



State Representative

KAREN BOBACK

Serving the people of the 117th Legislative District

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Summer 2011

Dear Neighbor

The first quarter of the 2011-12 legislative session has been a whirlwind of activity, as we are working to return prosperity to Pennsylvania, encourage the creation of jobs and make Pennsylvania a safer place to live and work.

The House passed nearly 150 bills already, and more than 70 new laws were signed by the governor. These include a measure to provide worker's compensation benefits to firefighters who develop cancer as a direct result of their firefighting duties, lawsuit abuse reform and maintaining PACE/PACENET eligibility for senior citizens who are bumped above income limits by slight Social Security increases.

One of the most important bills signed into law this year is the PennWATCH Act, which requires the governor's Office of Administration to develop, implement and maintain a single searchable, public website through which you can track what government is doing and how your tax dollars are being spent.

As part of the state budget agreement, several important welfare reforms will be implemented, saving the state hundreds of millions of dollars. These include drug testing for welfare applicants who have had a drug felony conviction in the past five years; increasing oversight into the Special Allowance program, where rampant fraud was identified by Auditor General Jack Wagner; creating an Income Eligibility Verification System to detect fraud; and discouraging benefit shopping by basing benefit amounts on the permanent legal residence of applicants.

You can learn about other important legislative initiatives throughout this newsletter. Information about state government happenings is also available on my website, RepBoback.com, and through my Facebook page, Facebook.com/RepBoback.

If you have any questions about the information you read here or any other state matters, do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Karen Boback, Ph.D.
State Representative, 117th District

You're Invited to My OPEN HOUSE

To provide citizens with the best constituent service, I am continually re-evaluating the assistance needed by the communities in the 117th District, including the locations of my offices. I strive to be as accessible as possible to the people I serve.

This year, I moved the location of my Sweet Valley office to 5929 Main Road (off Route 118) in Hunlock Creek to offer constituents from the Luzerne and Columbia County areas of my district a convenient location.

I am hosting an Open House at the new office on Thursday, Sept. 29, and I invite you to drop by to tour the office, meet my staff, learn more about the assistance we provide and partake in some light refreshments.

**Thursday, Sept. 29
5 p.m. to 7 p.m.
5929 Main Road in Hunlock Creek**

I look forward to meeting you at the Open House and discussing your vision for our region and our Commonwealth.



My staff and I are excited to meet you at my upcoming Open House on Sept. 29. Pictured are Ann Houssock, me and Michael Nerozzi.



I was thrilled to meet with fellow AARP participants at the state Capitol when members from across the state came for a lobby day in Harrisburg. Pictured from left are Warren Keller, me, John Headley and Darlene Headley.



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★ ★ ★ ATTENTION VETERANS ★ ★ ★

My office is seeking veterans to participate in a veterans event this fall. We are looking for veterans who served in all conflicts and eras, and all former and present members of the military are welcomed.

I have hosted similar events in the past and received glowing feedback from the participants. The goal is to recognize the heroic service of the members of the U.S. military and to thank them for all they have done for our nation. Information regarding veterans' benefits and services will be available.

If you are interested in participating, please complete and detach the form below, which can be remitted to either of my full-time offices. The addresses are listed on page 4. You can also register your interest on my website, RepBoback.com. When details of the event are finalized, you will be contacted with the date, time and location.

Thank you to all those who served, and God bless America!

✂ cut and mail

Name: _____ Email: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____ Phone: _____

Branch of Service: _____ Dates of Service: _____

Conflict/Era (if any): _____

Veterans Assistance Available Locally

If you are a veteran or the spouse or dependent of a veteran, monthly assistance is available to you in the Sweet Valley, Tunkhannock and Dallas areas.

I have coordinated with Rep. Sandra Major, Sen. Lisa Baker, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Wilkes-Barre Veterans of Foreign Wars to offer a comprehensive safety net for veterans in underserved areas.

Due to this collaboration, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' mobile veterans center visits our area three times each month. The state-of-the-art, wheelchair-accessible mobile unit provides medical referrals, employment guidance, alcohol and drug assessments, and counseling.

The mobile unit will be available from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. as follows:

- ★ First Monday of the month at the Route 29 and Route 6 Bypass (across the street from Gay's True Value) in Tunkhannock.
- ★ Third Monday of the month at my office, located at 608 Hunter Highway (formerly 6 Cross Country Complex) in Tunkhannock.
- ★ Third Friday of the month at the Dallas Shopping Center on Memorial Highway in Dallas.

