

State Senator **VINCE FUMO**

UPDATE TO THE NEIGHBORS OF THE FIRST SENATORIAL DISTRICT

FALL 2006

■ Fumo and State Attorney General Go to Work on Philadelphia Gun Violence



With incidents of shooting crimes rising steadily in Philadelphia over the past two years, state Senator Vince Fumo used his position as one of the state's chief budget officials to obtain funding for a major attack on illegal gun dealers.

State Attorney General Tom Corbett will establish a new task force dedicated solely to tracking down illegal guns in Philadelphia and arresting the criminals who are putting those weapons onto the street. The money for this effort — \$5 million annually — is a new line item Fumo proposed and fought for as he negotiated the 2006-07 state budget.

“Today’s illegal gun sale is tomorrow’s murder,” said Fumo, who helps to construct the state budget as the chairman of the Senate Democratic Appropriations Committee. “This is something we can do effectively to attack the problem and achieve results right now.”

The purpose of the appropriation is to create a well funded law enforcement group that will



Senator Fumo, center, announces the creation of a NEW law enforcement task force targeting illegal guns in the city. Joining him at a news conference on July 6 are Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne Abraham, left, and state Attorney General Tom Corbett, right. In the back row, (l to r) are state Rep. Harold James and state Sen. Vincent Hughes.

focus exclusively on illegal gun possession, sales and trafficking in an effort to prevent firearms from reaching criminal circles. The unit will be under the

direction of the Attorney General, and will work in cooperation with District Attorney Lynne Abraham and the City of Philadelphia Police Department.

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“We look forward to working hand-in-hand with District Attorney Lynne Abraham and the Philadelphia Police Department in developing a task force to take illegal guns off the streets of Philadelphia,” said Corbett.

Reacting to the surge of gun deaths in Philadelphia over recent months, Fumo approached Corbett with the idea of the task force, and they discussed it with Abraham. Fumo then lined up the support of other legislators from both political parties from across the state to include the money in the state budget for this Philadelphia-focused program. Fumo then got Gov. Ed Rendell to sign off on the funding as well.

Pennsylvania law – under provisions written principally by Fumo 11 years ago — already requires a criminal background check any time a gun is purchased, even a sale between private individuals. Citizens can sell to one another, but they have to go to a licensed dealer who can use the computerized background check system to check the criminal background of the buyer.

That means the straw purchasers and illegal dealers who are selling to criminals in the streets and alleys are breaking the law, and can be prosecuted, much

the same as drug dealers.

“Gun measures are very difficult to get through the Pennsylvania Legislature,” added Fumo, a 28-year veteran of the state Senate. “Meanwhile, too many innocent people continue to

die on the streets of Philadelphia at the hands of criminals who are not supposed to have those guns in their possession. The debate over new legislation will probably go on for a long time in Harrisburg, but we know we can make an impact on the problem by giving substantial financial resources to skilled law enforcement authorities.”

Abraham believes it will be helpful to have a state-level

task force working the gun problem in the city.

“I am grateful for the bipartisan participation of our Legislature,” she said. “We are favorably disposed to forming a strategic alliance with the Attorney General’s Office, which will focus efforts at preventing straw purchases of guns which find their way to Philadelphia.”

Fumo and Corbett announced the new task force at a press conference in Philadelphia in early July, joined by Abraham and a number of other state legislators.

“If we make a concentrated effort to disrupt the commerce of illegal guns, and send a message to illegal dealers on the street that they are now at serious risk, we can prevent a large percentage of guns from getting into criminal hands.”

Sen. Fumo

■ Minimum Wage Increased

Some January, an estimated 420,000 Pennsylvanians who rely on the state minimum wage will receive a long awaited pay raise. After nearly a decade since the last increase in the minimum wage, Pennsylvania will now join the ranks of other northeastern states that have taken the initiative to raise the minimum wage to a more equitable level.

