

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Martin Causer

67<sup>th</sup> Legislative District

PO Box 202067

Harrisburg, PA 17120-2067

PRSR STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
HARRISBURG, PA  
PERMIT NO. 432

Fall 2011



ECRWSS  
Postal Customer

## Budget Strikes Proper Balance Between Funding Essential Services and Reducing State Spending

After years of escalating state budgets, this year's \$27.15 billion spending plan takes an important step toward reining in the size and cost of government in Pennsylvania.

The 2011-12 state budget reduces spending by more than \$1 billion – just the third time in the last 40 years that the Legislature has adopted a budget that spends less than the prior fiscal year. And for the first time in eight years, it was done by the June 30 deadline.

As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, my priority was to adopt an on-time, fiscally responsible budget. To be fiscally responsible, we had to balance the need to fund essential services with the need to also control spending. I believe the final plan strikes the right balance for taxpayers.

After Gov. Tom Corbett presented his budget back in March, lawmakers worked hard to restore some of the deep cuts that were proposed for schools, higher education institutions and hospitals. The restorations are being funded primarily by cuts to the state's welfare budget. (See related article.)

For K-12 public education, the final budget restores more

than \$230 million originally cut in the budget put forth by the governor, including more than \$100 million for the Basic Education Funding line item, as well as \$100 million for the highly valued Accountability Block Grant program. The grant program provides flexible funds school districts often use for initiatives such as all-day kindergarten or pre-kindergarten.

Funding for the State System of Higher Education and state-related institutions such as the University of Pittsburgh was also increased in comparison to the administration's budget proposal. While the schools were initially slated to be funded at less than 50 percent of the current year's level, House and Senate negotiators pushed to have the funding restored to more than 80 percent of the current year's level.

The total investment in education exceeds \$10 billion and represents more than a third of the entire state budget.

Recognizing the importance of access to quality health care, lawmakers also worked to partially restore funding for the state's hospitals, including money for critical access hospitals which will be funded at 75 percent of the current year's level. The line item had been eliminated in the governor's proposal.

Mark Your Calendars For  
**Senior Expo**  
**2011**

**Friday, October 7**  
**9 a.m. to 1 p.m.**  
**Roulette Fire Hall, Roulette**

Stop by for helpful information on health care, insurance, nutrition and exercise, fire safety, financial planning, fraud protection, government services and more!



Rep. Martin Causer, with the help of his daughter Morgan, serves hot dogs at his ninth annual Senior Citizens Expo at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. A second expo is planned in Roulette in October.

**Keep in  
Touch!**

Stay informed about what's happening in state government and weigh in with your opinions at **Facebook.com/RepCauser**. Sign up for regular email updates at **RepCauser.com**

# Marcellus Shale Issues Top Fall Agenda

When the House returns to session in September, issues relating to the Marcellus Shale – from impact fees to drilling regulations to water safety – will be among the top items on the agenda.

As the state budget was being completed in June, discussions about an impact fee intensified significantly. In addition to Sen. Joe Scarnati's proposal, several bills have been put forth in the House. Most seek to impose an impact fee rather than an extraction tax, but there is a lot of variation in the proposals about where the money will go.

I will consider an impact fee as long as the money it generates comes back to communities like ours where drilling is taking place, and as long as it is set at a level that will not put Pennsylvania at a competitive disadvantage with other states that have Marcellus gas reserves.

As a member of the House Environmental Resources and Energy Committee, I look forward to the opportunity to further review these proposals and others affecting the growing natural gas drilling industry in our Commonwealth.

Specifically, the committee will be taking a close look at the report issued by the governor's Marcellus Shale Advisory Commission, which makes 96 recommendations for consideration by the Legislature. The recommendations include:

- Assessing an impact fee to address the effects of drilling on communities.
- Increasing the distance between gas well sites and streams, private wells and public water systems.
- Posting more information online about drilling companies and activities for the public.
- Monitoring and documenting the industry's effect on plants, forests, wildlife, habitat, water and soil.
- Assisting PA companies to do business with natural gas industry.
- Training Pennsylvanians for natural gas jobs.
- Developing "Green Corridors" for vehicles powered by natural gas.

## 2010 Property Tax/Rent Rebate Deadline Extended

Area residents eligible for the state's 2010 Property Tax/Rent Rebate program have until Dec. 31 to apply for rebates of up to \$650 based on rent or property taxes paid last year.

The program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians who are 65 years or older, widows and widowers 50 years or older, and those 18 years or older with disabilities.

