

State Representative

TIM BRIGGS

149th Legislative District



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Wolf's budget proposal offers a bold, promising start

In February, I had the honor of attending Gov. Tom Wolf's first budget address. His bold proposal for rebuilding Pennsylvania's middle class includes increasing educational opportunities, improving the state's job market and creating a more efficient government.

The past few years have been marked by a crippling disinvestment in our public schools, which has not only hurt the education of our children but has also increased the property tax burden on homeowners and small business owners. Parts of my district have been particularly hard-hit by these ever-increasing property taxes, which is why I was glad to see Wolf focus on a way to help homeowners find relief and finding a solution to the larger structural issue.

Properly funding education is a great first step, but Wolf is also calling for implementation of a balanced funding formula, which will ensure that every education dollar is spent where it is needed most. This method of funding our schools was abandoned by the previous administration, and I have consistently supported bills to reinstitute such a formula. I look forward to working with our new governor on this effort to make sure our teachers and students have the support they need.

I've always said that a budget is a statement of priorities. With a \$2.3 billion budget deficit currently facing the state, bold action and innovative ideas are needed to put us back on the right path. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate and the House to ensure the final budget works for the good of all Pennsylvanians.

Committee and caucus posts for the 2015-16 legislative sessions

This year, I was proud to be sworn in for my fourth term representing residents of the 149th Legislative District in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. After years of misguided actions by the Corbett administration, there is a lot to be done to get Pennsylvania back on track and I am eager to get to work.

I was appointed to five prominent standing House committees for the current session. I am serving on the Appropriations Committee again, which considers fiscal-related matters before the House and conducts budget hearings each spring to review and evaluate the governor's budget proposal.

I am also proud to be serving as a member of the Environmental Resources and Energy, Professional Licensure, Transportation, and Judiciary committees, and as the Democratic chairman of the Subcommittee on Courts.

In addition to my work on these committees, I am also serving as the Democratic chairman of the Arts and Culture Caucus, dedicated to supporting arts and culture in Pennsylvania through research, education and policy development; the Bio Technology/Life Sciences Caucus, which has the mission of advancing biotechnology in Pennsylvania, both through academic and industrial support; and the Brain Injury Caucus, which works to help improve the lives of those who have acquired traumatic brain injuries.

Caucuses are an important bipartisan part of our legislative tradition. They allow elected officials to focus on topics of concern to them and their constituents, and to look for solutions outside the normal process of Harrisburg. Serving as a chairman of these three caucuses allows me an opportunity to focus on key issue areas to develop policy.



LEGISLATION



The 2015-2016 legislative session is sure to be a busy time, as we work to restore Pennsylvania's economic prosperity and educational outlook. As a House member, I am actively involved in sponsoring and drafting legislation to address issues I feel are important. Some of the bills I have introduced at the beginning of this session focus on protecting children from firearms, implementing school policies to crack down on bullying, regulating electronic cigarettes when it comes to minors, municipal pension reforms, mandating physical activity during the school day, increasing the transparency of campaign finances and establishing a tax credit for video game development within the state similar to the popular film production tax credit.

In addition to these bills, I also work to partner with my House colleagues in co-sponsoring and advocating for legislation they have introduced throughout the session. For more information about legislation currently before the House, or if you have an interest or a concern that can be addressed by legislation, visit my website at www.pahouse.com/Briggs.

Medicaid expansion announced for Pa.

As you may know, Gov. Tom Wolf has announced his intention to expand Medicaid under the federal Affordable Care Act. This move represents a commitment to the health and well-being of hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians who will now be able to acquire health care coverage.

The full expansion is a win-win-win for Pennsylvanians. Expansion will create between 35,000 and 40,000 jobs, cover hundreds of thousands of uninsured Pennsylvanians, and open the flow of federal money into our state. This infusion will greatly benefit the state as we work to reduce the current budget shortfall, which resulted from a lack of vision from the previous administration. Most importantly, it will lead to a more vibrant Pennsylvania with healthier citizens, and I commend Wolf for doing the right thing.

At the time of his announcement, Wolf provided a few frequently asked questions about the Medicaid expansion changeover, which I have included to the right. As always, contact my office with questions about this or any state-related program.

Who qualifies for coverage under Medicaid expansion?

In addition to people who qualified previously, Pennsylvanians ages 19 to 64 with incomes up to 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) may be eligible for coverage under Medicaid expansion.

How does Medicaid expansion differ from Healthy PA?

Medicaid expansion will allow for eligible adults to be placed into one streamlined adult package. This will increase continuity of care and reduce unnecessary processes to make people eligible for uncomplicated health care coverage faster.

What does this mean for people who are in the Private Coverage Option?

The department is currently working on a plan to transition people into one streamlined adult package without interruption to their coverage and services.

What will happen to the Healthy and Healthy Plus benefit packages?

The department is currently working with the federal government to develop one benefit package for adults. Once that has been finalized, adults in Healthy and Healthy Plus will be transitioned to the new adult package.

