



25th District ♦ Winter 2008

State Senator JOE SCARNATI



Reports to You

Dear Friend,

When I was sworn in as President Pro Tempore of the Senate last January, I vowed to make changes to the way state government operates. First and foremost, I wanted to restore accountability and openness to government and reform the legislative process. Second, I wanted to make sure that taxpayers' interest were protected. For too long, government focused too much on spending money on new expensive programs without concern for those who had to pay the tab. And finally, I wanted to make sure that tax dollars were used wisely – for programs and services that benefit our state residents and job creators.

I'm pleased to say that the Senate has made major progress on all these issues and remains committed to these goals.

As we begin 2008, I'd like to update you on what we have accomplished and talk about some of our priorities for the coming year.

As always, I welcome your input and suggestions – as a public official, it is my responsibility to make sure that your voice is heard. It is a pleasure and honor to serve the hardworking people of the 25th Senatorial District, and I will continue to work diligently on your behalf.

Sincerely,


Joe Scarnati

Scarnati Pushes Senate Reform Agenda

In December, the Senate approved legislation that would give state residents greater access to government records. Senate Bill 1 would revamp and strengthen the state's Open Records Law, which has not been significantly changed since its passage in 1957. We made this bill our number one priority because we are committed to giving taxpayers more information about the government operations that they fund through tax dollars. A stronger Open Records Law will ensure that all levels of government are accountable to the people they serve.

The legislation would make a key change in the current law by adding a "presumption" that all records from Commonwealth agencies and local agencies are public unless they fall under a specific exception established in the law. The exceptions allow certain records to remain private, such as Social Security numbers, medical records, records that would threaten domestic security, and police investigative records.

Senate Bill 1 would also establish a state office that will be the first point of appeal for disputes and provide regular training to local, county and state officials on how the law is to be applied. Passage of Senate Bill 1 is a major step in our reform effort, which has seen great progress since the beginning of 2007. The bill was amended in the House and we will take final action on it when the Legislature reconvenes in January. Other notable reform measures include:

- Limiting Senate session times to between 8 a.m. and 11 p.m.
- Prohibiting robo-calls using Senate funds
- Requiring amendments to be posted on the Internet before they may be offered on the Senate floor
- Establishing a six-hour waiting period before the Senate votes on an amended bill or conference committee report
- Instituting a wage freeze for all Senate employees
- Eliminating private leases for Senate vehicles
- Implementing a co-pay on health insurance for senators and staff
- Strengthening the Sunshine Law (passed in the Senate)



Senator Scarnati meets with an area businessman during a workshop he recently held.

SENATOR SCARNATI'S LEGISLATIVE OFFICES IN THE 25TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT

Senate Box 203025, Harrisburg, PA 17120-3025 • (717) 787-7084 • FAX (717) 772-2755

315 2nd Avenue, Suite 203, Warren, PA 16365 • (814) 726-7201 • FAX (814) 726-7012 • Toll Free (877) 787-7084

410 Main Street, Brockway, PA 15824 • (814) 265-2030 • FAX (814) 265-2040

5 Main Street, Wellsboro, PA 16901 • (570) 724-5231 • FAX (570) 723-5119

Website: senatorscarnati.com

No New Taxes in 2007 Budget

When I talk to folks in my district, one of their top concerns is rising taxes. They have made it clear to me that they want to keep state government spending down, so that they can keep more of their hard-earned money. And they don't want costly new state programs that expand over time – requiring them to pay more in taxes. That's why I fought hard during this year's state budget negotiations to reject tax increases and costly programs that will require our state to spend more and borrow more.

The state's 2007-2008 state budget, passed in early July, DID NOT include more than \$2.5 billion in tax increases sought by the Rendell Administration. All of Governor Rendell's seven proposed

tax increases were rejected, including a sales tax hike, an electricity tax, a payroll tax on job creators, and a tax on trash collection.

In February, the Governor will announce his proposed state budget for the coming year, which must be passed by June 30. Once the budget is proposed, I will look carefully at every area of spending and fight against any tax increase proposals that could have a serious impact on my constituents.

You have my commitment that I will continue to fight against tax increases, excessive borrowing and efforts to hike state spending. Our state must continue to practice fiscal restraint and live within our means, just like families do.

Senate Republicans Blocked More than \$2.5 Billion in Tax Increases

- Sales Tax Increase (\$1.4 billion)
- Oil Company Gross Profits Tax (\$760 million)
- Health Plan Tax (\$60.4 million)
- Trash Collection Tax (\$46 million)
- Energy Use Tax (\$75 million)
- Cigarette Tax (\$49.7 million)
- Cigar/Loose Tobacco Tax (\$27.8 million)

State Tax Dollars Should Not Be Used to Provide Benefits to Illegal Immigrants

America is a country with people of many diverse backgrounds, but we cannot ensure public safety and remain an economic competitor if we do not secure our borders. We cannot continue to use Pennsylvanians' hard-earned tax dollars to provide benefits to those who have entered our country illegally.

That's why I have sponsored legislation in the Senate to prohibit illegal immigrants from receiving public benefits, including Medicaid, welfare and in-state college tuition.

Senate Bill 9 would require anyone

requesting public benefits in the Commonwealth to provide identification proving they are legal residents. Additionally, those seeking benefits would be required to sign an affidavit stating they are a U.S. citizen or an alien lawfully present in the United States.

According to recent studies, there are more than 100,000 illegal immigrants in Pennsylvania. Rather than paying their benefits, I believe we should make them return to their home and go through the proper legal immigration process.

Scarnati Fights To Preserve the Right to Pray Before Senate Proceedings

Recently, an anti-religious group from Washington D.C. notified me that they may file a lawsuit challenging the Senate of Pennsylvania and me over the issue of beginning our Senate session days with a prayer.

This is not just unreasonable but outrageous, and I made it clear that I will continue to allow prayer in the chamber of the Pennsylvania Senate.

It is an integral part of our Senate proceedings and sets the tone as we debate issues that are so important to the people of this Commonwealth.

I am pleased to say that Republican and Democrat leaders stand with me in this belief as does the Lieutenant Governor, who presides over the Senate.

Many of our core beliefs are being confronted every day in this great land of ours, and challenge and controversy seem to be the norm.

However, to capitulate to radical fringe groups that advocate an atheist view is unacceptable. We must stick steadfastly to our core beliefs and preserve the right to open each session day in prayer.

Senate Action Now Available on the Internet

A video feed of the Senate's floor action is now available live via the Internet



for citizens who want to keep in touch with legislative activity. **The live video stream is available by clicking on senatorsarnati.com.**

Making the Senate's floor activity open to anyone with an Internet connection is another step forward in opening government to the people.



Senator Scarnati testifies before a Senate committee on his bill to deny public benefits to illegal immigrants.