

FALL 2011

*Dear Friends,*

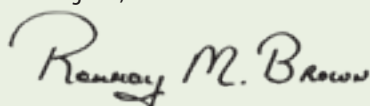
From time to time, I will be sending you a newsletter as a way to keep you informed about legislative happenings in Harrisburg and events throughout the district. This newsletter is just one of the many ways I reach out to residents of the 189th District. Other ways include my website at [RepBrown.com](http://RepBrown.com), my Facebook page at [Facebook.com/RepBrown](https://www.facebook.com/RepBrown) and email blasts. Please contact my office if you would like us to add you to our email list.

As this newsletter reaches you, we are in the midst of our fall legislative calendar, and working on many important issues. I should also mention that in addition to our current agenda, we have had a very productive year: the state budget was passed on time for the first time in eight years, and numerous other laws were enacted to improve our jobs climate, protect our communities and reform state government.

This first edition of my newsletter includes more information about the recently passed state budget, along with important legislation that has passed the House and new proposals that are still being considered in Harrisburg.

It is a privilege working with each of you to help make our area an even better place to live, work and raise our families. I encourage you to let me know your thoughts, opinions and suggestions for state government. My door is always open.

Kind regards,



Rep. Rosemary M. Brown  
189th District

Pennsylvania General Assembly



## THE FACTS ABOUT PROPERTY TAXES

School property taxes remain the primary concern of residents of Monroe and Pike counties and the chief focus of our area's legislators.

As part of the final state budget, the governor signed a bill to help with significant property tax relief. Act 25 of 2011 limits the circumstances by which a school district, under Special Session Act 1 of 2006, may increase property taxes above the state-set inflationary index without voter approval. The original law outlined 10 exemptions under which school districts could bypass the referendum process. Now, school districts will not be permitted to raise property taxes above the inflationary index, unless an exception is sought for special education expenses, grandfathered/electoral debt or pension costs. In addition, school districts seeking one of the remaining exemptions would have to meet certain financial criteria before gaining approval for the exemptions. Previously under Act 1, school districts were engaged in a blanket, no-questions-asked process to claim exceptions.

Due to the difficult and prolonged economic downturn, families have had to tighten their budgets dramatically. School districts also have this challenge and must find creative ways to lower costs while continuing to meet the educational needs of students. In the past, local school districts were given one-time federal stimulus dollars, which are no longer available. An effective funding formula must be put in place that supports our school districts and takes growth in an area into consideration. As many of you know, our area has grown tremendously over the last 10 years and the state funding formula has not been adjusted to support this growth financially.

I am an active member of the School Property Tax Policy Development Team, where we are working diligently to establish legislation to alleviate our tax burden.

The school property tax elimination plan is being reviewed and we are working on drafting possible legislation. There is currently no formal or final legislation drafted at this time. As a strong representative of our district, I want my constituents to be aware that I will not sponsor any "plan" unless the legislation is drafted and has details included, which I am sure will benefit our area.

I encourage you to answer the questionnaire you can find at my office or online at [RepBrown.com](http://RepBrown.com). This is one way you can show your opinion towards alleviating our school tax burden.

I will continue to advance measures in the Legislature that consider both property taxpayers and school districts. It is crucial to find feasible and reasonable solutions that will help both in the short and long term.



Please stop by my office in East Stroudsburg for any questions you may have about state government. My staff is ready to assist you. They include (above photo, from left): Lorna O'Farrell, Linda Meglio, Bethan Cassidy and Kathy Moran. Also assisting the 189th District is Sheila Korick (right), my legislative assistant in Harrisburg.



# Legislative Wrap-Up

Over the past year, the House passed more than 150 substantive bills, and nearly 100 have been signed into law. Many of these bills will translate into necessary reforms and regulations that will enhance our freedoms and protect the citizens of our Commonwealth.

