

THE NORTHEAST NEWS

From State Representative

Ed Neilson



SUMMER 2016

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2016-17 state budget a step in the right direction

Over the summer, I supported the passage of a state budget plan that funds education at record levels, without a broad-based tax increase. I will be the first to admit that this budget is far from perfect, but it is a solid step in the right direction especially for our schools and students.

After the protracted impasse of last year, it is refreshing to see this compromise, especially as it contains historic education funding but doesn't add to our structural deficit.

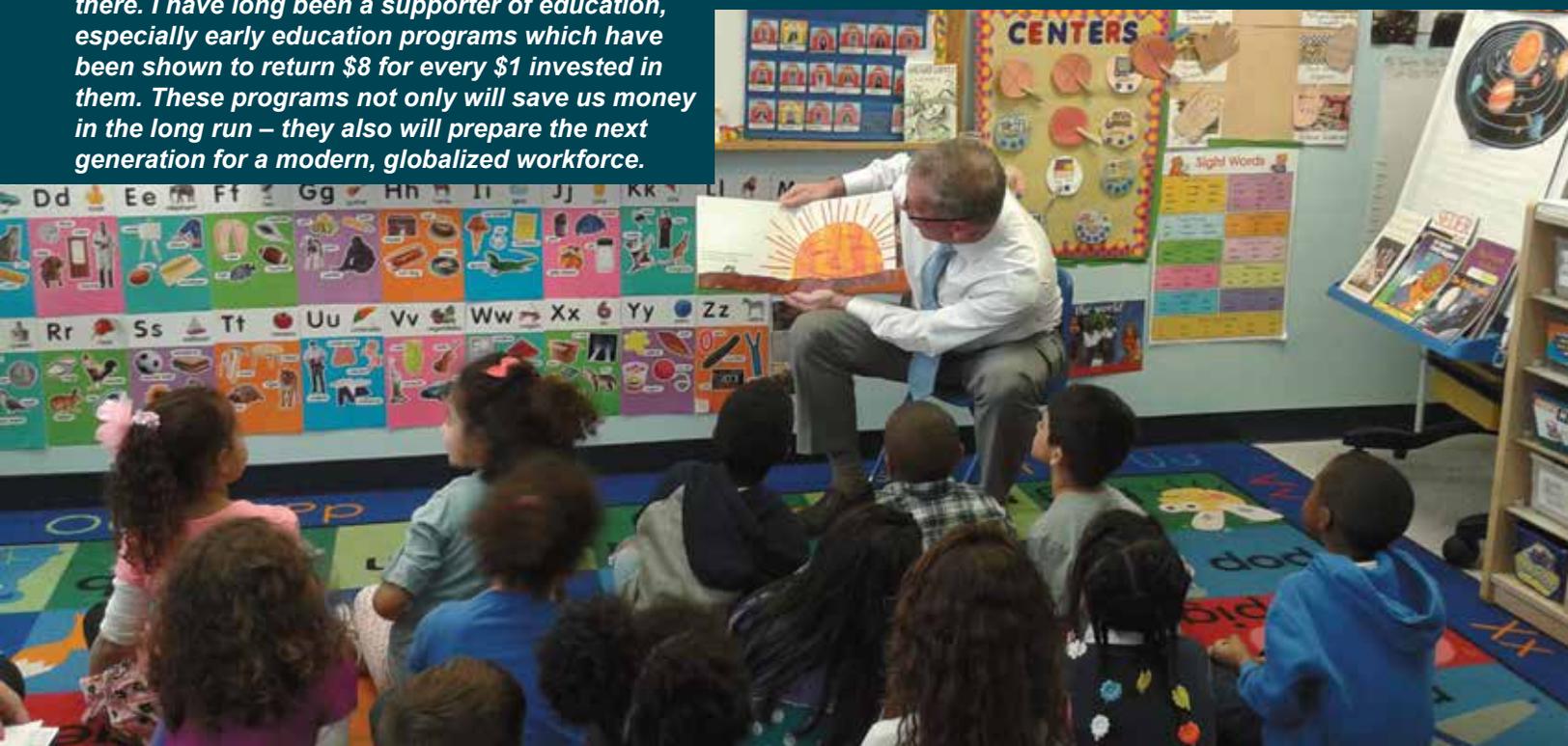
The state spending plan includes a \$250 million increase for pre-K through 12 education funding, including \$200 million for K-12, \$30 million for pre-K and Head Start, and a \$20 million increase for special education.

