



State Senator Mike Brubaker

Reports

36th Senatorial District



Dear Friend:

The first year of my term as your state Senator and the first half of the 2007-2008 legislative session have inspired me in many ways.

I often tell people that when I am in the district office, traveling in the 36th or talking with constituents, it is my favorite part of being your Senator. Then, when I am in Harrisburg on session days working with my colleagues to create legislation and policy that address the issues you have brought to my attention, I am fascinated by the process and the work we do there as well – in fact, I have been on the Senate floor for 100% of the votes that have been taken. I am very fortunate to be blessed with the best of both worlds in this job.

I am truly impressed by the countless good things that the people of the 36th district are doing for their communities. Every day I see our friends and neighbors opening businesses, teaching in the classroom, and reaching out a helping hand, and I know that this District would not be

the special place it is without each and every person. It is an honor for my staff and me to serve you.

In addition to learning my way around Harrisburg, I was given the opportunity to take a leadership role on agriculture issues and also played an active part in the Special Session on Energy Policies last fall. I am also pleased to report that the Senate has implemented new rules and is working on legislation that make your government more open and transparent, and thus more accountable to you. Although we tackled many important issues in my first 12 months, there are also several other policy areas on which I am eager to work throughout the second half of this session.

Thank you again for your support – I know that together we will find many more ways to improve the 36th District and the entire Commonwealth.

Best wishes for a happy new year!

A Look Ahead

Although I feel the General Assembly achieved many significant accomplishments in 2007, I know there is much work left to do in the remainder of this legislative term and beyond. I have identified several issues on which I hope to work in greater detail in 2008, including:

- **HEALTH CARE** – Families are having a difficult time handling the rising costs of health care in Pennsylvania, as are the businesses that struggle to help cover insurance costs for their employees. The General Assembly enacted several laws in 2007 to help reduce these costs (see “2007 Senate Accomplishments”) but there is certainly opportunity to develop additional innovative ideas that will continue to address costs, quality and access to health care.
- **ADDITIONAL WORK ON ENERGY POLICY** – Through the Special Session on Energy Policies, we have worked on numerous proposals to encourage the production and use of alternative energy sources that will help lower consumer costs, create a cleaner environment and reduce our dependence on foreign oil. The Senate approved several pieces of legislation in December (see “General Assembly Works to Improve Energy Policy”), and these bills are a very important step for Pennsylvania. I am looking forward to working in both the Special

Session and the regular session on this and other energy-related items.

- **EDUCATION** – Our children deserve a high-quality education, and I truly respect the work of our schools and teachers in preparing their students for a bright future. I feel that this is an area which always deserves the General Assembly’s attention, but particularly this year as we analyze the findings of the costing-out study and look for ways to make sure that public education is operating as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible, while remaining dedicated to helping all students achieve to the best of their abilities.
- **INFRASTRUCTURE** – Infrastructure comprises our transportation network as well as other areas, such as community development and planning and energy infrastructure. These areas must be continually

addressed because every individual, business and organization relies on a strong, safe and reliable infrastructure for day-to-day operation and long-term economic growth.

- **AGRICULTURE** – The Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, which I chair, will continue to follow through on the issues and concerns brought to our attention during the spring 2007 listening sessions, such as those concerning environmental matters and conservation, increasing economic opportunities for farmers, and encouraging the education of the next generation of the Pennsylvania agriculture industry.

These are only some of the issues critical to Pennsylvania’s future. There are many, many other areas which the state Senate will be addressing in 2008, and I am looking forward to a productive year in the General Assembly.



Senator Brubaker meets with Dr. Thomas Newcome, superintendent of the Octorara School District.

District Outreach

I believe that an effective representative must be engaged in the community to truly understand constituents' thoughts, concerns and ideas. For that reason, I convened a series of outreach events designed to give everyone the opportunity to meet with me from my first day in office, such as:

- **COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS:** These open forums were held at several public locations throughout the district to allow constituents to come and speak directly with me about any issue on their minds.
- **MUNICIPAL ROUNDTABLES:** I have held discussions with representatives of all 37 municipalities in the 36th District to encourage an open line of communication between our state and local governments, since much of what we do in the General Assembly has a direct impact on municipalities.
- **ADVISORY COUNCILS:** Six advisory councils on issues relating to business/agriculture, health care/insurance, youth, community, veterans and seniors meet with me periodically to offer firsthand information about their particular interests and expertise.

