



Senator Pat Browne



REPORT to the PEOPLE

16TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT • SPRING 2009

Dear Friends,

As we begin a new year and the Senate begins a new legislative session, I thought this would be an excellent time to update you on what is going on in Harrisburg and remind you of the state services and programs available through my office.

This report also includes a comprehensive calendar of community events I have scheduled for 2009. I hope you will take advantage of these free, informative programs.

I appreciate hearing from you. Government shouldn't be a monologue; it works best when information goes back and forth. If you encounter bureaucratic red tape and frustration, I'd like to hear about it. Do you need an answer in regard to state government? Feel free to call, write, or stop by any of my offices to share your opinions on pending legislation. I can best serve you when I know your feelings and have the benefit of your ideas.

Sincerely,

Pat Browne

Pat Browne

Senator Browne's Legislation Included in 10-Bill Reform Package

Senator Pat Browne's bill to open state spending to public scrutiny is a key component of a 10-bill package of government reforms unveiled by Senate Republicans at a January 21 press conference.

Senate Bill 105, sponsored by Senator Browne, would create a searchable online budget database that would include information on grants and contracts provided by state government agencies. Under this measure, all transactions above \$25,000 would be accessible to the public.

"I am reintroducing the Pennsylvania Taxpayer Transparency Act to bring more accountability to government spending," said

Senator Browne. "With the actions of state government segregated into many independent departments and agencies, it is currently very difficult for a Pennsylvania taxpayer to effectively monitor the spending practices of state government. However, with the use of technology, we can significantly improve this process and promote greater transparency in the affairs of the Commonwealth."

The other bills in the reform package include measures to change how consulting contracts are awarded, increase penalties for violating the Sunshine Law which requires public business to be done at open meetings,

ban bonus payments for state employees and eliminate lame-duck legislative sessions.

More information about gov-

ernment reform and other state issues can be found on the Senate Republican Caucus web site, www.pasenategop.com.



Speaking at a January 21 press conference hosted by Senate Republicans to unveil a 10-bill government reform package, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Pat Browne (R-16) discusses his proposal to create a searchable online budget database.

Balancing A Budget During Tough Economic Times

The single most important mission of the Legislature each year is the consideration and passage of the state budget before the end of the fiscal year on June 30. The General Assembly will carefully study the Governor's proposed \$28.9 billion general fund budget for Fiscal Year 2009-10, which includes a proposed \$1.26 billion (4.6 percent) increase in spending

"Considering Pennsylvania's

current economy and the projected \$2.3 billion revenue shortfall for the current fiscal year, that spending increase seems excessive and unwise," said Senator Pat Browne. "Just like Pennsylvania's families and businesses, state government must tighten its belt and live within its means."

The Governor's budget proposal anticipates additional revenues from: a 10 cent-per-pack increase in Pennsylvania's cigarette tax, raising the total tax per

pack to \$1.45; a new tax on cigars and smokeless tobacco; and a new tax on extraction from the state's Marcellus Shale natural gas reserve.

The Senate Finance Committee, chaired by Senator Browne, will comprehensively review the proposed tax increases. The entire spending plan will be vetted by the Senate Appropriations Committee on which he serves as a member.

"This year, more than ever,

Pennsylvania must prioritize state funding. We, the Legislature and Administration, must enter into budget deliberations with an open mind and realistic expectations," Senator Browne said. "Tough decisions must be made, considering the current economic climate, but Pennsylvania's taxpayers and economic future must come before rhetoric and partisanship. We must work together to pass a sensible, practical and fiscally responsible budget."

Property Tax and Rent Rebate Applications for 2008 Now Available

The 2008 Property Tax and Rent Rebate applications are now available. Senator Pat Browne's staff is always on hand to assist with these applications. Representatives from Senator Browne's office will also be visiting five community locations during the fourth week in March to help residents fill out the applications and answer questions. (See Page 4 for rebate assistance dates) **This Property Tax and Rent Rebate is for property taxes or rent paid in 2008.**

Homeowners or renters who paid property taxes or rent last year, qualify if they are age 65 or older, are a widow or a widower age 50 to 64 or are age 18 or older with a permanent disability.

