



State Representative
John J. Siptroth
 189th Legislative District

CAPITOL OFFICE:
 323 Irvis Office Building • Harrisburg, PA 17120-2020
 (717) 787-6492

CONSTITUENT SERVICE OFFICE:
 1A Jay Park, Dartmouth Drive • P.O. Box 1188
 Marshalls Creek, PA 18335-1188
 (570) 223-2636 • Toll Free: (866) 604-5578

E-MAIL: rep.siptroth@pahouse.net

JULY/AUGUST 2006

Dear Neighbor,

It is hard to believe summer is nearly half over. Before we know it, vacations will be over, kids will return to school, and the cold weather will be back. I hope that you have found some time already to relax, and will find some more before summer is through.

I have been hard at work both in the district and in Harrisburg. Some terrific things have been happening at the Capitol that I want to share with you. Inside this newsletter, you'll find updates on the state budget passed in early July; on some legislation that has been approved by the governor, including a measure I introduced; and on flood recovery.

As always, please feel free to contact me or my staff if you have any questions regarding this newsletter, or about any problems you are having with state government.

Sincerely,

John J. Siptroth

John

2006-07 budget is a solid investment in Pocono region

The \$26 billion state budget the legislature passed earlier this month included several initiatives that will help residents in our communities, without raising taxes. The plan, signed by the governor on July 2, invests in many initiatives I championed throughout the budget process, including an increase in the research and development tax credit and funding for local development districts. Measures within the budget also promote smart growth, development in the Pocono region and improvements in public education. The budget also included a timely allocation for emergency management for flood recovery.

I was most pleased by an increase in school funding for rapidly growing school districts. Recently, I hosted a policy roundtable in Harrisburg to bring legislators, Department of Education officials and school superintendents together to discuss challenges to local schools, and met personally with Education Secretary Dr. Gerald Zahorchak to devise solutions to the mounting challenge. This additional funding will help us meet the challenges posed by our unrelenting growth. I am continuing to seek more education funding for the Poconos.

The funding received by each school district in the 189th Legislative District is in the chart below.

District	2006-07 basic education	Increase over 2005	2006-07 Special Education	Increase over 2005	2006-07 Accountability Block Grant
East Stroudsburg Area	\$10,771,099	\$1,618,930	\$3,341,861	\$113,342	\$1,205,059
Pleasant Valley	\$17,987,843	\$3,536,526	\$2,853,366	\$109,991	\$1,227,030
Stroudsburg Area	\$8,383,310	\$1,065,205	\$2,430,298	\$74,618	\$720,352
Delaware Valley	\$10,852,115	\$1,606,638	\$2,249,154	\$81,413	\$729,540

(continued on page 2)



Rep. Siptroth meets with third- and fourth-grade students at Stroudsburg Intermediate/Elementary School in May. He spoke to the students about how laws get made and what it is like to be a legislator.

Inside you'll find information about

- ✓ the state budget
- ✓ flood recovery
- ✓ the minimum wage increase
- ✓ and much more...

continued from page 1

Other highlights from the budget:

- **Research & Development Tax Credit** – the R & D tax credit was increased from \$30 million to \$40 million, and the portion for small businesses is \$8 million. This initiative will encourage businesses to devote more funding to research and help Pennsylvania maintain its place among states leading in R & D.
- **Local Development Districts** – LDDs assist communities in planning and implementing special projects aimed at creating jobs. In the 2006-07 budget, LDDs receive \$6.14 million.
- **Cover All Kids** – This initiative received \$4 million in state funding to expand the Children's Health Insurance Program to working families who are currently ineligible. It will offer comprehensive coverage for kids from families of all income levels.
- **Emergency Money for Flooding** – Under the new budget, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency received \$5 million for emergency flood disaster relief. This was a timely allocation, as it was approved days after the massive flooding in Pennsylvania.



Dawn Chwastyk prepares Rep. Siptroth to donate blood at an American Red Cross blood drive at the Wesleyan Church in Stroudsburg. Rep. Siptroth sponsored the blood drive as a way to thank the Red Cross for assisting residents of Delaware Water Gap, Shawnee-on-Delaware and other areas devastated by the third major flooding in fewer than two years. As an active volunteer firefighter, Rep. Siptroth regularly donates blood and has given more than two gallons to the American Red Cross for trauma victims and surgical operations at local hospitals. He is encouraging residents to donate blood, especially since recent flooding has disrupted local blood drives and supplies are low.

LOCAL FLOODING

Once again, a deluge of rain left our communities underwater and incapacitated for days in late June and early July. Despite being in Harrisburg for budget negotiations during the rain and flooding, I was in regular contact with my local staff to assess the situation and the damage. I was also in continual contact with Congressman Paul Kanjorski, the governor's office, and with other state legislators and local leaders, including Monroe County Emergency Management.

