

Senate News Brief

from Senate Republicans

"This is information that people deserve to access and review when they wish, and we now have the technology to make it possible."

– **Senate President Pro Tempore Robert Jubelirer (R-Blair)**, joining **Senate Majority Leader David Brightbill (R-Lebanon)** in announcing that the Senate will begin posting the full current session Senate Journal on the Internet, making all Senate debates and roll call votes widely accessible.

Preview

COMBAT METH INITIATIVE TO BE UNVEILED WEDNESDAY

SEN. BOB ROBBINS (R-MERCER), **SEN. ROGER MADIGAN (R-BRADFORD)**, **SEN. ROB WONDERLING (R-MONTGOMERY)**, AND **SEN. JOHN GORDNER (R-COLUMBIA)** will join Attorney General Tom Corbett on Wednesday to unveil a package of bills targeting the production of methamphetamine in Pennsylvania. The seven bills are designed to make it more difficult to obtain the ingredients necessary to make methamphetamine, add new protections for children and clean up the environmental damage done by meth labs.

Review

SENATE ROLL CALLS AND SESSION TRANSCRIPTS WILL BE AVAILABLE VIA INTERNET

THE SENATE will begin posting the full current Senate Journal on the Internet, making all Senate debates and roll call votes widely accessible, **Senate President Pro Tempore Robert Jubelirer (R-Blair)** and **Senate Majority Leader David Brightbill (R-Lebanon)** announced recently.

The decision to post the Senate Journals was made through a unanimous vote by the Senate's bipartisan Committee on Management Operations. For more information, please see *In the Spotlight*, below.

"PA JESSICA'S LAW" MOVES TOWARD SENATE VOTE

LEGISLATION THAT WOULD CREATE SOME OF THE TOUGHEST LAWS in the nation to protect children from sexual assault and monitor sex offenders was approved Tuesday by the Senate Judiciary Committee, chaired by **Sen. Stewart Greenleaf (R-Montgomery)**.

Senate Bill 944, sponsored by **Sen. Jane Orié (R-Allegheny)** and **Sen. John Rafferty (R-Montgomery)**, would increase penalties for child rape, create Child Protection Zones, establish penalties for harboring an unregistered sex offender and create forfeiture laws for those convicted of sex offenses.

It would also require GPS monitoring of sexual predators and prohibit their presence within close proximity to daycares, schools, and other facilities where children traditionally congregate.

The committee also approved Senate Bill 1054, sponsored by state **Sen. John Pippy (R-Allegheny)**, which would require that all address information for sex offenders be listed on the state Megan's Law web site. Presently, addresses of only about 100 offenders designated as a "sexually violent predator" are listed. The remainder includes only county, hometown and zip code.

COMMITTEE VOTES TO REPEAL CELL PHONE TAX

THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Jane Earll (R-Erie)**, took action Tuesday to phase out the double tax on cell phones and interstate land lines over a five-year period.

The gross receipts tax on cell phones imposed an additional 5 percent fee on cell phone bills beginning January 1, 2004. The 5 percent gross receipts tax was in addition to a 6 percent sales tax on monthly calls making Pennsylvania one of the highest cell phone tax rates in the nation.

Under Senate Bill 691, sponsored by **Sen. Rob Wonderling (R-Montgomery)**, the phase-out goes into effect beginning in 2007, reducing 1 percent each year with the entire tax being repealed by 2011. Pennsylvania has more than seven million cell phone users.

SENATE APPROVES "OUNCE OF PREVENTION" BILL

THE SENATE approved legislation Tuesday that would provide in-home help for at-risk parents.

Under House Bill 200, also known as the "Ounce of Prevention Act," new parents could receive counseling and guidance on a voluntary basis. **Sen. Pat Browne (R-Lehigh)** advocated for the measure and sponsored a Senate version of the bill, Senate Bill 732.

Programs providing home visitation services, such as Family Centers and the Nurse Family Partnership, would be eligible for grant funding under the legislation. The bill returns to the House for concurrence of Senate amendments.

SENATE TAKES AIM AT ECO-TERRORISM, CROP DESTRUCTION

THE SENATE approved legislation Monday that would add the specific offense of eco-terrorism and agricultural crop destruction to the Pennsylvania Crimes Code.

Under House Bill 213, a person commits the offense of eco-terrorism if he or she commits a prohibited act against property with the intent to intimidate or prevent an individual from lawfully participating in an activity involving animals or natural resources. Any person convicted of eco-terrorism would be sentenced to pay restitution, fees and penalties to the owner of the damaged property.

The bill also states that a second-degree felony is committed if a person intentionally damages any crop grown for commercial or research purposes.

SENATE COMMITTEES HOLD JOINT HEARING ON HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE

THE SENATE CONSUMER PROTECTION AND PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Tommy Tomlinson (R-Bucks)**, and the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee, chaired by **Sen. Jake Corman (R-Centre)**, held a joint public hearing Tuesday on the effectiveness of state energy assistance programs.

Committee members questioned Secretary of Public Welfare Estelle Richman and other officials on how the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is being administered in Pennsylvania, the status of the \$19.3 million supplemental home energy assistance funding approved by the General Assembly, and the effect of Act 201 of 2004, which deals with utility customers who don't pay their bills.

In the Spotlight

THE SENATE JOURNALS for the current session will be posted to the Senate's web site, www.pasen.gov, as PDF files as soon as possible after floor action. It will typically take about a month. In the future, prior session Senate Journals will also be posted to the Internet.

Senator Jubelirer stated: *"Individuals will be able to easily check how their Senator voted on legislation. They will be able to read what was said about issues. This is information that people deserve to access and review when they wish, and we now have the technology to make it possible."*

Senator Brightbill said: *"Every debate will be available in its entirety, making the Senate's activity even more open and accessible to the public and the media. Our session activity is already available on PCN television and now the written record will be available to anyone interested in following the Senate."*

Senator Jubelirer announced last month that lobbyist expense reports collected by the Senate since the start of 2003 would also be made available to the public by way of the Internet.

Fast Facts

OPEN GOVERNMENT: DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE ON THE SENATE'S WEB SITE (WWW.PASEN.GOV)

- Lobbyists Expenditures
- Senate Registered Lobbyists Listing
- Senate Lobbyist Expense Reporting Statements for 2003-04
- 2005-2006 Senate Resolution 2 - Lobbying Registration and Disclosure Rules
- Senate Lobbyist Registration Statement for 2005-06
- Senate Journal (roll calls and debate) – coming soon
- Senate Lobbyist Expense Reporting Statements for 2005-06

Question or comments? Contact the Senate Republican Communications Office at senaterepublicancommunicationsoffice@pasen.gov or call 717-787-6725.