The income limits to qualify for the program are \$35,000 for homeowners and \$15,000 for renters. This includes all income, but only half of Social Security and Railroad Retirement benefits.

Qualifying applicants will receive rebates in amounts based on the following charts:

HOMEOWNERS

<i>Income Level</i>	<i>Maximum Rebate</i>
0 - \$8,000	\$650
\$8,001 - \$15,000	\$500
\$15,001 - \$18,000	\$300
\$18,001 - \$35,000	\$250

RENTERS

<i>Income Level</i>	<i>Maximum Rebate</i>
\$0 - \$8,000	\$650
\$8,001 - \$15,000	\$500

If you plan to attend one of the outreach events, here is what you will need to bring with you (if applicable):

- Property owners need to bring all of their 2008 real estate tax receipts stamped paid
- Renters need to have the rent certificate in the Property Tax and Rent Rebate booklet filled out by their landlord
- Driver's license or Pennsylvania photo identification card
- 1099 forms, 1099-R forms and W-2 forms (if applicable)
- Information on interest, dividends, Railroad Retirement benefits
- Information on gains or losses on the sale or exchange of property or stocks

Property Tax and Rent Rebate booklets will be available at each site and in all of Senator Browne's offices.

District Offices Offer Constituents Access to Many State Services

As part of his effort to make state services readily accessible to the people of the 16th Senatorial District, Senator Pat Browne operates multiple District Offices across the tri-county area he represents.

By contacting any of Senator Browne's offices, constituents can take advantage of a number of programs and services. His staff can help you:

- By providing information on legislation, including copies of Senate and House bills.
 - By processing PennDOT motor vehicle titles, registrations, driver's licenses and learner's permits renewals, disability plates/placards as well as supplying Pennsylvania Driver's Manuals and state maps.
 - By supplying applications for Pennsylvania birth and death certificates.
 - By providing Pennsylvania child abuse history clearance and criminal history applications.
 - By providing and processing Pennsylvania tax forms, Property Tax and Rent Rebate applications, PACE/PACENET applications and Notary Public applications.
- Senator Browne's **Main District Office** is located in downtown Allentown at 801 Hamilton Street. The office is open weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The phone number is

(610) 821-8468 or toll-free at (800) 280-7728.

The **East Allentown District Office** is located in the Lehigh Valley Career Link Building, 1601 Union Boulevard. The office (shared with three state Representatives) is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. with Senator Browne's staff available on Mondays and Tuesdays. The phone number is (610) 821-6813.

Residents of **Western Lehigh County** can visit the office in the Upper Macungie Township Building, 8330 Schantz Road. The office is open Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The phone number is (610) 366-2327.

Senator Browne's **Northampton County Office** is located in the East Allen Township Municipal Building, 5330 Nor-Bath Boulevard, Northampton. The office is open Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The phone number is (610) 502-1567.

Residents of the West End of **Monroe County** are served by the District Office at the intersection of Old Route 115 and Route 209, Saylorsburg. The office hours are Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturday from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. The phone number is (570) 402-1499.

www.senatorbrowne.com

Visit Senator Browne's website, www.senatorbrowne.com, to keep up with legislative news and other state issues.

Active Duty Personnel, Vets May Waive CDL Skills Test

Pennsylvanians on active military duty and recently discharged veterans may now be able to waive the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) skills test. Act 133 of 2008, which went into effect on January 26, 2009, allows

PennDOT to waive the skills test requirement for active duty personnel and honorably discharged veterans if they have at least two years experience operating a commercial motor vehicle as part of their military job requirements.

In order to receive the Military CDL Skills Test Waiver, individuals must obtain a CDL Learner's Permit and successfully complete all of the knowledge tests related to the type of commercial vehicle they intend to operate.

More information, the fact sheets and forms related to the waiver are available online at www.dmv.state.pa.us by clicking the "military personnel/veterans" link under information centers.

