



Report to the People

Spring 2014

State Representative
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19th Legislative District

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Wheatley wants to maintain your access to health care



Recently many people have contacted my office to express their deep concerns regarding the current dispute between UPMC and Highmark. This rift threatens to eliminate access to many of our stellar local and regional medical facilities based solely on the type of medical insurance a person has. Residents throughout the district have expressed their

strong displeasure with this possibility — **and I concur.**

Over the past several months, I have had meetings with representatives of both UPMC and Highmark. These talks have been courteous and respectful, as well as direct. It is undisputed that both UPMC and Highmark offer high quality services, and both are major employers in our area and state. That being said, we must be equally clear that medical “access” means more than just physically walking into a facility — it means having your insurance accepted there. The fear of losing such access even for a short period of time is a real concern that must soon be addressed.

As the end of the UPMC-Highmark contract nears, if a solution is not found, people with Highmark health plans will not be able to access UPMC’s care and will need to

be prepared. That includes taking this in to account when selecting coverage available through the new Affordable Care Act exchange (www.healthcare.gov; 1-800-318-2596).

I have strongly encouraged both parties to settle their dispute independent of any direct action by the legislature. However, these are tax-exempt organizations with clearly defined charitable missions. Access to their services is literally a necessity of life for thousands of Pennsylvanians. If a mutually agreed-upon deal cannot be reached in a timely matter, then other measures should be considered.

As a last resort, I have signed on as a co-sponsor of House Bills 1621 and 1622. Similar legislation has been introduced in the state Senate. These bills — which have bipartisan support — would prevent health care providers in Pennsylvania from refusing to accept other insurance plans. For example, these bills would apply whether UPMC were trying to exclude Highmark subscribers from its hospitals or whether Highmark were trying to keep UPMC Health Plan subscribers out of its West Penn Allegheny hospitals. **It’s not about a specific nonprofit — it’s about fairness and access for you, the patients.**

It is my sincere hope that this legislation will not be necessary. But UPMC and Highmark must end the uncertainty and fear that is growing among individuals and businesses alike. Until a deal is made that assures access for all, I will continue to support measures that would bring these two important, tax-exempt organizations together.



Grocery Store

I was excited to share in celebrating the Hill District’s first full-service grocery store in 30 years. At the event, I noted the past efforts initiated by state Rep. Dwight Evans of Philadelphia, and I recounted state government’s history and desire to take an interest in supporting grocery stores in “food deserts” across the commonwealth. A number of residents, community leaders and stakeholders attended the grand opening of the Hill District’s Shop N Save as a destination grocery store of which the community should be proud and take ownership.

Health and Wellness Weekend

I want to thank everyone who came out and participated in our inaugural Health and Wellness Weekend.

On Sept. 13 the Thelma Lovette YMCA invited participants to a free day at its facility, as we hosted an opening reception featuring Dr. Jeanette South-Paul who spoke about the importance of a healthy family.

The next day, Sept. 14, more than 150 people participated in the UpHill 5K along Centre Avenue. My annual Community Appreciation Day was held after the race at Kennard Field and featured free healthy food options, children's activities, a job fair, line-dancing with Roland Ford, a step exhibition, a spoken-word poetry slam and live local entertainment from the African American Institute Jazz Band.

Sunday's events on Sept. 15 included more than 30 health care organizations providing information and screenings at the Y. Participants also enjoyed healthy cooking demonstrations, a children's obstacle course, a rock-climbing wall, equipment and class orientations, line dancing and mural painting for families and kids. Our goal was to share information on how to live and sustain a healthy lifestyle.

Throughout the weekend, we were able to engage close to 1,000 participants across the Pittsburgh region during these events. Thank you for your participation and if you're interested in participating in a 365 Community Challenge, please contact my office. We look forward to seeing you next year!



Wheatley votes to save transit service, fix roads and bridges

I voted “yes” in November on the final transportation funding bill, which Gov. Corbett signed into law. The bill isn’t perfect, but this is probably the best we can get. Pittsburgh’s transit riders, motorists’ safety and our economy couldn’t afford to wait two more years or longer.

My vote was a vote to keep Port Authority riders from enduring another round of cuts, to prevent longer traffic

jams that more transit cuts would create by adding more cars on our roads — and to prevent a tragic bridge collapse. This is also a jobs bill, saving 9,600 jobs and creating 50,000 more jobs statewide.

