

**GENE DIGIROLAMO***Fighting for the Families of our Community - 18<sup>th</sup> Legislative District***Senior Expo to be Held Oct. 20**

Please mark your calendar for Thursday, Oct. 20, when my annual Senior Expo will be held at the Bensalem Senior Center from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m.

This year, our 2011 Senior Expo promises to be yet another enjoyable and informative social event.

This expo is a great way for seniors and their families to learn more about the wealth of programs and services that are available to help them live healthier, safer and more fulfilling lives. The best part is that all the information they need will be in one convenient location.

This event attracts hundreds of senior citizens each year. This year's expo will include representatives from local, state and federal agencies, as well as from local businesses and organizations. Residents can ask questions about the programs and services, and each booth will have more information available.

The 18th District includes all of Bensalem Township and the West District, Divisions 3 and 7, in Lower Southampton Township.

The senior center is located at 1850 Byberry Road in Bensalem. My staff and I always look forward to meeting with local seniors and their families during the Senior Expo, and we hope to see all of you there!

For more information, contact my district office in Bensalem.



*During my 2010 Senior Expo, I spent a few minutes speaking with Jack Golding, a lifelong Bensalem resident and member of the Bensalem Senior Activities Center. Golding is very active in veterans issues, having served in the Battle of the Bulge during World War II.*

**Committee Hears Testimony on Prescription Drug Monitoring Program Proposal**

The House Human Services Committee, which I chair, held two days of public hearings in June to learn more about the benefits and challenges of legislation I've sponsored to create a prescription drug monitoring program in Pennsylvania.

House Bill 1651 would create a database to allow doctors and pharmacists who are charged with the prescribing and dispensing of controlled substances to reduce misuse of the drugs of concern. The online database would allow pharmacists and doctors to find out if a patient is having certain prescriptions -- especially those that are highly addictive -- filled at different pharmacies, in a practice known as pharmacy shopping.

The intent of the bill is to pinpoint the potential for abuse and misuse of prescription drugs, namely those that are highly addictive controlled substances like pain relievers.

The hearing included testimony from the Drug and Alcohol Service Providers Organization of Pennsylvania, National Alliance for Model State Drug Laws, Pennsylvania Society of Anesthesiologists, Pennsylvania Pharmacists

Association, Westmoreland County Office of District Attorney, Westmoreland County Criminal Justice Advisory Board Jail Diversionary Program, Pennsylvania Association of Chain Drug Stores, parents of affected individuals, Ohio State Board of Pharmacy, Office of the Pennsylvania Attorney General, Pennsylvania Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence, Pennsylvania Psychiatric Society, AmeriHealth Mercy Health Plan, and the Partnership at DrugFree.org. Testimony was also submitted from two pharmacies in Cambria County, the Department of Public Welfare, the American Cancer Society, and the Commonwealth Prevention Alliance.

As a long-time advocate for treatment, I know that prescription drug use and abuse can be dangerous and unpredictable. What we need is intervention, prevention, education and treatment so that we can save lives that might otherwise be lost due to accidental overdoses.

This legislation is scheduled for consideration in committee in October.



# 90 Percent Support Natural Gas Severance Tax

## Informal web survey shows PA should tax Marcellus Shale

I sent out an email asking residents of the 18th District to share their thoughts on whether or not natural gas in the Marcellus Shale formation should be taxed.

According to results of this informal survey on my website, a clear majority – 90.7 percent – believe that an extraction tax should be imposed on the natural gas extracted from the Marcellus Shale. Many residents voiced support for the tax because Pennsylvania is the only natural gas producing state in the nation not to have such a tax.

Those favoring an extraction tax were given a series of options for how the revenue should be distributed. This was the response:

- 19.3 percent think it should go to the General Fund.
- 20.7 percent want to see the tax fund environmental programs operated by the Department of Environmental Protection.
- 6.4 percent believe local governments should benefit in order to deal with the expansion of drilling.
- 46.4 percent believe the revenue should fund the combination of the various options.
- 7 percent had no opinion.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to respond to this informal survey.