These activities are extremely valuable to me because they open lines of reciprocal communication through which my staff and I can offer assistance and information when needed. In addition, by working with individuals and groups in this way, we can establish partnerships within the district to help us accomplish mutual goals. Over the next year, I plan to continue holding roundtables with various organizations, and I will be actively reaching out to our local school district officials and school boards and developing other outreach activities.

The district office also moved over the summer to a new home in Lititz, a location that is very convenient and accessible to the 36th District. My staff and I have worked with thousands of constituents both in person and over the phone in Lititz and Harrisburg, and I receive countless emails sharing your perspective on a wide variety of topics. I use that input to ensure that I am focusing on the issues that really matter to you, and also to guide me as I consider the legislation that comes before me in the state Senate.

I encourage everyone to continue to be in touch with me and to visit the Lititz or Harrisburg offices; sever-



As a member of the Special Session Committee on Energy Policies, Senator Brubaker participated in a number of public hearings held to learn more about the development of alternative energy in the Commonwealth.

2007 Senate Accomplishments

During my first year as your state Senator, I have been proud to work with my colleagues to improve the quality of life for district residents. Here are some of the most important bills approved by the Senate in my first year in office.

My colleagues and I worked to **improve energy efficiency and promote alternative energies** during the Special Session on Energy Policies. The legislation would fund energy conservation projects for consumers, clean energy and alternative energy projects for business, and provide additional funding for the LIHEAP heating assistance program.

To improve the health of Pennsylvanians and reduce health care costs, the General Assembly passed legislation to **track and reduce hospital-acquired infections**. I also supported new state laws to **expand the scope of practice for qualified health practitioners** such as certified nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, clinical nurse specialists and physician assistants.

I supported legislation passed by the Senate that would **improve outreach assistance and support programs for Pennsylvania's veterans**. The General Assembly also passed a **five-year extension of the \$25 million Volunteer Fire Company and Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Program**, providing a valuable safety net for our first responders through 2012.

al regional meeting locations are also available to individuals who have difficulties that may prevent them from getting to either office. You can also call or write, to share your

The Senate approved legislation to **expand the state's Open Records Law** and ensure that the law would include all branches of government and improve accountability and transparency in government. At the beginning of the 2007-2008 session, the Senate also approved several reform measures to **improve the legislative process** and make government information **more open and accessible to the public**, including making all votes, debates, session video and lobbyist reports available online. You can find that information by going to my website, senatorbrubaker.com, and clicking on "Live Senate Feed" and "Citizen Access Page."

Keeping our communities safe is an important priority, and I supported legislation that would **crack down on methamphetamine production**. I was also supportive of legislation to offer new protections for victims of sexual violence.

I was very pleased that the General Assembly approved the creation of the Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) program to **provide tax credits to farmers who invest in proven conservation practices**; applications for the REAP program are now being accepted. We also acted to protect taxpayers by enacting a measure to **end the \$52 lump sum payments for the Emergency and Municipal Services Tax**, reducing the maximum deduction to \$1 per week.

thoughts, or if I can be of any assistance with a state government service or agency. My contact information is located on the back page of this newsletter.

Brubaker Cosponsors Open Records Reform

All Pennsylvanians deserve greater access to information on how our tax dollars are being spent, and making more information available to our citizens is the best way to restore public confidence in state government. In November, the Senate passed legislation that would strengthen the Open Records Law and promote greater transparency for all levels of government.

Senate Bill 1 would make all records from Commonwealth agencies and local agencies available to the public unless they fall under a specific exception established in the Law, such as critical homeland security information or private personal information like Social Security numbers and medical records. This is a very important change because under the current Open Records Law, all records are considered closed unless they appear on a short list of those records that are open.

Senate Bill 1 also seeks to establish a state office to help implement the Open Records Law changes as well as create a standard document for citizens to request records to make the process easier and more efficient. My

colleagues and I included changes that would reduce the response time for government agencies from 10 days to 5 days to help make the process easier and more efficient as well. The legislation also imposes stiffer penalties for violations.

