

State Senator **VINCE FUMO**



UPDATE TO THE NEIGHBORS OF THE FIRST SENATORIAL DISTRICT

FALL 2007

A message from **Senator Fumo**

■ **New Budget Means Progress for State, Philadelphia**

The final product is an excellent state budget that contains significant aid for Philadelphia, as well as advancements on important statewide problems – with no general tax increases.

In this, my 30th year as a Senator, I remain the senior member of the Appropriations Committee, and once again I played a lead role in completing the state budget. It proved to be a long and difficult negotiation, as Governor Ed Rendell insisted on several major new program initiatives, while our Republican colleagues in the Senate and the House were reluctant to approve some of his plans.

As the talks continued past the deadline, I eventually served as the go-between to resolve the last few major outstanding issues and break the deadlock.

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Historical Marker Honors South Philadelphia Market

Senator Fumo helped to dedicate a marker erected by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission during a ceremony on October 12. The state plaque, in the familiar blue and gold design, was placed on the corner of 9th and Christian. It is in the heart of the area that was historically known as the Italian Market, and is now home to businesses that are owned by a variety of ethnic groups and offer a wide selection of international food products.



State Senator Vince Fumo stands beneath the newly dedicated marker, along with (l to r) local historian Celeste Morello, Historical and Museum Commission member Janet Klein, HMC executive director Barbara Franco, and state Rep. Babette Josephs.



Senator Fumo addresses the gathering prior to the unveiling of the historical marker.



Seniors Still Have Time to Apply for Property Tax and Rent Rebates

Many senior citizens are eligible for property tax rebates, but they must apply by December 31.



The tax breaks come via Act 1, which passed in 2006. It uses the revenue from Pennsylvania's slots casinos to make more senior citizens from Philadelphia eligible for property tax rebates, and to increase the amount of those rebates.

Even though we only have five casinos (of the eventual 14) open so far in the state, and the revenue is just starting to come in, the first rebate checks to eligible seniors already went into the mail this summer.

Unfortunately, it is obvious from the statistics that many seniors are missing out on the chance to get back money to which they are entitled – between \$250 and \$650.

In Philadelphia, we estimate

that a total of more than 80,000 seniors are eligible, which is an increase of more than 57,000 homeowners over the number eligible under the previous rebate system. Yet as of the beginning of September, only about 36,000 Philadelphia seniors had actually applied for the property tax rebate – less than half.

The good news, however, is this: Seniors have until Dec. 31 to apply for the rebates they are eligible to receive this year.

Those seniors earning \$35,000 a year or less and who own a home are eligible for a rebate. And you only count one half of Social Security payments toward that income threshold. The cut-off point used to be \$15,000.

You must be a Pennsylvania resident age 65 or older, or be a widow or widower 50 years of age or older.

You are also eligible if you were permanently disabled or medically unable to work.

Renters who meet those age requirements and who make less than \$15,000 per year are eligible, too.

To receive a PTRR application, senior citizens should do one of the following:

Call toll-free: 1-888-222-9190

**Or: Call either of my district offices:
215-468-3866 • 215-423-7670**

Or: Register online at www.papropertytaxrelief.com

Or: There is information on my web site, www.fumo.com

Eventually, a portion of the more than \$1 billion that the state will receive annually from slots gambling will also provide significant wage tax cuts for Philadelphians. But senior homeowners are eligible RIGHT NOW, and they should take advantage of this historic tax break.

STATE SENATOR VINCE FUMO

OFFICES TO SERVE YOU

DISTRICT OFFICES

1208 Tasker Street • Philadelphia, PA 19148

(215) 468-3866 • Fax: (215) 952-1096

2637 East Clearfield Street • Philadelphia, PA 19134

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Senate Box 203001

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Senate of Pennsylvania: 1-800-364-1581 (TTY)

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■ Fumo's Transportation Act Provides Long-Term Funding Solution for SEPTA, Road and Bridge Repairs

A new transportation funding law, conceived and written mainly by Sen. Vince Fumo, will increase state funding for mass transit and for highway and bridge repairs throughout Pennsylvania by an average of almost \$1 billion annually over the next 12 years.

As part of the plan, many Philadelphia students who had been paying their own way to and from school will now be able to ride for free.

Governor Ed Rendell signed the legislation on July 18, just a few days after it passed the Legislature. It is the largest single-year transportation funding hike in Pennsylvania history. The plan will not require higher taxes.

"This solves the severe immediate financial problems for both highways and bridges, and for mass transit systems. We

structured it to grow with inflation, so we should not have to revisit transportation funding for several decades," said Fumo.

In the current fiscal year, the legislation would direct \$450 million to highway and bridge projects around the state and \$300 million to mass transit. The amount of new money jumps to \$900 million – \$500 million for highways and bridges and \$400 million for transit – in two years. All amounts would increase by 2.5 percent each year afterward.

Initially, the money would come from a bond issue that would be repaid over time by revenue from higher tolls on the

Pennsylvania Turnpike and from new tolls to be collected on Interstate 80, pending Federal Highway Administration approval.

For SEPTA, which is the state's largest mass transit system, the new funding plan provides an increase of more than \$156 million, or 44 percent, in operating funding, to a sum of \$507.8 million in the 2007-08 fiscal year. Along with new dedicated capital funding of \$57.8 million, SEPTA's total state subsidy is \$565.6 million.

The need to increase money for Pennsylvania's deteriorating highway and bridge infrastruc-

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–Sen. Fumo



ture, and to assist struggling mass transit systems, had been one of the main financial issues facing state government as it crafted a new budget.

"Transportation is critical to our economy in so many ways. I believe everyone, on a bi-partisan basis, recognized the potential harm to our citizens and to our whole state's well-being if we failed to put additional money into roads, bridges and transit," Fumo said. "I am grateful for the support this plan received."

Students Receive Free Weekly SEPTA Passes

As a result of the additional state resources for SEPTA and with Sen. Fumo's help, the agency worked out a co-operative agreement with the Philadelphia School District to furnish free weekly passes to students who are eligible to receive state-reimbursed transportation assistance – those who live more than one and a half miles from the school they attend.

Prior to this year, many Philadelphia students in grades 7-12 who rode SEPTA to and from school each day had to purchase tokens at cost of \$1 each way. That ended up costing Philadelphia families about \$6 million per year. Under the new system, about 40,000 students will now receive free weekly SEPTA passes, including those from Catholic, charter and private schools.



■ Fumo Presents \$2 Million Grant for Central Library Renovation

In June, the Free Library of Philadelphia took a major step toward renovation of its Central Library facility when Senator Fumo presented a \$2 million state grant for the project.

Fumo joined Phillies short-stop Jimmy Rollins for the announcement at Citizens Bank Park. Rollins signed on as the spokesman for the Central Library Project.

The Library has upgraded each of its 54 buildings throughout the city in recent years, except the main branch on the Ben Franklin Parkway. It is currently raising funds for that renovation. An anonymous donor has pledged \$15 million in a challenge grant, if the Library can raise \$15 million in matching funds.

"I'm excited about the plans to renovate the existing building and add a 180,000 foot addition designed by the world famous architect Moshe Safdie," Fumo said. "I have 13 libraries in my district and I am well aware of the many programs for pre-school children, school age children, small business owners and new immigrants to our city, which the library provides for free to everyone."

Fumo arranged for the state budget grant, with the money to be drawn from the Department of Community and Economic Development fund for Cultural Exhibitions and Expositions.

"The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the City of Philadelphia have been enormously generous; and with our anonymous \$15 million challenge gift and the support of the Senator, we will be ready to break ground next year," Free Library Foundation CEO Linda Johnson said.

"I was especially pleased to hear that the Central Library on the Parkway will have a new

children's library, double in size, and a first-time-ever space for teens. Keeping our children safe

and off the streets is crucial, and libraries provide a safe haven in every community in our city," Fumo said.

Rollins, who for six years has supported a program called JRoll's Readers Club to improve the reading skills of Philadelphia's youth, presented Fumo with a replica

of his number 11 uniform jersey in appreciation of the Senator's efforts.



Senator Vince Fumo (left) presented a check for the Central Library renovation project to (l to r) Phillies Shortstop, Jimmy Rollins; Library Board member and former president of Philly Coke, Ron Wilson; Linda Johnson, CEO of the Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation; and Jerry Clothier, Library Board member and CFO of the Phillies.

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■ As Gun Task Force Gets Results, \$5 Million in State Funds Renewed

In 2006, with the murder rate rising in Philadelphia, Senator Fumo conceived the idea for a special task force under the Pennsylvania Attorney General, specifically targeting illegal gun dealers operating in Philadelphia. Senator Fumo secured \$5 million in state funding for the program, and state Attorney General Tom Corbett went to work with Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne Abraham and the Philadelphia Police Department.

The task force geared up and began operating last December. In the first 8 months, the task force made more than 60 arrests. The majority have involved straw purchases, along with several burglaries and re-sales of stolen guns.

"I believe that over the long haul, one of our most effective strategies against gun violence is to keep weapons out of the hands of criminals, and prosecute the dealers who supply them illegally. I commend General Corbett, District Attorney Abraham, and the Police Department for the work they have done so far. We are off to a good start."

—Sen. Fumo

With the task force achieving results, the \$5 million line item was renewed for a second consecutive year when the 2007-08 Pennsylvania budget passed the Legislature in July.

Sen. Fumo joined Attorney General Tom Corbett, Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne



With several of the weapons confiscated from illegal dealers on display in front of her, District Attorney Lynne Abraham discusses the arrests made by the gun violence task force this summer.

Behind her are (l to r) state Attorney General Tom Corbett, Sen. Vince Fumo, who created the task force, and city Police Commissioner Sylvester Johnson.

Abraham, and Police Commissioner Sylvester Johnson at a news conference in August to announce the issuance of new arrest warrants based upon efforts of the task force.

Over the past year, Corbett, Abraham and the Police Department, used the initial round of state funding to establish the task force and gradually expand it throughout the city. It began working in the sixth and final police division in late summer.

"This program is just getting off the ground, but it is already producing results. We need to keep up the pressure on the illegal dealers who are fueling our city's murder rate. I want them to get the message – the police are not just going after the killers, but they are also going after the people who are giving the killers their tools,"

Sen. Fumo said.

Philadelphia has seen an escalating murder rate in the past several years – one reason Fumo was able to persuade the Legislature to create a police/prosecution unit to concentrate exclusively on illegal guns in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Besides this recent funding plan, Sen. Fumo was the main author of the 1995 revision to Pennsylvania's gun statutes, establishing the state's instant criminal background check system. That law subjects all gun transactions to state police approval, including private sales between individuals, as well as those at gun shows. It thus gives law enforcement authorities another means of pursuing arrest and prosecution when dealers and purchasers evade the required background check procedures.

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■ New Budget Means Progress for State, Philadelphia

The final product is an excellent state budget that contains significant aid for Philadelphia, as well as advancements on important statewide problems – with no general tax increases.

Some of the governor's proposals were put off until later in the legislative session, so we are going to keep working on solutions to things like health care coverage for all Pennsylvanians, and an energy independence strategy that will reduce our reliance on foreign oil, lower consumer energy costs, and result in a cleaner environment.

The biggest single new item was the enhanced transportation funding plan, which I designed. Along with providing money for highways and bridges, it gives SEPTA a huge financial boost. Another story in this newsletter gives you more details.

The job of creating this budget was made easier by a \$475 million surplus from last year, a testament to Gov. Rendell's fiscal management as well as to our careful planning in the Legislature.

Among the hundreds of line items in the 2007-08 budget, here are just a few highlights that may interest you:

- *Increases for many programs for seniors, including Alzheimer's services, home and community-based care programs, and money to make more people eligible for the PACE and PACENET prescription drug programs.*
- *Economic stimulus and job-creation programs to strengthen our business competitiveness, including help for small business, for technology investments, and housing and community revitalization. A new film tax credit that will lead to more film production in the state, providing economic benefits in the Philadelphia area.*
- *Funds for the six-year, \$625 million Growing Greener II program, including state parks and forests, community parks, and open space preservation.*

- *Increases for basic education support by 6.4 percent, or \$567 million. Early childhood education expands significantly, as do science and technology initiatives.*
- *The Legislature increased the Governor's proposed funding level for AIDS programs by five percent.*
- *Enough new funding to enroll an additional 21,000 children for health insurance.*
- *In the Department of Public Welfare, the budget contains expanded program spending of 3.7 percent.*

For additional financial information on these and many other state programs, as well as a complete list of line items in the state budget, and a report on how the budget affects Philadelphia specifically, go to my web site, www.fumo.com

Best wishes for a healthy and happy holiday season,



Sen. Vince Fumo



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