I was able to coordinate a tour of the flooded area for Congressman Kanjorski to see the devastation firsthand. The congressman was able to meet with my staff, Delaware Water Gap Mayor Walt Conway and other local officials, residents and business owners to fully assess the situation on the ground.

Together, Congressman Kanjorski and I are setting up a meeting of the Army Corps of Engineers, Pennsylvania Power and Light, the state Department of Environmental Protection, and East Stroudsburg and Stroud Township officials to facilitate urgent mitigation of the threat to the levee system.

Further, I arranged with PennDOT to have bridges in Delaware Water Gap and Smithfield Township inspected immediately after flood waters receded in order to be opened for traffic as soon as possible and arranged with power companies to expedite the process of getting power restored to the affected areas.

As soon as possible after the state budget was passed, I returned to tour the area myself with Monroe County Emergency Management Director Harry Robidoux, who tragically died days later.

Monroe and Pike were among 46 counties statewide to be declared disaster areas by the governor, which also succeeded in obtaining a federal disaster declaration.

The response to this disaster was a coordinated team effort that was handled at all levels of government.

For more information on local flooding, including a dialogue between Congressman Kanjorski and me regarding his tour of the flooding on June 30, and helpful disaster guidelines from the American Red Cross, check my Web site: www.pahouse.com/Siptroth.



Rep. Siptroth and Gov. Rendell listen to Mayor Walter Conway of Delaware Water Gap describe the flooding. The governor made the stop in Delaware Water Gap during the Founders' Day celebration at the request of Rep. Siptroth to hear the accounts of the damage and hardship caused to area residents and businesses. Rep. Siptroth and Congressman Kanjorski will head a task force to investigate the effects of storm waters originating from reservoirs upstream in Pike and Monroe counties and possible mitigation of future flooding that could include dredging accumulated silt from the Delaware River.

Protecting our children

Recently, Gov. Rendell signed Act 113 into law, which included a provision of mine, to heighten the penalties for adults who leave children unattended in cars. My measure makes it a separate offense for each child 6 years and younger left unattended in a vehicle. Under current law, the penalty is the same regardless of the number of children left unattended.

Often I think parents don't consider the potential danger to their children left in the car for even a few minutes. Parents and other adults run into the store to grab an item, pay for gas or pick up dry cleaning, but leaving children unattended can have several serious consequences.

No matter what the weather is like outside, heat exhaustion and cold-induced illness are more likely when children are left. Car theft and abductions are also more likely. Further, cars are not childproof and children can put a vehicle into motion with very little effort and be unable to stop it, endangering their lives and the lives of others in the area.

It may seem trivial to go through the trouble of getting all of your children out of the car to run a simple errand, but it is in everyone's best interest to take the time to do so. My plan had the support of local police and children's welfare groups.



Rep. John Siptroth receives the David L. Lawrence Legislative Award from the Fraternal Order of Eagles. The award was presented in Harrisburg by Chet Pipher, the incoming state president. Siptroth has been a member of the Order for over 30 years.

Pa. minimum-wage workers will see their first raise in nearly 10 years

After a tireless effort by the House and Senate Democratic caucuses, the state's minimum-wage workers will finally see a well-deserved raise. The House, which approved a wage increase in April, compromised with the Senate on a bill that will increase the wage to:

\$6.25 AN HOUR BEGINNING JAN. 1, 2007

\$7.15 AN HOUR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2007

Part of the compromise was an amendment providing for a lower training wage for young people equal to 85 percent of the new minimums and would also allow employers with 10 or fewer employees to have more time to reach the minimum wage target of \$7.15.

FOR EMPLOYERS WITH 10 OR FEWER EMPLOYEES, THE MINIMUM WAGE WILL BE:

\$5.65 AN HOUR BEGINNING JAN 1, 2007

\$6.65 AN HOUR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2007

\$7.15 AN HOUR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2008

Pennsylvanians' labor is worth as much as residents of New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and 17 other states plus Washington, D.C. which all have minimum wages above the federal minimum. I supported this measure (Act 112 of 2006) which will help to keep working families out of poverty.





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Rep. Siptroth prepares breakfast at the Delaware Water Gap Fire House Pancake Breakfast on Founders' Day. Rep. Siptroth has been a Volunteer Firefighter for 37 years with the DWG Fire Department. He has served as president, secretary and treasurer and reached the rank of Captain. He is currently treasurer of the DWG Fireman's Relief Association. Pictured with him are Captain Ken Daley, Joel Kulp, Fire Chief Bob Gallagher and Caroline Pedraza.

check it out

MY MONTHLY
 COLUMN IN THE
**COMMUNITY
 EXPRESS.**



For the latest news
 in Harrisburg, check out
 my Web site at
www.pahouse.com/Siptroth.



Rep. Siptroth celebrates the first Nascar Day at the state Capitol. He is joined at the National Guard car by Reps. Sean Ramaley of Beaver County and Marc Gergely of Allegheny County. Siptroth met Nascar drivers, looked at the cars and spoke with other fans about NASCAR, which has a huge local following.