Senate Bill 1090, which increases the minimum wage, passed by a 38-12 margin in June. After its passage in the House, the bill was signed into law by Governor Rendell as Act 112 of 2006. Starting on January 1, 2007, the minimum wage in Pennsylvania will rise to \$6.25 an hour. On July 1, 2007 the wage will again increase to \$7.15 an hour. This is the first time the Pennsylvania legislature has increased the minimum wage since 1988.

“At a time when skyrocketing fuel costs continue to raise the cost of living throughout the state, this bill will bring relief to those families who are in need the most,” said Senator Fumo. “Unfortunately, we’ve learned that we can’t wait on Washington to respond to this critical need. Since the last federal increase, nearly a decade ago, the rate of inflation has far outpaced the purchasing power of the minimum wage. The time for raising the minimum wage is long overdue.”

The new law includes a provision for small business owners which will gradually phase in the wage increase. Businesses that employ fewer than 10 employees will also be required to increase the minimum wage paid to employees, but will do so over a more gradual period of time.

River Wards To Hold Rally Supporting Troops

Community organizations, businesses and community leaders will hold a rally on **September 30** in support of our military forces.

The second annual Philadelphia River Wards Support Our Troops Rally will begin at 7 p.m. at Campbell Square, Belgrade and Allegheny Avenue in Port Richmond.

The hosting organizations are Port Richmond On Patrol and Civic Association, the Port Richmond Community Group, the Ancient Order of Hibernians Division 51 from Fishtown, the AOH Division 87 from Port Richmond, and the Fishtown Neighbors Association. Many other groups, businesses and officials, including Senator Vince Fumo, are co-sponsors.

The event is not a pro-war or anti-war rally. It is only about showing support for the men and women serving our country in uniform, and their families.

Last year, about 1,000 people turned out for the first annual rally.



Political Protests at Fallen Soldiers Funerals Banned

In recognition of the Pennsylvanians who have sacrificed their lives in military service for our nation, Senate Bill 1190 passed the Legislature and has been signed into law by Governor Rendell. It prohibits political demonstrations at funerals and memorial services of fallen soldiers. Beginning on August 29, 2006, the Pennsylvania crimes code will be amended so that those

who are found to be in violation of the new law will be guilty of a third degree misdemeanor and liable for additional civil damages.

“At a time when so many Pennsylvanians have selflessly sacrificed their lives during this Iraqi conflict, the Pennsylvania legislature must act to recognize our men and women in the armed services and their families,” said Senator Fumo.



“Passing a bill to honor and venerate the memory of those who have given their lives for this country is a small act that will demonstrate our reverence and appreciation for those who have given their lives in service of our country.”

Help Available for Veterans Who Own Businesses

The Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce will hold an event for military veterans who own their own business on October 25th in Center City. Representatives of government and business will offer information about Vetwork Your Business, a Chamber of Commerce program that seeks to provide Veteran Owned (VOB) and Service-Disabled Veteran (SDVOB) businesses with the training and contacts necessary to gain contract opportunities with large private sector companies.

The October 25th communication session will include a panel discussion with representatives of the Small Business Administration, the Small Business Development Center, Lockheed Martin and Merck. It will be followed by a question-and-answer period. The speakers will cover topics such as laws applying to veteran owned businesses and how veterans can go about obtaining business assistance.

The event is free and open to any veteran or emerging veteran who owns or aspires to start a business. It will take place at the Philadelphia Chamber office, 200 S. Broad St., Suite 700, Philadelphia 19102,

To inquire about the event or to obtain more information about Vetwork Your Business, call **215-790-3649**, or email rossomando@greaterphilchamber.com.

■ Philadelphia Gains from New State Budget and Local Tax Relief Plan

BIG BOOST FOR SCHOOL FUNDING IN 2006-07

With Sen. Fumo playing a key role in the negotiations, the state on July 2 passed a \$26.8 billion state budget for the 2006-07 fiscal year, one that included almost all of Gov. Ed Rendell's agenda for the year. It required no tax increases – and in fact cut some business taxes to help the economy – and it includes a big increase in education funding.