During a recent meeting of the Rotary Club of Bensalem, Mayor Joseph DiGirolamo and I joined Rotarians in presenting four Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs) to the Bensalem Police Department. These life-saving devices will be carried in police cruisers, for the purpose of reviving citizens who have cardiac emergencies. Pictured with us are Dr. Dan Breninghouse (far left) and Fred Harron (second from right), director of public safety in Bensalem.



In August, I toured the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania at the New Bolton Center with Dr. Michael Moyer, who operates a veterinary clinic in Bensalem and who also works at the school, and Dr. Joan C. Hendricks, dean of the school. While there, I learned about many of the advances in veterinary medicine. The school is the only school of veterinary medicine in the entire Commonwealth.



As chairman of the House Human Services Committee, I convened a public hearing on Aug. 30 on House Bill 272, legislation that would address education, prevention and treatment of Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses. The hearing included Lyme disease advocates and compelling accounts from patients suffering from the condition. Pictured at right is Rep. Mark Cohen (D-Philadelphia), minority chairman of the committee.

## DiGirolamo Proposes Compromise Severance Tax Plan

As a way to ensure that natural gas drillers working in the Marcellus Shale pay their fair share in state taxes, I am currently developing legislation that would impose a fair severance tax on the natural gas that is harvested in our state.

Overall, the tax would help provide financial support to a number of items that have taken drastic budget cuts in recent years. Those programs that would be targeted to receive revenue would include statewide environmental programs, hazardous site cleanup programs, local municipalities (both those that host drilling sites and others), affordable housing, conservation districts, education, job training, transportation infrastructure, and human services.

The tax – to be set between 4.8 percent and 5 percent – is estimated to generate anywhere between \$350 million and \$500 million annually.

Most Pennsylvanians support a tax, which would represent a very small fraction of the profits the natural gas drilling companies are enjoying.

Pennsylvania is currently the only state in the nation without some sort of natural gas severance tax, and I think my compromise proposal is one that can garner bipartisan support.

# New Law Toughens Penalties for Drug Deliveries Resulting in Death

One of the new laws enacted this summer will strengthen the penalties for those who deliver illegal drugs and death occurs. This situation happens when an individual dies from the drug, either by an overdose or as a result of a deadly cocktail with other medications, alcohol or illegal substances, and law enforcement can prove that the drug caused his or her death.

This new law, Act 40 of 2011, will give law enforcement a stronger tool to prosecute drug dealers by changing the Pennsylvania Crimes Code to classify "drug delivery resulting in death" as a first-degree felony. Anyone convicted of this crime will face a maximum sentence of up to 40 years in prison.

Under previous state law, the specific crime of "drug

delivery resulting in death" is classified as third-degree murder. In these cases, a defendant's guilt can only be proven by establishing malice on the part of the drug dealer, which was difficult in many cases.

The new law will establish a defendant's guilt by proving that the defendant intentionally administered, dispensed, delivered, gave, prescribed, sold or distributed any controlled substance or counterfeit controlled substance in violation of the law and another person died as a result of using the substance.

Although I am a strong advocate for drug treatment, I am hopeful this new law will help discourage drug dealers and thereby, keep drugs out of the hands of potential users.



*During Earth Day in April, I met with volunteers from AmeriServa of Bensalem.*



*Rep. Frank Farry and I had the chance to meet with representatives from Bayada Nurses during their legislative day in Harrisburg this spring.*



*I joined students at St. Charles Borromeo School in Bensalem, along with representatives of the Bridge Educational Foundation and Verizon, for the presentation of \$20,000 to benefit scholarships for students at the school. The Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program offers tax credits for businesses that donate to educational foundations for the purpose of awarding scholarships to students in need. Earlier this year, my colleagues in the House and I overwhelmingly passed bipartisan legislation that would expand this program to allow more children to benefit.*

## PA Lottery Proceeds Benefit Local Seniors

Nearly \$35 million in proceeds from the Pennsylvania Lottery benefited senior citizens in Bucks County during the 2009-10 fiscal year, according to a recent report.

