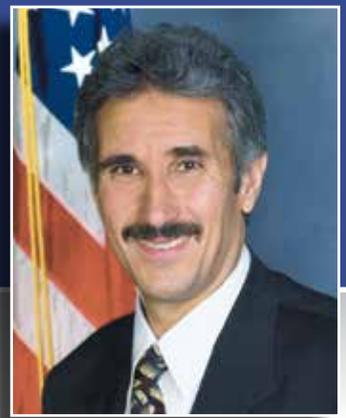


Rep. Chris

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Summer 2020

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Pandemic prompts stopgap budget

COVID-19 has complicated life in every way, and budget planning is no exception.

The pandemic and measures taken in response – from business shutdowns to postponed tax filing deadlines – created unprecedented revenue shortfalls, including April revenues that were more than \$2 billion below expected.

The new economic landscape also created a spate of unanswered questions that made budget planning – normally based on predictable income and spending patterns – extremely challenging.

To keep the state running, the General Assembly passed a \$25.8 billion partial spending plan, which the governor signed in late May. The stopgap plan funds most agencies and programs for five months, through the end of November, at the same rates as the 2019-20 budget. The exception – public education – receives flat funding for a full year.

A sticking point for many of us during budget deliberations involved the loss of \$300 million in casino income normally used to fund the state homestead exemption. Without that income, we feared the state's homeowners would be left footing the bill through increased property taxes.

To address the issue, we passed legislation to transfer up to \$300 million in emergency funding to the Property Tax Relief Fund to make the full property tax relief payment to school districts and homeowners.

When we return to the table to work out a budget for the remainder of the fiscal year, we hope to have a more complete picture of the state's revenue and needs – and hopefully, clear signs of a healthy pulse returning to the state's economy.

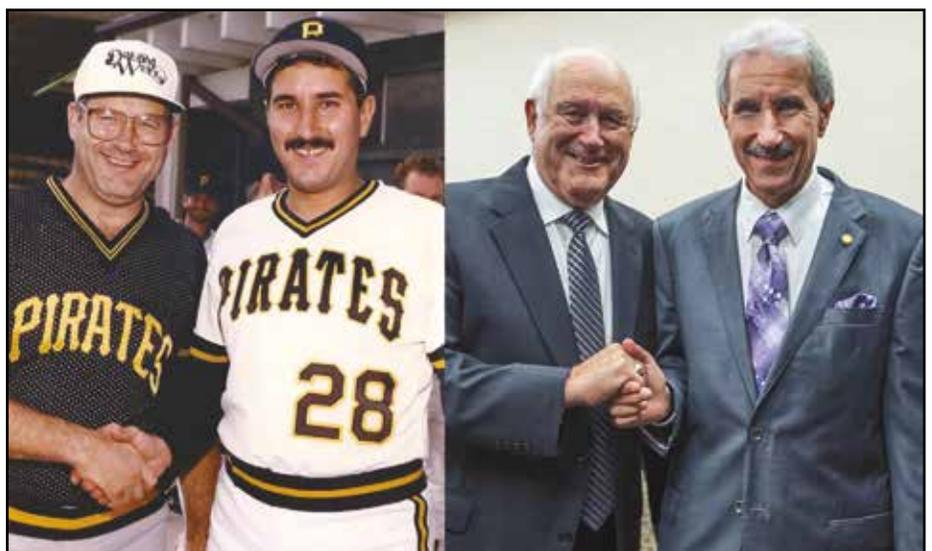


Reuniting with a baseball legend

Twenty-eight years ago, I stood shoulder-to-shoulder with a legend. It was 1991, and as a lifelong Pittsburgh Pirates fan, I was attending Pirate Camp in Bradenton. Hands down, the highlight was spending time with Steve Blass, the legendary pitcher who helped lead the Pirates to victory against the Baltimore Orioles in the 1971 World Series.

It was thrilling to get to know Steve, who by 1991 was in the midst of a successful career as a broadcast announcer for the Pirates. After cheering him on the field, I was now a devoted fan of his broadcasts – which made every Pirates game come alive for thousands of fans – and his tireless volunteer work in the Pittsburgh community.

Cemented in my memory, though, was the 1971 World Series, when Steve made history by pitching two complete game wins – including the seventh and deciding game – and allowing only seven hits and two runs in 18 innings.



I remembered that game vividly when I reunited with Steve at the state Capitol and we honored him with a resolution recognizing Oct. 28, 2019, as "Steve Blass Day in Pennsylvania." The resolution memorializes his 60-year career with the Pirates and his lifelong dedication to the Pittsburgh area, its fans and its people.

A look at CARES Act funding

In addition to voting on a budget in late May, my colleagues and I passed a spending package allocating \$2.6 billion of Pennsylvania's \$3.9 billion in federal funding under the CARES Act. Some highlights include:

- **\$692 million to long-term living programs.** The funding will allow the state's nursing homes and long-term care facilities – hit especially hard by the pandemic – to increase their testing capabilities, improve infection control practices and acquire other important resources for fighting COVID-19.
- **\$625 million to counties – including \$7.72 million to Lawrence County** – to help cover the costs associated with coronavirus prevention, protection and treatment.
- **\$260 million** to protect people with intellectual disabilities and autism.
- **\$225 million** in grant funding to help small businesses get back on their feet.
- **\$175 million** for rent and mortgage assistance to low- and middle-income families impacted by the pandemic.