Eligibility income limits for homeowners are set at the following levels, excluding 50 percent of Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, and Railroad Retirement Tier 1 benefits:

- \$0 to \$8,000, maximum \$650 rebate (homeowners and renters)
- \$8,001 to \$15,000, maximum \$500 rebate (homeowners and renters)
- \$15,001 to \$18,000, maximum \$300 rebate (homeowners only)
- \$18,001 to \$35,000, maximum \$250 rebate (homeowners only)

For information or Property Tax/Rent Rebate claim forms, contact my offices in Bradford (78 Main St., First Floor, 814-362-4400) or Coudersport (107 S. Main St., 814-274-9769). Forms are also available online at [RepCauser.com](http://RepCauser.com).

## Study of Lottery Fund Sustainability Under Way

A resolution I sponsored calling for a comprehensive assessment of the state's lottery fund and the senior citizen programs it supports has been unanimously approved by the state House.

I proposed the study after finding that there had been no review of the health of the lottery fund since gaming was legalized in Pennsylvania in 2004. In fact, no such study has been done since 1994.

Given the importance of the senior citizen benefit programs the lottery fund supports – including PACE/PACENET, Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program, free transit and reduced fare shared-ride services and long-term living services – we need to determine what impact the gaming industry is having on the lottery and ensure we have sustainable revenue in place to continue these benefits.

House Resolution 106 directs the nonpartisan Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to conduct the assessment and indicate whether any changes to law, regulation or policy may be necessary to maintain the future solvency of the fund. The committee is directed to report back to the General Assembly by the end of the year.

The Pennsylvania Lottery was established in 1971 with the specific purpose of funding benefit programs for senior citizens.



*Matthew Causer, son of Rep. Martin Causer, served as a guest page on the House Floor in June. They are pictured with Speaker of the House Sam Smith. Students interested in serving as a guest page should contact Causer's offices in Bradford or Coudersport. Guest pages must be at least 12 years old.*

## **GOP Welfare Reform Measures Included in Budget**

The 2011-12 state budget agreement includes several cost-saving measures aimed at stopping waste, fraud and abuse within the Department of Public Welfare (DPW).

After seeing welfare spending skyrocket by 62 percent during the Rendell administration, House Republicans have been pushing a welfare reform initiative to hold the program accountable while still ensuring benefits are available to those people who truly need it. Some of those initiatives have been incorporated into this year's Welfare Code.

The law requires DPW to use an electronic cross-reference system to provide a 19-point check on an applicant's eligibility and create a standard fraud detection system to stop fraud before it starts. It also requires the department to subject drug felons who are applying for benefits or already receiving benefits to random drug testing. This will ensure welfare benefits are not being used to subsidize drug abuse.

The measure clarifies that people are only eligible for benefits based on the levels allowed in their county of residence, regardless of where they apply. This is important because cash benefit levels differ from county to county, which has prompted some to "shop around" for the highest benefit rates.

Finally, the law calls on DPW officials to cut costs by weeding out fraud in the Special Allowance Program, which was identified by Auditor General Jack Wagner as being among the most misused programs in the department.

Although not included in the new law, there are additional changes we are working to make within DPW. The changes include requiring the use of photo identification to make sure benefits aren't misused; strengthening legal penalties for those who commit welfare fraud; reducing abuse in a transportation support program that helps people in need get to and from medical appointments; and prohibiting the purchase of tobacco with welfare benefit cards.

More information about these welfare reform initiatives is available at [RepCauser.com](http://RepCauser.com).

## **Castle Doctrine Now Law**

Legislation reinforcing a person's right to defend himself or herself in the face of an intruder, also known as the Castle Doctrine, is now law.

Act 10 of 2011 recognizes that law-abiding citizens under attack should not have to retreat before taking action to protect themselves. It reaffirms our right to protect ourselves, not only in our homes but in our vehicles or any other place we have a legal right to be.

The measure creates a presumption in law that an attacker or intruder intends to do great bodily harm and therefore force, including deadly force, may be used to protect oneself, one's family and others in the face of an attack while at home or in an occupied vehicle. The presumption also applies if a person is trying to unlawfully remove an occupant, against the occupant's will, from a home or vehicle.

The presumption would not apply if the person entering a home was another resident of the home, a law enforcement officer or a parent, grandparent or other guardian removing a child from the home or vehicle. It also would not apply if a person was using his or her home or vehicle to further criminal activity.

Finally, the law offers specific protection against civil liability for the lawful use of force in self-defense.



*Rep. Martin Causer participated in the official bill signing of Act 10 of 2011, the Castle Doctrine.*

## **814 Area Code Update**

Responding to public outcry that followed the announcement that people in half of the 814 area code region would be getting a new phone number, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) scheduled eight hearings – including one at the Bradford Township Fire Department – throughout the month of August. The hearings were designed to gather feedback on other ways to address the impending shortage of telephone numbers.