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 Constituent Meetings • 2nd Friday of each month • 1 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Pike County • Delaware Township Building • Thursdays 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
 Constituent Meetings • 3rd Thursday of each month • 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

REP. SIPTROTH'S MONROE/PIKE UPDATE



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SUMMER 2006

Dear Neighbor,

Summer is fast approaching, and I hope you and your family will be able to spend some quality time together and relax in the coming months.

We are upon one of the busiest times of the year for the legislature, when we debate the details of the state budget, which needs to be passed by June 30. In this newsletter I'll talk a little about the budget process. I also will provide you with an update about where debates on raising the minimum wage and passing property tax reform stand in Harrisburg, the progress on some of my legislation, our environment and some citation presentations I have made recently.

I have also included a short survey I would like you to complete at your leisure so I know your views on some important issues.

Thanks for reading, and again if there is anything my office can do for you please let us know.

John J. Siptroth
 John Siptroth



Property tax: the fight continues

The General Assembly came close in May to securing some relief for many of our seniors. I felt the plan did not go far enough, but was a step in the right direction. The bipartisan plan (H.B. 39) developed in a conference committee among all four caucuses in the legislature was overwhelmingly approved in the Senate, but never came to a vote in the House. I think every piece of legislation that has agreement from a bipartisan group deserves its day of debate and the opportunity to vote on it.

I continue to support the idea of raising the sales tax by up to 1 percent to generate additional revenue to reduce property taxes and will be urging my House and Senate colleagues to pass legislation this session so that all homeowners can receive school property tax relief in 2007 on this year's taxes.

In addition, I recently brought superintendents and business managers from a number of fast-growing school districts to Harrisburg for a roundtable discussion with the Secretary of Education and House colleagues in order to impress upon Harrisburg the need for supplemental school funding for Monroe and Pike counties, the fastest-growing counties in the entire state.

School property taxes will remain a legislative priority for me until we have reformed the way that the state funds public education in Pennsylvania and this tremendous burden is lifted from the shoulders of local homeowners.

Minimum wage: one step closer

In early April, the House made monumental progress in the fight to raise the minimum wage for a half-million Pennsylvanians. After a year of relentless advocacy, the state House finally voted on House Bill 257, which had been amended to increase the wage in stages: first to \$6.25 per hour on July 1 this year and again to \$7.15 on July 1, 2007. It was approved by a nearly 3-to-1 margin.

However, the Senate has not acted on this important bill. Meanwhile, other states like Arkansas and Michigan are raising their wages; 20 states in all have a wage higher than the federal minimum. I hope Pennsylvania will be next to join the states who value their residents' labor and improve the quality of life of over 400,000 workers and their families.

The current wage of \$5.15 an hour (unchanged since 1997) isn't enough for even a small family to live on, let alone get ahead. A full-time low-wage worker earns less than \$11,000 a year, which is below the federal poverty standard for a family of two. In the nearly 10 years that the minimum wage has remained the same, other household costs have increased substantially: food, a 21 percent increase; rent, a 28 percent increase; childcare and pre-school, a 48 percent increase; and gasoline, an 81 percent increase.

WIRED Summit

Rep. Siptroth teamed with Congressman Paul Kanjorski at the Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development Summit at East Stroudsburg University. Shortly following the summit, ESU broke ground on a new Science and Technology Center. Siptroth supported a \$15,000 grant to purchase computers for the new technology center.

Also recently, the Pocono Mountains Industrial Park Authority has been approved for \$5 million in state funding for construction of the Penn Regional Business Center in Smithfield Township. The project, which Siptroth has been lobbying hard for, will house operations in support of New York's financial institutions, and is expected to generate thousands of well-paid jobs for skilled workers. In conjunction with building construction, the state Department of Transportation is projected to make at least \$20 million in roadway improvements to the area.



MONROE UPDATE

Curbing underage drinking on our campuses

Many kids enjoy college as their first experience with freedom from their parents; they explore their views and experiment with different hobbies, interests and lifestyles, in addition to earning a good education. Unfortunately, some students will experiment with alcohol before they have reached 21.

Alcohol use often leads to irresponsible behavior, which can result in injury, violence, lifelong struggles with alcohol and even death. Underage drinking is responsible for an estimated 1,400 student deaths a year. I believe that severe consequences could be avoided or reduced if the lines of communication between colleges and parents were stronger.

That is why I have been pushing to pass a bill I introduced last year that would require colleges and universities to notify parents if their student has been involved in an underage drinking incident. Together, parents and schools can help a student break an unhealthy pattern before it starts, to avoid some serious consequences that can begin after just one episode.

My legislation (H.B. 1574) was recently approved unanimously by the Liquor Control Committee and is awaiting further action in the House.

CHECK OUT

MY MONTHLY
COLUMN IN THE
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For the latest news
in Harrisburg, check out
my Web site at
www.pahouse.com/Siptroth.