- **\$150 million – including more than \$3.3 million to Lawrence County school districts** – to fund equipment, building modifications, staff training, safety programs and other resources needed to create and maintain a safe, sanitary environment. (Schools will see an additional \$50 million from the Elementary and Secondary School Relief Fund.)
- **\$116 million** to help child care facilities reopen safely.
- Additional funding for higher education, child care services, emergency responders, food and agricultural assistance, and other important programs. Lawrence County recently received **nearly \$480,000** – the first of several rounds of funding – for critical food, affordable housing and community development programs.

While there are no quick fixes, the federal funding will help restore strength to our small businesses, ensure protections for students and vulnerable residents and mitigate some of the pandemic's harshest effects on working families.

Nearly \$3 million in federal funding to rehab existing homes, expand affordable housing options

A safe, affordable place to call home is more important than ever as our community copes with hardships created by the pandemic. Several recent grants to our district totaling nearly \$3 million will help improve and expand housing opportunities.

The funding includes \$750,000 to Lawrence County for a project to rehabilitate 18 owner-occupied homes and \$500,000 to Shenango Township to rehabilitate 12 owner-occupied homes to be administered by Lawrence County Community Service.

In addition, Lawrence County will receive more than \$1.72 million – which it will distribute locally as well as to 19 other counties – to expand affordable housing options and provide emergency shelter and other resources to residents in need.



Presenting a legislative citation to the St. Luke AME Zion Church on the momentous occasion of their 175th anniversary!

Complete the census:

Our community's fair share depends on it!

There is still time to reply to the 2020 Census, and I'm urging anyone who has not yet replied to do so now! It's quick and easy – just 10 questions and 10 minutes of your time – and so much depends on your participation.

The census count determines our community's share of billions in federal funding – for roads, schools, health care, community development, emergency services and so much more. We only have a chance to participate once every 10 years, and making sure you're counted makes our entire community safer, stronger and more prosperous.

The census also determines our share of representatives in Congress, so your participation means our community gets a greater say in Washington, D.C., decision-making that affects our lives.

The census is safe and secure: answers can't be used against residents who respond, and data security is managed by high-level experts. The law prohibits the U.S. Census Bureau from releasing any information that identifies individuals, under penalty of large fines and possible prison time.

Please do your part to make sure our community receives its fair share. You can respond online, by phone or by mail. Visit www.census.gov to learn more!

Around the district

One of the best parts of my job is getting to work with the open-hearted, civic-minded members of our community. Here is a look at just a few of those great groups.



It was an honor to help celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Church of Genesis Neighborhood Food Pantry, which is powered by community donations and the hard work of volunteers.



Supporting the "Out of the Darkness Walk to fight Suicide" at the Riverwalk in Downtown New Castle last September. Many in our community turned out for the walk.



Last year's Bessemer Volunteer Fire Department Fireman's Festival featured great food, family activities and entertainment.



Joining folks from the Disability Options Network, who organized another outstanding Freedom Fair Fireworks Festival in New Castle last year.



With some young participants at the 2019 Annual Children's Summer Arts Festival at the Hoyt Institute of Fine Art in New Castle.



Hard work by all the sponsors, teams and volunteers made last year's Relay for Life at Cascade Park a wonderful, well-attended event to raise money for the fight against cancer.



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Flattening the curve – and keeping it that way

This spring, I joined colleagues in supporting legislation to help Pennsylvanians stand strong against the pandemic. We passed measures to require the state to develop a comprehensive statewide testing plan, expand testing in nursing homes, keep stimulus checks tax free, replenish funding for our first responders, and more.

But the true credit for helping our community get through this belongs to all of you. Lawrence County residents have met the challenge of COVID-19 with strength, resilience and a sense of responsibility. Your efforts to follow safety protocols, such as social distancing and wearing masks, have directly helped to flatten the curve of new cases.

Because the virus is still with us however, it's as important as ever to stay the course.

I want to echo requests by the Vice President, the Governor of Texas, the Governor of Ohio, and our own Governor by calling on residents to continue wearing masks when they are within six feet of others and when they enter buildings other than their own homes. New research has shown that doing so significantly reduces the spread of COVID-19.

Believe me when I say that I am as eager as anyone for the day COVID-19 is eliminated as a threat, and we can put the masks away. But until we have succeeded in keeping the curve flat, continuing to make these small sacrifices is the best path for keeping our businesses open, our economy going, and our community in the green.

REAL ID enforcement deadline postponed to Oct. 2021

With COVID-19 forcing temporary closure of driver license centers, the enforcement deadline for the REAL ID Act has been postponed to Oct. 1, 2021.

That means your regular state driver's license or ID card will still be accepted beyond this October for activities such as boarding a domestic flight or visiting a secure federal facility.

Although a REAL ID is optional (you don't need one to vote, visit regular federal buildings like the post office, apply for

or receive federal benefits, or gain access to hospitals and health clinics), you may find one handy, especially if you fly frequently and want to continue using your driver's license for identification.

REAL ID services will hopefully be resuming soon at driver license centers around the state. In the meantime, you can learn more by visiting www.dmv.pa.gov and scrolling down to the REAL ID icon with the star.



At the dedication of the New Castle Lower East Side Community Garden, where we applauded the efforts of Ken Rice and all the groups and organizations that helped make this possible.