In April, I visited the Paley Early Learning Center and had the opportunity to read to the kids while there. I have long been a supporter of education, especially early education programs which have been shown to return \$8 for every \$1 invested in them. These programs not only will save us money in the long run – they also will prepare the next generation for a modern, globalized workforce.

The budget will also:

- Provide funding for three additional Pennsylvania State Police cadet classes;
- Transfer millions from the Oil and Gas Fund to the General Fund to give money to conservation programs, Growing Greener, and the Hazardous Sites Cleanup Fund; and
- Dedicate \$15 million to combat heroin and opioid addiction, including funds for emergency addiction treatment and behavioral health services.

While there are parts I dislike about the budget, in reality it is a workable compromise that will invest in our state without relying on a sales or income tax increase and avoiding an impasse should prevent any future downgrades of the state credit rating.



Pennsylvania's Battle with Heroin and Opioid Addiction

Pennsylvania is dealing with a major epidemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, heroin and opioid overdoses are the leading causes of accidental deaths, killing more Pennsylvanians than those involved in deadly crashes. This epidemic crosses all social, geographic and political lines.

A study by the Pennsylvania State Coroners Association provides a harsh reality: seven Pennsylvanians die every day due to heroin or prescription opioid overdose. In 2014, nearly 2,500 Pennsylvanians died from a drug overdose.

Pennsylvania has taken several important steps to combat the heroin and opioid crisis. Dr. Rachel Levine, the physician general, signed a standing order for naloxone, making access to this crucial anti-overdose drug available to all Pennsylvanians. State troopers are equipped with naloxone for when they arrive first on the scene of a drug overdose. This life-saving drug is also available free in many public high schools. Pennsylvania has developed a prescription drug monitoring program to help detect and prevent prescription fraud and abuse.

Gov. Tom Wolf has been hosting roundtable discussions with state lawmakers, local officials, law enforcement, emergency responders and health care professionals to discuss ways to work together to combat the opioid abuse and heroin use epidemic.

In June, he also announced that he intends to call a special session of the General Assembly later this year that will focus on combating the opioid crisis facing our communities.

I applaud Gov. Wolf for his leadership on this issue and I look forward to joining my colleagues — Democrat and Republican — in continuing our work on a way to address this crisis head-on. Pennsylvanians are counting on us to make it happen.



State to eliminate vehicle registration stickers

The state Department of Transportation is eliminating vehicle registration stickers on license plates beginning Jan. 1, 2017. PennDOT will issue the last registration sticker on Dec. 30.

Drivers still will need to have their vehicles registered and inspected, but they won't need to display a registration sticker after Dec. 31.

Law enforcement officers will use Automated License Plate Reader technology to check the status of vehicle registrations and insurance instead of looking for the stickers. The new system will permit officers to have real-time electronic access to PennDOT's database. PennDOT officials said the new technology is an improvement over the visual inspection of vehicle registration stickers, which can be counterfeited, sold, affixed to dead plates or applied to plates for which they were not intended.

Also starting Jan. 1, drivers who renew their vehicle registration online will be permitted to save a copy of and print a permanent registration card.

More information can be found on PennDOT's website at www.dmv.pa.gov.

'Stop and go' stores pose a continued threat to our community

Gov. Wolf signed a bill the House passed in June allowing wine sales in some restaurants and grocery stores, and making wine and liquor sales more convenient for Pennsylvania consumers.

Unfortunately, I was unable to vote for this legislation due to my serious concerns about the unintended consequences it would create with the numerous "stop and go" stores in Philadelphia. Due to previous legislation, these stores have been able to acquire restaurant licenses, despite the fact that many sell little more than candy and chips.

This law will allow these stores to sell even more alcohol with hardly any additional oversight. Additionally, the law commits insufficient enforcement resources to solve this complicated issue.