The PUC announced late last year that it would split the region in half, assigning a new area code to McKean County and points west. Cameron County and most of Potter County, all except for Shinglehouse, would keep the 814 area code. Citizens launched a petition drive in protest of the change and the PUC agreed to re-evaluate.

Other options available to address the number shortage include different geographic split proposals, as well as an overlay that would allow people to keep their existing phone numbers and area code. Any new numbers assigned throughout the region would come with the new code. This would require 10-digit dialing for all calls, including local ones, but it would not change rates in any way. I have introduced a House resolution calling on the PUC to consider that option.

Neustar, a third-party area code relief planner, estimates existing numbers in the 814 area code will be exhausted by the first quarter of 2015.

For additional information, visit [RepCauser.com](http://RepCauser.com) or [Facebook.com/RepCauser](https://www.facebook.com/RepCauser).



*Rep. Martin Causer presented a citation from the House of Representatives in honor of Lewis Run's centennial. Accepting the citation are Mayor Albert Montecalvo and Council President Frank Langianese.*

## Sprinkler Mandate Repeal Now Law

Legislation to repeal a mandate that would have required the installation of sprinklers in all new single-family home construction is now law.

Installing a sprinkler system could add anywhere from \$5,000 to \$20,000 to the cost of new home construction. The cost tends to be higher in rural areas like ours where people rely on well water and additional work would have to be done to ensure adequate water pressure to support the sprinkler system.

This mandate was another example of government overreaching its bounds, and I am pleased we were able to repeal it. The decision about whether or not to have sprinklers installed in a home should be made by the homeowner, not the government.

I am equally pleased that the law changes the process for updating the state's building code to prevent the automatic adoption of overly burdensome regulations in the future.



Rep. Martin Causer spoke at this year's Austin Memorial Day service. He was joined by his son, Matthew, and daughter, Morgan. They are pictured with Austin resident John Rotello.



Dozens of area senior citizens made their way to Harrisburg on June 7 for AARP's annual Capitol rally. Pictured in the front row, left to right, are: Marion Booth, Arlene Russell, Rep. Martin Causer, Gloria Vecellio, and Anthony Falconi. In the back row: Shirlee Keenan, Elizabeth Lindemuth and Rita Verolini.

## Website to Improve Access to Government Spending Information

To improve transparency in state government, a new law requires the Pennsylvania Treasury Department to create a comprehensive, searchable website of state budgeting and spending information.

The Pennsylvania Web Accountability, Transparency and Contract Hub, or PennWATCH, will initially include information about annual appropriations and expenditures for Commonwealth agencies; identities of vendors receiving payments; and the amount of each expenditure and the funding source.

By the end of 2013, the site will also incorporate hyperlinks to state contracts, a description of the program under which an expenditure is made and the expected outcomes of the expenditure.

The PennWATCH legislation is one of several reform proposals adopted by the House earlier this year. Other measures, currently awaiting action by the Senate, would:

- Increase penalties for lobbyists who violate the state's Lobbyist Disclosure Act.
- Extend whistleblower protections to employees of nonprofits and private sector companies with state contracts who report waste of public money obtained by their employer for services or work.
- Enhance the state contracting process by allowing for public review of a contract not awarded by a competitive bid process prior to execution of the agreement and by prohibiting an employee of the administration who previously worked for a company bidding on a state contract from participating in the evaluation of that proposal.
- Prohibit lawmakers from creating nonprofit organizations that receive public funds.

## Contact Me

To help maintain open lines of communication, I operate two full-time district offices in Bradford and Coudersport, as well as hold monthly office hours in Emporium and Port Allegany on the first Thursday of the month. The offices provide a variety of services, including information about and assistance with applications for various state programs, including those for senior citizens and children, as well as help with resolving matters relating to state agencies. We also help with PennDOT matters and with securing birth and death certificates.

**Bradford Office: 78 Main St., 1st Floor, 814-362-4400**

**Coudersport Office: 107 South Main St., Room 1, 814-274-9769**

**Toll-free: 1-866-437-8181**

**E-mail: [mcauser@pahousegop.com](mailto:mcauser@pahousegop.com)**

**Online: [Facebook.com/RepCauser](https://www.facebook.com/RepCauser)**

**[RepCauser.com](http://RepCauser.com)**

ARE WE CONNECTED ON  
**FACEBOOK?**



GET MORE STATE AND  
COMMUNITY NEWS ON  
**[FACEBOOK.COM/REPCAUSER](https://www.facebook.com/REPCAUSER)**

**[www.RepCauser.com](http://www.RepCauser.com)**