Below is a brief summary of some of these important new laws:

- ✓ **REPEAL OF THE SPRINKLER MANDATE** removes the requirement that automatic sprinkler systems be included in new home construction.
- ✓ **CASTLE DOCTRINE** permits the use of force, including deadly force, as self-defense against an attacker or intruder inside a home or occupied vehicle with specific protection offered against civil lawsuits.
- ✓ **FAIR SHARE ACT** restores fairness when assessing penalties in liability lawsuits. Defendants would only be held responsible for their proportionate share of total damages awarded to compensate a plaintiff.
- ✓ **WELFARE REFORM PACKAGE** includes measures that require the Department of Public Welfare to use an electronic cross-reference system to provide a 19-point check on an applicant's eligibility, creates a standard fraud detection system and subjects drug felons applying for benefits or already receiving them to random drug testing.
- ✓ **PENWATCH REFORM** creates a public online database of all state government expenditures to promote greater openness and transparency of state government to Pennsylvania taxpayers.
- ✓ **CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE LEGISLATION** bans street drugs commonly referred to as "bath salts" as well as synthetic marijuana and Salvia Divinorum.



On June 28, Gov. Tom Corbett signed House Bill 40 into law. Seated with me is Rep. Mike Peifer and (standing, from left) are NRA Pennsylvania Liaison John Hohenwarter and Majority Leader Mike Turzai. The new law allows law-abiding citizens to have the right to defend themselves against violent attackers without incurring civil liability.

## GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES HIS PLAN TO IMPOSE FEE ON DRILLERS

In early October, Gov. Tom Corbett announced his plan to enact an impact fee on drilling in the Marcellus Shale.

Based on recommendations made by his Marcellus Shale Advisory Commission, the governor is proposing an impact fee to be adopted by counties for use by local communities experiencing the actual impacts of drilling. The commission's plan contains 96 recommendations for responsible natural gas drilling in the Commonwealth, including tougher regulations for drilling, stricter penalties for violations, promoting the use of natural gas vehicles, posting more information online for the public, and training Pennsylvanians to work in the industry.

The money outlined in the Corbett plan could be used for the construction, repair and maintenance of roads, bridges and other public infrastructure, and the repair of water, storm water or sewer systems, among other things. Money would also be directed back to state agencies that respond to issues that arise as a result of Marcellus Shale natural gas drilling.

More information about the plan is available by visiting this website: [http://www.governor.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/marcellus\\_shale\\_proposal/20490](http://www.governor.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/marcellus_shale_proposal/20490).



In October, Gov. Tom Corbett visited Monroe County for a local prayer breakfast, where more than 700 local residents participated. It is always nice to welcome the state's top elected leader to our area, especially at 6 a.m.

## MARCELLUS SHALE: THE NEXT STEP

Still on our plate as part of the Legislature's fall session is the issue of whether to tax or impose a fee on drilling in the Marcellus Shale.

Many people believe that we should tax the natural gas as it's being extracted from the ground. This would be recurring revenue that could be used in a multitude of ways: the General Fund, property tax relief, environmental programs, transportation, etc.

Some believe that instead of a tax, companies should be assessed an impact fee every time a well is drilled, with revenue targeted to benefit the areas that are most impacted by gas drilling. I believe impact fees should stay local and allow municipalities and counties the financial means to protect the areas experiencing the majority of drilling.

Numerous proposals are in the House and Senate that call for a tax or a fee. They all differ on where and how the money should be spent. They include:

- **HOUSE BILL 1671**, which would create a severance tax on the extraction of natural gas, which would then be used to reduce the current Personal Income Tax rate from 3.07 percent to 2.99 percent.
- **HOUSE BILL 1700**, which would create a graduated annual impact fee on each completed Marcellus Shale natural gas well, with revenue being dispersed to local governments, county conservation districts, the Environmental Stewardship Fund, the Hazardous Site Cleanup Fund and the Motor License Fund to address the impact on state roads and bridges.
- **HOUSE BILL 1705**, which would assess a severance tax on natural gas extraction, with the revenue collected through the tax being distributed through a Property Tax Assistance Program to assist eligible applicants in the payment of property taxes.
- **HOUSE BILL 1715**, which would enable counties to establish an impact fee on each unconventional natural gas well. Fees would be placed on each completed well according to a schedule, which would end once the well is taken out of production or in the 11th year after it has been constructed. The bill would prohibit the impact fee costs from being passed on to the property owner or the lease holder. The fee would be disbursed to the county that hosts the well; the municipalities in which the wells are located; the municipalities in which there are no wells but the local government is within a county which hosts the wells; school districts within a county hosting a well site; and the county conservation district.



In January, I recognized officers of the Delaware Valley Volunteer Fire Company during their installation. Pictured with me are (back row, from left): Jim Owens, George Beodecker, Bill Maion, and Ray Chat-taway and (front row) Chief Jeff Graeber.

