



Harper Report

State Representative **Kate M. Harper**
61st Legislative District
KateHarper.net

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Budget Balanced on Time with No New Taxes

Dear Neighbors,

As I write this, the federal government is locked in debate over the federal debt limit, the national debt, and whether the government should enact a balanced budget requirement. Here in Pennsylvania, we have had such a requirement for decades, and we are also required to get the budget done by June 30 of every year. This year, for the first time in nine years, under the leadership of our new governor, Governor Tom Corbett, we got the Commonwealth's budget done on time with no new taxes.

It was another difficult budget year. With the economy still very weak, the state's revenues are also down. Income taxes, business taxes and sales taxes are all down, reflecting the reality that some have lost jobs, some have taken pay cuts, and companies are less profitable. Everyone seems to have less disposable income, so retail sales (and hence, sales taxes) are all less than they were before.

Of course, in two areas, costs always increase, and they are the two largest areas of our budget—education and welfare, or Medicaid and other social service spending. In a bad

economy, more people need help (we owe the federal government \$4 billion for unemployment assistance we have sent out) and government tax revenues simply do not keep up the pace.

With a balanced budget requirement, we in the General Assembly had two choices: raise taxes or cut spending.

We decided we had to balance our state's \$27 billion budget without increasing taxes. When people are hurting, it's wrong to "pile on," and ask for more for government spending. You are living within your household's means, and we need to do the same.

Cuts were made across the board, in every department and in nearly every line item. (Yes, the General Assembly cut its own budget and is also returning money from the legislative reserve fund to the General Fund to avoid deeper cuts elsewhere this year.)

Our local school districts received about 10 percent less than they had received last year with the federal stimulus money (a one-time grant) gone. Wissahickon and North Penn school districts did not raise taxes. Colonial did raise real estate taxes.

In the future, voters and taxpayers have a bigger say in school property tax increases. Coupled with the budget this year was a strengthened taxpayer protection bill that limits

a school district's ability to raise property taxes above the rate of inflation unless they ask you, the taxpayer, for permission in a referendum. Only pension costs and special education costs provide "exceptions" to the referendum requirement.

There was some drama around funding for our state-owned and state-related universities, but ultimately, the State System of Higher Education colleges (Bloomsburg, Shippensburg, West Chester, etc.), and Pitt, Penn State, Temple and Lincoln received more than 80 percent of last year's funding. The Community Colleges received 90 percent of last year's funding, keeping all of them an affordable choice for middle-class families. (Temple, for example, estimates that state support provides a \$9,000 tuition reduction to in-state students.)

In this issue, be sure to check out articles on the Marcellus Shale and road construction projects. As always, call me, write or email me, or visit me on the Web at KateHarper.net or [Facebook.com/RepKateHarper](https://www.facebook.com/RepKateHarper).

Kate M. Harper

Call Today!

Get Your
Mammogram
Oct. 12

The Fox Chase Cancer Center's mobile mammography van will be at the Blue Bell office on Wednesday, Oct. 12, starting at 9 a.m. Women over the age of 40 who are interested in receiving a mammogram can log on to KateHarper.net or call the office at (610) 277-3230 for more information. To schedule an appointment, call Deb Resnick of Fox Chase at 215-214-1682. Space is limited, so make your appointments as soon as possible.

Be in the Know

For updates on everything from local road construction detours to key state and local issues, sign up at www.KateHarper.net.

You can also find discussion of local and legislative news by following PA State Rep. Kate Harper on [Facebook.com/RepKateHarper](https://www.facebook.com/RepKateHarper).



Rep. Kate Harper and Sen. Stewart Greenleaf recently presented a \$2 million H2OPA grant to Upper Gwynedd Township and North Wales. The grant will be used to consolidate the North Wales sanitary sewer treatment system with Upper Gwynedd's regional waste water treatment facility. This will address environmental concerns and save money for ratepayers. Several local officials participated in the grant presentation. In the front row, left to right: Commissioner Tom Duffy, President of Commissioners Ken Kroberger, Commissioner Jim Santi, North Wales Water Authority (NWWA) Board Chair Joan Nagel, and NWWA members Herb Kavash, Albert Tenney and Carene Sanders. In the back row, left to right: Township Manager Len Perrone, Commissioner Clare Edelmayer, Commissioner Gene Ziemba, Rep. Harper, Sen. Greenleaf, NWWA Member Donna Mengel and NWWA Executive Director Robert Bender.