Senator Browne Ready for Expanded Role in New Session

With the opening of the 2009-10 Legislative Session, Senator Pat Browne has taken on an expanded role in the state Senate.

Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati appointed Senator Browne in December to serve as Majority Caucus Administrator for the 2009-10 Legislative Session. In this leadership position, Senator Browne is responsible for scheduling activities before the caucus and working with Senate leaders to set the agenda and advance Republican policy.

Senator Browne will retain his chairmanship of the Senate Finance Committee for the 2009-10 Session. The Finance Committee has the primary role of reviewing legislation affecting Pennsylvania's Tax Codes. Senator Browne will once again put his tax law and accounting skills to work to help the Commonwealth through these tough economic times while fighting against raising taxes.

"I appreciate the opportunity to again serve as Chairman of the Finance Committee," Senator Browne said. "It is important that the state of Pennsylvania remains fiscally responsible and



Top left to right, Caucus Chairman Mike Waugh, Caucus Administrator Pat Browne, Policy Committee Chairman John Pippy, Caucus Secretary Bob Robbins and Appropriations Committee Chairman Jake Corman. Bottom left to right, Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi, President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati and Majority Whip Jane Clare Orié.

looks to cut wasteful spending wherever possible while faced with these tough circumstances. One of my jobs as Finance Committee Chairman is to look at ways we can change tax laws to help encourage businesses to

grow, increase its payrolls and encourage other people to start their own businesses. Now is not the time to add more burdens and unfair taxes to businesses."

Senator Browne was also

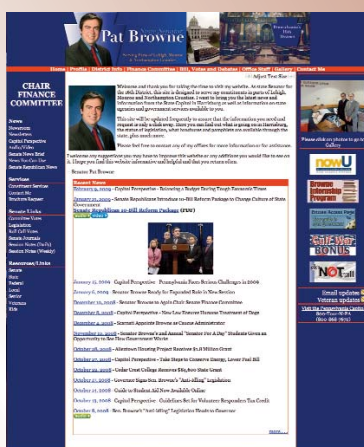
appointed to serve as Vice Chairman of the Education Committee and as a member of the Appropriations, Banking and Insurance, Communications and Technology, and Judiciary committees.

Website Offers Information On Services, Legislation

Have a question about a bill or simply want to know what's happening in state government? Senator Pat Browne's website www.senatorbrowne.com offers you the latest news and information from the State Capitol in Harrisburg as well as information on state agencies and government services available to you.

This site is updated frequently to assure that the information you need and request is only a click away. You can find out what is going on in Harrisburg, the status of legislation, what brochures and pamphlets are available through the state, plus much more.

The website also includes special sections of interest to senior citizens, veterans and kids, as well as links to other government and civic organizations.



"There is a wide variety of information available on my website," Senator Browne said. "The Internet is a good way to keep constituents informed about what is going on in state government and tell them about programs that are available. The Internet provides an excellent and convenient way for busy people to keep track of what's going on in state government and how it affects their everyday lives."

Internship Opportunities with State Senator Pat Browne

Senator Pat Browne's internship program offers college students an opportunity to receive real world experience and a behind-the-scenes look at how state government operates.

Senator Browne's interns routinely:

- Research information on issues related to the development of new legislation.
- Handle constituent problems/concerns and refer problems/concerns to the

proper agency/Senate staff member.

- Prepare correspondence, procure copies of legislation and/or other state-related documents or information requested by constituents.
 - Assist with various outreach projects.
 - Spend a day in Harrisburg shadowing Senator Browne.
- For more information, contact Senator Browne's Main District Office at (610) 821-8468.

Email Updates From Senator Browne

As part of his efforts to keep his constituents informed about state government activities, Senator Pat Browne periodically sends out electronic newsletters and instant legislative updates about issues that affect your family and your community.

Signing up for these email updates is quick and easy. You can subscribe by visiting his website at www.senatorbrowne.com and clicking on the Email Updates link on the right column.