# 2011-12 BUDGET FACTS AND FIGURES

- The General Fund Budget is \$27.149 billion, a decrease of 4.1 percent, or more than \$1.1 billion. It represents the LARGEST reset of state government spending in decades.
- This is a historic budget in that it is only the third time in nearly 40 years Pennsylvania will be spending less than the prior year.
- Streamlining state government, the General Fund Budget eliminates or combines nearly 100 line-items, eliminating wasteful, non-essential and duplicative programs.
- Funding for education represents 34 percent of the entire budget, or \$9.59 billion, including \$100 million for Accountability Block Grants for school districts to spend as they see fit, including pre-K or all-day kindergarten programs.
- Welfare spending was cut by more than \$400 million from the original proposal but continues to support those residents who truly need that safety net. The Department of Public Welfare line is still 1 percent above last year's level.
- The budget does not rely on any tax increases to be balanced. It was built upon realistic and sustainable revenues. This budget will not create a deficit by spending beyond our means.
- The budget was passed by both the House and Senate and signed on time.

## ON THE TEEN SCENE: WORKING TO MAKE OUR STATE SAFER FOR TEENS

The following is a list of bills the House has passed that help our teens:

**ACT 81 OF 2011** will help teen drivers (and other passengers and motorists) by reducing distractions, encouraging the use of seatbelts and gaining more behind-the-wheel training.

This measure allows for no more than one passenger under age 18 in a vehicle operated by a junior driver for the first six months after receiving his or her license. After the first six months, only three passengers under age 18 are permitted in a vehicle if the junior driver has been free of incidents. In both cases, exceptions are made for family members and if a parent or legal guardian is also in the vehicle.

It also requires all drivers and passengers under age 18 to wear a safety belt and increases the training time for permit holders from 50 hours to 65 hours. Ten of those training hours must take place after dark and five hours must be logged during challenging weather conditions.

**HOUSE BILL 1610** will help ensure that proper steps are taken when a student athlete shows symptoms of cardiac distress, such as fainting and shortness of breath. Those measures include the removal of an athlete from the game or practice by an official, coach, trainer or doctor. The student cannot return to the athletic activity until cleared by a doctor.

House Bill 1610 calls for the development of guidelines and informational materials to educate students, parents and coaches about Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) and its warning signs. Coaches are also required to complete a SCA training course each year.

**SENATE BILL 200** is designed to improve the management of concussions among high school athletes and increase public awareness regarding the injury's devastating effects on young lives. The Safety in Youth Sports Act calls for the removal from play of an athlete who shows symptoms of a concussion, such as confusion, headache, nausea, blurred vision or memory loss. The athlete would not be eligible to return to action until examined and cleared by a doctor.

Under the new law, student athletes and parents are required to read and sign a concussion awareness sheet annually before the student is allowed to participate in a sport, including cheerleading and club sports like rugby and hockey. In addition, coaches must complete a concussion certification course every year.

## WHAT IS A 'COMMONWEALTH'?

You've often heard of Pennsylvania as a "Commonwealth." Simply, the word "Commonwealth" is a traditional term for a political community founded for the common good. In Pennsylvania, the work I do as your state representative is for the common good of all of our state's 12.5 million residents.

As your state representative, I am your link to state government. I help with many state government-related activities, such as state laws, state taxes, state roads and state parks. I am also your voice in the Pennsylvania General Assembly, our state Legislature, which means that I have the responsibility to speak on all matters affecting the entire state of Pennsylvania.

While I serve the Commonwealth, our local congressmen, Tom Marino and Lou Barletta, serve at the federal level. Their offices deal with such items as Social Security, Medicare, trade laws, etc. and voting on legislation that affects the entire country. If residents call my office looking for assistance with federal matters, my staff may often refer them to their offices.

Likewise, residents will often ask my office for assistance with such things as locally owned roads, bridges and trash collection. My office may then refer residents to the local municipality which is affected.

If you're at all unsure of which level of government to call, please contact my office, and we'll help guide you in the right direction.