Keeping our roadways safe

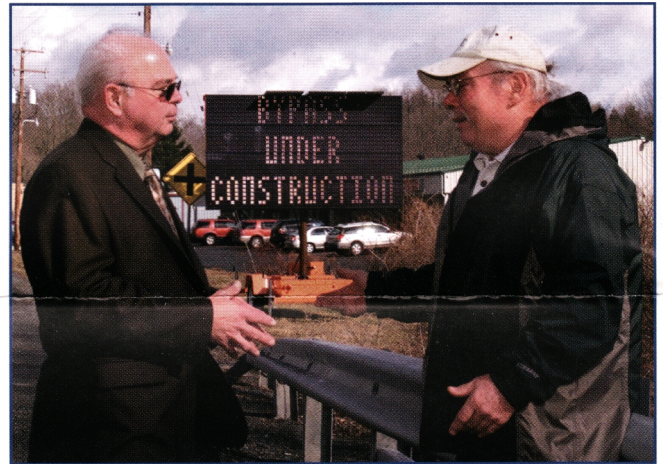
The travel season is just heating up, and local families are planning vacations, many of which involve driving long distances. Even if your family isn't going far, chances are you'll be shuttling between barbecues, baseball games and trips to the community pool. Our roadways provide easy access to great destinations, but can also be dangerous during the summer. Traffic congestion, construction, fatigue and bad weather can all hinder driving skills. Add alcohol to the equation and the results could be deadly.

Every summer there are thousands of accidents on our roadways and hundreds of fatalities – many that could be avoided by practicing safe driving. The loss of so many drivers on local roads this year has been shocking, and as a community we must do all we can to prevent further needless tragedy.

Every motorist has a responsibility to follow the rules of the road, like obeying the posted speed limit and road work restrictions. Everyone should be buckled up and children should be in a car seat if the law requires it. Often traffic patterns change due to construction, and drivers need to be alert and focused on the road in order to respond to lane closures and shifts, and traffic delays. Remember that road crews are often close to where vehicles are passing and the lives of crew members are in the hands of drivers.

Some of our local roadways have been repaved and improved, but even with these improvements it is important to obey speed limits. Parents should also set a positive example for teen drivers by following the rules.

Memorial, Independence and Labor days are three of the four deadliest holidays in terms of traffic fatalities. About 50 percent of traffic deaths on those days involve alcohol. Drinking aggravates poor driving conditions, and furthermore drinking and driving is illegal. By drinking and driving you put the lives of everyone in your vehicle and everyone else on the road at risk. If you drink at a barbecue or picnic, designate a driver or spend the night. Don't put lives at risk.



Rep. Siptroth meets with Walt Korab, the construction manager on the Marshalls Creek Bypass project, to examine and discuss progress on the bypass.

Keeping our West End communities safer

Recently a satellite office of the State Police opened up to make coverage in the West End more efficient and effective. I led a group of legislators, including Rep. Tom Tigue and Sen. Pat Browne; local organizations, including the West End Chamber of Commerce and the Western Pocono Library; representatives from Chestnuthill, Eldred, Polk and Ross townships; and the State Police from Lehigh and Fern Ridge barracks in work sessions to research and implement a project to bring a satellite office to the West End.

The troopers will be located in Rep. Tigue's office on Route 209 in Gilbert. This station will provide a location for troopers to perform their required duties within their assigned coverage area without having to return to the Lehigh or Fern Ridge barracks. This will improve response time and provide enhanced coverage for Chestnuthill and Ross townships and neighboring communities.

REP. JOHN SIPTROTH'S MONROE UPDATE



Rep. Siptroth presents Army Spec. Cody Ace with a citation from the House of Representatives in April after his battalion returned home from a year-long deployment in Iraq, while sustaining no casualties. Ace and his family are from Hamilton Township.

Rep. Siptroth presents Pfc. Patrick Clifford with a citation from the state House of Representatives. Pfc. Clifford, a member of the 82nd Airborne based in Fort Bragg, N.C., had recently returned from Iraq.



Budget sneak preview

Even though the final budget has not been adopted yet, I would like to highlight a few proposals included in the governor's budget proposal that he delivered in February. In addition to a 5 percent increase to basic education funding and a 4 percent increase in special education funding, this year there are new initiatives in the \$25.4 billion budget that would help residents stay healthy and keep Pennsylvania competitive in the marketplace. Some of the new initiatives are:

- Cover All Kids – this program would provide access to affordable and comprehensive health care coverage for uninsured children.
- PACE Plus Medicare – this program would create a comprehensive state pharmaceutical benefit that complements Medicare Part D and ensures that PACE enrollees would not incur an increase in out-of-pocket costs. It would also provide coverage for up to 120,000 additional seniors.
- Pennsylvania Competes – this initiative includes several programs that aim to expand and promote trade partnerships, invest in medical research, improve state infrastructure, like roads, and alleviate the impending nursing shortage.

