

State Senator **VINCE FUMO**



UPDATE TO THE NEIGHBORS OF THE FIRST SENATORIAL DISTRICT

SUMMER 2005

◆ Fumo Proposes Judicial Reform for Philadelphia

State Senator Vince Fumo proposed a major reform measure for the Philadelphia Court system in June.

Along with state Senator Anthony H. Williams of Philadelphia, Fumo introduced a constitutional amendment that calls for judges on the Philadelphia Common Pleas Court and Municipal Court to be appointed instead of elected.

Under their plan, the Governor would choose from a list of highly qualified candidates supplied by a Judicial Nominating Commission. Appointees would be subject to confirmation by a two-thirds majority of the state Senate.

The appointed judges would have to stand for a retention election initially four years after their appointment, then every 10 years.



At a news conference in the City Hall courtyard June 24, State Senator Vince Fumo explains details of the judicial reform proposal that he is introducing along with Sen. Anthony Williams (l).

"Our method of picking judges has become too heavily dependent on things such as ballot position, campaign contributions, and street money. Judges should serve on the basis of their legal experience, competency, and professional temperament."
— Sen. Fumo

state constitution.

The Fumo/Williams resolution would have to be approved by two successive state Legislatures – the one now seated and the one that will take office in January of 2007, after the 2006 general election. It would then have to pass in a statewide referendum. Additionally, this referendum would have to be approved by a

majority of Philadelphia voters, so that the rest of the state would not be imposing a change rejected by citizens of the city.

The proposed amendment was developed after lengthy discussions with the Philadelphia Bar Association and the statewide non-partisan court reform organization Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts.

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For the plan to be adopted, both the state Legislature and voters would have to agree to change the

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◆ Tax Credits Available for Contributions to Pre-Kindergarten Programs



State Senator **VINCE FUMO**

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HARRISBURG OFFICE
Senate Box 203001
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3001
(717) 787-5662
Fax: (717) 783-5210

E-MAIL
Senator_Fumo@fumo.com

WEB SITE
www.fumo.com

DEMOCRATIC SENATE WEB SITE
www.pasenate.com

In 2003, the state enacted a law that allows businesses to receive tax credits when they make a contribution to approved pre-kindergarten scholarship organizations. The Pre-Kindergarten Tax Credit is administered by the state Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED).

A business can receive a tax credit equal to 100 percent of the first \$10,000 that it donates to a qualified pre-kindergarten scholarship organization during a taxable year, and can receive a tax credit of 90 percent of any additional contribution during that year, up to a limit of \$100,000 per year.

The DCED web site, www.inventpa.com, contains a list of approved pre-kindergarten scholarship organizations, as well as a complete list of eligibility criteria and guidelines under

which a pre-kindergarten scholarship program may be included on the list. It also contains application forms for organizations to be listed, and application forms for business firms to receive tax credits. Or, this and other information is available from DCED by writing to:

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
The Educational Improvement
Tax Credit Program
Pre-Kindergarten Tax Credit
Center for Business Financing
Tax Credit Division
400 North Street, 4th Floor
Commonwealth Keystone Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0225
Or Call
717-787-7120

The law that authorized the program is Act 48 of 2003.



Sen. Fumo visits a pre-kindergarten school in Philadelphia. Businesses can receive a tax credit when they donate to approved pre-kindergarten scholarship programs.



Fumo Proposes Judicial Reform for Philadelphia Continued from page 1

Philadelphia Bar Association Chancellor Andrew A. Chirls applauded the proposal. Speaking for the 13,000 member Bar Association, Chirls said: "This is an important step in the right direction. We are enthused about joining our legislative leaders as they launch an effort that seeks real and substantial improvement over the current electoral system. We know that change will not be easy. We know that legislation is a moving target until it is passed. But we are encouraged today. And we will work with all those who are committed to a merit-based non-elective judicial system for Pennsylvania. For the first time in a long time we have a real sense of hope about this issue."

"Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts applauds Senators Fumo and Williams for taking this important first step to fix Philadelphia's broken system for selecting judges. As a long-time supporter of judicial selection reform, PMC welcomes this new effort to put Philadelphia on the path to a better system."

**—Lynn Marks
Executive Director,
Pennsylvania for Modern Courts**

Fumo and Williams said the amendment is not designed to take politics out of the process. Officials elected by the voters will have integral roles in the selection and confirmation of judges. Rather, the purpose of the change is to ensure that the most qualified candidates are nominated, that campaign money is removed from the selection process, and that a



Supporters of the plan listen as Michael Coard of "Judging the Judges" explains his reasons for changing the judicial selection process in Philadelphia. Left to right are co-sponsor Sen. Anthony Williams, Coard, Sen. Vince Fumo, Lynn Marks of Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts, and Andrew Chirls, chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar Association.

diverse consensus forms around nominees to the bench.

The plan would establish a Judicial Nominating Commission of 19 members, all Philadelphia residents. The commission must include "men and women from civic, labor and business communities and should reflect the geographic, political, economic, ethnic and racial diversity of the City of Philadelphia." Commission members would be appointed by the District Attorney, the Chief Public Defender, the Philadelphia Bar Association, the Governor, state Senate leadership, and the chairs of the two major Philadelphia County political parties.

When a court vacancy occurs, the Commission would offer a list of at least three but not more than five candidates to the Governor. His nominee would be confirmed only by receiving the vote of two-thirds of the state Senate.

No potential nominee could appear on the list submitted to the Governor unless he or she is a member in good standing of the

bar of the Supreme Court, and has demonstrated professional competence, judgment and integrity. Applicants for vacancies on Common Pleas Court must have actively engaged in the practice of law or the teaching of law for 10 years, and on Municipal Court, for five years.

