



State Senator

John M. DiSanto

APRIL 2021



UPDATE from The General Assembly

Voters will Decide Three Constitutional Amendments on May 18

When voters head to the polls on May 18, they will have the final say on three potential amendments to the Pennsylvania Constitution. The way the Wolf Administration worded two of these questions has been roundly criticized as confusing and prejudicial, so it is **CRITICAL** for **VOTERS** to **UNDERSTAND** what the questions really mean before casting their votes.



Ballot Question #1 asks whether the General Assembly should be allowed to terminate an emergency declaration if a governor continues to wield emergency powers long after the disaster has passed. A **YES** vote means the General Assembly, as elected representatives of the people, could serve as a check on the governor's power during an emergency to protect the rights of Pennsylvanians.

Ballot Question #2 asks whether future emergency declarations should be limited to 21 days unless extended by the General Assembly. A **YES** vote means the governor would be prohibited from maintaining unilateral control for an indefinite period of time during an emergency.

Ballot Question #3 asks whether new protections should be added for Pennsylvanians based on race or ethnicity. A **YES** vote means the rights of all state residents would be pro-

ected – regardless of an individual's race or ethnicity – and the new protections at the state level would match those provided by the U.S. Constitution.

The intent of these amendments is not to further divide state government – the goal is to require the governor to work collaboratively with lawmakers and local emergency officials to avoid the kind of negative consequences we have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. That's why I proudly co-sponsored the amendments and supported placing them on the May 18 ballot.

I encourage you to share this information with your family, friends and neighbors so everyone understands what a **YES** vote means for these critical ballot questions in May. Visit www.votespa.com for more information about voter registration and mail-in or in-person voting.

2021-22 State Budget Due by June 30

In February, Governor Wolf unveiled his proposed \$40.2 billion General Fund Budget for Fiscal Year 2021-22, representing a \$3.1 billion, or 8.2%, increase from the current year. Legislators immediately went to work analyzing his budget request and holding hearings with state government agencies to better understand their spending plans. These meetings recently concluded, and legislators have now begun the process of negotiating a final budget with the governor.

To pay for the massive new spending and cover a projected \$2.5 billion deficit, the Governor's original budget proposal called for the imposition of a natural gas extraction tax, \$168 million in fees to all municipalities for State Police services, and an increase in the state personal income tax (PIT) rate from 3.07% to 4.49% (a 46.3% jump) that was coupled with a significant expansion of the tax forgiveness program. About one-third of all Pennsylvanians, including many small business owners, would see their state tax burden increase under the governor's proposed PIT rate hike.

I will be working to rein in the governor's spending plan and implement a state budget that funds core public services while living within our means. For nearly a year, the

governor's use of prolonged and unprecedented executive power has made Pennsylvania a national leader in unemployment and business closures. It will take many of these workers and small businesses years to recover from this severe economic contraction, and yet the governor is proposing to "help" with a staggering increase in our state income tax and other costly burdens. Higher taxes and energy costs will only make Pennsylvania a less desirable place to live.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 passed by the Federal government in March will provide Pennsylvania with \$7.3 billion that must be spent by December 31, 2024. These stimulus funds can be used to respond to and address the economic effects of the COVID-19 emergency, including investments in broadband infrastructure, assistance programs for individuals and businesses, and maintaining government services when faced with reduced revenues. I will encourage my legislative colleagues to allocate these one-time funds in a responsible and productive manner that supports our economic recovery while not creating ongoing liabilities for which taxpayers will be on the hook in coming years.

Wolf Administration Makes Plans to Toll I-83 South and Other Bridges

In February, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) unveiled a proposal to toll nine existing bridges on the Interstate System. The plan raised serious concerns since it was done unilaterally by the Wolf Administration without any sense of transparency or accountability, and without the input or authorization of the General Assembly.

Locally, the proposal would directly impact the John Harris (South) Bridge on Interstate 83 in Harrisburg between Dauphin and Cumberland County. PennDOT argues the tolls, expected to be set at \$1-2 per car each direction, are necessary to raise funds for the estimated \$500-650 million total replacement of the 61-year old South Bridge, widening the bridge to five lanes in each direction, and reconfiguring the Lemoyne interchange on the West Shore.

According to PennDOT, the project's next step is to complete the environmental studies and prepare the Environmental Assessment, which will be made available for public review and comment, including a formal Public Hearing, expected to take place in Summer 2021. Construction of the project is estimated to begin in 2024.