This bill also contains language that came from years of work around diversity and inclusion. It provides for real mechanisms to ensure contracting opportunities for disadvantaged



businesses and veteran-owned businesses. I am also extremely excited about the possibility of getting some of our chronically unemployed a real opportunity to gain some skill development that can ultimately lead to gainful employment that will come with this \$2.3 billion annual investment.



Projects in and near the 19th Legislative District that the bill is expected to fund include:

- Repairs and repainting on the Panhandle Bridge that carries two “T” lines across the Monongahela River;
- Mount Washington transit tunnel repairs;
- Monongahela Incline repairs;
- Neville Ramp bridge deck replacement and painting;
- East Busway and park and ride lighting upgrades;
- B&O Railroad Bridge repainting and repairs.



Rep. Wheatley asks a question during a House Appropriations Committee hearing on the state budget.

Internet Essentials program helps low-income students

Home Internet access helps many of us conveniently search for all kinds of information that is helpful to our daily lives. It also gives our children a leg up with school assignments and projects. But for thousands of families in our area, access for their children is something they cannot afford.

Please help me to spread the word about Internet Essentials, which provides the families of children who receive free or reduced price lunch the ability to access home Internet service at discounted rates.

No tax dollars are spent on this program.

More information about the program, including eligibility guidelines, is available by calling 1-855-846-8376.

Meet my Staff: *Introducing the staff serving the People of the 19th Legislative District*

Kyle Stewart, Executive Assistant

Beth Ann Cushman, Legislative Assistant

April V. Ashe, Legislative Assistant, Harrisburg Office.

We are here to assist you with any issues or concerns you may have within your community, as well as state government. We offer free faxing (certain restrictions apply), notary service on site and copying service for any non-legal items.

Capitol-All Stars Game: **Hunger Caucus**

On Sept. 30, I joined more than 50 of my colleagues in the General Assembly in the first-ever Capitol All-Stars Softball Game. The game was held to fight against hunger.

Nearly one out of every six Pennsylvanians is at risk of hunger and may not know where their next meal is coming from. As co-chairman of the Legislative Hunger Caucus, I thought this game was a great opportunity to

raise awareness about hunger in our communities while generating significant resources to help charities and nonprofits that are working to feed Pennsylvanians in need.

The game was East against West and I'm proud to say my team, West, trounced the other team. But it was all in bipartisan fun and helped a number of food banks, including the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank.

Corbett's new budget is shaky, built on one-time sources of funding

Gov. Tom Corbett's new budget proposal is a "house of cards" built on one-time sources of funding.

This budget plan contains more than \$1 billion in unsustainable, election-year gimmicks the governor hopes to use to fill budget gaps — gaps created mostly by his giveaway of more than \$2 billion in corporate tax breaks. This budget would leave a mess to be cleaned up by Pennsylvania taxpayers and whoever's governor next year.

When I and other Democrats talk about needing to pass a reasonable gas-drilling tax as other states have done, that is a major reason why, in addition to the better-known need to restore the governor's nearly \$1 billion in K-12 education cuts.

The Corbett cuts went the deepest in school districts like Pittsburgh and some Mon Valley communities. The long-term cost of that disinvestment in basic education is that many children in working-class school districts receive less than children in nearby wealthy districts. This sets many of our kids up to fail, continuing the unsustainable school-to-prison pipeline.

I'm also concerned that the governor rejected simply accepting the federally funded Medicaid expansion that would cover 500,000 Pennsylvanians now. Instead,



he's come up with his own plan that seems designed to be rejected by the federal government, which could delay coverage for many of our friends and neighbors by a year or more.

Fortunately, what the governor announced Feb. 4 is not the final budget. While the legislature is majority-Republican, we have the chance to scrutinize, debate and vote on it — and the power to change it. As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, I have been participating in hearings where every state agency is questioned on its portion of the governor's budget proposal.

Unclaimed Property:

The Pennsylvania Treasurer's Office might be holding money or property that belongs to you. And Treasurer Rob McCord wants to return it.

Over the years, you may have lost track of a bank account, or an uncashed check.

Some people have money owed to them from a life insurance policy which a deceased relative left behind — or the contents of a safe deposit box.

By law, that money or property must be turned over to the state treasury if no one claims it. Last year, Treasurer McCord and his staff returned \$100 million to their rightful owners, but the treasury still has millions more to return.