Along with other schools throughout Pennsylvania, Philadelphia was a big winner in education. The budget will provide Philadelphia with a total of \$74 million in new funding for city schools from the major education line items.

That includes a \$39 million increase in basic school funding and a \$3.3 million increase for special education services. Rendell's Accountability Block Grant program will direct another \$10 million to Philadelphia, and another \$7 million will go to Alternative Education Demonstration programs. The state also added \$34 million to the budget to reimburse school districts for charter school costs, and Philadelphia will receive \$14 million of that.

"This was an outstanding budget year for education, and Philadelphia will certainly reap its share of the financial benefits," said Fumo. "We ended last year with a sizable state budget surplus that allowed us to devote a considerable amount of money to public schools."

Another important aspect of this budget is that it makes perma-

nent a \$25 million additional appropriation for Philadelphia schools, which had been allocated on a temporary basis for the past several years.

LOCAL TAX RELIEF PLAN HELPS PHILADELPHIA WORKERS, SENIORS

Wage tax cuts for anyone who lives and works in the city, plus lower property tax bills for senior citizens, are on the way as a result of legislation passed several months ago in Harrisburg.

The new law will allow revenue from gambling to be applied to Philadelphia wage tax reduction, once the 14 casinos are up and running across Pennsylvania. If the state's share of gaming revenue reaches \$750 million per year, Philadelphians would receive slightly more than \$100 million in wage tax relief. Once the state is taking in \$1 billion annually from gambling – a figure it is expected to reach within several years – Philadelphians would realize about \$140 million per year in wage tax cuts.

The gambling money will accelerate the wage tax reductions already scheduled to take place in the city.

Many Philadelphia seniors will benefit from an expanded property tax and rent rebate program that will take effect next year, including about 59,000 seniors who don't currently qualify.

For everyone in the state over 65 – along with widows and widowers age 50 and above, and the disabled – including Philadelphians, the income limit to qualify for the rebate is increasing from \$15,000 per year to \$35,000. (One half of Social Security payments are

not counted toward annual income.) The size of the rebate depends upon income – for those with incomes up to \$8,000 it is \$650; for those between \$8,000 and \$15,000 it is \$500; for those between \$15,000 to \$18,000 it is \$300, and for those between \$18,000 to \$35,000 it is \$250.

In addition, seniors from Philadelphia who earn \$30,000 or less will receive an additional rebate that is 50 percent of the amount they are otherwise entitled to. For example, someone who qualifies for a \$500 rebate under the new state-wide plan would get an additional \$250, for a total of \$750.

That plan is for homeowners. The rebate program for renters continues to have a \$15,000 income limit.

Senator Fumo was one of the main authors of the gambling bill that will produce the revenue that will fuel the tax cuts. He also had a hand in developing the bill to direct a large portion of the money to wage tax relief in the city, while also ensuring that Philadelphia retirees receive a tax break as well.

"We must cut the wage tax to make the city more competitive from a business standpoint," Fumo said. "At the same time, we had to realize that if we used all the money for wage tax cuts, there would be nothing in the legislation for seniors who have already left the work force. That was the reason we had to get the Legislature to go along with a plan that divides up Philadelphia's share of the tax cuts."

In most of Pennsylvania, all of the tax relief is going toward property tax reduction for homeowners of any age.

■ PA's College Savings Plan Now Better Than Ever



Saving for college through Pennsylvania's Guaranteed Savings Plan is now easier and more financially rewarding, thanks to changes made this summer by the Pennsylvania Legislature and state Treasurer Bob Casey, Jr.

Pennsylvania's Guaranteed Savings Plan, one of the so-called 529 plans allowed under federal law, is now tax free and less costly.

Families can use 529 plans to invest money today by purchasing credits that are applied toward future college tuition costs.

In July, Gov. Ed Rendell signed a bill, which Sen. Vince Fumo supported, that makes contributions to 529 plans state tax-deductible.

