance Costs, Reforming CAT Fund

Act 13 achieved one of our major goals – lowering the cost of malpractice insurance for doctors and hospitals in this legislation.

The state will move \$400 million from the automobile CAT Fund to the medical CAT Fund to help reduce liability insurance premiums. More money from the medical CAT Fund will be targeted for malpractice insurance premium relief to hospitals and top-end specialists such as OB-GYN physicians, neurosurgeons, orthopedic practitioners and certain surgeons. General practice and family physicians also benefit.

The medical CAT Fund will be gradually phased out while requiring doctors to obtain a minimum of \$1 million in liability insurance coverage by 2006. To help cut costs, we reduced the minimum from \$1.2 million.

## Strengthening Patient Safety

This final section of the act contains the House's strong patient protection provisions. It makes sure the accuracy of patient records is preserved. Under this provision, notations on records cannot be changed or removed. The 11-member state authority to be created to monitor and improve patient safety will be required to develop a means to protect the records that serve as the basis for its actions.

## Now Law:

# Semmel's Bill to Fund Maintenance of PA Veterans Memorial and Expand Armory Board Membership

I'm pleased to report that legislation expanding the membership of the State Armory Board and providing a maintenance funding mechanism for the PA Veterans Memorial at Indiantown Gap National Cemetery is now law.

Act 63 stipulates that money from the Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial Trust Fund is to be used for the operation and maintenance of the memorial. In this way we can guarantee that funds will be there to operate and maintain this impressive memorial that was dedicated this past October to all Pennsylvanians who have served their country in the military.

As the chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I became aware that the Pennsylvania Armory Board – contrary to similar state boards under the Administrative Code – has only five members.

The other administrative boards operate with eight members and a chairman. Act 63 simply brings the Armory Board into conformity with its counterpart state boards. The membership of the board – which is

responsible for 97 National Guard Armories across the state – will now be increased to include the Pennsylvania Adjutant General as chairman and eight members appointed by the chairman. This will allow the board to disburse its workload, providing for a more efficient operation.

Armory Board members, who usually are active senior officers in the Pennsylvania National Guard, receive no compensation for their service on the board.

*The Pledge of Allegiance . . . As a patriotic American, I joined Pennsylvania U.S. Senator Rick Santorum in a special Pledge of Allegiance ceremony held on the grounds of the state capitol in June. The senator organized the event to honor the Stars and Stripes and protest a decision by a federal judge to band the recitation of the pledge in public schools.*

However, I'm pleased to report that the state House is a step ahead of the rest of the country in recognizing the importance of giving our students the ability to publicly display their patriotism by reciting the Pledge

*of Allegiance. As chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Management Committee, I ushered House Bill 592 through the committee and the full House last year. The bill – now in the state Senate for consideration – requires schools to display the United States flag in each classroom and offer the Pledge of Allegiance or the National Anthem on each school day.*

