

State Senator John Gordner

Reports



To the 27th Senatorial District

WINTER 2004

Dear Constituents:

In this, my first newsletter as your State Senator, I'd like to update you on some important initiatives that we have been working on in the General Assembly and provide you with information on upcoming action.

Since I was sworn into the State Senate, I have been working hard to set up district offices, meet with groups and individuals, and develop a legislative agenda that will benefit our area.

I'm committed to bringing more jobs to this area and to making health care more available and affordable for all state residents. I also will be working with my colleagues to find a way to reform our property tax system to reduce skyrocketing increases and make it fairer and less burdensome.

I welcome your input and your recommendations, and look forward to hearing from you. If you have questions, concerns, or need help with state programs or services, please call any of my district offices, located on the back page of this newsletter.

You can also contact us by logging onto my website at www.senatorgordner.com. I enjoy serving as your State Senator.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Gordner".

Legislature Expands Prescription Drug Program for Seniors

Affordable prescription drug coverage is crucial for senior citizens living on a fixed income. Unfortunately, over the past decade or so, the cost of drugs has escalated so rapidly that it has left some seniors unable to pay for their medications.

That's why I voted for a new law that will expand the state's PACE and PACENET programs, to provide prescription drug coverage to more seniors than ever before.

Under the new law, which took effect January 1, 125,000 additional seniors will be covered by PACE and PACENET. Our goal is to reach more people and to ensure that seniors who are already enrolled will continue to receive coverage.

The law raises the current income limits for PACE from \$14,000 to **\$14,500** for single individuals and

from \$17,200 to **\$17,700** for married couples.

Income limits will also increase for PACENET, a program designed to provide coverage to those people whose incomes rise higher than PACE eligibility. These limits will change from \$17,000 to **\$23,500** for individuals and from \$20,200 to **\$31,500** for couples.

Those applying for benefits will be allowed to use their 2002 income information until March 31, 2004. As of March 31, 2004, however, applicants must use 2003 income information.

Seniors who would like more information on PACE and PACENET may contact my office. Seniors may also contact the Department of Aging at 1-800-225-7223, or go to the Department of Aging's website, www.aging.state.pa.us and click on the PACE/PACENET quick link.



Sen. Gordner joins Chris Holcombe and Vell Holcombe of Milton Steel. The company was recently honored by the Central PA Chamber of Commerce with the chamber's Business of the Year Award.



New Law Provides Grants, Loans to Volunteer Firefighters, EMS Squads

Our volunteer emergency responders have a difficult job, and their responsibilities and challenges only grew in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks.

As a strong supporter of our local firefighters and ambulance personnel, I was pleased to vote for a new law that will offer much-needed funding to Pennsylvania's volunteer fire and ambulance departments.

Under Act 17 of 2003, which was signed into law this past summer, volunteer fire departments and

emergency medical services (EMS) squads were eligible to apply for \$25 million in state grants.

The new law created the Volunteer Fire Company and Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Program, providing assistance to local fire companies and volunteer ambulance crews. Grants range from \$2,500 to \$15,000 for volunteer fire companies and \$2,500 to \$10,000 for volunteer ambulance services. At press time, 87 fire companies and ambulance

squads in the 27th Senatorial District applied for grants. They can be used for construction or renovation of facilities, as well as the repair or purchase of equipment, debt reduction, and training and certification of members.

The Pennsylvania Senate also has approved legislation, which I cosponsored, to authorize \$50 million in loans to volunteer firefighting and emergency services. The loans will be funded by a bond issue approved by voter referendum in 2002. Almost 75 percent of voters favored the measure.

The Volunteer Loan Assistance Program provides low-interest loans to volunteer fire, ambulance and rescue companies for the acquisition, rehabilitation or improvement of facilities and equipment.

The program has made more than \$275 million in loans available to the commonwealth's volunteer emergency services community since its creation in 1976.

The high cost of equipment and training has created serious financial difficulties for many of fire and EMS providers. I urge my constituents to remember how important our volunteers are and please consider helping them in any way you can.



Sen. Gordner joins Mount Carmel area veterans to honor those who have served our country during Veterans' Day ceremonies at American Legion Post 91.

Health Care Crisis Averted with Passage of Medical Insurance Measure

A health care crisis that threatened to close doctors' offices and cut off access to care for Pennsylvanians was averted with passage of legislation by the Senate and House late last year.

