



2015

The Year in Review

A Report from
State Senator Camera Bartolotta

46th District • Beaver, Washington & Greene Counties

Dear Friend:

It was an incredible honor to be sworn in to serve as your state Senator in 2015. My first year in office was certainly eventful, and I appreciate all of the people who added their voice to the conversation by contacting me on social media, participating in telephone town hall meetings, visiting my website and speaking with me at numerous community events throughout the area.

Although the 2015 legislative year will be remembered primarily due to the bitter disagreements generated by the prolonged state budget impasse, lawmakers made significant strides on a number of other critical issues that will have a considerable impact on local communities. Two measures I sponsored have already been signed into law, and progress has been made on a number of other measures designed to make Pennsylvania a better place to live, work and raise a family. I am pleased to share a snapshot of these highlights with you in this “2015 Year in Review” newsletter. These accomplishments present a good starting point, and I am hopeful we can achieve even greater things in 2016.

Elected officials are ultimately accountable to taxpayers, and we must explore every avenue to reduce the amount of money state government requires to operate effectively. For that reason, I have created this update for distribution to my e-mail contacts and on social media rather than printing and mailing a traditional newsletter to households in the 46th Senatorial District. This approach will help save on printing and mailing costs, providing a more cost-effective way for community residents to learn about the General Assembly’s progress on issues of interest to our region.

As always, I appreciate hearing your views on the most important issues facing southwestern Pennsylvania. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding any state government matter.

Sincerely,



Senator Camera Bartolotta



It was an incredible honor to be sworn in to serve residents of the 46th Senatorial District.

Lobbyist Reform Measures Proposed

In numerous conversations with community residents, concerns and frustrations have been expressed due to the way business is conducted in Harrisburg.

In 2015, I joined a number of colleagues in announcing a package of bills designed to reform Pennsylvania's lobbying system. Specifically, I will introduce legislation that would require anyone who must file a Statement of Financial Interest to disclose any immediate family member of theirs who is required to register under the Lobbying Disclosure Law, and vice versa. The measure would ensure a greater level of transparency and openness.

Pennsylvanians deserve a state government that is responsible and accountable. In addition to promoting these proposals, I will continue to explore new ways to improve the way state government operates.



The Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee, of which I serve as Vice Chair, and the Local Government Committee gathered input during a joint public hearing on the benefits of Act 13 Impact Fee dollars. Greene County Commissioner Charles Morris also offered testimony.

New Law Helps Protect Fresh Water Supplies

It is imperative for lawmakers to support efforts to protect our environment and develop our natural resources safely and responsibly. In October, lawmakers gave final approval to a bill I sponsored that will help reduce the amount of fresh water used in oil and gas drilling operations.

The new law, Act 47 of 2015, clarifies liability issues pertaining to the use of treated mine water in oil and gas operations, an innovative process that reduces the need for fresh water in the natural gas extraction process. It will not change or weaken any existing environmental safeguards designed to protect public health or maintain water quality; it only clarifies parties that could be held responsible if the mine water is not treated or utilized properly.

The law opens the door for more companies to put this innovative and environmentally friendly process to good use, significantly reducing the withdrawal demands on Pennsylvania's rivers, lakes and streams.

New Protections for Highway Workers Signed Into Law

Families of highway construction workers and emergency personnel live in constant fear of having their loved ones injured or killed by a distracted or aggressive driver. A new law I co-prime sponsored with Senate Democratic Leader Jay Costa creates stricter penalties for irresponsible driving in work zones to help deter dangerous driving behavior.

The new law establishes a three-tiered punishment system for violations. Violators will face fines and penalties exceeding \$1,000 for irresponsible driving in work zones. More serious offenses involving injuries to highway workers or emergency responders will result in a fine of up to \$5,000 and a six-month suspension of the violator's driver's license, while drivers who cause the death of a worker will pay a fine of up to \$10,000 and surrender their license for one year.

The new law expanded the definition of "highway workers" to include emergency personnel, local government and municipal workers, members of the Pennsylvania State Police and local law enforcement community, and contractors or utility company workers.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health reports that approximately 100 workers are killed and another 20,000 workers are injured every year



MarkWest Energy Partners offered lawmakers a tour of its operations in the 46th Senatorial District, including the Brighc Compression Station and the Houston Processing Plant and Rail Yard.

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in highway and street construction accidents. It is my hope that by strengthening the penalties for reckless drivers, we can help limit the dangers faced by the men and women who help maintain our vital infrastructure.

Senate Approves Statewide Authorization of Transportation Network Companies

In addition to creating new economic opportunities for drivers, innovative transportation network companies like Uber and Lyft have the potential to meet a variety of needs in communities throughout the state. The Senate approved legislation I introduced to ensure these companies can operate safely and responsibly in all 67 counties in Pennsylvania.

Transportation network companies are currently operating in some counties under temporary authority granted by the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission. My legislation would create a framework that would allow these companies to operate on an ongoing basis in every county in the state.

Additional consumer protections are included in the bill, such as maintaining adequate insurance coverage for drivers and companies, as well as meeting vehicle safety requirements and reporting accidents.