I also had a budget amendment passed in the House that would restore and increase funding to local development districts, which help to spur economic development in communities by disbursing funding and other resources to local businesses, and help to generate high-paying job opportunities by supporting local businesses and development projects.

Look for budget details from me later in the summer, when I will highlight the funding for each local school district, as well as the initiatives mentioned above.

FORM 189-0606

Survey

1. Should the House have voted on H.B. 39 (page one, property tax reform) even though it did not go far enough? yes no
2. The minimum wage has remained the same since 1997 (\$5.15 per hour). Do you support an increase in the state's minimum wage? yes no
3. Do you think that residents should pay for state police coverage if their municipality does not have a police department? yes no
4. Would you pay 1 percent more in sales tax (on items currently eligible for sales tax) in return for school property tax reductions? yes no
5. Do you think investing in conservation easements on prime developable land is a good investment of tax dollars? yes no

6. Which do you think are the most effective ways for me to communicate with you? (choose 2)
newsletters my Web site my office hours
town meetings the newspaper e-mails
Other _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____

Phone: _____

Please send this to my office or fill it out online at
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Keeping Green



Rep. Siptroth joins Monica Restrepo, Clean Up Coordinator for the Shawnee Institute Ltd., at the third annual River Road Clean Up. The Clean Up was part of April's Great PA Clean Up.



Rep. Siptroth joins local government and environmental leaders, activists and outdoor enthusiasts at the Pocono Environmental Education Center, where he was keynote speaker at the Earth Day ceremony. He presented a mock check representing \$500,000 in funding from the state's Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program. Siptroth urged his House and Senate colleagues to endorse the project last year.



Rep. Siptroth, a member of the House committee that oversees emergency preparedness and a volunteer firefighter himself, speaks with other volunteer firefighters and local government officials about incident management trailers.



Recently, the West End Advanced Life Support service recognized Rep. Siptroth for his commitment to the group and the local residents it serves. The special recognition was in coordination with National Emergency Medical Services Week. Siptroth assisted the organization in securing funding to replace its aging cardiac monitor/defibrillators with new cutting-edge units. The new equipment has been used several times in saving local cardiac patients.

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Dear Neighbor,

I hope everyone had a restful and fulfilling holiday season. I know that often, with the hustle and bustle of seeing friends and family, rest can be the last thing on the agenda.

Before recessing for the winter holidays, the House was full of action, trying to tie up loose ends before adjourning for 2005. The House Democrats led a noble crusade to increase the minimum wage, and continued to work toward ensuring property tax relief across the state, while protecting our lowest-income neighbors from an unfair expansion of the sales tax. I had a personally fulfilling moment when my first amendment was adopted by the House to protect our children.

Inside this edition of my newsletter, I talk about each of these topics, as well as

- **Safe home heating and assistance with heating bills,**
- **Updates on identity theft,**
- **Growing Greener awards our communities have received, and**
- **The new Medicare Part D program.**

Again, I invite you to contact me or my staff in regards to any questions you have about state government. And I hope you have a safe and warm winter.

Thanks,

John J. Siptroth

Siptroth proposal garners unanimous approval, moves to Senate

In an effort to protect our children, I introduced an amendment in the House that would make it a separate offense for each child left unattended in a vehicle by an adult. Right now the law is lax in punishing adults for this practice and warrants the same penalty despite the number of children left unattended.

Often in an effort to save time and energy, parents or other adults, will leave their kids in a car to run into the store or to run an errand. This could create a deadly scenario in several ways.

First, the car could be stolen and the children kidnapped; this is made even easier if the keys are left in the car. Another danger of leaving the keys in the car unattended with children is that a child could do something to set the car in motion, causing an enormous hazard for the child and for bystanders. Thirdly, the temperature outside is magnified in the car, meaning if it is hot outside, the temperature in the car is several degrees warmer. The same is true of the reverse, when it is cold outside, children could suffer from hypothermia or other ailments.

I have received wide spread support, not only from my colleagues, but also from local police departments, child advocate groups and parents.

My amendment (A04488), attached to House Bill 804 (regarding the state vehicle code), was adopted unanimously in the House. The bill is now in the Senate for consideration.



Rep. Siptroth at a state Capitol hearing on law enforcement.

Siptroth-supported tax plan passes House

After employing historic tactics in the final weeks of 2005 in order to hear all property tax reduction proposals, the bipartisan plan I supported passed the House.

I strongly encouraged Democratic leadership and caucus colleagues to consider the plan and to engage in negotiations with the Republican Caucus so that an equitable proposal could be approved. I am happy to say that my fellow members joined me in voting YES. The plan's projected reductions are nearly 40 percent for homeowners in the 189th Legislative District. The measure would expand the sales tax slightly, but still exclude food and clothing, and increase the Personal Income Tax by less than a quarter percent. It also calls for using gaming revenue when it becomes available. We are also calling for an increase in the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program for seniors to \$750 and raising the eligibility level to \$25,000.

