

STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
**MIKE TOBASH**  
*Serving the people of the 125<sup>th</sup> Legislative District*

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*Dear Neighbor,*

Thank you for taking time to read the first edition of my newsletter. I am honored by the opportunity to represent you in Harrisburg, and I look forward to your feedback about the issues addressed in this newsletter, as well as any other concerns you may have.

The biggest challenge facing the Legislature this year is the state budget. The level of spending during the last few years was unsustainable and not in the best interest of the taxpayers. Governor Tom Corbett is proposing a 3.1 percent cut in spending for the 2011-12 fiscal year. We are reviewing the details of that budget and will work with the governor to adopt a fiscally responsible plan for the coming year.

Other issues on the agenda in Harrisburg include welfare reform, illegal immigration reform, Castle Doctrine legislation, Marcellus Shale drilling, and the repeal of the sprinkler mandate for new home construction.

I hope you will find the information in this newsletter helpful. It is very important to me to keep the lines of communication open, and I welcome your input. You may contact my office any time. You also may keep up with the latest news in Harrisburg by following me on Facebook at [Facebook.com/RepTobash](https://www.facebook.com/RepTobash) and by signing up for email updates on my website, [RepTobash.com](http://RepTobash.com).

Sincerely,

Michael Tobash

**Working Together Toward a Fiscally Responsible Budget**

Gov. Tom Corbett delivered his first budget address to a joint session of the General Assembly in March, unveiling a \$27.3 billion proposal that CUTS state spending by 3.1 percent.

It's the first time in many years that any governor has put forth a plan to reduce state spending. It includes no new or increased taxes and is a necessary response to the struggling economy. Just as families need to live within their means, so does state government.

That doesn't mean cutting spending is easy. Many people have contacted me to voice their concern about some of the governor's proposed cuts, especially those to education funding. Under the proposal, basic education funding to the state's school districts would be rolled back by approximately \$550 million due to the loss of federal stimulus funds. Higher education, including the State System of Higher Education schools and Penn State, would see their state subsidies cut by about 50 percent.

I have met with a number of educators, school superintendents and school board members during the last several weeks about these cuts and their potential impact. Recognizing that a good education is vital to the success of our children, I share their concerns. But I also think it's time to ask ourselves some tough questions:

- When it comes to funding our schools, do we have a revenue problem, or do we

have a spending problem? Pennsylvania school districts have 23,000 more teachers than they did in 1996, and 7,000 fewer students.

- Are the proposed cuts forcing districts to increase taxes or get their spending under control? School spending during the last eight years has far outpaced the rate of inflation.

- Do we need to increase the taxes on our middle class, or do we have a need to increase our tax base? Employers pay taxes, and the earning power of wage earners helps our bottom line.

We must stop spending money to educate our children only to ship those young adults to other communities and states because we have no jobs for them. Instead, we should work together to tighten our belts and make Pennsylvania's education system AND its economy first-rate.

The House and Senate are scrutinizing the governor's proposal, working toward a final plan to be enacted by the end of the fiscal year on June 30. I am committed to cutting spending because the state simply cannot spend money it doesn't have. But there is work to be done on how our limited resources are going to be spent.

For updates about the budget and other state-related issues, visit my Facebook page at [Facebook.com/RepTobash](https://www.facebook.com/RepTobash) or sign up to receive email updates at my website, [RepTobash.com](http://RepTobash.com).

**OPEN HOUSE**

Approximately 150 people stopped by for an open house at Rep. Mike Tobash's Schuylkill Haven office in February. Tobash also has satellite offices in Pottsville, Tilden Township, Tower City and Valley View.



**Keep  
in  
Touch!**

Stay informed about what's happening in state government and weigh in with your opinions at [Facebook.com/RepTobash](https://www.facebook.com/RepTobash). Sign up for regular email updates at [RepTobash.com](http://RepTobash.com).





## House Committee Appointments

I have been appointed to four House committees for the 2011-12 legislative session: Insurance, Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Commerce, and Urban Affairs. The real legwork of the legislative process takes place at the committee level, and I am very pleased with my appointments.