Under the new law – a portion of new cigarette tax revenue will be used to offset the MCARE bills of health care providers. High-risk specialists such as OB-Gyns and neurosurgeons, who pay the highest premiums, will have 100 percent of their MCARE surcharge abated. Other physicians will receive a 50 percent reduction.

Physicians are required to purchase MCARE insurance by the state on top of their regular liability insurance.

Exorbitant medical liability insurance costs are shrinking the number of physicians and limiting access to health care. Half of the doctors in Pennsylvania are over age 50, and the state has only three orthopedic surgeons under 35. While Pennsylvania is a national leader in the number of medical schools, 75 percent of graduates practice elsewhere, according to the Pennsylvania Medical Society.

The General Assembly passed several measures over the last two years aimed at encouraging more insurance companies to offer medical liability policies in Pennsylvania, at lower competitive rates. Some long-term measures were aimed at reforming the process of filing medical malpractice lawsuits.

Our goal is to preserve the health care delivery system in Pennsylvania and to keep good doctors in our communities.

Senate to Take Up Economic Stimulus Package

As a member of the House, and now as a State Senator, one of my top priorities has been to bring new jobs and economic opportunity to this area. That's why I have consistently supported lower business taxes, job training programs, and economic incentives to help companies locate and expand their operations. All these efforts have paid off.

As we start to see an economic upswing, we need to continue to reduce high business taxes – such as

the capital stock and franchise tax – and develop economic programs that encourage job creation. We need to invest in our colleges and universities and research institutions, and bring good paying opportunities to Pennsylvania – so young people don't have to leave the commonwealth to find a job. Higher taxes and more regulation only stifle business – and hurt our ability to create jobs.

This year, one of the top agenda items – and a top priority for me – will be passage of a major economic stimulus package. This measure will be very important to encouraging business growth and creating new jobs in our communities.

It will provide targeted, affordable and timely funding for local economic development and infrastructure projects that are crucial to business location and expansion.

Among its provisions, the package:

- Encourages job growth and expansion in high-tech and biotech industries, as well as in agriculture and tourism – Pennsylvania's top two industries.
- Creates a Business in our Sites program to provide loans for brownfields redevelopment, in addition to existing and new site development.
- Creates a Core Industries Capitalization program to provide loans to develop or retain manufacturing jobs and for medical facility infrastructure and equipment improvements to promote patient safety.

- Provides for a growth-stage financing program to make loans available to companies between three and seven years old in order to help these companies become more financially stable and better-situated for business expansion.
- Establishes a \$500 million water and sewer infrastructure program.
- Establishes a \$500 million increase in Capital Redevelopment Assistance, with a \$100 million maximum set aside for hospitals and medical facilities, and an additional \$100 million to be utilized for site development projects.
- Provides for the establishment of Keystone Innovation Zones near accredited colleges and universities across Pennsylvania, including those located in our area. The zones will be established within a radius of one mile from the college or university in urban areas and five miles in rural areas, helping to curb the problem of "brain drain" from our communities.

All of these measures are intended to jumpstart our economy and help bring us out of the downturn that our state and nation have faced in the past several years. I believe our Senate Economic Package will help move the economy forward and make Pennsylvania an attractive place to locate or expand a business. I am committed to making sure that it becomes law – so that we can create more jobs for state residents and keep our economy strong.

Two Gordner Bills Signed into Law

Two pieces of legislation that I prime sponsored were recently signed into law by Governor Rendell.

One law allows municipalities to retain fines collected from those convicted of summary harassment offenses. The measure, introduced when I was a House member, corrects a provision of a law passed last year that negatively affected municipalities throughout the Commonwealth. Communities will again be able to retain a portion of fines collected for offenses committed within their borders. This is important to many communities who are facing tight budgets.

The governor also signed into law my bill to establish a "Technology Work Experience Internship Program." Under the program, college students will have the opportunity to obtain a college or university-approved internship or work experience in science, technology or a related field with an emerging technology employer in the Commonwealth.

Sen. Gordner joins 27th District resident and Superior Court Judge Correale Stevens (center) during a recent meeting with Senate Judiciary Committee members. Also pictured (left to right): Senior Superior Court Judge Peter Paul Olszewski, Senator Michael O'Pake, and Superior Court Judge Jack Panella.