"This new tax break gives families another incentive to start saving for college now," said Casey, who as state Treasurer manages the plan. "Paying for a child's higher education with money that you've saved costs about half as much as paying for that same education with money that you've borrowed."

Last November, Pennsylvania's GSP became the only 529 plan in the country to earn an investment-grade rating (Triple A) from Moody's Investors Service. Casey said that Pennsylvania's GSP is also the only college saving option that provides both tax breaks for contributions and qualified withdrawals, along with a guarantee that investments will keep pace with tuition inflation.

Over the next 10 years, tuition and expenses at a four-year state college in Pennsylvania are

expected to almost double from \$12,000 to \$20,000.

The new tax law allows any investor in Pennsylvania's GSP—which can be parents, grandparents, relatives or friends — to deduct up to \$12,000 in contributions (\$24,000 if filing jointly) per beneficiary, on their state income tax.

In August, Casey made another change to the plan that will help parents more. Pennsylvania families saving for college will no longer have to pay premiums, or surcharges, on the tuition credits they purchase. The surcharges went into effect in 2003, prior to Casey becoming treasurer, when the GSP fund was facing a \$52 million actuarial deficit.

"The Guaranteed Savings Plan fund made substantial gains this year because tuition inflation

moderated and our investments did very well," Casey said. "We have eliminated the premiums to encourage greater investment in the GSP and to make it one of the very best college savings options for Pennsylvania families."

The change was retroactive to September 1, 2005. As a result, contributions made to GSP accounts since September 1, 2005 and from now on, are now worth more in GSP credits.

There was another piece of good news for the GSP recently. Earlier this summer, Congress extended indefinitely the federal tax exemption for qualified withdrawals from the GSP and other Section 529 college savings plans.

For more information on the GSP, visit www.tap529.com or call 1-800-440-4000.



The Pennsylvania Industries for the Blind and Handicapped (PIBH) honored Senator Fumo as Legislator of the Year for his support of persons with disabilities. He received the award at a dinner near Harrisburg on June 6. Television talk show personality Montel Williams was also honored by the organization and was the keynote speaker at the event. Williams and Fumo congratulated one another during a reception prior to the dinner. PIBH markets products and services provided by persons with disabilities throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and strives to help persons with disabilities achieve a meaningful and productive life, as well as contribute to the economic life of their community.

■ Proposed Marriage Amendment Dies

In June, the Pennsylvania Senate passed a proposed amendment to the state constitution that restricts marriage as a union between one man and one woman only. A week prior to its passage, the Senate Judiciary committee had changed the original House bill to remove provisions that were even more discriminatory. These provisions could have been used to ban civil unions and deny benefits to those unmarried persons who live together, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Once again, Senator Fumo vehemently led the fight to oppose this proposed initiative to legalize discrimination. Ten years ago, with little fanfare, Fumo was one of only five members of the Senate to oppose the passage of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). During this time, Fumo has sought to protect the LGBT community in the Pennsylvania Senate.

"If we are really a country and a state that is about equal protection for all, that means all", said Fumo during the Senate

debate. "If peoples' marriages anywhere are threatened because two people love each other and they happen to be of the same sex, then God help your marriage!

What you are saying, is that the institution of marriage in this Commonwealth is so weak, that we need a Constitutional Amendment to say that it can only be between one man and one woman to protect that 'sanctity of marriage'."

"Marriage is about two people loving each other, caring for each other, wanting to make a commitment to each other, and living together. It doesn't make any

difference what they look like, what the color of their skin is or their sexual orientation. Marriage is about love!"

Because this bill had been amended in the Senate Judiciary Committee, it had to return to the House of Representatives for another vote. The House did not take it up before summer recess, however, so it has effectively died for the 2005-06 legislative session.

If you would like a DVD copy of Sen. Fumo's remarks on the Senate floor, call his office or send an Email to the address in the box below.

State Senator Vince Fumo

1st Senatorial District

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