I bring firsthand knowledge and experience to the Insurance Committee, where I expect we will take up some legislation addressing the cost and accessibility of health insurance in the Commonwealth.

Serving on the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee is important given the significant role it plays in the local economy. I want to ensure government is not standing in the way of this important industry.

As a member of the Commerce Committee, I will have the opportunity to work on policies that will make the state a better, more competitive place to do business, thereby helping to create new jobs for the Commonwealth's citizens. The Urban Affairs Committee will address such issues as affordable housing, code enforcement, infrastructure improvements and economic development.

## Reforming PA's Welfare System

With a budget of more than \$10 billion annually, spending in the Department of Public Welfare makes up more than a third of the state's budget. Auditor General Jack Wagner recently identified a number of examples of waste, fraud and abuse in the system, and that needs to be addressed immediately.

We recently introduced a package of bills called WelFair (Fairness, Accountability, Integrity and Responsibility) to help ensure only those who need and deserve benefits receive them.

The House has already approved and sent to the Senate bills that require cross referencing welfare applicants through 19 different databases to confirm eligibility, prevent applicants from "shopping" for benefits in other counties and strengthen penalties for those who commit welfare fraud.

Other measures include:

- Using photo identification to make sure benefits aren't misused.
  - Reducing abuse in a welfare program that helps people truly in need get to and from doctor appointments, pharmacy visits, methadone clinics, dialyses treatments, physical therapy and other medical appointments.
  - Transitioning the fraud-laden special allowance program from grants to a loan-based initiative.
  - Prohibiting the purchase of tobacco with welfare benefit cards.
  - Requiring drug felons who apply for welfare benefits to submit to random drug tests.
- For more information about the WelFAIR initiative, visit [www.RepTobash.com](http://www.RepTobash.com).

## House Renews Effort to Enact Castle Doctrine

Legislation reinforcing a person's right to defend himself or herself in the face of an intruder is back on the legislative agenda after being vetoed by former Gov. Ed Rendell late last year. The House approved the "Castle Doctrine" measure in mid-April, and it is now awaiting action in the Senate.

House Bill 40 creates in law a presumption 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.
- A parent, grandparent or other guardian removing a child from the home or vehicle.

In addition, the presumption would not apply if a person was using their home or vehicle to further criminal activity. The bill also offers specific protection against civil liability for the lawful use of force in self-defense.

Under current law, a person under attack in his or her own home has to retreat before taking action in self defense. That just doesn't make sense. I look forward to getting this bill to the governor for his signature in the very near future.

## Around the District



Rep. Mike Tobash talks with area residents at his legislative breakfast at the Hegins Fire Company.



Rep. Mike Tobash was the speaker at the Pine Grove Hose, Hook and Ladder Fire Co. No. 1 banquet. Pictured (left to right) are State Instructor Mike Kitsock, Pine Grove Chief David Sattizahn, Schuylkill Hose 1st Assistant Engineer Dave Hasenauer, Schuylkill Hose Chief Engineer Chad Hasenauer, Schuylkill Hose Firefighter Jeff Maley and Rep. Tobash.

## State Takes on Illegal Immigration

In recent years, Pennsylvania has seen an increase in the number of illegal immigrants living in our communities. This is having a significant effect on taxpayers through the loss of job opportunities for legal citizens and through public benefits paid to the illegal residents.

I am supporting legislation that aims to remove the incentives for illegal immigrants to come to our state. While I welcome people who come to this country legally, I believe it is important to stem the tide of illegal immigration as soon as possible.

House Bill 41 requires a person applying for public benefits to provide identification and document that he or she is a citizen or permanent resident of the United States.

