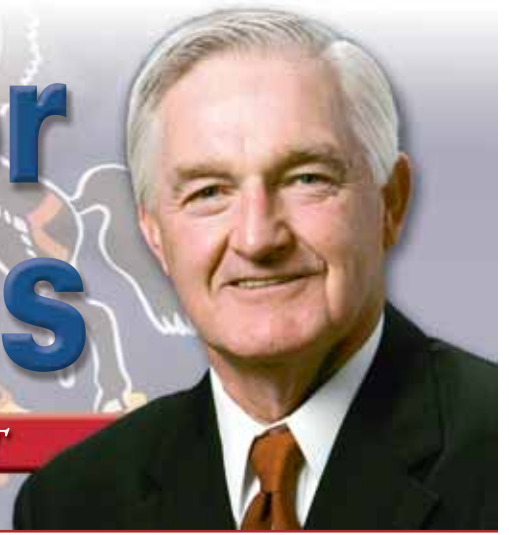


# State Senator Bob Robbins

REPORTS TO THE 50TH DISTRICT

FALL 2008



## Senate Approves 2008-09 State Budget

In recognition of the economic slowdown in Pennsylvania, the legislature approved a state budget for Fiscal Year 2008-09 that holds the line on state spending while ensuring the continuation of essential services and programs, according to Senator Bob Robbins.

“Not everyone is going to be happy with this budget, but I believe we did the best we could with what we had available. Certainly the key was to hold the line in spending,” Senator Robbins said. “With the economic conditions in Pennsylvania the way they are now, we have to look down the road and tighten our spending accordingly. We need only look at last year, when we rejected all seven of the Governor’s proposed tax increases. We were better able to hold the line this year because the Commonwealth is in a much better financial position than many of our neighboring states.”

One of the key elements in the new budget is a more equitable proposal for funding basic education in Pennsylvania. More than 100 of Pennsylvania’s



501 school districts – including several in the local area – would have seen a minimal increase of 1.5 percent in their basic education funding under the Administration’s proposal. Senator Robbins worked to ensure that every school district in Pennsylvania received a minimum 3-percent increase in its basic education subsidy – providing increased support for 238 districts across the state.

“I am very pleased with the education budget and the significant increases for 12 school districts in my area,” Senator Robbins said. “Many would have only seen a 1.5-percent increase in their state subsidy for basic education under the Governor’s proposed budget. Those districts, their students and their taxpayers, all benefit from our proposal which ensured that all school districts receive at least a 3-percent increase.”

## Senate Approves Senator Robbins’ Science in Motion Bill

The Senate approved Senate Bill 472, a bill introduced by state Senator Bob Robbins to formally enact into law the highly touted Science Technology Partnership Program, better known as “Science in Motion.”

“This is a major step in protecting this outstanding program,” Senator Robbins said. “Over the past few years, the Governor has cut funding in each of his budget proposals and the Legislature has been forced to restore the money as part of the budget negotiations. The Senate had made it crystal clear that it supports Science in Motion.”

The program makes state funding available to higher education institutions to purchase high-tech science equipment. This equipment is then transported to and shared with surrounding schools. This past year, more than 300 public, private, and parochial schools were served throughout the state by 11 higher education institutions: Cedar Crest College, Clarion University, Drexel University, Gannon University, Gettysburg College, Juniata College, Susquehanna University, the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, Ursinus College, Westminster College,

and Wilkes University.

“The truth is, American students are lagging behind many other western nations in the fields of math and science. I strongly believe that we must support partnerships between colleges and high schools as a way to encourage young

people to explore those technical fields,” Senator Robbins said. “Science in Motion is an outstanding program that gives students the opportunity to go beyond the textbook and see that science is a field that has no boundaries, limited only by the imagination.”



Senator Bob Robbins stopped by the Westminster College booth during a Science in Motion program in the State Capitol. Pictured to the right of Senator Robbins is Lori Martin, Administrative Assistant for the Westminster College Science in Motion Program and Melissa Hart (left), also of Westminster College.

## TV Broadcast Changeover Set for Feb. 17, 2009

**B**roadcast officials were in the State Capitol earlier this year for an event organized by Senator Bob Robbins to alert Pennsylvania residents who use antennas that they will no longer be able to receive reception as of February 17, 2009.

“That’s the date under federal law that broadcasters will switch from analog to digital (DTV) transmissions,” Senator Robbins said. “Anyone now relying on an antenna must either switch to cable, satellite or get a DTV converter box to keep receiving the signal.”

Richard Wyckoff, President of the Pennsylvania Association of Broadcasters (PAB) and longtime friend of Senator Robbins, estimates there are more than 416,000 Pennsylvania homes that currently use antennas to receive free television broadcasts.