Marcellus Shale: It's a Gas (or Is It?)

There's a gold rush of sorts going on in rural Pennsylvania these days, caused by the discovery of the Marcellus Shale, a rock formation that underlies about two-thirds of the Commonwealth (none in Montgomery County) and is believed to hold trillions of cubic feet of natural gas. It's been the subject of much debate in Harrisburg and elsewhere this year.

Most recognize that the Marcellus Shale and the influx of natural gas drilling, jobs and investment it has brought to the state can be a good thing for Pennsylvania, and especially in the rural communities where jobs have been scarce for a generation. It has the potential to be very good for our country as well as the source of domestic fuel. On the other hand, the Marcellus Shale natural gas requires an intense industrial operation to retrieve it, and many are worried that if not done safely, the drinking water supplies can be ruined.

An intense debate is under way to make sure that Pennsylvania is regulating the "fracking" process needed to release the natural gas can be done safely.

"Hydraulic fracturing," or "fracking" as it is commonly called, involves collecting and injecting millions of gallons of water, infused with sand and proprietary chemicals, at high pressure, 5,000 to 8,000 feet below the earth's surface to fracture the rock and let the gas escape. This process also results in millions of gallons of water (dirty from the process and often containing large amounts of salt, sand and sometimes naturally occurring radioactive matter) that requires either reuse or careful disposal. While the fracking itself takes place thousands of feet below the drinking water aquifer, improper casings on either the drillers' wells or domestic drinking water wells can result in cross contamination. Likewise, improper disposal or accidents can allow the frack water into streams and waterways that supply public drinking water.

The Department of Environmental Protection already regulates drilling permits, restricts drilling near high quality streams, requires the drilling companies to treat the waste water and has increased permit fees to hire more staff. More information on what DEP is doing in this area can be obtained by visiting www.depweb.state.pa.us and clicking on the "oil and gas" button.

Some believe more oversight is needed. The Delaware River Basin Commission, a multi-state commission responsible for the Delaware River, is acutely aware that the river supplies drinking water to 15 million people. It is working on its own regulations, and received 50,000 comments after a recent public airing. For more information see www.state.nj.us/drbc.

We are watching the development of this important industry carefully.

Spotlight on PA Business

Anyone looking for a quality example of the entrepreneurial spirit need look no further than Asher's Chocolates in Souderton.

Founded in 1892 in Center City Philadelphia by Chester A. Asher, Asher's Chocolates has grown by leaps and bounds through four generations of the Asher family. It is the oldest continuously family-owned and operated candy making company in the country. The company now makes its home in Souderton.

Chester Asher should be an inspiration to people considering starting their own business. Assistance is available to aspiring entrepreneurs through Pennsylvania's Small Business Development Centers at www.pasbdc.org/start or the state Department of Community and Economic Development at www.newpa.com.

Property Tax/Rent Rebate Deadline Extended

Pennsylvanians eligible for the state's Property Tax/Rent Rebate program now have until Dec. 31 to file for 2010 rebates.

The program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians who are 65 years or older, widows and widowers 50 years or older, and those 18 years or older with disabilities. For income guidelines and additional information, call the Blue Bell office.

Leading Woman Award

Rep. Kate Harper received the 2011 Leading Woman Award from Montgomery County Community College in June. She was recognized for her support of MCCC's women's entrepreneurship program at the college. She was a member of the steering committee of the college's popular "Starting a Successful Woman-Owned Business" program. To date, more than 300 aspiring female business owners have completed the program, resulting in 25 new businesses in the community.

Outstanding Citizen

Congratulations to Montgomery County Recorder of Deeds Nancy Becker of Towamencin in the 61st Legislative District upon her election as President of the Pennsylvania Recorder of Deeds Association (PRODA). Nancy has served as the county Recorder of Deeds since 2003 and has made her office a state model of efficient and effective document management. Good work Nancy!

Helpful Sites Online: Fall Hiking and Walking Trails

Looking for an opportunity for both exercise and relaxation? See Pennsylvania from the ground up by checking out hiking and walking trails in our region. Following are links to just a few of the many interesting places to visit.