People have waited a long time for relief – this plan can start to bring that relief in 2006. The plan is back in the Senate for consideration, and I am urging our senators to work with the House to agree on final legislation that the governor can then sign.

MONROE UPDATE

REP. JOHN SIPTROTH'S MONROE UPDATE

Serious steps to combat identity theft

In August, I was appointed to serve on the Identity Theft Task Force. The 28-member group, created under a bipartisan piece of legislation, is assigned to investigate and review policies and procedures in place and to determine if current security practices are sufficient.

The committee held a hearing to listen to testimony from experts including a U.S. attorney, a Secret Service agent, U.S. postal inspector, a representative of the Federal Trade Commission and a representative from the major credit bureau TransUnion.

As the crime of identity theft has been publicized, many people have become more vigilant. Practices like shredding credit card offers and bank statements may seem like a hassle, but can save you time, money and aggravation in the end.

The task force is considering the other ways that identity thieves are at work, like rogue employees at stores and restaurants.

We are also examining the ways that computer hackers are using technology to steal identities.

The best way to combat this crime is through the cooperation of authorities at the local, state, federal and global level and by residents remaining diligent in securing their own information.



Rep. Siptroth speaks on the House floor in opposition to a proposal that erodes local control over zoning issues. Siptroth's work as a municipal official has made him a leader in local government advocacy.

Fighting to make the minimum wage a living wage

Nearly a full year ago, House Democrats started on the path to increase the minimum wage. I joined the journey as soon as I was elected. I believe Pennsylvanians deserve a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. Unfortunately, many people are not earning enough to survive, including thousands of residents in our region.

The federal minimum wage, which Pennsylvania adopts, is \$5.15 an hour. But if someone works at \$5.15 an hour, 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, they still only earn \$10,712 – far below the federal poverty guideline.

The House Democratic legislation introduced to raise the minimum wage would increase the wage to \$7.15 by January 2007, with a cost-of-living

increase in the years after. It garnered enormous support from the House Democratic Caucus, the governor, labor organizations, religious groups and workers from across the state.

However, some of the state House's leadership didn't feel the urgency that my colleagues and I felt. We employed a seldom used legislative tool in an attempt to force the bill from committee, only to have the bill promptly voted on and defeated. But in a mixed victory, an amended bill was passed from committee, calling for a smaller increase with no COLA.

The fight is not over and the wage is still insufficient. I am doing all I can to help local residents earn a living wage.

Siptroth joins seniors in calling for PACE expansion

Last autumn, I joined my House colleagues and seniors from across the state in a show of support for expanding PACE and PACENET, the state's prescription drug programs.

The bipartisan legislation, (H.B. 2060) of which I am one of nearly 100 co-sponsors, would lower the age eligibility to include seniors 60 to 64; currently the programs are limited to seniors 65 and over.

In 2003, income limits were updated, allowing 100,000 more

seniors to enroll. The new proposal would permit and estimated 500,000 more residents to be eligible.

The funding for the proposed expansion was secured mainly through aggressive savings measures implemented in 2003. The savings, primarily through drug manufacturers, total more than \$80 million.

PACE and PACENET are funded by the Pennsylvania Lottery.



Rep. Siptroth knows the importance of managing your health with routine screenings.

Medicare Part D – *It's not too late*

Medicare's new program for seniors and the permanently disabled was officially introduced in October with enrollment beginning Nov. 15, 2005. Many local seniors received an income eligibility assessment over the summer, but were confused about application deadlines, eligibility and what the new guidelines meant for them.

First of all, any person who qualifies for doctor and hospital benefits under Medicare also qualifies for the Part D prescription coverage. Some people with limited income and assets will be able to receive their prescriptions for free.

When determining a person's assets, the Social Security Administration includes real estate (other than a primary residence), bank accounts (checking, savings and certificates of deposit), stocks and bonds (including U.S. savings bonds), mutual funds, IRAs and cash. They exclude up to \$1,500 as a burial allowance. The maximum allowable assets are \$10,000 for an individual and \$20,000 for a couple.

Most new plans carry premiums between \$20 and \$35 a month, not counting deductibles or co-payments. Part D will provide out-of-pocket savings, estimated to be 50 percent or more on drugs covered under the program.

The initial open enrollment period goes through May 15, 2006. Also, you have the option to enroll

in a prescription drug plan between Nov. 15 and Dec. 31 each year. So it is not too late.

Understandably, no decision regarding medical care should be made on impulse. You need to consider seriously which plan works for you. I suggest you seek information from Social Security and Medicare or Pennsylvania's APPRISE insurance advice program.

The Social Security Administration can be reached by calling 1-800-772-1213 or TTY 1-800-325-0778, or by visiting the Social Security Web site: www.socialsecurity.gov. You may also contact Medicare with questions at 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227); TTY users may call 1-877-486-2048. Medicare's Web site is www.medicare.gov. APPRISE can be reached at 1-800-783-7067.