What kind of coverage will be provided?

Medicaid coverage meets national standards for coverage. This includes primary care doctors, preventative care, prescriptions and behavioral health parity.

Who will pay for the expansion?

Federal funds will cover 100 percent of the cost of Medicaid expansion for 2014 to 2016, 95 percent in 2017, 94 percent in 2018, 93 percent in 2019 and 90 percent in 2020 and subsequent years.

What do I need to do if I am already covered under Healthy PA?

If you are already covered, your coverage will remain unaffected at this time and you do not have to do anything at this time. As Pennsylvania transitions to the new comprehensive adult package, the Department of Human Services will notify you of any changes prior to those changes taking effect.

What do I do if I want to apply for health insurance?

If you do not have health care coverage, you can apply online at www.compass.state.pa.us.



Protecting our state parks and forests

In January, I was invited by Gov. Tom Wolf to be present when he signed a moratorium banning further gas drilling in state parks and forests.

Former Gov. Tom Corbett made an effort to expand these types of drilling activities in state lands in an attempt to close a budget deficit, but Wolf understands that the potential environmental damage done to this land would hardly be worth the revenue. The state constitution makes it clear that the state has a responsibility to protect the environment on behalf of its citizens. More drilling on these lands would ignore that responsibility and endanger an irreplaceable asset.

Wolf made his announcement in beautiful Benjamin Rush State Park, which highlighted the importance of preserving these natural treasures for future generations. His actions do not stop natural gas drilling in the state; they simply reaffirm what we all know to be true – there is some land that is just too important to disturb.

Pennsylvania finally has a governor who understands the environment is an important consideration, and one that shouldn't be risked to bring in a few extra dollars. I am sure Wolf will continue to be a strong protector of our natural resources and I intend to support him in that mission.



My fellow Montgomery County House Democrats join me at Benjamin Rush State Park to support Gov. Tom Wolf as he leads Pennsylvania into a new era marked by environmental support and respect.



Extraction tax would ensure natural gas drillers pay their fair share

While the moratorium on gas drilling in state parks and forests is a great start, an extraction tax on Marcellus Shale drillers is still needed to ensure that these companies are supporting their obligation to pay a fair share.

Currently, natural gas drillers pay an impact fee, but it is nominal and is supposed to compensate local municipalities and the state for the cost of their drilling activities. However, this is little more than the cost of doing business. A severance tax, as envisioned by myself and many of my colleagues – from both sides of the aisle – would tax the industry at a competitive rate to ensure the industry is contributing to the prosperity of the commonwealth.

I do not believe the enactment of a fair and reasonable severance tax would render Pennsylvania any less favorable for drilling than our neighboring states, all of which currently impose an extraction tax on production of natural gas.

Experts estimate that a modest severance tax of 5 percent has the potential to raise more than \$600 million this year alone, and I support Gov. Tom Wolf's intention to have these funds go toward funding public education. With the state currently facing a \$2.2 billion budget deficit, I believe a reasonable extraction tax is an integral part of trying to close that gap.

Upper & Lower Merion awarded traffic light grants

Upper Merion and Lower Merion townships will share more than \$130,000 in state transportation funding to upgrade traffic signals to use LED technology. I am glad to see this much-needed investment in transportation infrastructure get awarded to our area. Not only will these funds help eliminate needless traffic delays, but the LED signs will also help save energy and money over the long term. Lower Merion Township will receive \$80,000 to upgrade traffic signals at 20 intersections. Upper Merion Township will be awarded \$52,420 to upgrade traffic signals at 30 intersections along DeKalb Pike, Gulph Road, Henderson Road, Valley Forge Road and Swedeland Road. The "Green Light Go" program requires matching grants from municipalities, and is made possible by the Act 89 transportation funding bill I was proud to support.

Supporting the arts in our schools

As chairman of the Arts & Culture Caucus, I believe arts education is integral to a well-rounded education. Whether it's recognizing the talent of local artists in my district through my ongoing Student Art Series or speaking in Harrisburg on behalf of music programs, I'm consistently focused on supporting the arts in our schools and throughout the region.



In February, I was proud to recognize art students from Upper Merion Area High School whose artwork hung throughout my district office as part of my Student Art Series.

I spoke in the Capitol Rotunda in March to commemorate "Music in our Schools Month."



Art teachers and students from Upper Merion Area Middle School were recognized in my district office this April as part of my Student Art Series.

Members of the Upper Merion High School Chamber Strings performed in the Capitol Rotunda in March to highlight the importance of music programs in our public schools.



REPORT A POTHOLE

After the freezing temperatures this winter, it is impossible to not notice that our roads have taken a beating. Potholes can damage cars and lead to accidents, so it's important that we do what we can to fix them before they become even bigger problems.

I have aggressively worked with PennDOT to address many of the problem areas in a timely manner, but if you know of a state road in need of repair, go to my website at pahouse.com/Briggs and click the "Report a Pothole" link. I'll make sure PennDOT is aware of the location of any potholes reported and will track their repairs.