Mark Your Calendar

Monday, March 23 through Friday, March 27 – Representatives from Senator Pat Browne's office will hold outreach days to help fill out Property Tax and Rent Rebate applications and answer questions regarding the Property Tax and Rent Rebate Program. The sessions will run from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the following locations:

- **Monday, March 23** – North Whitehall Township Meeting Room, 3256 Levans Road, Coplay.
- **Tuesday, March 24** – Lower Level Meeting Room of the Allentown Library, 1210 Hamilton Street, Allentown.
- **Wednesday, March 25** – Fearless Fire Hall, 1221 South Front Street, Allentown.
- **Thursday, March 26** – Lower Macungie Township Community Center, 3400 Brookside Road, Macungie.

- **Friday, March 27** – Bath American Legion, 278 Race Street, Bath.

Thursday, April 23 – Senator Browne's office, in conjunction with Representative Mario Scavello, will hold an Identification Theft and Cybercrime Forum from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the Chestnut Hill Township Park Building, Route 715, Brodheadsville.

Thursday, April 30 – Senator Browne's office, in conjunction with Representative Craig Dally, will hold an Identification Theft and Cybercrime Forum from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the Hanover Township (Northampton) Community Center, 3660 Jacksonville Road, Bethlehem.

Thursday, June 11 – Senator Browne will host a Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency and



BUCKY BOYLE EVENT

Senator Browne speaks with constituents at his annual Bucky Boyle Community and Family Expo in Allentown on July 31, 2008.



DA VINCI EVENT

Senator Pat Browne interacts with constituents at his and Representative Doug Reichley's annual Kids Discovery Expo at the Da Vinci Science Center on September 6, 2008.

Department of Banking Public Forum from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the Weed and Seed Building at Bucky Boyle Park, North Front and Gordon Streets, Allentown.

Thursday, July 30 – Senator Browne will host his annual Community and Family Expo at Bucky Boyle Park from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. at North Front and Gordon Streets in Allentown. The Expo is designed to provide valuable information to parents, grandparents and children about the myriad of programs, information and other services available to them from government and community groups.

August – Senator Browne and Representative Mario Scavello will hold a Senior Fair. The date and location are to be determined.

Saturday, September 12 – Senator Browne and Representative Doug Reichley will hold their fourth-annual Da Vinci Kids Discovery Expo from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the Da Vinci Science Center, 3145 Hamilton Boulevard Bypass, Allentown. The Expo is designed to provide valuable

information to parents, grandparents and children about the myriad of programs, information and other services available to them from government, community and corporate groups throughout the area.

Thursday, September 17 – Senator Browne, in conjunction with Representative Gary Day, will hold a Senior Information Fair from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in the Schnecksville Fire Company, 4550 Old Packhouse Road, as part of North Whitehall Township's Senior Day. The Fair is intended for seniors and their families and will provide information on health care issues, leisure activities as well as other government programs that are available for seniors.

Thursday, October 8 – Senator Browne will hold his fourth-annual Senior Fair from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Country Meadows, 410 Krock's Road, Allentown. The Fair is intended for seniors and their families and provides information on health care issues, leisure activities as well as other government programs that are available for seniors.

State Senator Pat Browne 16th District Legislative Offices

801 Hamilton Street, Allentown, PA 18101-2420
(610) 821-8468 • FAX (610) 821-6798

East Allen Twp. Municipal Bldg.
5330 Nor-Bath Boulevard, Northampton, PA 18067
(610) 502-1567 • FAX (610) 502-1570

Monroe County Office
Old Route 115 & Route 209
P.O. Box 16, Saylorsburg, PA 18353-0016
(570) 402-1499 • FAX (570) 402-0746

1601 Union Blvd., First Floor, Allentown, PA 18109
(610) 821-6813 • FAX (610) 841-1137

Upper Macungie Twp. Bldg.
8330 Schantz Road, Breinigsville, PA 18031
(610) 366-2327 • FAX (610) 366-2329

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