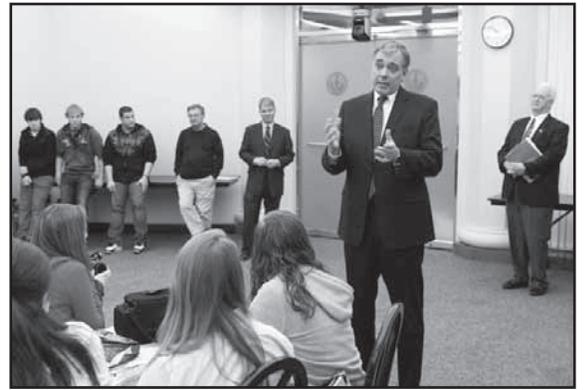
The benefits covered by this bill would include grants, contracts and loans issued by state and local government agencies, as well as unemployment benefits, public housing and assisted housing benefits, postsecondary education assistance, health benefits, food assistance and welfare benefits provided by a state or local government agency. Benefits provided by the federal government would not be covered by this state law.

The bill has been referred to the State Government Committee.

Other measures that address illegal immigration would provide additional authority to state and local law enforcement officers and require employers and government entities to use the federal government's E-Verify program to confirm Social Security numbers of prospective employees.

## VISITING THE CAPITOL

Students from Pottsville Area High School visited the Capitol in late February. Rep. Mike Tobash, Sen. Dave Argall, and Rep. Jerry Knowles had the opportunity to talk with the students about state government.



## House Votes to Repeal Sprinkler Mandate

Legislation to repeal a mandate requiring the installation of sprinklers in all new home construction was approved by the General Assembly in April and, at the time of this writing, awaits the governor's signature.

Failure to repeal the mandate could add anywhere from \$5,000 to \$20,000 to the cost of new home construction. People may choose to add a sprinkler system for safety reasons (statistics show that people who live in homes with sprinklers have a 99.65 percent survival rate, as opposed to 99.45 percent in homes with smoke detectors only). But that is the key – it is their choice.

During these difficult economic times, government should not be adding to the cost of home construction. The mandate, which took effect in January, is already having a negative effect on the home-building industry and the people it employs. The legislation makes the repeal retroactive to Jan. 1.

Watch my Facebook page for updates on this legislation: [Facebook.com/RepTobash](https://www.facebook.com/RepTobash).



## SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY

Rep. Mike Tobash met with children from various area child care centers on St. Patrick's Day. The kids, along with several parents and teachers, delivered shamrocks thanking him for his continued support of their centers.

## Facts About Drilling in the Marcellus Shale

Much of Pennsylvania sits atop the Marcellus Shale, the largest known shale deposit in the world. By some estimates, the shale may hold nearly 500 trillion cubic feet of recoverable natural gas – an amount equal to 13 years of current U.S. natural gas demand.

Harvesting the natural gas from the Marcellus Shale holds great promise for stimulating our economy, boosting job creation and moving the state and nation a step closer to energy independence.

According to a Penn State study, the Marcellus industry generated more than \$8 billion in value added to the Pennsylvania economy in 2010. The industry has been responsible for the creation of more than 88,000 Pennsylvania jobs through 2010 and is projected to stimulate the creation of up to 220,000 jobs by 2020.

An estimated \$4 million is invested in producing each Marcellus Shale well, and every mile of pipeline represents an investment of \$1 million. For every \$1 invested in the state by Marcellus producers, \$1.90 in total economic output is generated.

Many have called for a severance tax on the extraction of this valuable natural resource. While it is true that many states impose such a tax, drilling companies operating in Pennsylvania already pay a significant amount through other taxes.

In 2009, the state accrued an additional \$44.4 million in Sales and Use Tax, Corporate Net Income Tax and Capital Stock and Franchise Tax revenue. Additionally, the state received \$20 million in payroll taxes in 2010; \$12.4 million in oil and gas permit fees in 2010-11; and nearly \$430 million in funding for the Oil and Gas Lease Fund.

It is important that we don't overtax this industry because the Marcellus Shale formation extends beyond the borders of Pennsylvania and the drilling companies will go to other states to find the most favorable tax climate.

It is equally important that we hold drillers accountable for their actions to ensure our air and water supply are protected. In addition to the laws that govern oil and gas drilling operations, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has imposed new water quality regulations and is implementing more stringent standards for the cementing and encasing of well bores as they are drilled into the earth.

