



25th District ★ Winter 2007

# State Senator **JOE SCARNATI** ★★★★★ *Reports to You*



## Scarnati Elected Senate President Pro Tempore

**I**n January, I was honored to be elected by my Senate colleagues to the third-highest elected position in the Commonwealth: Senate President Pro Tempore.

It comes with a great deal of responsibility, but it also means a much more prominent voice for the citizens of the 25th Senatorial District, and a new focus on the rural issues our communities face.

The President Pro Tempore is responsible for appointing the chairpersons and members of the standing committees of the Senate. Duties also include presiding over the Senate when the Lieutenant Governor is unavailable to do so.

Beyond the actual running of the Senate, the President Pro Tempore is in a unique position to shape policy. It will allow me to play a significant role in negotiations with the Administration and House of Representatives regarding key bills and judicial nominations.

Surrounded by family and friends, my swearing-in ceremony was a day I will never forget. But, I was also eager to get to work. One of the first orders of business that day was the adoption of seven reform

proposals put together by Republican and Democrat leaders improving how the Senate operates. *(Please see the other side for details.)*



*Federal Judge D. Michael Fisher administers the oath of office to the new Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati. The senator holds the third-highest elected position in Pennsylvania after governor and lieutenant governor.*

### SENATOR SCARNATI'S LEGISLATIVE OFFICES IN THE 25TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT

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## Reform Measures Make Senate Process More Open to Public

Following the administering of the oath-of-office to members, the Senate's first official act of the 2007-2008 legislative session was adopting seven reform proposals designed to make the legislative process more open to the public.

The rules changes were developed with bipartisan input and are the first step in a push for greater transparency in the Senate. The package was a result of a lot of bipartisan hard work where the thoughts of members, media, and most of all our constituents, were taken into consideration.

They will help ensure that the people's business is conducted at reasonable hours, with enough notice so that everyone knows what they are voting on. In addition, text of the debates and the votes themselves will be available for public inspection on the Internet.

Under the new rules:

- **Session times** will be limited to between 8 a.m. and 11 p.m.

- **Amendments** will be posted to the Internet before being offered on the Senate floor.
- The Senate will **wait at least six hours** before voting on an amended bill or a conference committee report.
- All **roll call votes** will be posted on the Internet as soon as possible after a vote, but always within 24 hours of a vote.
- **Committee votes** on bills will be posted on the Internet within 48 hours of the vote.
- The Senate's Legislative Journal - which includes the full text of **all floor debates** - will be posted on the Internet upon Senate approval of the Journal or within 45 days, whichever is earlier.
- An updated **fiscal note** will be prepared if a bill is amended after consideration by the Senate Appropriations Committee, if the amendment has a fiscal impact.

All branches of government must have the courage and willingness to make the changes necessary for a more effective, more efficient, more accountable government. I'm proud that the Pennsylvania Senate is leading the way by making implementation of these reforms the first order of business of the newly elected Senate.

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## Property Tax Exemptions Expanded for Disabled Veterans

It is impossible to adequately repay the brave men and women who answered the call to defend our nation and were left disabled as a result.

We have a duty to craft public policy that honors their service and helps improve their quality of life. Among the numerous new laws passed for veterans in the recently concluded session was legislation to make more of Pennsylvania's disabled veterans eligible for property tax exemptions.

**Act 161 of 2006** includes guidelines for determining need to extend current eligibility to a greater number of disabled veterans and ensure that applicants with the greatest financial need receive the benefit. Although applicants may be required to provide proof of income to claim the exemption, the new law will not require the detailed financial information required under the current system.

The law also extended eligibility to disabled veterans who own their home with his or her spouse. Under previous law, a disabled veteran would only be eligible if he or she was the sole owner of the property. In addition, the legislation extended the time to review exemptions from two years to five years.

Many Pennsylvanians have bravely served our country over the years, and I am pleased we passed this new law to provide more disabled veterans with tax relief.

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## Scarnati Leads Crafting of Minimum Wage Increase That Protects Small Businesses

One of the most important tasks any legislator faces is crafting policy that balances the needs of employers with those of the workers, who are the driving force of our economy.

I believe the minimum wage increase that took effect in January strikes this balance, and I was proud to help craft the compromise during my tenure as Chairman of the Senate Labor and Industry Committee.

After weeks of negotiations, we were able to put together a bipartisan plan that raised the state minimum wage from **\$5.15 to \$6.25** beginning January 1. On July 1 of this year, the minimum wage will increase to **\$7.15**. I supported this because working families are being squeezed with rising heating costs, medical insurance, and gasoline prices. The minimum wage had to be increased, but it had to be done carefully.

One of the key components of the final legislative package was an amendment I placed in the bill to assist small businesses. It allows small businesses with the equivalent of ten or fewer full-time employees to pay a lower minimum wage until July 1, 2008. The lower minimum wage was raised from **\$5.15 to \$5.65** in January. On July 1, it will be raised to **\$6.65**, and finally **\$7.15** on July 1, 2008.

I felt very strongly that all legislators had to recognize that there were two sides to the minimum wage issue. Small business employers, who will be most affected by the increase in the minimum wage, must have time to adjust to the new salaries.

This legislation was the result of negotiation and compromise. It is a wonderful example of both sides working together to ensure that our workers keep working and our businesses continue to do business.

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## Constituent Services: How Can We Help You?

While it is an honor to represent you in the state Capital, some of the most important work is done right here in the 25th Senatorial District.

Below is a listing of some of the services my district offices offer.

My staff and I can provide the following:

- Information on **legislation, regulations, and laws**
- Assistance dealing with state **government agencies**
- Pennsylvania **Tax Forms**
- Help with **PENNDOT** paperwork and other transportation issues
- Help obtaining copies of Pennsylvania **Birth and Death Certificates**
- Assistance with **unemployment compensation** problems
- Guidance on state **senior citizen** programs
- **Absentee ballot** applications and **voter registration** forms
- **Student financial aid** information
- **Notary Applications**

- **Senate Citations** for accomplishments and family milestones
- Help arranging **Capitol Tours**

For additional information, please call the numbers listed on this newsletter or visit my website at [www.senatorsarnati.com](http://www.senatorsarnati.com).

### CONTACT ME

If you would like to receive updates on these and other legislative issues, just send me an email at [jscarnati@pasen.gov](mailto:jscarnati@pasen.gov) and I'll keep you informed.