From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the third Tuesday of the month, a claims consultant from the Wilkes-Barre Veterans of Foreign Wars visits my Sweet Valley office, located at 5929 Main Road (off State Route 118), to offer support and assistance to veterans.

Appointments for these hours are not required, but hours for the mobile units may occasionally be altered due to the availability of staff. Veterans are encouraged to confirm hours with any of my full-time offices.

A personalized Honor and Remember Flag was bestowed to Jack Cleary, in honor of his son, fallen soldier 1st Lt. Michael J. Cleary, who was killed in December 2005 in Iraq. Pictured with me are George Lutz, founder and executive director of Honor and Remember, and Jack Cleary.



Honoring and Remembering Our Fallen Soldiers

I am thrilled to report that Gov. Tom Corbett has signed into law my legislation to recognize the Honor and Remember Flag as a symbol of the service and sacrifice of all fallen U.S. Armed Forces personnel since the nation's founding.

House Bill 385, now Act 19 of 2011, establishes the Honor and Remember Flag as an official Pennsylvania emblem for fallen armed forces personnel and requires the flag to be permanently placed in Soldiers' Grove near the state Capitol. The adoption of the Honor and Remember Flag by Pennsylvania will help provide a universally recognized symbol that acknowledges the men and women of our U. S. Armed Forces who never made it home.

A soldier or airman who has made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation deserves an appropriate emblem to recognize his or her service to America. I am hopeful that the Honor and Remember Flag will represent Pennsylvania's gratitude, offer some consolation and healing, and help remind us of the value of each individual life given for our freedom.

I sponsored the legislation in honor of 1st Lt. Michael J. Cleary, who was killed in December 2005 in Iraq. His father, Jack Cleary, a dear friend and resident of my district, was presented an Honor and Remember flag on behalf of his son in June 2010.

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ENVIRONMENT, PUBLIC SAFETY AND GOVERNMENT INTEGRITY FOCUS OF 2011 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Drinking Water Protections Key to Marcellus Shale Safety

This session I am continuing my fight to increase protections for drinking water supplies in the Marcellus Shale region.

I have reintroduced legislation that would increase the distance between natural gas wells and any waterway and drinking water reservoir or community water system. My legislation would also specify that drilling may not occur horizontally under such water supplies.

The goal of my legislation is to safeguard our precious natural resources and to ensure citizens are notified of proposed natural gas drilling sites. The priority of the Commonwealth must always be the protection and safety of its citizens.

Ban on So-Called Bath Salts Enacted

In June, Pennsylvania joined a growing list of states that have banned the sale of synthetic marijuana and bath salts marketed as synthetic cocaine. Act 7 of 2011 adds the chemical compounds in these drugs to the state's list of controlled substances.

The effects of the bath salts are comparable to methamphetamine abuse. Abusers of bath salts have made headlines for committing violent crimes and injuring themselves. Several people in our area have died from ingesting the drugs.

The bath salts that are now banned do not include those sold at specialty retailers or department stores, but are traditionally found at hemp stores, tobacco shops and other outlets selling brands like "Ivory Wave," "White Lightning" and "Hurricane Charlie."

House Approves Stronger Punishment for Corrupt Public Officials

Time has not diminished my anger about the horrible abuse of power and lack of basic human consideration that occurred in the Cash for Kids scandal. Since the scheme was uncovered, I have been collaborating with my colleagues to enact meaningful reforms, safeguards and penalties to thwart corruption.

In June, the House adopted three measures to fight corruption, including my House Bill 1567, which would amend the Public Employee Pension Forfeiture Act to mandate immediate forfeiture of pension benefits when a plea of guilty or no contest is entered, or when a finding of guilt occurs. The legislation would apply to employer contributions to a public pension. Money contributed by an employee would be returned to the individual. An acquittal would result in the reinstatement of full pension benefits.

Other anti-corruption measures approved by the House include House Bill 1546, which would add into law recommendations from the Interbranch Commission on Juvenile Justice by requiring statistical data on juvenile justice to be compiled and posted on the state website, and House Bill 1436, which would increase the penalty for official oppression from a second-degree misdemeanor to a third-degree felony and set a mandatory minimum sentence of two years for such an offense.

All three bills are now awaiting the Senate's consideration.



On June 28, I attended the bill signing of House Bill 40, known as the Castle Doctrine. I have advocated the measure for several years because it will protect the rights of law-abiding citizens to defend home and family from criminals.

