

Senate News Brief

from Senate Republicans

“Governor Rendell’s veto of the bipartisan ‘Fair Share Act’ lawsuit reform measure is not only a blow to job-creators, health care providers and Pennsylvania consumers, it is also another abrupt reversal – this time of his promise to fight frivolous lawsuits and make Pennsylvania’s legal system fairer.”

– **Sen. Jake Corman (R-Centre)**, sponsor of Senate Bill 435, lawsuit reform legislation passed overwhelmingly by the General Assembly but vetoed by the governor.

Preview

COMMITTEE TO EXAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF GASOLINE ADDITIVES

THE SENATE ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Mary Jo White (R-Venango)**, will hold a public hearing Wednesday on gasoline additives and their impact on the environment and fuel supplies. The hearing will specifically look at MTBE and ethanol use in reformulated gasoline.

Review

SENATORS, ATTORNEY GENERAL UNVEIL PENNSYLVANIA COMBAT METH INITIATIVE

TAKING AIM AT THE PRODUCTION OF THE DEADLY DRUG METHAMPHETAMINE, a group of Republican Senators and state Attorney General Tom Corbett on Wednesday announced a comprehensive legislative package to combat the growing meth problem in Pennsylvania.

The seven bills, known as the “Pennsylvania Combat Meth Initiative,” 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 caused by meth labs.

Among those attending the news conference were **Sen. Bob Robbins (R-Mercer)**, **Sen. Roger Madigan (R-Bradford)**, **Sen. Rob Wonderling (R-Montgomery)**, **Sen. Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland)**, **Sen. John R. Gordner (R-Columbia)**, **Senate President Pro Tempore Robert Jubelirer (R-Blair)**, and **Senate Majority Leader David J. Brightbill (R-Lebanon)**. For details, please see *In the Spotlight* and *Fast Facts*, below.

SENATE APPROVES FREE EDUCATION FOR FAMILIES OF FALLEN MILITARY

THE SENATE APPROVED LEGISLATION Wednesday that would provide tuition credits to spouses and children of Pennsylvania National Guard members who die while on active military duty.

Sponsored by **Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee Chairman Don White (R-Indiana)**, Senate Bill 1043 would benefit the families of deceased Pennsylvania National Guard members who are killed while serving on federal or state active duty. The measure will increase the benefit for children from a 50 percent tuition credit to a 100 percent tuition credit, while creating a 100 percent tuition credit for spouses to attend any Pennsylvania state-owned college or university, or approved trade school. The bill was sent to the House of Representatives for consideration.

SENATE PASSES MEASURE TO CLARIFY OUT-OF-STATE GUARD DUTY

LEGISLATION TO CLARIFY when the governor can send Pennsylvania National Guard troops to help other states during emergencies, was approved by the Senate on Wednesday.

House Bill 2157 was approved in late March by the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, chaired by **Sen. Don White (R-Indiana)**. The measure amends state Military Affairs laws to codify the parameters of “active duty” when the Pennsylvania National Guard aids other states as part of the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. Current law specifies only “in-state” emergency response for active state duty for emergencies, creating some confusion when the Pennsylvania Guard responded to the Hurricane Katrina disaster.

HEARINGS HELD TO EASE TRANSFER OF CREDITS AMONG STATE-FUNDED SCHOOLS

AT THE SECOND OF TWO HEARINGS to be held by the Senate Education Committee, committee chairman **Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill)** on Wednesday called on Pennsylvania's publicly-supported colleges and universities to create a statewide articulation system that would allow students to transfer credits more easily from one school to another.

The senator's legislation, Senate Bill 1147, would require community colleges, universities in the State System of Higher Education, and the state-related universities to adopt a statewide articulation system. If they fail to do so, the Department of Education would establish one for them. Participation by independent colleges and universities would be optional.

In the Spotlight

METH PRODUCTION is a serious problem in rural areas of the state, but its popularity is spreading because most of the ingredients used to make it can be purchased in local stores. The drug is "cooked" in home-made labs and is highly addictive and deadly.

One of the bills, Senate Bill 1121, sponsored by Senator Robbins, creates "Meth Watch." It is a cooperative program between the Attorney General's Office and retailers to educate and provide warnings regarding methamphetamine and the common ingredients used to make it.

Senate Bill 1116, sponsored by Senator Wonderling, would limit the sale of pseudoephedrine, a common ingredient in many over-the-counter cold medicines. The bill, which will be amended to make it consistent with federal law, also makes it an offense to knowingly possess ephedrine with the intent to unlawfully manufacture methamphetamine.

Senator Madigan was joined by Bradford County Sheriff Steve Evans. Meth production led to the death of two Bradford County Sheriff deputies who were gunned down as they tried to serve a warrant on a meth user who was producing the drug at his home. Seizure of meth labs in the county dropped from 16 to zero after local stores moved pseudoephedrine products behind the counter, the sheriff noted.

Fast Facts

PENNSYLVANIA COMBAT METH INITIATIVE LEGISLATIVE PACKAGE

- Establishes "Meth Watch," a cooperative program between the state Attorney General's Office and retailers to educate and provide warnings regarding methamphetamine and the common ingredients used to make it. (*Senate Bill 1121, Senator Robbins*)
- Limits the sale of pseudoephedrine, a common ingredient in many over-the-counter cold medicines used to manufacture meth. (*Senate Bill 1116, Senator Wonderling*)
- Makes it a specific violation of the Controlled Substance Act to possess an ephedrine-related substance with the intent to manufacture methamphetamine. (*Senate Bill 1118, Senator Gordner*)
- Adds the definition of "precursor substance" to the Controlled Substance Act. This would allow the Secretary of Health to add chemicals to the current list of controlled substances by regulation if they are found to be used in the production of drugs. (*Senate Bill 1115, Senator Madigan*)
- Makes it a criminal offense to operate a meth lab and imposes additional penalties for operating a lab near a school or day care center. (*Senate Bill 1117, Senator Gordner*)
- Makes it a misdemeanor for a parent or guardian to knowingly operate a methamphetamine laboratory in the vicinity of a child. (*Senate Bill 1120, Senator Robbins*)
- Allows a court to assess costs on a defendant convicted of an offense involving a meth lab for environmental clean-up costs against the defendant. (*Senate Bill 1119, Senator Gordner*)

Question or comments? Contact the Senate Republican Communications Office at senaterepublicancommunicationsoffice@pasen.gov or call 717-787-6725. Current and archived News Briefs are also available online at www.pasenategov.com.