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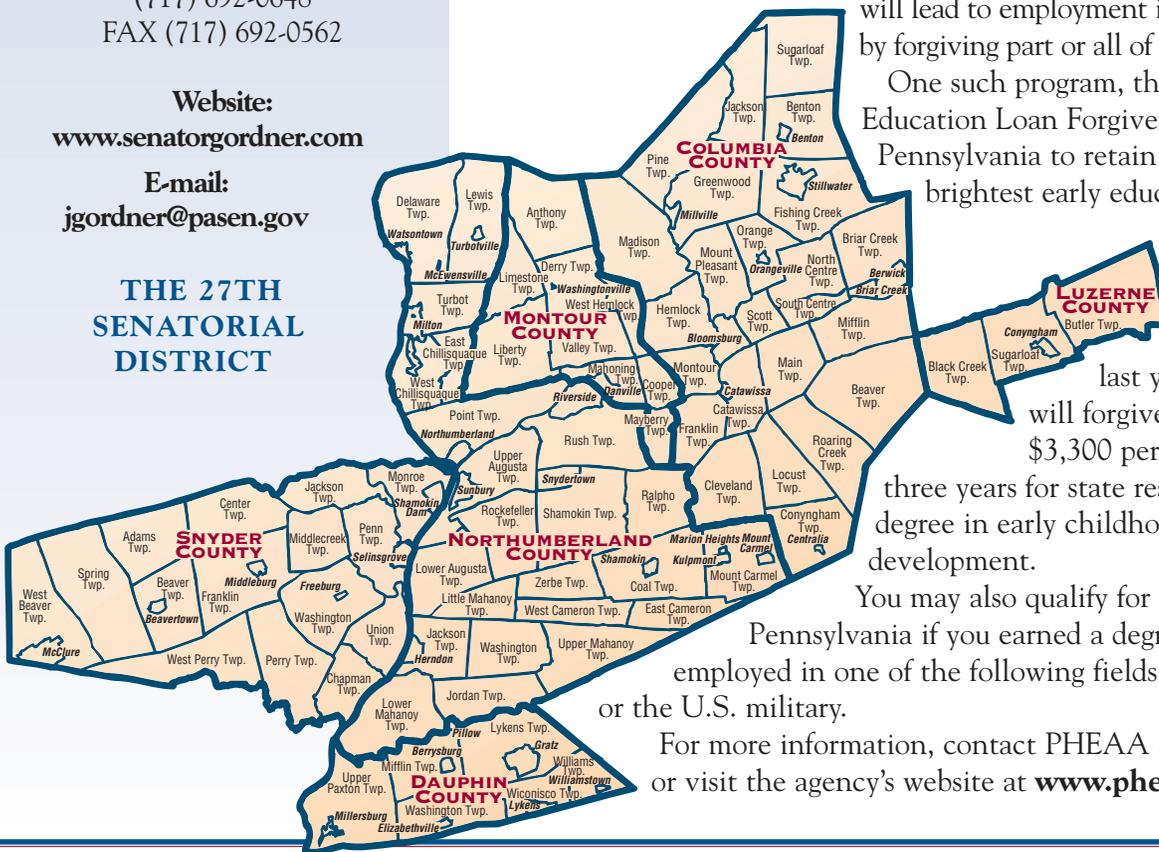
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**THE 27TH
SENATORIAL
DISTRICT**



Students and administrators from Mount Carmel Area High School join Sen. Gordner at a recent Capitol ceremony honoring McKelvy Foundation Scholarship recipients.

PHEAA's Loan Forgiveness Programs Encourage Workers to Stay in PA

The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) offers several student loan forgiveness programs as a means to keep workers in the state and to encourage students to pursue educational goals that will lead to employment in specific occupations by forgiving part or all of their debt.

One such program, the Quality Early Education Loan Forgiveness Program, helps Pennsylvania to retain the states best and brightest early education professionals.

It is similar to a program that I proposed and introduced in legislation

last year. The program will forgive a maximum of \$3,300 per year of loan debt for three years for state residents who earn a degree in early childhood education or child development.

You may also qualify for loan forgiveness in Pennsylvania if you earned a degree for and are employed in one of the following fields: nursing, agriculture, or the U.S. military.

For more information, contact PHEAA at **1-800-233-0557** or visit the agency's website at **www.pheaa.org**.



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