- Montgomery County Trail System: trails.montcopa.org
- Audubon Center at Mill Grove: pa.audubon.org
- Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust: www.pennypacktrust.org
- Wissahickon Trail: www.wvwa.org
- Brandywine Valley Trails: www.brandywinevalley.com
- Appalachian Trail: www.appalachiantrail.org
- Delaware Water Gap: www.nps.gov/dewa/planyourvisit/hikes-cliff-park.htm
- State Park Trails: www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks/recreation



Rep. Kate Harper speaks at a town hall meeting to discuss funding for the state's Growing Greener program. Joined by Rep. Josh Shapiro and area environmental advocates, Harper held the public meeting at Penlyn Woods, one of several local sites preserved through the initiative.

Visit me online at KateHarper.net



Eagle Scout Awards

Congratulations to these fine young men on their Eagle Scout achievements!



Rep. Kate Harper congratulates Jesse P. Gehringer for achieving the rank of Eagle Scout. His community service project involved organizing and supervising a group of scouts to build a brick patio on the grounds of Neshaminy Manor. Jesse is a member of Troop 152 in West Point and is the son of Patrick and Debra Gehringer.



Rep. Kate Harper congratulates David J. Yost for achieving the rank of Eagle Scout. His community service project involved collecting books and personal items for members of the United States Armed Forces stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan. David is a member of Troop 152 in West Point and is the son of Bill and Shelly Yost.



Rep. Kate Harper congratulates Sean Bailey for achieving the rank of Eagle Scout. His community service project included building and installing mile markers and directional signs at Harriet Wetherhill Park. Sean is a member of Troop 216 in Plymouth Meeting and is the son of Donald and Debra Bailey.



Rep. Kate Harper congratulates Ian R. Truscott for achieving the rank of Eagle Scout. His community service project involved restoring the Orvilla Cemetery in Hatfield by resetting headstones and landscaping. Ian is a member of Troop 152 in West Point and is the son of Bill and Anne Truscott.



Rep. Kate Harper congratulates Jeffrey Bennett for achieving the rank of Eagle Scout. His community service project involved collecting eyeglasses and hearing aids for New Eyes for the Needy. Jeffrey is a member of Troop 216 in Plymouth Meeting and is the son of Mark and Wendy Bennett.



Rep. Kate Harper congratulates Michael Sanders for achieving the rank of Eagle Scout. His community service project included refurbishing six sets of bleachers at St. Philip Neri School in Lafayette Hill. Michael is a member of Troop 140 in Conshohocken and is the son of Ronald and Ann Marie Sanders.

House Works to Enhance Safety for Teen Drivers

With a recent study showing overwhelming support for tougher laws for young drivers, the state House has approved legislation to increase driver training requirements and enact passenger limits and enhanced seatbelt use requirements for junior license holders.

The survey commissioned by Allstate Insurance Co. showed nearly 60 percent of Pennsylvanians support tougher laws for junior drivers and nearly three in four believe that passenger limits should be set for teen drivers. In addition, 77 percent supported increasing behind-the-wheel training for permit holders.

House Bill 9, which is now awaiting action in the Senate, addresses these concerns by increasing behind-the-wheel training requirements from 50 hours to 65 hours, restricting the number of passengers the teen driver may have to one person under age 18 (there is an exception for family members) and making it a primary offense for any person driving a vehicle where a passenger under the age of 18 isn't wearing a seatbelt.

Across the country, 43 states already have already implemented initiatives similar to those included in House Bill 9, and they report as much as a 40 percent drop in the number of fatal crashes among 16-year-old drivers.



Sitting in Traffic & Wondering

Dear Sitting in Traffic:

Here I sit AGAIN, in a long line of traffic because the road is under construction. It's been under construction, I think, since I learned how to drive, or maybe it just feels that way. Why do road construction projects take so long these days?

Sitting and Waiting Not Patiently
North Wales, PA

Dear Sitting and Waiting:

The schedule for completing a road or bridge construction project is dependent on a number of factors, especially the size and complexity of a particular project. Highway construction is an intricate enterprise that requires meticulous coordination and execution among several entities, including contractors, sub-contractors, material suppliers and utility companies.

Among the many factors affecting the time it takes to rebuild a road, improve an intersection or replace a bridge, are: moving utility lines; weather; staged construction in order to maintain traffic flow in a work area; limited hours when a contractor can restrict travel lanes (weekdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.) or work above active railroad tracks; material deliveries; sequence of construction (e.g., erosion and sedimentation controls must be in place before excavation begins); and the need to perform temporary work for traffic flow during a later stage of construction (e.g., reinforce a roadway shoulder).

