

Senate News Brief

from Senate Republicans

"Because these laws are so tenuous, a number of states have already ratified similar constitutional amendments and it is time that Pennsylvanians have the same opportunity to decide whether the traditional definition of marriage deserves constitutional protection."

– **Sen. Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland)** on a constitutional amendment pending before the Senate that would define marriage as a covenant between one man and one woman.

Preview

SENATE TO CONSIDER JESSICA'S LAW

SENATE BILL 944, sponsored by **Sen. John Rafferty (R-Montgomery)** and **Sen. Jane Orié (R-Allegheny)**, would establish serious mandatory minimum prison sentences for first-time offenders convicted of raping a child 12 or under. This legislation, known as Jessica's Law, is scheduled for consideration this week.

MERCURY REDUCTION LEGISLATION TO BE CONSIDERED

SENATE BILL 1201, legislation sponsored by **Sen. Mary Jo White (R-Butler)** and which would require mercury emission reductions of 86 percent over 1999 levels no later than 2018, is likely to be considered this week.

MARRIAGE PROTECTION AMENDMENT ON SENATE SCHEDULE

A PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION to define marriage as a covenant between one man and one woman is expected to be considered by the Senate this week. House Bill 2381 is similar to legislation sponsored by **Sen. Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland)**, Senate Bill 1084.

Review

SENATORS ANNOUNCE SECOND PHASE OF SUCCESSFUL FARMERS FIRST AGENDA

BUILDING ON THEIR SUCCESSFUL "FARMERS FIRST AGENDA," **Sen. Mike Waugh (R-York)** and **Sen. Noah Wenger (R-Lancaster)** on Tuesday unveiled the second phase of a comprehensive legislative agenda aimed at promoting agriculture in Pennsylvania.

The senators, who serve as chairman and vice chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, also provided a status report of several of the laws already enacted in the first year of their "Farmers First Agenda." These include new measures to preserve farmland, help farmers be more competitive and protect the Commonwealth's equine industry from lawsuits. For more, please see *In the Spotlight*, below.

LEGISLATION UNVEILED TO IMPROVE DELIVERY OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

WORKING TO IMPROVE THE DELIVERY OF VOLUNTEER FIRE SERVICES in Pennsylvania, **Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee Chairman Don White (R-Indiana)** and **Sen. Mike Waugh (R-York)** announced bipartisan legislation Tuesday to encourage mergers and partnerships among private departments.

Senate Bill 1236 would establish a grant program funded by the \$100 million bond issue approved by voters in 2002 for the purpose of improving the delivery of volunteer fire and emergency services across Pennsylvania.

Currently, volunteer emergency service organizations have limited sources of grants and loans, such as the Community Revitalization Program, the Emergency Responders Resources and Training Program, the Volunteer Fire Grant, the Two-Percent Loan Program, and Relief Association distributions.

Senate Bill 1236 would make grants available to private, non-profit volunteer fire companies or EMS organizations, and local governments applying on behalf of the fire companies. For details, please see *Fast Facts*, below.

SEN. PICCOLA, SEN. CONTI ANNOUNCE SCHOOL PROPERTY TAX REFORM PLAN

SENATE MAJORITY WHIP **JEFF PICCOLA (R-DAUPHIN)** AND SENATE MAJORITY CAUCUS CHAIRMAN **JOE CONTI (R-BUCKS)** on June 12 unveiled a plan designed to move the Commonwealth in a direction to possibly eliminate property taxes. The plan

would incorporate most of the provisions of the Special Session House Bill 39 – which the House passed last week and will now go to the governor for his signature – and includes two additional components. It would generate approximately \$2 billion in revenues by selectively expanding the state sales tax base in 2007 and using anticipated gaming revenues. The plan also would establish a “super backend referendum” to ensure that after July 1, 2008, the voters must approve any increases in school property taxes.

COMMITTEE APPROVES SEN. WHITE’S BILL TO REDUCE MERCURY EMISSIONS

THE SENATE ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Mary Jo White (R-Venango)**, approved the senator’s bipartisan legislation Tuesday to reduce mercury emissions from Pennsylvania power plants.

Now before the full Senate, Senate Bill 1201 would require mercury emission reductions of 86 percent over 1999 levels no later than 2018. It also directs use of the emissions trading program authorized under the federal Clean Air Act. Emission trading has proven to be a highly successful means of reducing pollutant discharges quickly and in a cost-efficient manner.

Mercury, a naturally occurring element, can affect the development of fetuses and young children if ingested in significant quantities over a sustained period of time. The primary pathway to humans of methylmercury – the specific form of mercury regulated under Senate Bill 1201 – is through eating fish. Methylmercury poses no danger from inhalation or physical contact.

SEN. CONTI INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO BOOST DRIVER EDUCATION SUPPORT

LEGISLATION THAT WOULD INCREASE STATE SUPPORT OF DRIVER EDUCATION PROGRAMS and encourage more high schools to offer training was introduced Tuesday by **Sen. Joe Conti (R-Bucks)**.

Senate Bill 1233 would increase the subsidy from \$35 per pupil to \$350 per pupil. The Commonwealth has not raised the subsidy since 1955.

Pennsylvania’s graduated driver licensing program requires a prospective driver to obtain 50 hours of supervised experience behind the wheel. The program is currently available to about half of Pennsylvania high school students.

In the Spotlight

PHASE II OF THE FARMERS FIRST AGENDA includes the following:

- The creation of “The Centers for Agriculture Excellence and Education” to serve as a central clearing house of programs and information for current and new farmers.
- Combined funding for conservation districts through a fund administered by the State Conservation Commission.
- Legislation to ensure the continuation of vocational agriculture and FFA programs operated by school districts and area vocational-technical schools.
- Funding to implement alternatives that would provide for water releases during low-flow periods without having to impose consumptive use fees on farmers.

Senator Waugh and Senator Wenger said the new initiatives are designed to help ensure that the farming industry remains strong in Pennsylvania.

Fast Facts

SENATE BILL 1236: MERGING EMERGENCY SERVICES TO IMPROVE DELIVERY

Maximum Grants:

- \$100,000 for each finalized merger, consolidation or regional entity created.
- \$50,000 for each company involved in a merged, consolidated or regionalized entity.
- \$20,000 for creation of each new association of emergency service organizations.
- \$50,000 for each new company absorbed into or added to an existing merged, consolidated or regional entity.
- \$20,000 maximum for design, creation and delivery of communication or education programs designed to recruit and retain members. Funds awarded under this activity are restricted to this activity and may not be used for other purposes.

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.pasenategop.com.