While I support liquor modernization efforts, I could not support this bill when it came up for a vote in the House. I will continue to work with my colleagues in the General Assembly and city officials to seek a solution to the "stop and go" issue that threatens the safety and well-being of communities throughout Philadelphia.

Pa. ABLE savings program will help families with disabilities

In April, Gov. Wolf signed Act 17 of 2016 into law. Known as the ABLE Act, which stands for Achieving a Better Life Experience, this new program will allow families to ensure family members with a disability are taken care of by providing them with a savings account without jeopardizing eligibility for important programs that their loved ones depend on.

I was proud to vote for this legislation, which allows the savings accounts to be used for a wide range of disability-related expenses including health care, housing and transportation. Hopefully, the ABLE Act will foster independence, community-based support and employment opportunities for people with disabilities, while at the same time helping put at ease the minds of family members who worry about caring for them.

The ABLE Program will be administered by the Pennsylvania Treasury, which also administers the Pennsylvania 529 College Savings Program. Under this new law, benefits of the program include:

- Save up to \$14,000 per year;
- Tax-free growth;
- Use the account to pay for a wide range of disability-related expenses;
- Federal and state income tax-free withdrawals when used for qualified disability expenses;
- Exemption from Pennsylvania inheritance tax.

One of the most vital aspects of the ABLE Program is that savings are excluded from eligibility determinations for many government-related benefits. This means Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medical Assistance and other disability and health benefits cannot be taken away because of ABLE savings.

Family caregiver measure signed into law

About 1.6 million Pennsylvanians, including some right here in Philadelphia, are caring for their aging parents or other loved ones.

That can be a daunting task, since caring for them can involve managing multiple medications, managing special diets and operating medical equipment.

I was pleased to support legislation – PA CARE, the Caregiver Advise, Record and Enable Act – to help caregivers when a loved one is admitted into a hospital and when they return home.

The law has three important parts. It requires hospitals or rehabilitation facilities to:

- Record the name of the family caregiver when a loved one is admitted into a hospital or rehabilitation facility;
- Notify the family caregiver if the loved one is to be discharged to another facility or back home;
- Provide an explanation and instruction of the medical tasks – such as medication management, injections, and wound care – that the family caregiver will perform at home.

CARE takes effect in April 2017. Meanwhile, AARP, the state Department of Aging, and the state Hospital and Healthsystem and Nurse's associations – all supporters of the effort – are helping to integrate caregivers into health care facilities' admission and discharge procedures and educate stakeholders statewide about their rights under the new law.

Pennsylvania is the 23rd state to approve CARE legislation. The benefits include helping older loved ones remain at home and controlling health care expenses by reducing costly hospital readmissions and trips to the emergency room.

Northeast Philly ambulance companies awarded nearly \$29,000 in state grants

In April, I was pleased to announce that four ambulance companies in Northeast Philadelphia were awarded nearly \$29,000 in state grants.

The grants are from Pennsylvania's Fire Company and Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Program and are partly funded from gaming revenue. In all, 2,538 grants were awarded to fire and EMT companies statewide.

Grant recipients and amounts awarded in Northeast Philadelphia are as follows:

- Northeast First Aid Corps – \$7,202
- Burholme First Aid Corps Inc. – \$7,202
- Rhawnhurst Bustleton Ambulance Association Inc. – \$7,202
- Wissinoming Volunteer First Aid Corps – \$7,202.

Medical marijuana now law in Pa.

Pennsylvania this spring became the 24th state to legalize marijuana for medical purposes.

I voted to legalize medical marijuana and allow doctors to prescribe the treatment they see fit to help heal their ailing patients. The measure, Senate Bill 3, was signed into law by the governor in April, and it took effect in May.

Regulated medical marijuana will help bring relief to tens of thousands of children, adults and senior citizens suffering from serious medical problems.

S.B. 3 establishes an independent, 12-member State Board of Medical Cannabis Licensing to oversee growers, with indoor and secure facilities and regulated dispensaries across the state.

When the law is fully implemented, doctors will be able to prescribe marijuana in pill, oil, vapor or liquid form. Patients will not be able to legally obtain marijuana to



smoke and will not be allowed to grow it on their own.

At long last, Pennsylvania is moving to provide another tool for doctors to help patients, including countless suffering children, who are battling debilitating and life-threatening illnesses.