The pothole hotline was established in my first term in office, and it has been great to see other legislators and local communities implement this idea to coordinate with residents.

New law requires background checks for volunteers

Last year, Act 153 of 2014 was enacted, amending the Child Protective Services Law. Under this new law, as of July 1, 2015, “volunteers responsible for the welfare of a child or having direct contact with children” will be required to complete criminal history checks and child abuse clearances every three years. In response to recent events including the Catholic church and the Jerry Sandusky child abuse scandals, the House adopted House Resolution 522 establishing the Task Force on Child Protection to review our state’s child protection laws and make recommendations on how they could be strengthened. The new requirements for background checks were one of 23 pieces of legislation enacted as a result of these recommendations.

I understand there has been some confusion during the transition, and this has caused constituents to contact my office with questions and concerns. It should be noted that while the state does require volunteers who are responsible for the welfare of a child or having direct contact with children to obtain clearances, it is the responsibility of the school districts and individual entities to determine who fits that role.

Under Act 153, volunteers are now required to obtain the following by July 1, 2015:

- Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Background Clearance (\$10)
- Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Abuse Clearance (\$10)
- FBI Criminal Background Clearance with fingerprints (\$27.50)

NOTE: Those who have lived in Pennsylvania continuously for the past 10 years are NOT required to obtain an FBI clearance.

Requiring clearances for those who work with our children is a necessary reform to ensure the safety of our kids. We have always required these checks from school employees, day-care workers and those working with our kids in a professional capacity. We should require the same from those volunteering to work closely with our children.

I have worked with school administrators within my district to help reduce any confusion that may arise as they begin to implement this law, and I am exploring possible amendments to better clarify the law. In addition, I have co-sponsored a bill that would remove the financial burden of obtaining these checks by preventing the State Police and Department of Human Services from charging a fee.

Schuylkill River West Trail Update



I spoke to the media and community leaders at the December groundbreaking ceremony for the Schuylkill River West Trail.

I have been championing efforts to increase

and connect trail projects throughout our region. In December, I was proud to participate in the groundbreaking for a portion of the Schuylkill River West Trail linking Heuser Park to Valley Forge National Historical Park, which is scheduled to be completed by the fall of 2015. I was equally proud to help secure \$600,000 in state grants to kick off the project and help defray the \$1.8 million in costs for this 2.2-mile extension. Once fully completed, the 15.5-mile Schuylkill River Trail will run along the Schuylkill River from Valley Forge National Historic Park through Upper Merion and Lower Merion townships to the border with Philadelphia.

In addition, I’m also focusing on the Montgomery County Chester Valley Trail extension, which will begin at the Schuylkill Expressway and continue into Upper Merion Township, through Bridgeport and into Norristown where it will connect to the Schuylkill River Trail.

These two links are critical in completing The Circuit, Greater Philadelphia’s Regional Trail Network. The Circuit will be a 750-mile network of bicycle and pedestrian trails connecting people to jobs, communities and parks in the Greater Philadelphia Region. As of 2014, 300-plus miles of the 750-mile network were completed. This will attract tourism while allowing residents to better enjoy our scenic treasures.

State grants will assist KOP-BID in developing a linear park

In the fall, I was proud to help secure over \$2.4 million in state funding awarded to the King of Prussia Business Improvement District (KOP-BID) to help with the completion of a linear park located on First Avenue in Upper Merion Township. Along with roadway improvements, the linear park project will ultimately provide green space allowing recreational activities, benches and pedestrian walkways.



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Working for you

My office assists thousands of constituents just like you with problems, questions and concerns about state-related issues.

I could not do it without the help of great staffers who are always ready to serve you. At my district office, you can obtain a variety of informational booklets, brochures and other publications on state programs; receive help completing state forms; and get help solving a problem regarding a state law, program or service.

The office is located at 554 Shoemaker Road in King of Prussia, and is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. To be as open and accessible as possible, we also have satellite offices at locations that might be more convenient for you. Free notary service is also available at all offices.

Problem-solving and constituent service is a lot of what we do, but I am also just as committed to being available to discuss legislative issues and concerns about our state. I have been excited to host a number of community events including town halls, community roundtables and my "Breakfast with Briggs" meetings. This helps me to stay in touch with you and hear what's on your mind. I look forward to seeing you around the district.



My office can help!

Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program
 Free Notary Service
 PennDOT Driver Services

Any state-related service or program!

Save the Date! Upcoming Free Events!

These events are always a success and I am very happy to provide constituents with this service. The events are only for residential document shredding and to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to dispose of their documents, we're asking that you bring only what you can carry.

Community Document Shredding Events

Saturday, May 9
11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Harrilton High School
 600 N. Ithan Ave.
 Bryn Mawr, PA 19010

Saturday, May 16
11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Swedeland Park
 B Street & River Road
 Swedeland, PA 19406