The state Department of Transportation recently expanded its Rural Transportation Program for Persons with Disabilities to include Monroe County. The Monroe County Transportation Authority will receive funding and implement the program this spring. Under the program, disabled riders will receive a discounted fare for shared-ride services. Monroe is one of seven new counties selected to join the original 28 counties in the program. As a member of the House Transportation Committee, I urged PennDOT to expand this program to serve more local residents, and supported MCTA in the application process.



Rep. Siptroth speaks with Congressman Paul Kanjorski about the effects of population growth and commercial development on the environment and conservation

Monroe is Growing Greener thanks to grants

Three local projects were among the first in the state to receive money under the new Growing Greener II initiative.

In November, Middle Smithfield was awarded a grant for \$357,000 to convert an existing wastewater treatment plant with new technology. The plant treats 22,000 gallons a day. Stroud Township received a grant for \$250,000 to purchase Glen Brook Golf Course, which will be used as an active recreation area, as well as for open space preservation.

These projects were among the governor's top 140 projects awarded funds in the first installment.

The Brodhead Watershed Association was awarded a \$155,000 grant to protect the Paradise Watershed.

Growing Greener II was overwhelmingly approved in Monroe County last May. The funding is an investment in our environment, our economy and our communities. It goes to support projects that help renew and restore the great quality of life we enjoy in Monroe County.





State Representative

**John J.
Siptroth**

189th Legislative District

323 Irvis Office Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2020

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Safe heating and help with heating bills

Many local residents are feeling the burden of increased energy costs this year, especially during the harsh winter months. Households are employing different approaches for keeping their homes warm. There are a few things to remember when heating your home.



- If you use a furnace or fireplace install a carbon monoxide detector. CO is a deadly gas responsible for thousands of deaths every year.
- Have your furnaces and fireplaces inspected annually to ensure cleanliness and proper functioning.
- If you use a space heater, keep it at least 3 feet from combustible items and never leave it unattended.
- Further, unless it is specifically noted, space heaters should not be used outside, in bathrooms or in damp, wet areas.

If you just can't afford heating bills, or if a critical piece of your heating equipment breaks, there is help. The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program is a federally funded, state-administered program to help pay heating bills or make emergency repairs.

You do not need to be on welfare or miss a bill to receive help. Eligibility guidelines allow for a single person to have an income of \$12,920 or less; for households of two, \$17,321 or less; three people, \$21,722 or less, and for each additional person add \$4,401.

The deadline for applications is March 23, but the program will not accept applications after the

funds are depleted, so apply as soon as possible. For an application, visit www.compass.state.pa.us, or call or stop by one of my offices.

Last month the governor signed a bill to add up to \$23.1 million in emergency LIHEAP funding from the state. The measure was part of the governor's initiative, which I supported, Stay Warm PA. Pennsylvania joined neighboring New York and New Jersey in providing supplemental funds for LIHEAP. Pennsylvania's is only a one-year provision, but I hope that the Commonwealth will join other states that dedicate funding annually. For more information visit www.staywarmpa.com.

1A Jay Park, Dartmouth Dr., P.O. Box 1188 • Marshalls Creek, PA 18335-1188

Phone (570) 223-2636 • Toll free (866) 604-5578

Office hours:

West End Constituent Service Office • Ross Township Building • Fridays 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Constituent Meetings • 2nd Friday of each month • 1 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Pike County • Delaware Township Building • Thursdays 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Constituent Meetings • 3rd Thursday of each month • 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

REP. JOHN SIPTROTH'S MONROE UPDATE



Rep. John J. Siptroth



reports on Property Tax Relief



Dear Neighbor,

At long last, state government put partisan differences aside and enacted school property tax relief. It wasn't without a struggle. In fact, anyone reading the newspapers this May might have thought it would never happen. Headlines talked about delays and derailments.

But I was determined to make sure property tax relief would not die. It's too important to my district – especially to older residents.

It is not a perfect law – very few laws are. The legislature was able to accomplish a feat that has eluded Pennsylvania government for nearly 30 years. This property tax relief act is a very big step in the right direction – lower school property taxes.

The new law makes it possible for the anticipated \$1 billion in slots gaming revenue to ease property taxes for **all** homeowners across Pennsylvania. Be assured that I will keep you up to date on the progress the new gaming industry is making, and how it affects your wallet.