The measure is currently under consideration in the House of Representatives, and I am hopeful that legislation to authorize transportation network companies will be signed into law in 2016.

Expanded Tax Breaks for Disabled Veterans Proposed

Throughout Pennsylvania's history, our state has been blessed with an extraordinary number of men and women who were willing to answer the call to serve in the military. Many of these brave individuals sacrificed their health and well-being in order to protect our freedoms, and they live with a daily reminder of the cost of war in the form of permanent disabilities.

I recently joined the Chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee in an effort to ensure more disabled veterans would be eligible for property tax exemptions. Under current law, an honorably discharged veteran must be 100 percent disabled to receive a total exemption from paying property taxes. The new proposal we are sponsoring would provide tax exemptions to all disabled veterans based on their level of disability.

The proposal would require an amendment to the Pennsylvania Constitution, so it must be approved by the General Assembly in two consecutive legislative sessions and be approved by voter referendum.

Measure Unveiled to Improve Background Check System

Under current law, individuals who wish to purchase firearms must first pass background checks through both the Pennsylvania Instant Check System (PICS) and the National Instant Check System (NICS). While the majority of states rely solely on the national background check system, Pennsylvania is one of only 13 states that duplicates this process with a redundant, time-consuming and expensive state-run program.



Corner Cupboard Food Bank director Meribeth Coote emphasized the importance of public assistance and donations during my tour of their facility in Waynesburg.



Participating in the Veterans Day ceremony at the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies was a very moving experience.

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While well intended, PICS has all too frequently resulted in many firearms dealers reporting long delays, shutdowns and glitches when using the state background check system. Consequently, it has not only hurt their business, but also created headaches for customers who were delayed for no good reason. That's why in 2015 I introduced legislation that would more effectively streamline this process and save taxpayer dollars by utilizing the national system as the sole source of background checks for prospective firearm purchasers.

The PICS system maintains an annual budget of over \$6 million - 95% of which covers personnel costs. I believe this money, as well as the fees used to sustain PICS, can be put to better use than supporting a duplicative firearm background check system of limited value.

The issue of public safety must not be taken lightly. My bill ensures the state will provide the FBI's NICS background check system with all the pertinent state-specific information to prevent firearms from falling into dangerous hands, such as information about involuntary commitment for mental health issues and will improve safety by requiring that Protection From Abuse orders are provided to the NICS system, to ensure individuals cannot access firearms by simply crossing state lines.

Eliminating PICS will help save taxpayer resources and prevent businesses and consumers from being subjected to frequent problems associated with the state system. Ultimately, it also puts our Commonwealth in line with the majority of other states that utilize the federal system for background checks.



It was an honor to be invited to serve as commencement speaker at the graduation ceremony for West Greene Middle-Senior High School.

Keeping Connected to the Community

My district offices are designed to serve as a point of first contact for constituents who have problems relating to state agencies or questions regarding state programs. I invite you to drop by or call my offices in Canonsburg, Waynesburg, Monongahela and Hopewell Township if I can be of assistance on any state government question or issue.

In addition, I have established a website for residents of the 46th Senatorial District that offers a wealth of information about government programs and resources. Constituents can also contact me through the website to offer their views or ask questions. I encourage you to visit www.senatorbartolotta.com for more information.

I also provide updates on local and state issues on my social media accounts, including Facebook at www.facebook.com/senatorbartolotta and Twitter at www.twitter.com/senbartolotta. In an effort to reduce printing and mailing costs, I send regular electronic newsletters featuring legislative updates and items of local interest. For more information on the locations and hours of operation for my offices as well as details on how to subscribe to my e-news, visit my website.



I joined Senators Argall and Folmer and other members of the Senate to introduce Senate Bill 76 – the Property Tax Independence Act – to completely eliminate all school property taxes.

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TV Program Highlights Local Organizations, Attractions

Our region is fortunate to host a wide range of interesting and successful businesses, organizations and attractions that add to the character of our communities. In April, I began hosting "Focus on the 46th," a monthly TV program to highlight some of these organizations, as well as to provide information on noteworthy legislation in the General Assembly.

2015 Focus on the 46th episodes include:

- A conversation with local officials regarding the benefits of the Impact Fee paid by natural gas companies,
- An in-depth look at the local coal mining industry, including a tour of a local mine and interviews with employees,
- A discussion about legislation to better protect highway workers,
- A tour of the Washington City Mission to highlight recovery efforts after a devastating fire,
- A tour of blighted properties in local communities, as well as a roundtable discussion about blight prevention and remediation,
- A closer look at after-school programs offered at the LeMoyne Community Center in Washington,
- A behind-the-scenes tour of the Pennsylvania Trolley Museum in Washington, and
- A delicious tour of Sarris Candies in Canonsburg.



I enjoyed serving as a foster parent for "Rocky the Alligator" as part of an online auction coordinated through the Monongahela Aquatorium to fund their Mon Concert Series. Rocky got his hands dirty in the Capitol Hunger Garden.



I had the privilege of speaking with students during Career Day at Trinity West Elementary School in Washington.



I had an opportunity to meet with a number of young people who were participating in the 2015 Farm Show.