I believe tolling the South Bridge amounts to a new tax on area residents who travel daily between the East and West Shores for work, shopping and entertainment. While we need to provide for appropriate transportation infrastructure in the Commonwealth, government always seems to jump first to higher taxes and fees, and we already have nearly the highest gas tax and Turnpike tolls in the country, putting Pennsylvania at a competitive cost disadvantage when it comes to transportation.

That's why I support Senate Bill 382, which would, if enacted into law, void the PennDOT Pathways Major Bridge Public-Private Transportation Partnership (P3) Initiative and require reconsideration of this tolling proposal by the P3 Board. It would also increase transparency by requiring PennDOT to publish a detailed analysis prior to the P3 Board's voting meeting, which did not happen with tolling of the South Bridge.

Before PennDOT implements tolling or any other new fees or taxes, we need to look instead at the out-of-control and non-effective regulatory compliance activities that drive up costs. Let's look at PennDOT's inefficient planning and procurement processes and bloated bureaucracy. Let's look at how we prioritize the use of existing gas tax revenues, hundreds of millions of dollars of which are currently diverted to funding the State Police. Government needs to explore cost savings and focus on delivering a better product more efficiently before asking taxpayers to pay more.



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DiSanto Introduces Property Tax Elimination Amendment & More

Senate Bill 424, A Constitutional Amendment to Eliminate School Property Taxes, would allow PA residents to vote directly on the elimination of school property taxes through an amendment to the state constitution. The General Assembly would be tasked with replacing property tax revenues with a combination of state and local sales and income taxes (retirement income is not taxed in PA). The proposal would also ensure local school districts receive the same amount of revenue as the year prior to enactment so school needs are met.

Senate Bill 252, Flexibility for Local Government Advertising and Notice Requirements, would modernize a costly and archaic

state mandate requiring school districts and municipalities to publish all public notices in a printed local newspaper. This bill provides flexibility to meet these advertising requirements through a menu of print and electronic options such as a local government's regularly printed publications or internet website. In an era when far more Pennsylvanians prefer to get their news online, the broad reach and convenience of technology makes public notices more efficient while substantially reducing costs borne by taxpayers.

Senate Bill 188, Streamlining and Expediting the Adoption Process, requires the courts to set a hearing date no more than 30 days after the birth parents file a petition for

relinquishment of parent rights to an adoption agency or adult wishing to adopt the child. It also provides procedures for a diligent search for alleged birth fathers.

Senate Bill 500, Per Diem Reform, requires public officials and employees, including legislators, to provide receipts in order to obtain reimbursement for claimed expenses like food and lodging while on legislative business more than 50 miles from their home. Currently, legislators can collect many thousands of dollars in per diem payments without receipts just for coming to work at the Capitol.

For more of my sponsored legislation, visit my website at www.senatordisanto.com.

DiSanto Named Chair of Senate Banking & Insurance Committee

I have been appointed Chairman of the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee for the 2021-22 legislative session by Senate President Pro Tempore Jake Corman. This committee has jurisdiction over the Pennsylvania Department of Banking and Securities and the Insurance Department. The committee is responsible for ensuring financial institutions and insurers are fiscally sound and compliant while promoting healthy market competition that best serves Pennsylvania consumers and residents. Key pieces of legislation before the committee include:

Senate Bill 432, Strengthening the State Banking Fund, would ensure fees and assessments levied against banks and credit unions are used to examine and provide regulatory

oversight of these financial institutions. The bill makes certain the Department of Banking and Securities operations are sustainable and able to resolve any failed institutions without relying on taxpayer dollars for support.

Senate Bill 225, Streamlining prior authorization of healthcare services, would establish a more streamlined and standardized process for physicians and patients to obtain the necessary advanced approval from a health insurer before conducting a medical procedure or service. The bill seeks to improve patient care by requiring consistent response times, increased transparency, and improved appeal procedures.

Financial services and insurers are major employers and critical service providers across

the state and play integral roles in responding to our economic and health needs during the pandemic and our recovery. I look forward to advancing legislation that supports our businesses' and residents' access to high-quality banking and healthcare services.

Senator DiSanto's Senate Committee Membership

- Banking & Insurance, Chair
- Urban Affairs & Housing, Vice Chair
- Education
- Labor & Industry
- Transportation

Senator DiSanto also serves on the:

- State Employees' Retirement System Board
- Pennsylvania Capitol Preservation Committee



In December, I joined the Office of U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey in presenting a posthumous Korean War "Ambassador for Peace Medal" to the family of Ray Dillman of Perry County. Contact my office for more information about eligibility for this Medal.

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