Households can apply to the National Telecommunications Information Administration to receive up to two coupons, valued at \$40 each, toward the purchase of DTV converter

boxes. Information about those coupons is available at the website [www.ntia.doc.gov](http://www.ntia.doc.gov). More information about the switch to DTV is available at the PAB website [www.pab.org](http://www.pab.org).



*Broadcast officials were in the State Capitol to alert Pennsylvania residents who use antennas that they will no longer be able to receive reception as of February 17, 2009.*

## New \$100 Tax Credit for Volunteer Responders

**T**he General Assembly passed legislation providing a \$100 state income tax credit for active volunteer firefighters and EMS workers, according to Senator Bob Robbins, Vice Chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

“Recruitment and retention are serious issues facing many volunteer fire and rescue companies,” said Senator Robbins. “This tax credit will have a minimal impact on the state budget, but could be a major incentive to keep volunteers in uniform and possibly attract more people to consider volunteering.”

## Persian Gulf Vets Can Now Apply for Bonuses

**P**ennsylvanians who served in the Persian Gulf Conflict (1990-91) can now apply for a bonus of up to \$525, according to Senator Bob Robbins, Vice Chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

Act 29 of 2006, which Senator Robbins strongly supported, allows for compensation to be paid to eligible Pennsylvania veterans as well as certain surviving relatives of deceased veterans.

“These bonuses are similar to those the Commonwealth provided to veterans of previous wars and conflicts,” Senator Robbins said. “This is a way for Pennsylvania to recognize the service and sacrifice of its residents who answered the call of duty.”

Eligible veterans, or beneficiaries, may receive a one-time benefit of \$75 per month for each month of active service, up to \$525, for which the veteran was eligible to receive the Southwest Asia Service Medal. Survivors of veterans who lost their lives or died as a result of service-connected wounds, diseases or injuries may also be eligible for an additional payment of \$5,000.

For more information visit [www.persiangufbonus.state.pa.us](http://www.persiangufbonus.state.pa.us).

## State Celebrates Youth Art Month

**O**n March 10, the Senate adopted Senate Resolution 235, a resolution sponsored by Senator Bob Robbins recognizing March 2008 as Youth Art Month in Pennsylvania.

“I am honored to introduce this Resolution because I have seen first hand that art education and appreciation provides important tools and skills which enable young people to lead fuller, more meaningful lives,” Senator Robbins said. “Art education develops self-esteem and self-expression, as well as an appreciation for the work of others. The truth is art education helps young people expand their horizons and develops critical thinking skills that are important as children continue their education and when they enter the working world.”

Earlier in the day, Senator Robbins was a main speaker during a ceremony in the Capitol East Wing Rotunda organized by Avalyn Shank, an art

teacher at Wilmington Area Middle School, to honor the winners of a statewide student project to design a Youth Art Month flag. This year’s

theme is “Pennsylvania Arts are the Legend on the Roadmap to our Creative Vision.”

Three local students – Brooklyn Walsh from Slippery Rock Area Elementary School, Megan Sweyer from Wilmington Area Middle School and Briana Yoursh from New Castle Junior/Senior High School – were among the young people honored at the event.

Youth Art Month was created in 1961 by the Council for Art Education, Inc. as a national advocacy program. It is observed each March as a way to emphasize the value of art education for all children and to encourage support for quality school art programs.



*Joining Senator Bob Robbins in Harrisburg to celebrate March 2008 as Youth Art Month in Pennsylvania was Briana Yoursh, a student at New Castle Jr./Sr. High School who had her artwork displayed in the Capitol Building. Pictured from left to right: Emma Yoursh, Briana’s mother; Briana Yoursh; Marc Yoursh, Briana’s father; and Senator Robbins.*



*Senator Bob Robbins spoke to the graduating law enforcement cadet class of the Pennsylvania Game Commission in February.*