All drillers must submit a permit application to DEP, and the agency goes to great lengths to ensure the proposed operation complies with all applicable laws and regulations and will meet standards for ensuring minimal environmental impact. DEP also has increased permit fees for oil and gas drilling to help fund the addition of nearly 100 field inspectors to ensure laws and regulations are being followed.



## Property Tax/Rent Rebate Applications Available

Applications for the state's 2010 Property Tax/Rent Rebate program are now available at RepTobash.com or at my offices in Schuylkill Haven, Pottsville and Tilden Township.

Rebates of up to \$650 on rent or property taxes paid in 2010 are available to eligible Pennsylvanians age 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)

Applications are due by June 30. Call or stop by one of the offices for additional information. Remember my offices can help you complete the forms; there is no need to pay for assistance.

## Additional Benefits for Senior Citizens

Many Pennsylvania seniors are familiar with the Property Tax/Rent Rebate and PACE/PACENET programs, but you may not be aware of a number of other benefits available. Here's a look at a few of those programs:

### Vehicle Registrations

Retired Pennsylvanians receiving Social Security or other pension funds whose incomes are under \$19,200 annually may register one passenger car or non-commercial light truck at a reduced rate.

Instead of the regular \$36 fee for a passenger vehicle, retired Pennsylvanians pay just a \$10 processing fee. The discount does not apply to title fees, transfer fees or sales tax.

Please call or visit my office if you would like to obtain more information about this program.



### Hunting and Fishing Licenses

Pennsylvanians age 65 and older may purchase hunting and fishing licenses at reduced rates of \$13.70 for a hunting license and \$11.70 for a fishing license. Lifetime licenses are also available: \$51.70 for hunting and \$51.70 for fishing. Free fishing licenses are available for Pennsylvania veterans with 100 percent service-connected disabilities.

Licenses may be purchased at license issuing agents, county treasurer's offices, or at the online Outdoor Shop at [www.pa.wildlifelicense.com/start.php](http://www.pa.wildlifelicense.com/start.php).



### Dog Licenses

Pennsylvania dog owners age 65 and older (proof of age required) may obtain licenses for their dogs at a reduced price. The fees are: \$6.45 annually for productive male or female dogs or \$4.45 annually for spayed or neutered dogs. Dog license applications are available at county treasurer's offices, pet and pet supply retail outlets, and online at [www.agriculture.state.pa.us](http://www.agriculture.state.pa.us).



## Help Available at Local Offices

In an effort to make state government as accessible as possible to the people of the 125th Legislative District, I have one full-time office in Schuylkill Haven and part-time offices in four other locations across the region.

A variety of services are available at the offices, including:

- Information about legislation.
- Information and applications for senior citizen benefit programs, including PACE and PACENET, and the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program.
- Assistance with resolving matters relating to state agencies, such as Veterans Affairs, Public Welfare, Labor and Industry, or Insurance, as well as the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the Fish and Boat Commission.
- Voter registration forms and absentee ballot applications.
- Assistance with PennDOT issues.
- State tax forms.

In addition to the offices listed below, I plan to open an additional part-time office in Pine Grove in the very near future. Please contact my office in person, by phone or by email for assistance with any state-related concerns.

- ❑ **Schuylkill Haven Office:** 988 East Main Street, Suite A, Schuylkill Haven Phone: 570-385-8235  
Monday through Wednesday: 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Thursday: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- ❑ **Pottsville Office:** 100 North Centre Street, Pottsville  
Tuesdays: 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Thursdays: 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
- ❑ **Tilden Township Office:** 874 Hex Highway, Hamburg  
First and third Thursdays of each month, 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- ❑ **Tower City Office:** (Tower City Municipal Building), 219 E. Colliery Ave., Tower City  
Third Saturday of each month: 9 a.m. to noon.
- ❑ **Valley View Office:** 1012 W. Main St., Valley View  
First and third Wednesdays of each month: 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.



Rep. Mike Tobash took the oath of office Jan. 4 at the state Capitol. Pictured (left to right) are his wife, Amie, and daughters Lexi and Mikaela.



RepTobash.com



Facebook.com/RepTobash



mtobash@pahousegop.com