

Senate News Brief

from Senate Republicans

"In order to properly evaluate the nominees for re-confirmation, Senators and the public have a right to fully understand this issue."

– **Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati (R-Jefferson)**, **Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi (R-Delaware)**
and **Senate Majority Caucus Secretary Bob Robbins (R-Mercer)**

in a letter to Gov. Rendell regarding the nominations of DEP and DCNR secretaries.

Preview

COMMITTEE TO HOLD HEARING ON SECURITY AT PA UNIVERSITIES

SECURITY AT PENNSYLVANIA'S INSTITUTIONS of higher education will be the subject of a public hearing by the Senate Education Committee next week.

The hearing, chaired by **Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill)**, will be held Wednesday, beginning at 9 a.m. in Hearing Room 1 of the North Office Building.

Review

SENATE CONVINCES GOVERNOR TO SEEK ETHICS PANEL OPINIONS

AFTER SENATE LEADERS ASKED for more time and information to properly review the nominations, Gov. Rendell agreed Wednesday to withdraw and resubmit his nominees to serve as secretary of Conservation and Natural Resources and secretary of Environmental Protection.

The leaders asked for more time to understand recent revelations about more than \$4 million of no-bid state contracts that were awarded by the departments to organizations which employed the secretaries' spouses. They also asked the governor to seek formal opinions from the independent State Ethics Commission, which he agreed to do.

Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati (R-Jefferson) said the Senate's responsibility to confirm cabinet secretaries should never be taken lightly: *"This is one of our major responsibilities. Any suggestion that our request for additional time and information is somehow partisan in nature is both stunning and inappropriate."* For more, please see *In the Spotlight*, below.

JOINT HEARING FOCUSES ON LEGALITY OF GOVERNOR'S NEW TAX ON EMPLOYERS

THE SENATE BANKING AND INSURANCE COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Don White (R-Indiana)**, and the Senate Finance Committee, chaired by **Sen. Pat Browne (R-Lehigh)**, held a joint public hearing Tuesday on the legality and practicality of Gov. Rendell's proposed tax on employers to support his health care plan.

The committees heard testimony from a national expert, who said a recent court decision involving a mandated health benefits program in Maryland means "an act of Congress" would be needed before Gov. Rendell's proposal could be enacted. In January 2007, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit affirmed a decision that invalidated Maryland's program citing that it clashed with the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974.

Todd Anderson, Outside General Counsel for Retail Industry Leaders Association, said the Fourth Circuit Court's decision would directly apply to Governor Rendell's tax proposal. For more, please see *Fast Facts*, below.

SEN. PICCOLA'S SCHOOL VIOLENCE REPORTING BILL PASSED BY THE SENATE

THE SENATE APPROVED LEGISLATION Monday that would make it mandatory for Pennsylvania schools to report criminal activities to law enforcement officials or face disciplinary action.

Senate Bill 112, sponsored by **Sen. Jeffrey Piccola (R-Dauphin)**, would require school districts, vocational-technical schools, Intermediate Units, and charter schools to form "memorandums of understanding" with local law enforcement. These agreements require schools to immediately notify law enforcement if a crime is committed on school property and outline the emergency response procedures for that district or school.

In 2005, a Dauphin County grand jury found that school administrators failed to comply with the reporting requirements of the Safe Schools Act and failed to work cooperatively with local police to respond to and prevent violence in a Dauphin County school district. As a result, the Grand Jury called upon the General Assembly to address the deficiencies. Senate Bill 112 was sent to the House of Representatives.

SENATE POLICY COMMITTEE HEARS TESTIMONY ON TAXPAYER PROTECTION ACT

THE SENATE MAJORITY POLICY COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Jake Corman (R-Centre)**, held a public hearing Thursday in Greensburg, Westmoreland County, to hear testimony on the Taxpayer Protection Act.

Senate Bill 7, sponsored by **Sen. Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland)**, is a proposed constitutional amendment that would limit state spending to the average inflation rate plus the average percentage change in state population over the three preceding years. Senate Bill 707, sponsored by **Sen. Mike Folmer (R-Lebanon)**, would provide the same common-sense limitation, but not as a constitutional amendment.

David Taylor, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Manufacturers Association, testified that Pennsylvania's spending policies have left the state behind the nation in terms of economic growth.

COMMITTEE HOLDS SECOND HEARING ON 'NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND' INITIATIVES

THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill)**, held its second public hearing Wednesday on Pennsylvania's implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law.

Sen. Rhoades pointed out that, even though federal funding to support NCLB has declined, the Commonwealth has invested \$845 million in new state funding for the accountability block grant program and the education assistance tutoring program. Both are programs that the General Assembly created to help schools and students meet the NCLB goals.

Sen. Rhoades stated: *"We all support the goals of No Child Left Behind, ensuring that all students meet high standards of academic achievement. But we can't just keep enacting new programs and initiatives that distract our schools from their primary mission, teaching our boys and girls. We can't afford to waste money or time. We have to fund programs that work so that our schools can meet the NCLB goals and have the tools to do the job."*

In the Spotlight

THE SENATE REQUEST FOR STATE ETHICS COMMISSION opinions was prompted by a desire to give the public and senators a full understanding of the situation before a final vote on the nominees. The media first reported the existence of the grants in question less than a week ago, on Friday, April 20.

Senate Republican leaders have agreed to schedule a vote on both nominees within a few legislative days after receiving the State Ethics Commission opinions. If the opinions are received by Friday, May 4, a final vote on the nominees is possible by Tuesday, May 8.

Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi (R-Delaware) stated: *"We want the public and our members to be operating in a fully informed and a fully transparent way. We believe this is the only way we can proceed and have a fair vote on these two nominees."*

Fast Facts

PENNSYLVANIA'S 800,000 UNINSURED RESIDENTS

- 30% are eligible for Medicaid and have not signed up
- 20% are non-citizens
- 20% are young adults who choose not to be insured
- 15% are between jobs (some are eligible to continue their insurance under COBRA)
- 15% have had no insurance for two years

Source: Commonwealth Foundation

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.