There is no question that, with all the road construction activity in the region, drivers are understandably tired of sitting in traffic jams and growing increasingly frustrated as they go through the same hassles day after day after day. But the end result will be better, safer and less congested roadways, and they should be worth the wait.

Kate

Go Green with the "Harper Report" Online

Many people have asked if they can stop receiving the paper version of the Harper Report and instead read it online to help protect the environment and our natural resources. The answer is....absolutely.

Simply go to www.KateHarper.net and click on the "Go Green" icon on the upper right side of the page to sign up.

Even if you already receive regular email updates, you must fill out this form and include your full mailing address so you can be removed from the newsletter mailing list. You will be notified via email when a new edition of the Harper Report is available.

On the Road to Better Highways

This fall finds reconstruction on two expressways wrapping up and continuing progress being made on a few other high profile transportation projects across the region. Here's what's being done:

Route 309

PennDOT's \$375 million investment to rebuild and improve the Route 309 Expressway in Montgomery County is substantially completed. Major work to reconstruct the northern part of the expressway finished this summer when the final pavement layer was placed between Highland Avenue and Route 63 (Welsh Road). PennDOT's contractor is finishing off-road "punch list" items on the reconstructed northern section, which when done will complete the project that has markedly improved travel along the heavily-traveled expressway between Cheltenham and Lower Gwynedd townships. Crews also will work through the fall to install and test Intelligent Transportation System components (e.g., highway cameras, dynamic message signs) on the northern end of Rout 309.

For weekly updates on area construction and its impact on traffic patterns, sign up for email updates through my website, KateHarper.net.

Blue Route Improvement Project

The road and bridge portion of PennDOT's \$71.7 million rebuilding of I-476 (Blue Route) between I-76 (Schuylkill Expressway) and the Pennsylvania Turnpike Mid-County interchanges in Montgomery County will finish in late fall when work wraps up on the inside half of the northbound lanes. Once the construction barriers are removed, northbound and southbound motorists will find smooth driving on almost four miles of completely rebuilt interstate. Some work will continue into 2012, but most of it is expected to be off-roadway and include repairs to the undersides of the seven smaller overpasses within the work zone.

Route 202 Parkway

Route 202 Parkway construction is moving steadily toward completion in fall 2012. With the southern section between Route 63 (Welsh Road) and Route 463 (Horsham Road) finished, contractors are busy building bridges and retaining walls, excavating the roadway's footprint and completing the multi-use path from

Route 463 (Horsham Road) in Montgomery Township to Route 611 in Doylestown Township. Construction also is under way to widen County Line Road where it intersects with the Parkway and on improvements to other crossing routes in Bucks County. Work at the southern end, where the Parkway will connect with Route 202 (DeKalb Pike), is moving ahead as utility companies relocate poles and lines to the edge of the new right-of-way so construction crews can rebuild and widen Route 202 (DeKalb Pike) and Route 63 (Welsh Road) leading to the Parkway entrance.

Morris Road and North Wales Road

Construction is moving forward on the \$1.7 million project to realign and improve the crossing of Morris and North Wales roads by creating a single four-way signalized intersection. In addition to realigning the roads and removing the former T-intersection, the contractor is also resurfacing and widening the roads to provide right and left turn lanes; improving drainage; and installing pavement markings and signs. The project is scheduled to finish by November.

Northeast Extension

For the past seven months, construction work on the southern section of the Turnpike's 10.5-mile Total Reconstruction and Widening Project has involved clearing trees and shrubs, excavation, installing posts for sound barriers and more. Utility relocation work was completed in July, and construction continues at one of the mainline bridges with minimal impacts to local traffic at the Jolly Road underpass. Demolition of the Wentz Road Bridge will start sometime in October. Work is scheduled to begin shortly on retaining walls adjacent to the Turnpike mainline.

The southern section, from Mid-County Interchange to Berks Road (milepost A20-A26) will be under construction through late 2013.

Now in final design, the northern section, from Berks Road to the Lansdale Interchange (Exit #31) is scheduled for reconstruction in 2014 through 2016. On May 2, the new \$7.8 million Morris Road Bridge in Upper Gwynedd and Worcester townships was re-opened to traffic. The new bridge is the second to be replaced (Kriebel Road was the first) in advance of construction for the northern section of the project.

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- Handicap Parking Placards

- PACE/PACENET Applications
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