



# Senator Joe Scarnati



## REPORTS TO YOU

25TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT • SPRING 2011

### Governor Rendell Vetoes Bill That Would Expand Self-Defense Law

Late last year, the General Assembly gave overwhelming bipartisan support to legislation that would have expanded Pennsylvania's self-defense law. I am deeply disappointed that Former Governor Rendell chose to veto this legislation and put the interests of criminals above those of law-abiding citizens.

House Bill 1926 would have expanded the Castle Doctrine in Pennsylvania. Under current law, individuals have the right to defend themselves against a criminal who enters their home. This legislation would have expanded the Castle Doctrine to

an individual's car or any other place that individual has a legal right to be.

This is a common-sense bill that further allows individuals the right to protect themselves and their loved ones if they believe to be lethally threatened. The basic right to protect ourselves and loved ones, whether they are home, in a vehicle, or in a public place is one of the fundamental premises of our democracy.

I am hopeful we can see this measure signed into law during the upcoming legislative session to protect individuals who act in self-defense.

### Newsletter, E-Updates Now Available

In an effort to provide you with information more quickly and affordably, I am now providing newsletters and other updates through email. You can go to [senatorscarnati.com](http://senatorscarnati.com) to sign up for email updates.

Register Today!



### Follow Senator Scarnati on Twitter and Facebook

Residents of the 25th Senatorial District can now follow me through my new Twitter and Facebook accounts. I set them up to make information readily available to those who are interested in learning more about what is taking place around the district, as well as in Harrisburg. This is another quick and cost-effective way to notify the public of current actions and to get their input.

My Twitter account will help me to better communicate with voters in real time, while my Facebook page gives constituents the ability to view current photos, videos and audio files and offer comments.

To access these accounts please go to:

[www.twitter.com/senatorscarnati](http://www.twitter.com/senatorscarnati)  
and  
[www.facebook.com/senatorscarnati](http://www.facebook.com/senatorscarnati)



*Pennsylvania Supreme Court Chief Justice Ronald D. Castille swears in Senator Joe Scarnati (R-Jefferson) as President Pro Tempore of the Senate after his election by the full Senate.*

## Reforms Make State Government More Open, Accessible

**T**wo years ago, the Senate kicked off the 2009-10 legislative session by unveiling a package of reform bills designed to continue changing the culture of state government by increasing accountability and transparency.

The Senate also adopted a new set of Rules of Ethical Conduct for the Senate to formalize a clear set of rules regarding what activity is permissible and what is not.

The measures are in line with the Senate Republican effort to rewrite Pennsylvania's Right-to-Know Law, to strengthen the Sunshine Law, and to improve the operation of state government. The bipartisan ethics rules are part of my commitment to run the Senate like a business and ensure that it is accountable to state taxpayers. Among the new ethics rules are the following:

- No Senate employee may conduct any campaign activity on Senate work time.
- No campaign activity may be conducted in a Senate office or with Senate resources.
- The solicitation or receipt of campaign contributions on Senate work time or with Senate resources is prohibited.

- No Senate employee may serve as an officer on a campaign committee or a campaign finance committee on behalf of any Senator or Senate candidate.
- No Senate employee may be required to perform campaign activities or to make campaign contributions.
- No Senate employee may be required to perform any non-work-related task.
- Senate mailing lists and email lists may only be used for legislative purposes, and cannot be sold or given to any other entity, including campaigns.
- Clarifies that Senate employees who are responsible for taking or recommending official actions are required to file Financial Interest Statements with the Secretary of the Senate. To ensure that state residents have easy access to Pennsylvania Senate votes, debates, bills and statutes – as well as live video of Senate floor activity – I also have a Citizen Access Page on my website [senatorscarnati.com](http://senatorscarnati.com). Visitors can click on the Citizen



Access Page button (on the right side of my home page) to look up bills and amendments, review text of floor debates, and see how senators voted. Information is available for votes in committee and the full Senate.

The site guides users through the process, under the headings "How to View Senate Votes and Debates," "How to Search Pennsylvania Statutes," and "How to View Lobbyist Disclosure Reports."

Citizens have a right to access this information, and the Citizen Access Page is a great starting point for navigating the various online sources where the information is found.

The Citizen Access Page is part of the ongoing effort to provide greater transparency in the Senate. Other steps include limiting voting session to between 8 a.m. and 11 p.m. to prevent late-night votes, and waiting at least six hours before voting on an amended bill to give legislators and the public time to understand the changes before a final vote.

## Scarnati Law to Protect Communities

**P**ublic hearings may now be required to be held in communities where convicted murderers are being released into

group homes, under legislation I introduced last session that was signed into law.

The new law was prompted

by the lack of public information given to the residents in the Jefferson County area when a convicted murderer was to be placed in a local group home. It states that anyone moving to a group home who has been convicted of murder or any crime related to a murder must be reported to the county.

The county can then hold a public hearing where operators of the group home would be required to answer questions from community members.

The public should be notified and given the ability to gain answers as to why a convicted murderer is being located in their neighborhoods. When these individuals are being placed in group homes near our families, friends and children, it is vital that all the facts are being relayed to the concerned members of that respective community.



*Senator Scarnati talks to area residents and students who attended a College and Career Fair which he hosted to provide information for those either entering the job market or pursuing higher education.*



*Local seniors take part in Senator Scarnati's annual Senior Expo, which provides information on state and local programs and services available to older Pennsylvanians.*

## **Property Tax/Rent Rebate Applications Available Now**

The state's Property Tax/Rent Rebate program provides rebates on property taxes or rent paid in the previous year for seniors and disabled Pennsylvanians who are living on a fixed income. To be eligible for a rebate, applicants must be Pennsylvania residents age 65 or older, widows and widowers age 50 or older, or individuals with disabilities 18 years or older and meet income eligibility guidelines.