Fumo, who has long favored a judicial appointment process, said the difficulty of achieving that goal statewide, plus the severity of problems that plague local judicial races in Philadelphia, caused him to limit the proposal to the city.



"Maybe if this is successful, other areas of the state might want to adopt a similar merit selection system for their counties. And if it works, it might also be a breakthrough in convincing others to go along with statewide merit selection," Fumo said. "My approach to government is the art of the possible."

◆ Fumo Proposes Increase in Death Benefit for Guard Members

"Those who have been called up to active duty for an extended period of time during an armed conflict are making tremendous sacrifices, both personal and financial. They are away from their families, and they are away from their jobs. If they give the ultimate sacrifice by losing their lives, we should show our gratitude by helping their loved ones to provide for themselves."

— Sen. Fumo

Families of Pennsylvanians who are killed in Iraq or Afghanistan while they are serving in the National Guard would receive a death benefit of \$250,000, under legislation introduced recently in Harrisburg by Senator Fumo. Currently, beneficiaries receive just \$12,000 from the federal government, but nothing from the state.

"Those who have been called up to active duty for an extended period of time during an armed conflict are making tremendous sacrifices, both personal and financial. They are away from their families, and they are away from their jobs. If they give the ultimate sacrifice by losing their lives, we should show our gratitude by helping their loved ones to provide for themselves," said Fumo.

Many National Guard members serving in Iraq and Afghanistan receive much higher pay in civilian life. When they are serving on active duty for extended periods, their family budget suffers, meaning that

families are often already in difficult financial circumstances if the guard member is killed.

"Although I think starting the war in Iraq was a huge mistake, I do support the men and women who are serving there. And this is the very least we can do for them and their families at this terrible time in our history," Fumo said.

The money for the death benefit would come from the state General Fund, but Fumo's legislation also establishes the Fallen Patriots Memorial Fund within the State Treasury, to defray some of the cost. Under that program, taxpayers would have a check-off option on their tax return to dedicate a portion of their tax refund, or to enclose a contribution, to the death benefit.

"Beyond putting a ribbon on their car or lamp post or front door, the Memorial Fund is another way for people to show tangible support to our troops."

— Sen. Fumo



◆ Prescription Drug Help Available for Disabled Who Lack Insurance

A settlement with the nation's largest pharmacy benefits manager will yield \$1.8 million in prescription drug assistance for older disabled Pennsylvanians without health insurance.

Pennsylvania will receive the money as part of a 2004 settlement between Medco Health Solutions, Inc., and 20 states,

resolving claims that Medco violated the states' unfair trade practice laws. Pennsylvania's share will help to cut drug costs for 3,000 residents.

The prescription drug benefit is open to disabled persons who are residents of Pennsylvania, age 55 and older, have no other prescription drug coverage, and have annual incomes of \$20,000 or

less for singles and \$25,000 or less for couples. They can apply for up to \$600 in free generic prescription drugs.

To apply for the prescription drug benefit, call the PACE Clearinghouse at 1-800-955-0989, weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

◆ City Year Offers Service Opportunities

Young people between the ages of 17-24 can serve their community and earn money for education while working for City Year, a national urban youth service corps.

In Philadelphia, members serve full time for 10 months in schools and after-school programs, tutoring, mentoring, running civics programs and leading community service projects. In 12 Philadelphia High schools as well as several middle and elementary schools, they work on developing students' leadership, civic and academic skills, with a goal of helping students to succeed in their school environment, increasing student retention, preparing students for life after school. For younger students, they run an after school program and a socialized recess program.

City Year has operated in Greater Philadelphia for eight years, currently with 175 members. It is part of a national group that is in its sixteenth year and now numbers about 1,000. It is an AmeriCorps program.

Participants receive a weekly living stipend, and an AmeriCorps education grant, as well as several other benefits.

City Year is taking applications in the Greater Philadelphia area. Those between ages 17-24 can learn more by contacting:

City Year Greater Philadelphia
23rd and Chestnut • 2nd Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19103

or by phone at
267-386-7013.

They can also learn more, and download an application, at
www.cityyear.org



Summer Fun Series Returns to Park in Port Richmond

Campbell Square will be the scene of 10 weeks of "Summer Fun" from June through August this year.

The park, which is the oldest public square in Port Richmond, underwent extensive renovations that were completed in 2004. It serves as a first-class central outdoor gathering space that helps to bring neighbors of all ages together, and to revitalize the community.

Senator Fumo obtained some of the funding for the park renovations, and for the summer event program. City and community organizations have also poured time and money into the facility.

The "Summer Fun" series, planned by the not-for-profit

The Friends of Campbell Square, has been popular in the past and is expected to attract even more neighbors this year.

"Campbell Square is a great success story. It shows what can happen when an active community group, local businesses, and government organizations work together to try to make good things happen in a neighborhood," Senator Fumo said.

Along with money from various sources, volunteers have contributed 5,000 combined hours of work to maintaining the park improvements.

June 15 saw the opening of the "Summer Fun" Series with a movie and children's crafts. Later events are listed below.

SUMMER SCHEDULE

Wed., July 20: Movie "Singing in the Rain"

Mon., July 25: Barbershop Harmony

Wed., July 27: Oldie's Night

Wed., August 3: Movie "Mission Impossible 2"

Tues., August 9: Children Step Dancers

Wed., August 17: Eagles Pep Rally

Tues., August 23:
 City Rhythms Orchestra



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