Castle Doctrine Legislation Signed Into Law

I am pleased to report that legislation known as the Castle Doctrine was signed into law as Act 10 of 2011. This new law provides important protections for law-abiding citizens and clarifies a person's rights and duties when faced with a threat from a violent attacker.

I co-sponsored the legislation because I believe an individual should have the right to take any action to defend life and family against violence without the fear of criminal or civil reprisal. The measure removes the duty to retreat, so an individual can now stand his or her ground and face an attacker if he or she deems it to be an appropriate response to a threat.

A person acting in self-defense should not be held economically responsible for injuries an attacker receives while in the course of a crime. For too long, the scales of justice have been tipped in the favor of criminals, but this new law returns balance to our system.

Caylee's Law

Since the outcome of the Casey Anthony trial, many concerned citizens have written to me asking for Pennsylvania to adopt new laws to help prevent similar horrific cases of abuse and neglect here.

I share the frustration and outrage of so many Americans regarding this case. Though a jury has acquitted Casey, the fact that she failed to immediately notify authorities either of the child's death or disappearance is incomprehensible.

Pennsylvania's Crimes Code includes a provision which makes it a crime for a parent to knowingly keep the death of his or her child from the proper authorities. Likewise, Pennsylvania's "Endangering the Welfare of a Child" statute could be used to prosecute a parent who knowingly fails to report to authorities that his or her young child is missing. Each of these crimes is a first-degree misdemeanor, punishable by up to five years imprisonment.

I have brought my concerns about this case to the attention of the House Judiciary Committee and requested that it review our laws and take all necessary steps to ensure clarity regarding the responsibility of parents and guardians. I have also co-sponsored legislation that would make such negligence a felony and raise the maximum penalties.

I believe it is the supreme mandate of government to protect citizens, especially those vulnerable individuals who are unable to protect themselves.

2011 Property Tax Survey

One of my main priorities is the complete elimination of school property taxes. I believe with a lot of hard work, we can find a fair method of funding public education that does not rely solely on property owners.

With the 2011-12 budget now completed, I will again urge my colleagues to consider meaningful property tax reform. I would like your assistance in presenting members of the Legislature with your vision on how to fund public education.

Please complete the following property tax survey and return it to either of my full-time offices. An online version of the survey is available at RepBoback.com. Your responses are very important to the fall legislative agenda, and I appreciate your assistance in this matter.

1. Do you support the elimination of school property taxes?

- Yes No Undecided

2. What level of school property tax elimination do you support?

- Residential school property taxes only
 Both residential and commercial school property taxes
 Neither

3. The elimination of just residential school property taxes will require identifying an alternative revenue source(s) totaling \$9.1 billion and a constitutional amendment, which will take a minimum of three years to pass. Do you support raising other taxes to offset the elimination of residential school property taxes?

- Yes No Undecided

4. The elimination of both residential and commercial school property taxes will require identifying an alternative revenue source(s) totaling \$12.9 billion. Do you support raising other taxes to offset the elimination of residential and commercial school property taxes?

- Yes No Undecided

5. If you support the elimination of residential and/or residential and commercial school property taxes, which method or methods of taxation do you support to offset the elimination of school property taxes? Please mark all choices you would support.

- Increasing the Sales and Use Tax (a 1 percent increase would garner \$1.34 billion)
 Increasing the Personal Income Tax (a 1 percent increase would garner \$3.25 billion)
 Levying a new tax on retirement income, excluding Social Security, to raise \$2.3 billion
 Applying the sales tax to food to raise \$1.2 billion
 Applying the sales tax to clothing to raise \$757 million
 Taxing all items and services currently exempt from the Sales and Use Tax to raise \$16 billion
 Applying the Sales and Use Tax to clothing items costing more than \$100
 Raising the Real Estate Transfer Tax
 Other: _____
 None of the above

6. In order to completely eliminate school property taxes, either for residential only or for residential and commercial properties, it will require a reserve of funds from increasing other taxes for at least one year, all while paying your current school property taxes. Do you still support the elimination of school property taxes knowing you will pay higher taxes for one year, while still paying school property taxes before school property taxes can be completely eliminated?

- Yes No Undecided

7. Please feel free to write your property tax elimination comments and suggestions here.

8. Please check all the social media sites on which you participate:

- Facebook Twitter LinkedIn

9. Do you follow me on Facebook?

- Yes No

Name: _____

Email: _____

Address 1: _____

Address 2: _____

City: _____

State: _____ ZIP: _____

Phone: _____

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