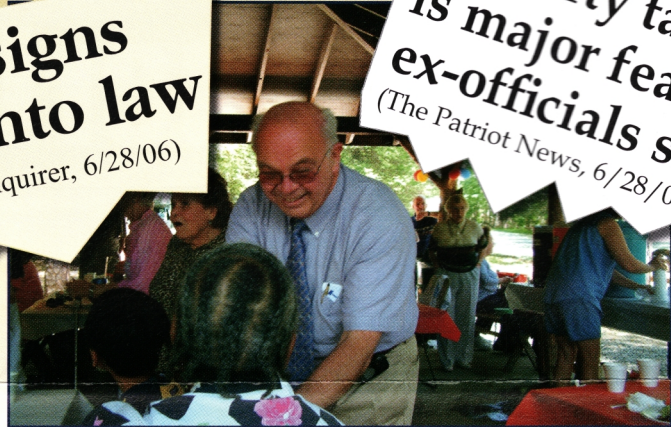
In the meantime, read more about how the new law immediately helps seniors of modest income and protects you from future school property tax hikes. You can be certain of my priority to address fair state funding of our school districts so that you don't have to shoulder so much of the burden.

John J. Siptroth
John J. Siptroth

Siptroth: PROPERTY TAXES MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION



Rendell signs tax cut into law
(The Philadelphia Inquirer, 6/28/06)



Property tax law is major feat, ex-officials say
(The Patriot News, 6/28/06)

Relief is on the horizon

Rep. Siptroth voted for a newly signed law that will deliver property tax cuts to homeowners using the anticipated \$1 billion in slots gaming revenue. After 30 years of debate and failed plans, a mechanism is finally in place to give Pennsylvanians the tax relief they deserve.

Once all the slots facilities are up and running, homeowners will see annual reductions in their property tax bills. It's not property tax elimination, but it is substantial and long-term reduction, and a victory for the homeowners of Pennsylvania.

Thousands more seniors in Monroe and Pike Counties eligible for property tax cuts!

The new law gives special priority to older homeowners with a modest income by expanding the existing Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program. **Thousands of additional senior citizen homeowners in Monroe and Pike Counties will see tax cuts of up to \$650, and over 1,000 seniors in our area will see their property taxes totally eliminated when slots gaming revenue kicks in.**

That's significant property tax relief for those on a fixed income who are at greatest risk of losing their homes because they can't pay rising property tax bills. Applications will be available early next year, and the rebate checks will start arriving in mailboxes in July 2007. (See page 3 to pre-apply and see if you qualify.)

Greater taxpayer control

Of course, no one wants to see property tax relief cancelled out by future tax increases. The new law allows school boards to raise property taxes each year only to keep up with inflation, but then – for the first time ever in PA – gives voters sensible and fair controls over proposed future tax increases beyond inflation by requiring voter approval in a referendum in each school district. Pennsylvanians will not only see school property tax reductions, but taxpayers in every school district will now have a direct say at the ballot box on proposed school tax increases.

"This plan provides the most relief to lower and middle income older Pennsylvanians and addresses the immediate concerns of many seniors who fear rising property taxes may force them from their homes. Expanding both the income limit and the size of the rebate greatly extends the financial safety net for our older residents."
~ AARP Pennsylvania State Director Fred Griesbach



Do you qualify for a property tax or rent rebate?

Please fill out this pre-application and return it to Rep. Siptroth.



Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail address: _____

- You are 65 or older
- You are 50 or older and widowed
- You are 18 or older with a permanent disability

If you checked any of these boxes, please proceed.

Total Annual Household Income	\$ _____
Subtract 50% of your Social Security benefits	-\$ _____
Subtract 50% of your railroad retirement benefits	-\$ _____
Total	= \$ _____

Homeowners: If your total is less than \$35,000, you may qualify for up to a \$650 rebate!

Renters: If your total is less than \$15,000, you may qualify for up to a \$650 rebate!

- Rep. Siptroth, I think I qualify for the new property tax or rent rebate. Please sign me up for an application. I understand that I won't get a check until 2007, but I don't want to miss the chance to sign up for my rebate now.
- Rep. Siptroth, I am a homeowner who will qualify for tax cuts when gaming revenue kicks in. Please send me more information.

Please clip this page and mail it back to my Harrisburg office (the address is on the back page of this newsletter) **or visit my Web site and fill it out online at**

[www.pahouse.com/Siptroth.](http://www.pahouse.com/Siptroth)



State Representative
John J. Siptroth
 189th Legislative District
 323 Irvis Office Building
 House Box 202020
 Harrisburg, PA 17120-2020

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Rep. John J. Siptroth *reports on* **Property Tax Relief**



- Millions more Pa. seniors qualify for property tax rebate
- Modest-income older renters get higher rebates
- \$1 billion in property tax relief for all other homeowners
- No large tax increases without voter approval

Rep. John J. Siptroth played a key role in saving property tax relief for Pennsylvania homeowners...

See inside for more information!

State Representative
John J. Siptroth
 189th Legislative District



Capitol Office:
 323 Irvis Office Building
 Harrisburg, PA 17120-2020
 (717) 787-6492

Constituent Service Office:
 1a Jay Park, Dartmouth Drive
 P.O. Box 1188
 Marshalls Creek, PA 18335-1188
 (570) 223-2636
 Toll Free: (866) 604-5578

Web site: www.pahouse.com/Siptroth
 E-mail: rep.siptroth@pahouse.net