Seniors can receive a rebate of up to \$650 on property taxes paid in 2010 if household income does not exceed \$35,000, not including 50 percent of Social Security payments, Supplemental Security income and Railroad Retirement benefits. Renters can earn up to \$15,000 and still be eligible for the program. The amount of the rebate is determined by household income, with lower-income households receiving larger rebates.

Property Tax/Rent Rebate applications are available at my district offices. District residents can also apply by visiting [www.revenue.state.pa.us](http://www.revenue.state.pa.us) or by calling toll-free **1-888-222-9190** weekdays between 7:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Applicants who have already signed up for the program and would like to check on the receipt and status of their claim can call toll-free **1-888-PATAXES**.

## **Bill Would Prohibit Illegal Immigrants From Receiving Public Benefits**

**T**his session, I have once again introduced Senate Bill 9, legislation that prohibits illegal immigrants living in Pennsylvania from receiving public benefits, such as Medicaid, welfare, and in-state college tuition.

This has been an issue that I have been pushing very strongly for a number of years, but with the economy in crisis and folks losing jobs, it is even more crucial that we stop providing benefits to individuals who are living outside the law. Pennsylvania citizens who are struggling to make ends meet should not have to use their hard-earned dollars to pay for illegal immigrants.

Federal law prohibits illegal immigrants from receiving state or local public benefits; however, current Pennsylvania law is simply too lenient in enforcing the federal provisions.

My bill will require anyone receiving public benefits in the

Commonwealth to provide identification proving they are legal residents. In addition, individuals would be required to sign an affidavit stating they are a United States citizen, or an immigrant lawfully residing in this county. Any applicant signing the affidavit stating that they are a legal resident would have their status verified by the Federal Systematic Alien Verification of Entitlement Programs operated by the United States Department of Homeland Security.

Illegal immigration drains public funds, creates unfair competition for jobs with American workers, and imposes unnecessary strains on services designed to provide assistance to hard-working taxpayers. My bill would help Pennsylvania to take the lead on the growing problem of illegal immigrants by making it clear that we will not provide government benefits and services to those who enter this country outside the law.

## **Marcellus Shale Industry Presents Opportunities, Challenges**

**W**e in Pennsylvania are witnessing and taking part in the development of a brand new industry. By the end of the next decade, the Commonwealth could be host to a \$13.5 billion Marcellus Shale industry that generates up to 200,000 jobs across the state.

The Marcellus Shale region, much of which is located in this district, has the potential to supply most of the energy needs for the Northeast for the next 100 years. That is good news because it reduces our dependence on foreign oil, creates jobs and oppor-

tunities for area residents and can help to lower energy costs for all Pennsylvanians. But we also face a variety of environmental and governmental challenges as we manage and regulate this energy resource.

Currently, the Legislature is considering a number of bills to improve the safety of pipelines and wells and strengthen environmental protections related to gas drilling. I also support establishing a local government impact fee – to ensure that communities impacted by drilling have the revenue to support

needed changes and improvements.

Recent press reports, originally printed by the Philadelphia media, have questioned my integrity in dealing with the numerous Marcellus Shale state issues. You have my word that every decision I have made, or will make in the future, will be based on what I believe is in the best interests of the residents of the 25th Senatorial District.

The impact of this industry will be felt throughout the Commonwealth. Our goal is to ensure that we manage this resource in a way that improves our economy but also protects our environment and our communities.

# Finding Solutions to Transportation Funding Needs

The Senate Transportation Committee held a series of hearings on transportation funding issues as we seek to find solutions to the number of challenges affecting the state's roads, bridges, rail lines and aviation.

This is a vitally important issue to public safety and our economy, and we want to keep it in the public spotlight and look for innovative ways to fund and improve our transportation systems.

While I am pleased with the federal government's decision not to allow the tolling of I-80, we cannot ignore that we have a transportation funding crisis across this country. The Federal Highway Fund, which helps states fund a significant portion of our road and bridge needs, is almost bankrupt. Unless federal officials come up with a solution quickly, it is going to be left up to the states to find means to support a deteriorating infrastructure.

This will be one of the greatest challenges we in the Legislature face in the coming year, particularly in light of our state's fiscal crisis and our economic situation.

As we work with the new Governor and Administration to craft a new fiscally responsible



budget, we have to make tough, prudent decisions, control spending in areas that are not related to public health and safety and find innovative ways to fund much-needed road and bridge repairs.

## Bill Prohibits Government From Mandating Health Insurance Coverage

Government would be prohibited from mandating that individuals obtain health insurance coverage and also imposing any fines or penalties upon those who decline to do so under legislation I am sponsoring to amend our state's Constitution.

The healthcare reform legislation passed by Congress last year contains a provision which would mandate that individuals purchase health insurance by 2014 or face a substantial fine of up to 2.5 percent of total household income. To date, at least 26 states, including Pennsylvania, have announced that they will challenge the constitutionality of the bill based on this mandate. Legal experts agree that amending a state's constitution is the most legally effective way to challenge the federal healthcare mandate passed by Congress.

While obtaining reasonably priced healthcare insurance should be an affordable option for all Pennsylvanians, it should remain each individual's personal choice whether to do so. My constitutional amendment will clearly state that government does not have the right to mandate that individuals purchase a specific level of health insurance coverage or impose penalties on those who choose not to do so.

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