Further, the Senate adopted amendments that would extend the Open Records Law to ensure that all facets of state government are included. All state contracts, including contracts with the Legislature, would be posted online in a searchable database. The judicial branch's financial records will be added to the law, and the new law would also clarify that the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) is covered under the Open Records Law. Senate Bill 1 would also take

steps to ensure that state agencies are in full compliance with the law.

The state House of Representatives amended Senate Bill 1 before approving it last month. There are some minor differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill that will need to be ironed out at the beginning of the New Year, but I am optimistic that a comprehensive extension of the Open Records Law will be signed into law in the very near future.



Senator Brubaker visits with members of the VFW during their visit to the State Capitol.

General Assembly Works to Improve Energy Policy

Last fall, the General Assembly convened a Special Session to focus on the Commonwealth's energy policy to promote the use of alternative energies and reduce the need for foreign sources of energy. I have had the privilege of playing a leadership role in the Senate as a member of the Special Session Committee for Energy Policies.

The Senate passed Special Session Senate Bill 1, legislation which would make funding available for consumer conservation projects such as energy efficient windows and doors, solar panels, insulation and energy efficient furnaces. Funding would also be

made available to expand rebates to consumers who purchase alternative fuels vehicles. In addition, a one-time payment of \$5 million would be directed to the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency for a revolving low-interest loan program for homeowners to complete weatherization projects.

Businesses could take advantage of funding for alternative energy conservation projects, clean energy initiatives and pollution prevention programs as well. The funding for the program would be spread over 10 years and would not require any new taxes, making it an affordable and prudent investment in our state's energy future. The governor

called for a more expensive plan that would have required a new tax on electricity bills, but I believe that the

Senate plan is more fiscally responsible and will not overburden ratepayers when energy costs are expected to rise in the near future.

The Senate also approved legislation to update the state's alternative energy portfolio standards to include biomass and low-impact energy resources, thereby assisting the state in reaching its goal of having 18 percent of our energy produced in PA to be generated from alternative energy sources by 2020. Finally, my colleagues and I addressed alternative fuels by supporting legislation that would provide for the production, sale and use of biodiesel in the Commonwealth.

However, we realize that our work is not done when it comes to energy policy. We have taken important steps over the past few months to address energy issues and will continue to develop and consider new ideas in 2008.



Senator Brubaker at the groundbreaking for the collaborative effort between Granger Energy and UGI to construct a nine-mile pipeline, which will be used to bring methane gas from the Conestoga Landfill to many industrial customers in the eastern Lancaster County area as a source of energy.

Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee Update

During the spring of 2007, the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee conducted a series of listening sessions across the Commonwealth to gather information about the most important priorities for our farmers and their communities. After getting valuable input from concerned citizens, we are now moving forward to address some of the most pressing issues facing the agriculture community and rural Pennsylvania.

For instance, many farmers testified at the listening sessions that they are having trouble attracting and retaining enough workers, and the committee held a joint hearing with the Senate Labor and Industry committee in October to address workforce availability in agriculture. Some of the

possible solutions which were brought to our attention included promoting technologies to improve efficiency and working with the state Department of Labor and Industry to improve workforce development for careers in agriculture. We will continue to monitor the issue to determine the best way to address this matter.

Dairy reform was one of the committee's most important concerns, as many dairy producers, although currently enjoying healthy profits, recently suffered through some of the most financially challenging years in decades. The complex milk pricing process has been a major problem, and we are advocating for a simpler, more transparent process for determining milk prices.

Another important action has been working to improve the state's highly successful farmland preservation program. The committee approved legislation that would permanently maintain the Agricultural Land Conservation Grant Program, a program that provides matching grants to counties to assist in protecting farmland. The committee also approved a resolution I sponsored to direct the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to conduct a comprehensive review of the program to determine ways the program can be improved.

As Chairman of the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, I am committed to promoting our state's number one industry and finding new ways to move our farming community forward. We have made considerable progress so far, but we still have a number of issues that we need to address in the coming months. I appreciate all of the input we received during the listening sessions, and I would encourage district residents to contact me with any additional suggestions for improvements.



Senator Brubaker celebrated the grand opening of The Sports Barber in Ephrata with owners Eric and Joan Bair.

Senator Brubaker took a Red Rose Transit Bus from Ephrata to the Queen Street Transit Center in Lancaster City to meet with RRTA Executive Director Dave Kilmer and hear more about the upcoming renovations to the transit center.



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