*It was a pleasure to present Ryan Senholzi with a citation from the House of Representatives for attaining the rank of Eagle Scout. Ryan is the son of Jeffrey and Patricia Senholzi of East Stroudsburg. Ryan has been very involved with numerous leadership positions over the years. As part of his Eagle Scout project, he created "The Orange Trail," which is an access trail from the Lake Naomi Club Community in Pocono Pines through state gamelands and then connects with the Camp Minsi trail system. This will allow the public to hike and enjoy the existing trail system. Congratulations, Ryan!*



*As part of Red Ribbon Week in October, I spoke to about 600 students at Stroudsburg Intermediate Elementary School about the dangers of abusing drugs, alcohol and prescription medications. I urged them to say no to these substances and to resist peer pressure.*



*Also at the installation dinner, I had the honor of recognizing Delaware Valley Volunteer Fire Company's Firefighter of the Year Jim Owens. All of our first responders do a great job protecting our communities. Thank you!*



*On Oct. 15, I was honored to attend the dedication of the Fallen Troopers Memorial Highway on Interstate 84. Joining me at the ceremony were (from left): Lt. Col. George Bivens, State Police Commissioner Frank Noonan, Pike County District Attorney Ray Tonkin, Pike County Commissioner Rich Caridi, Sen. Lisa Baker, Commonwealth Court Judge Kevin Brobson, Lt. Col. Scott Snyder and Lt. Col. Kenneth Hill.*



Earlier this year, I stopped by the Center for Developmental Disabilities of Pike County and spent a few minutes reading to the children. The center provides educational, therapeutic, behavioral, and family support services for children with developmental delays and disabilities from birth to kindergarten age. Currently, more than 200 families in Pike County are receiving services. Pictured at my right is Lisa M. Randazzo, Development Director.



During a recent roundtable discussion with the House Appropriations Committee, I spoke about the need to consider the population growth of school districts in terms of state funding for education, senior services and economic development. The committee held the roundtable with local school superintendents and directors of the local Area Agencies on Aging at Shawnee Inn in Monroe County. Also attending the discussion were (from left) Reps. Mike Piefer (R-Pike/Wayne), Scott Petri (R-Bucks) and Mario Scavello (R-Monroe).



To help assist older residents with the variety of private and public services available to them, I co-sponsored a Senior Fair along with Rep. Mike Peifer (R-Monroe/Pike) and Sen. Lisa Baker (R-Luzerne) in Pike County on Sept. 22. We had a great turnout and it was wonderful to have so many seniors join us that day.

## ATTENTION VETERANS

A veteran will now be a member of the State Civil Service Commission. Until a new law that was enacted this year, a veteran was not required to be on the commission board. Previous audits show that veterans' preference was not being enforced, and this new law is an effort to make sure that veterans are given preference in state Civil Service positions.

Are you registered with the Veterans Administration for health benefits? If not, contact the Office of Veterans Affairs in your county:

Monroe County Veterans Affairs  
One Quaker Plaza, Room 101  
Stroudsburg, PA 18360  
Phone: (570) 517-3187

Hours: Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to noon, 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Pike County Veterans Affairs  
514 Broad St., Milford, PA 18337  
Phone: (570) 296-3563

Hours: Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

## DISTRICT OFFICE GRAND OPENING



Earlier this year, family, staff and guests joined me in celebrating the grand opening of my district office at 696 Seven Bridge Road, Suite 110, on Route 209 near East Stroudsburg.

### DISTRICT OFFICE:

**Physical:** 696 Seven Bridge Road, Suite 101  
(Route 209) / East Stroudsburg, PA 18301

**Mailing:** PO Box 869 / Marshalls Creek, PA 18335  
Phone: (570) 420-8301 Fax: (570) 420-8304

### HARRISBURG OFFICE:

PO Box 202189 / 164A East Wing  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2189  
Phone: (717) 260-6171 Fax: (717) 787-9185

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[www.RepBrown.com](http://www.RepBrown.com)

[facebook.com/RepRosemaryBrown](https://www.facebook.com/RepRosemaryBrown)

## I'D LIKE YOUR OPINION

Several important topics are under discussion in the General Assembly, including property tax reform, a tax or an impact fee in the Marcellus Shale region, Sunday hunting, school choice and the privatization of the state store system.

If you are interested in sharing your views on these topics, please visit my website at [RepBrown.com](http://RepBrown.com) to complete the survey posted. If you do not have computer access, or would prefer to fill out a printed survey, please call my district office to request a paper copy be mailed to you. We look forward to your input.

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