Finding out if you have a claim is easy. Simply go to the state treasury website at www.patreasury.gov and follow the instructions, or call 800-222-2046, and a state treasury return team member will assist you.

Wheatley introduces teacher tax credit bill

I recently introduced an important bill with bipartisan support. House Bill 1619 would provide a tax credit of up to \$500 per year to reimburse teachers who spend their own money on school supplies for their students. Eligible classroom supplies would include books, supplies, computers and related equipment, including related software and services, other equipment and supplementary materials.

There are many dedicated teachers in Pittsburgh and

across Pennsylvania who are doing a great job for their students, often in difficult circumstances. And it's a fact that many of these teachers are spending hundreds of dollars of their own money on basic classroom supplies.

I think it would be one of the best, most cost-effective investments we could make in the state budget. Maryland and Arkansas already have similar programs. Pennsylvania should join them.

Wheatley announces \$225,000 in state grants for district



I recently announced the Commonwealth Financing Authority has approved two state grants for projects in the 19th District.

Riverlife was approved for a \$100,000 grant to help renovate and enhance the Allegheny Landing riverfront park on the North Shore. The project will include resurfacing paved areas, replacing pavers, concrete and the decking on the boat dock, as well as cleaning walls. The project will include environmentally

responsible design elements, such as the use of native plants, LED and solar lighting and updated fountain pump control technology. Upgraded LED lighting that is more energy efficient will provide safe public access to the riverfront for North Side residents as well as visitors to the North Shore.

Highwoods Properties was approved for a \$125,000 grant to help fund an urban plaza revitalization project next to the EQT Plaza on Liberty Avenue downtown. The project will be a rehabilitation and transformation of the outdoor public plaza and repair of the parking structure roof deck that supports the area. The goal is to create a more inviting and usable space for the building's customers and the general public. The open space is a highly traveled access for people walking from the cultural district downtown and a gathering space for workers, residents and tourists. When the project is finished, the area will have an array of benches and plantings to make the space more inviting and create a focal point on Liberty Avenue.

Fairness in 'bread and butter' driver's licenses

I recently reintroduced my bill (H.B. 1916) to provide first-time drug offenders the same opportunity that first-time DUI offenders have to get to and from work, school and medical treatments.

Current law allows first-time DUI offenders to obtain an occupational limited driver's license, often called a "bread and butter license," giving them the ability to support their families and begin to rebuild their lives. This opportunity is not currently available to first-time drug offenders, but it is in society's interest to equalize this situation. I believe that's why this bill has bipartisan support, as it has in the past.

Under the bill, a first-time drug offender would have to serve 60 days of his or her license suspension to qualify for the limited license, the same as first-time DUI offenders do now.



Reduced automobile registrations

PennDOT offers retired Pennsylvanians earning less than \$19,200 annually a reduced automobile registration rate of \$10,

compared to the normal \$36. The income limit to qualify for this discount is per person. It is NOT based on household income.

People 65 or older also may purchase a two-year license renewal for \$19. A regular four-year license fee currently costs \$29.50.

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Stay updated! It's free and easy

Important news happens between newsletters, whether it's overdue funding finally being released for our schools or winter weather postponing an event in Pittsburgh that I've already announced.

That's why I invite you to use two FREE, easy ways to stay updated:

- "Like" my Facebook page — www.facebook.com/RepWheatley
- "Follow" my Twitter page — www.twitter.com/RepWheatley

These outlets also allow me to share videos about what's happening in Harrisburg and how it affects you.

If you live in the current 19th District, I can also send you periodic email updates — including news for veterans. To sign up, just visit www.pahouse.com/Wheatley and click "Contact Me." Then just send me a short message from that page.

You can also use the same page to send me an e-mail if you live in an area that will be added to the 19th District as of December 2014.

I encourage everyone who emails me to include a mobile phone number if you have one — this helps me to respond better and keep you updated if you choose.



My office can help you with:

- Car registrations, special tags, disability placards, titles and driver's license applications
- Assistance in obtaining and completing state forms of all kinds
- Voter registration and absentee ballot applications
- Unemployment compensation, disability and workers' compensation
- Birth and death certificates
- Problems with the Department of Public Welfare (food stamps, medical and income assistance)
- Pennsylvania income tax questions or problems
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate problems or questions
- Requests for literature of all kinds – bills, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
- Complaints and problems with insurance companies
- Problems or questions about the state lottery
- Consumer complaints
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups