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State Representative

TIM BRIGGS

149th Legislative District



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Investing in PA's future

Dear friends and neighbors,

Pennsylvania has a budget surplus that should be used as a pathway to future success for millions of PA residents. The state's Rainy Day Fund is now larger than it has been at any time during my tenure, and we can opt to choose opportunity over status quo.

I am hopeful the budget surplus is used to:

- Fully fund public education as well as provide much-needed support to PA's higher education system – which has struggled to adjust since the state slashed PASSHE funding a decade ago.
- Finally pass charter school accountability reform, which could mean a savings of more than \$350 million for taxpayers.
- Invest in the workforce by improving access to affordable child care, increasing the state's meager minimum wage (now \$7.25), and support business entrepreneurship.
- Implement corporate tax reform to cut taxes on corporations responsible for creating quality-paying jobs.
- Continue to support health care workers and those negatively affected by the pandemic.
- And do all of this without raising taxes.

In recent weeks, I voted with my colleagues to release \$225 million in funds for health care workers and hospitals, addressing their needs – including staff recruitment and retention. I also voted with my colleagues to release \$25 million in funds for EMS and ambulance rescue crews that have seen their workload skyrocket in the age of COVID-19.

Over the next few months, we will have an opportunity to debate what Gov. Wolf's last budget will look like, and I will continue to advocate for one that uses the surplus to help those hurting and also invests in the future of PA and the future of our children.

Sincerely,



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Dangerous precedent

Unable or unwilling to use traditional legislative means to pass the laws they want, the Republican-controlled General Assembly has increasingly turned to the act of legislating via constitutional amendment.

How a constitutional amendment works:

- The same legislation must be passed by both chambers in two consecutive legislative sessions, for example the House and Senate would need to pass a measure in 2021-22 and again in 2023-24.
- The amendment would then be placed on a statewide ballot for approval or rejection.
- If the amendment stands up to legal challenges, the state constitution would then be amended.

Why Republicans like legislating this way:

- It bypasses the executive branch and avoids a governor veto.
- It avoids any attempt to compromise on policy, since Republicans own a majority in the PA House and PA Senate.
- The question on the ballot would be worded in a way to make it likely to pass, with PA voters rejecting only six of the 49 constitutional amendments proposed since 1968.

The majority party has introduced constitutional amendments to allow judicial districts to be gerrymandered and allow the General Assembly majority party complete power in redistricting.

Lost in this process – and there have been dozens of constitutional amendments already introduced by the General Assembly since January 2021 – is the inherent danger in this style of “legislating.” It removes checks and balances. It disregards the traditional democratic means, circumvents one branch of government, and pushes a partisan agenda not otherwise capable of passing by ordinary democratic means. Remember, a veto can be over-riden with a 2/3 majority vote in both chambers.



To vote on constitutional amendments, legislators are not required to listen to constitutional experts or even hold in-depth hearings, as we saw with House Bill 2207 – a bill which would put the General Assembly's majority party in charge of redistricting passed out of committee by party line vote in less than 10 minutes. The last few sessions I've introduced a change to this process to require a hearing to be held on any constitutional amendment before it is voted and support changing the requirement to have it pass the House and Senate by super majorities before it can be placed on the ballot.

If the majority party truly cared about the voice of the people, which is always their argument in pushing constitutional amendments, why have they not introduced constitutional amendments to require more stringent background checks on firearm purchases or passed an amendment to protect PA residents from discrimination based on sexual orientation?

Moreover, in February, the PA General Assembly appears on target for historic lows in the number of bills passed that were introduced by the minority party. Zero bills introduced by a Democrat have passed this session, which is unfortunate since we are always stronger when we work together.

Changes to PASSHE

The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education has long had a positive influence across the state and the entire Mid-Atlantic region, providing quality education at the lowest possible cost. For decades it has provided children from middle- to low-income families a pathway to higher education and subsequently a better way of life. I'm a proud product of the state system, graduating from West Chester University, and I serve on the PASSHE Board of Governors.

I am advocating for the state to fairly fund our state system in order to address the fact that the system has continued to suffer from the state slashing its funding about a decade ago.

An increase in tuition has helped contribute to decreased enrollment as well as saddled students with higher student loan debt – which in turn is a problem for the state's economy.

Faced with, at some institutions, plummeting enrollment numbers, PASSHE needed to act in order to preserve the system. A decision moving forward also had to be cognizant of the fact that regional economies rely on the existence of these institutions – thereby making closing schools a terrible option. In an attempt to address the dire financial issues of the system, the board voted to integrate Bloomsburg, Lock Haven and Mansfield



universities in the northeast as well as integrate California, Clarion and Edinboro universities in the west.

The plan is not perfect. The end result will include faculty and administrative realignment, however, it preserves residential campuses with in-person learning while increasing the use of hybrid and remote learning.

I voted against the initial integration plan in April since we had no study detailing the effects this change would have on local economies. I reluctantly voted for integration in July only after requesting a delay and being informed by PASSHE Chancellor Daniel Greenstein, "we're bleeding cash," and any delay in the vote would only make financial issues more dire.

Following phased implementation, consolidated schools will be under the leadership of one president during the 2022-23 fiscal year.

What redistricting means to you

The process of redrawing legislative maps is still uncertain. Sign up for occasional emails from my office at www.RepBriggs.com/emailsignup and I will send an update once the Supreme Court certifies the map. If you are unclear about what this means for you, you can find an online map of the changes at <https://pennsylvania.redistrictingandyou.org/> or you can call my office.



RGGI addresses real issues

The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative addresses pollution and climate change in New England and Mid-Atlantic states.

Pennsylvania has ranked among the worst states in the nation for air quality as well as one of the worst for industrial toxins and one of the worst in pollution health risks.

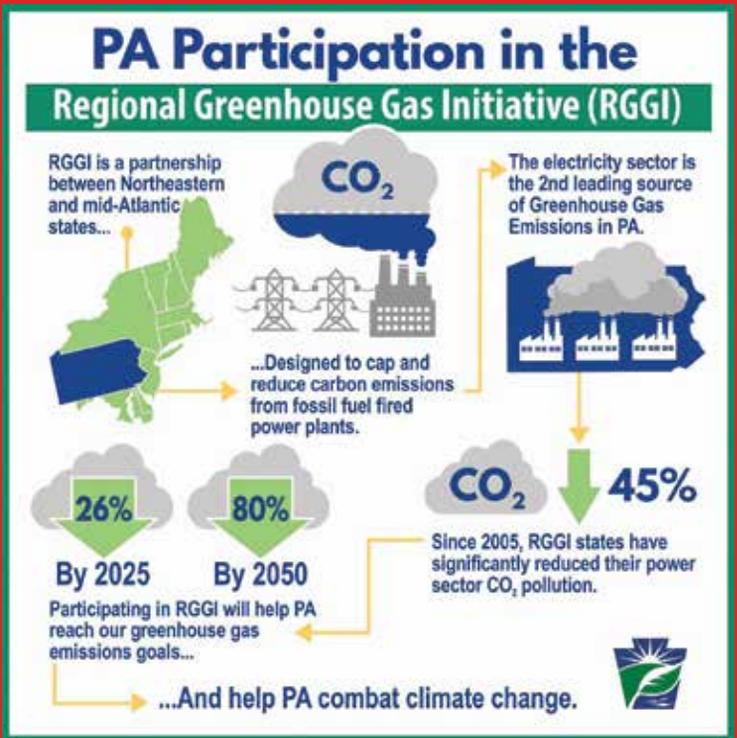
The initiative is an attempt to cap carbon emissions from fossil fuel-fired power plants. Limits are placed on emission and power plants, which in turn purchase allowances for emissions. The environmental and public health benefits to an initiative that limits pollution are obvious, but RGGI also has seen positive economic effects.

From 2008 through 2019, the 10 states participating in RGGI saw their GDP increase by 47%, outpacing the nation's average. It also incentivizes the creation of green energy jobs.

Pennsylvania needs to lay the foundation for the creation of green energy jobs now if it hopes to be competitive with its neighboring states. I will continue to stand up against efforts to force Pennsylvania out of RGGI and support efforts to address the climate crisis.



In February, I joined PennEnvironment and state lawmakers to collect water samples at Valley Forge to learn more about microplastics that contaminate our water.



Prescription help for seniors

Earlier this year, Pennsylvania addressed the need to provide older Pennsylvanians with the affordable medications they need. The state expanded the Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly (PACE) and the Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly Needs Enhancement Tier (PACENET) programs.



PACE and PACENET enrolled more than 250,000 older Pennsylvanians in 2021. The House passed legislation to expand income limits for the program to open it up for an additional 100,000 older adults with 20,000 older adults expected to enroll during 2022.

3G phased out

Starting on the first day of 2022, many mobile carriers began phasing out 3G coverage in order to make room for more advanced network services. This will affect anyone who relies on older cell phones, medical devices, tablets, smart watches, SOS vehicle services and security systems. Once 3G is phased out, older 3G phones and devices – and certain older 4G phones – will no longer be able to make calls, including 911, or send texts.

Contact your mobile provider or consult your provider's website for more information about their 3G retirement plan and whether your phone, or other connected device, may be affected.

Broadband expansion

The pandemic highlighted a glaring need in Pennsylvania for broadband internet expansion, considering when schools shifted to remote learning in March 2020, children with no access to broadband in their house experienced extreme disadvantages. They needed to find local hotspots at libraries or public spaces to continue learning.

After years of work on this legislation by my colleague Rep. Pam Snyder, the House passed a bill to create the Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority, the first official broadband entity in state history. The Broadband Development Authority consists of an 11-member governing authority board, charged with creating a statewide broadband plan and distributing grant money for broadband expansion projects in underserved areas of the commonwealth.

This legislation was long overdue, especially for rural sections of the state and urban communities with insufficient access to broadband. The law addresses the need for broadband for students as well as opening the door for telehealth opportunities in rural communities, so I'm glad to see the state acting to address this shortcoming.



Report Montco potholes

Just a reminder, you can always request road work in our neighborhood for dangerous potholes. You can find the online form at RepBriggs.com under the "How Can I Help You" section or go directly to <https://bit.ly/montcopothole>. We will notify PennDOT or the correct municipal organizations of the issue.

Beware of phone scams

A resident recently informed my office they had suspicions about a phone call that seemed to be a scam. Be suspicious of calls asking you questions that require you to say, "yes." The phrase "Can you hear me?" is often used to prompt you to say yes so scammers can record your voice, and scammers have been known to then ask you to press a number. If you feel you have received a suspicious call or are the victim of a scam, you can report it to the office of Attorney General Josh Shapiro online at: www.attorneygeneral.gov/submit-a-complaint/scams-complaint/



In February, I toured the new Behavioral Health Inpatient Unit at Bryn Mawr Hospital (below), and I toured the Kaiserman Jewish Community Center in Wynnewood and met with new CEO Alan Scher (left).





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My Office Can Help You With:

- Car registrations, special tags, handicap placards, titles and driver's license applications
 - Information on financial assistance for higher education
 - Obtaining and completing state forms of all kinds
 - Voter registration and absentee ballot applications
 - Unemployment compensation, disability and workers' compensation
 - Birth and death certificates
 - Problems with the Department of Human Services (food stamps, medical and income assistance)
 - Pennsylvania income tax questions
 - Consumer complaints
 - Complaints or questions about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
 - Requests for literature of all kinds – bills, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information
 - Citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding accomplishments and family milestones
 - Complaints and problems with insurance companies
 - Renewal of state-issued licenses or certifications
 - Property Tax/Rent Rebate questions
 - Questions about the state lottery
 - PACE prescription discount cards for senior citizens
 - Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups
 - Liquor Control Board concerns
 - Information about federal, state and local government agencies
- Any issue with state government!***

Notary services

**Free notary services are available for constituents at my district office!
Appointments are required. Call 610-768-3135.**