You can find more details at www.health.pa.gov – click on “Medical Marijuana” under “Hot Topics.”

Patients diagnosed with one of these 17 serious medical conditions can be prescribed medical marijuana by a participating doctor:

- Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis
- Autism
- Cancer
- Crohn's Disease
- Damage to the nervous tissue of the spinal cord with objective neurological indication of intractable spasticity
- Epilepsy
- Glaucoma
- HIV/AIDS
- Huntington's Disease
- Inflammatory Bowel Syndrome
- Intractable Seizures
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Neuropathies
- Parkinson's Disease
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Severe chronic or intractable pain of neuropathic origin, or severe chronic or intractable pain in which conventional therapeutic intervention and opiate therapy is inadvisable or ineffective
- Sickle Cell Anemia

Summer Movie Nights

All movies will start at dusk. For additional information, call the district office at (215) 330-3714.

Friday, Aug. 19

Crispin Boys/Girls Club
Holme Ave. & Convent Ave., 19136
Movie: Guardians of the Galaxy

Friday, Aug. 26

Mitchel Playground
3700 Whitehall Lane, 19114
Movie: Underdogs

Stayed tuned for more information on September Movie Nights!

Friday, Sept. 9 • Friday, Sept. 16 • Friday, Sept. 23



Bear den visit



As a member of the House Game and Fisheries Committee, I had the privilege in March to visit a bear den in Delaware, Pennsylvania. At the den, a Game Commission biologist tagged a hibernating bear and recorded its measurements. I even had a chance to get up close with a cub. While it was a great opportunity to get to see these amazing animals in their natural habitat, I also was pleased to know that the Game Commission is composed of amazing professionals who advocate and care for these animals and their habitats.

Sign up for the Do-Not-Call list

People can register their cell phone and landline numbers with the state and federal Do-Not-Call lists to avoid most telemarketing calls.

To register, call 1-888-777-3406. Registration is free. There is a rolling enrollment; you may sign up at any time and the registration is good for five years. After that, you can re-enroll. Signing up on Pennsylvania's list automatically adds those numbers to the national Do-Not-Call list.

If you continue to receive unwanted telemarketing phone calls, complaints can be filed with the Bureau of Consumer Protection in the Attorney General's Office by calling 1-800-441-2555. Violation of the law carries a civil penalty of up to \$1,000 and as high as \$3,000 if the person contacted is 60 or older.

Please keep in mind the law does not prevent telemarketers from calling those with whom they had an established business relationship within 12 months before the call, or telemarketers calling on behalf of charities, political parties or candidates.



Is the state holding your property?

It is estimated that roughly one in 10 Pennsylvanians has unclaimed property. The state treasurer is currently holding more than \$2.3 billion worth of that unclaimed property – such as closed bank accounts, uncashed checks, lost stocks and bonds, contents of safe deposit boxes, and unexpired gift certificates and gift cards.

You can search for and claim any property the treasurer is holding for you – it's easy and it's free! Simply visit the treasurer's website at www.patreasury.gov and click on the "Unclaimed Property" box on the left side of the page or call Treasury's Unclaimed Property Program at 1-800-222-2046.



From left to right, Courtney Schonewolf, Marie Smith, Danielle Cubas and Nick Graveley are ready to help! If you need assistance with any state service, call or stop by my district office and my staff and I will be happy to lend a hand.

Meet my staff!

Those of you who've visited my office or attended one of my district events know my staff is topnotch. They are my representatives in the district with a mission to provide high-quality constituent service. I wanted to take an opportunity to introduce you to them. If you ever need help with a state service or you have a question about a local or state issue, please don't hesitate to contact my office at 215-330-3714 or 16 Old Ashton Road, Philadelphia, 19152. My staff is ready to assist however you need!

Property Tax Rent/ Rebate Deadline Extended

The deadline to file a 2015 Property Tax/ Rent Rebate Program application has been extended from June 30 to Dec. 31, 2016 and my office is here to help!





STATE REPRESENTATIVE

ED NEILSON

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INSIDE:

- Budget update
- Medical marijuana now law
- Meet my staff

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STANDING UP FOR PHILADELPHIA

Fighting for our communities and our families