The breakdown of benefits to seniors in Bucks County includes:

- Area Agency on Aging and affiliated senior centers -- \$4.8 million.
- PACE and PACENET -- \$12.7 million.
- Shared and Free Ride Program -- \$4.5 million.
- Property Tax and Rent Rebates -- \$7.6 million.
- Long-term living services through the Department of Public Welfare -- \$5.3 million.

In addition, more than \$73 million in lottery prizes were awarded to residents of Bucks County.

The Pennsylvania Lottery is unique in that it remains the only lottery in the nation that exclusively targets all of its proceeds to programs for older residents.

## Bill to Study Methadone Deaths Clears House

My legislation that seeks to find out more about deaths related to methadone passed the House unanimously earlier this year. House Bill 140 calls for methadone death and incident review teams in cases where methadone was either a primary or secondary cause of death. The review team will be part of the new Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs.

Having methadone death review teams in place will allow the Commonwealth to collect information necessary to find out how and why an individual taking methadone has died. Right now, there are still so many unanswered questions with respect to methadone, and nationwide, the incidents of methadone-related deaths are climbing. Without this legislation, I fear that cases will only continue to increase and we will be left with many more mysteries.

House Bill 140 will allow the department to thoroughly review cases and find out if weaknesses occur in state laws with respect to methadone use or clinics with authority to dispense the substance. Under the bill, the review team must adhere to strict confidentiality laws to protect the privacy of the patient. The proposal is expected to have no financial impact on the Commonwealth.

The legislation is now with the state Senate.

## Website Available for Electric Consumers

Since caps on electricity rates have come off, more than 1.2 million electric consumers in Pennsylvania have shopped for the best rate for their electricity. However, according to experts who testified before the House Consumer Affairs Committee, even more Pennsylvanians can be benefitting from less expensive power – all without compromising the quality and service they've been used to.

The website at **PAPowerSwitch.com** includes information about electric shopping, what it is, how to shop and which suppliers are available, as well as the Public Utility Commission's list of competing suppliers and the Office of Consumer Advocate's Shopping Guide pricing information.

Residents without Internet access can call 1-800-692-7380.

Generation supply costs comprise the majority of the average electric bill, and you can shop based on price, environmental preferences or special services and deals.

A ZIP-code search feature is also available so consumers can see all suppliers and offers serving a given area.

The website is designed for residential, commercial and industrial customers, and also offers inexpensive energy conservation tips and other ways to make a home energy efficient.

## Do You Have Unclaimed Property Being Held by the State?

Area residents are being encouraged to check and see if the state's Bureau of Unclaimed Property has money for them.

According to the Pennsylvania Treasury, millions of dollars in unclaimed property comes into the bureau each year.

The most common types of unclaimed property are dormant bank accounts, stocks and dividends, uncashed payroll checks, uncollected utility deposits, unredeemed gift certificates and items in safe deposit boxes. Unclaimed property is any financial asset that has been left inactive for a period of about five years.

In an effort to return the property to those who rightfully own it, an online database makes information more easily accessible. The Treasury is only required to advertise the names of people, businesses, or organizations owed property valued in excess of \$250 and that the names appear in the newspaper only one time even though they may be owed multiple pieces of property.

Officials are also cautioning individuals to be wary of services or "finders" who charge fees to help locate unclaimed property. Finders often charge the maximum amount allowed by law, up to 15 percent of the property's value, for making use of the same online-databases that individuals can use free-of-charge.

For additional information on unclaimed property, visit my website at **GeneDiGirolamo.com** or the Treasury's website at **patreasury.org** or call the Bureau of Unclaimed Property toll-free at 1-800-222-2046.

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