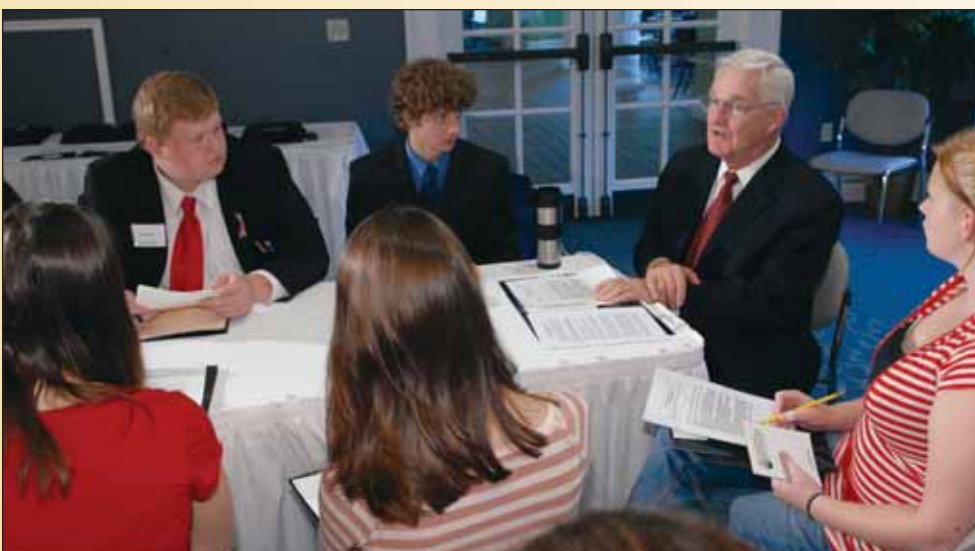


*Senator Bob Robbins (left) and Lieutenant Governor Catherine Baker Knoll (center) met with Suzanne Gale (second from left) and Diane Shafer Domnick and her husband James Domnick (at right) from Meadville prior to an April 1 Senate ceremony commemorating the life of former Governor Raymond P. Shafer. Diane is the daughter of former Governor Shafer. Suzanne Gale is the daughter of Augusta Gale, who was the secretary to all the First Ladies of Pennsylvania from the 1930s until Mrs. Thornburgh.*



*Senator Bob Robbins visited with participants of Crawford County LEAP as they toured Pennsylvania's State Capitol in May. Crawford County LEAP assists individuals with cognitive and/or mental health challenges.*

*Senator Bob Robbins, Vice Chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, received a little help signing the National Guard Family Covenant in April. The Covenant represents a commitment to the thousands of National Guard families across the Commonwealth and formally recognizes the sacrifices made on the home front while their loved ones are serving around the world. Joining Senator Robbins (far left) at the table are Representative Jerry Nailor from Cumberland County, Senator Lisa Baker, Chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee and state Adjutant General Jessica Wright.*



*More than 110 local students from 18 schools had the chance to serve as "State Senators" as part of Senator Bob Robbins' 2007 Student Government Seminar. The students took on the role of legislators and were tasked with considering a number of bills during the daylong seminar held at Thiel College's Howard Miller Student Center.*

# Senate Advances Government Reform Agenda

**W**ithout a doubt, the 2007-08 Senate Legislative Session will go down in Pennsylvania history as one that ended “business as usual” practices of the past that limited public input and inspection of state activities.

On the very first day, the Senate adopted a number of new rules, one of which provides for the daily adjournment of the Senate by 11 p.m.

Later, the Senate took additional steps to make legislative activities more transparent. As part of that effort, the public can now visit the website [www.legis.state.pa.us](http://www.legis.state.pa.us) to read bills and amendments, review text of floor debates, and see how Senators voted in committees and on the Senate floor.



## State Senator Robert D. Robbins

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Citizens can also track lobbyists, their clients and expenditures per client.

This year began with the enactment of a strong and enforceable Open Records Law. This proposal will truly benefit Pennsylvania’s citizens and taxpayers as it goes to the heart of responsive, responsible, and accountable government.

“I am proud that we have taken these steps. The public has a basic right to hold their elected officials – at all levels – accountable for their actions,” said Senator Bob Robbins. “It is essential that we continue these efforts. Legislative actions are open to public review and the process by which we consider, and ultimately approve, the state’s budget is also open to the public.”

Senator Robbins is pushing for additional reforms including the passage

of the Pennsylvania Taxpayer Transparency Act (Senate Bill 1350), which he is a co-sponsor.

“We have heard the concerns of the people of Pennsylvania and are committed to making government more open and more accountable,” Senator Robbins said. “Open government is a keystone to our democracy. In order for government to effectively serve their constituents, citizens must be aware of the actions undertaken by the elected representatives and by agencies supported by taxpayer funds.”



## Senate Passes Senator Robbins’ HEAT ON Act

**W**ith fuel costs at record levels, the Senate recently approved legislation introduced by Senator Bob Robbins that would provide essential reforms to Pennsylvania’s Low-Income Home Energy Assistance, or LIHEAP Program.

Senate Bill 352, known as the Home Energy Assistance in Time of Need, or HEAT ON Act, would make needed changes to maximize the benefits for eligible low-income households and ensure that funding is allocated in a timely and expedited fashion.

“With energy prices skyrocketing, it is imperative that all LIHEAP funds be appropriated expeditiously and responsibly to assist the growing number of Pennsylvanians who will be struggling this coming winter to pay their heating bills,” Senator Robbins said.

Last year, state Auditor General Jack Wagner reported that a special performance audit found serious deficiencies in the Department of Public Welfare’s administration of LIHEAP.

SB 352 provides for additional oversight and directs the Department of Public Welfare to take appropriate action if it discovers any false, misleading or inaccurate statements by applicants, participating energy vendors or state employees.

“With home heating oil running at almost \$5 per gallon, more Pennsylvania households are looking at troubling financial times ahead and it is important that we maximize the efficiency, accountability and effectiveness of Pennsylvania’s LIHEAP Program,” Senator Robbins said.

