

the JOSEPHS Report

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE BABETTE JOSEPHS • 182ND DISTRICT

Spring 2006

The fight for increasing the minimum wage

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the minimum wage kept a family of three out of poverty. But since then, the minimum wage has ceased to function as it should, as a living wage. The buying power of the minimum wage has fallen to its lowest point since the late 1940s. Today, a family of three with a full-time minimum wage earner would fall \$5,888 below the federal poverty guideline. Even families of two fall \$2,488 below the poverty line.

There are no more excuses. Republicans in Congress have blocked a national minimum wage increase for the wage, which has been stagnant at \$5.15 per hour since 1997. Pennsylvania must raise its minimum wage just as New York, New Jersey, Maryland and Delaware have done. Gov. Rendell has joined House and Senate Democrats in endorsing the increase.



At the news conference calling for an increase in the minimum wage, from left, Lt. Gov. Catherine Baker Knoll, Sen. Tina Tartaglione, Joyce Blackburn of Pa. Women's Work, Rep. Phyllis Mundy and Rep. Babette Josephs.

The Democratic proposal

The proposal I support would increase the wage to \$6.26 an hour this year and then to \$7.15 an hour in January 2007. In addition, there would be a yearly cost-of-living adjustment to the minimum wage thereafter to help keep the minimum wage a living wage.

There is the belief that there are enough votes to pass this measure, and that might be what has the Republicans worried, because the Republican leadership has done everything it can to prevent the proposal from coming up for a vote.

Republicans repeatedly block Democratic bills

First, the bill introduced by my colleague Rep. Mark Cohen was bottled up in the House Labor Relations Committee for nearly a year. When we tried to force the bill out for a floor vote through a procedure known as a discharge resolution, Republicans called an impromptu committee meeting and finally voted out the bill, but not before severely amending it and making it less effective. The radically changed bill proposed an increase of just \$1.10, did not include a cost-of-living adjustment, and would prevent some workers under 18 from receiving the increase. *continued on page 2*

Voter ID requirement vetoed

I am pleased to report that Gov. Ed Rendell has vetoed a bill that no elected Democrat supported; not in the House, nor in the Senate, nor in Conference Committee. This Republican bill would have created barriers to voting instead of making it easier for more citizens to cast their ballots. Since it takes a two-thirds vote of each chamber to override a gubernatorial veto, it is expected to stand.

House Bill 1318, which was introduced to correct a minor flaw in the election code, was amended by Democrats in the House to make sure military and overseas ballots were counted properly. It was then amended by House

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Update on property and wage tax reform

I am sure you have been hearing about many different property tax reform proposals as the special session on local tax relief continues. I am pleased to report that the House of Representatives soundly rejected the ill-conceived Commonwealth Caucus plan that would have imposed a 5 percent sales tax on many goods and services including basic necessities such as food, clothing, water, and over-the-counter medicine. This plan would have also added sales tax to legal and architectural services as well as health club

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Babette fights constitutional amendment that would hurt families

Recently, an amendment to the state constitution, which would discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) individuals and hurt families, particularly children and seniors, was introduced. The pertinent language of House Bill 2381, reads: "Only a marriage between one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in this Commonwealth, and neither the Commonwealth nor any of its political subdivisions shall

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New and Improved website

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Babette fights for increasing the minimum wage

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Then, when we announced plans to call up a similar bill, Republicans again blocked our efforts with a rare parliamentary tactic by reporting out the bill, but with a negative recommendation. This tactic was an effort to force Democrats to either vote against a bill they supported or, in essence, say they didn't like the bill. I'm proud to say that my colleagues in the Labor Relations Committee stood firm and refused to participate in the sham.

Republican women hypocritical in commitment to women

So far, all further efforts to bring the proposal up for a vote have been blocked by House Republicans, including the 15 Republican women legislators. Each of these women has stood up publicly in support of women. They speak out about preventing heart disease among women, protecting women from violence, and creating better opportunities, but they act just like their male counterparts in their lock-step opposition to raising the minimum wage. They do not seem to believe that if women were making better wages, they could better protect themselves. There is a word for these women officeholders, it is "hypocrite."

Indeed, two-thirds of minimum-wage earners are women – women raising families on a wage which simply does not allow them to make ends meet. These women and their families need more than pretty words; they need a living wage for the valuable work they do.

More than 80 percent of Pennsylvanians agree that we must make Pennsylvania's minimum wage a living one. This is among my top priorities.

Punishing Republican dirty election-day tricks

House Bill 544, which was drafted to protect overseas and military voters, is currently waiting approval in the Senate. The bill would allow the examination of absentee voters lists only upon written request; the names and addresses no longer would be posted in public at the county elections office or the polling place. In some counties, thieves were using these lists as a way to identify empty homes that were safe to break into.

In the House State Government Committee, where I am Democratic chair, amendments were added to make it a crime to intentionally mislead voters in a mailing about the date of an election or the location of polling places and it would require each county board to prepare enough provisional ballots for 10 percent of the voters in that area. And it would allow overseas and military voters to apply for an absentee ballot and register to vote at the same time, to apply via computer, and to cast an absentee ballot up to 8 p.m. on Election Day.

During the 2004 presidential election, newspapers all over the state reported that Republicans tried many dirty tricks in areas where they expected a heavy Democratic vote. In committee we made it a serious crime to mislead the voters. Under the proposals, violators would face a fine up to \$15,000 and up to seven years in prison.

Gov. Rendell and I are encouraging the Senate to act on this bill so we can help protect our military women and men and punish dirty tactics no matter who tries to perpetrate them.

Voter ID requirement vetoed

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Republicans to require citizens to present photo or non-photo identification at each and every election even if they voted for years and everyone on the Election Board knows them well.

This is nothing but an added burden for seniors and city residents who walk to the polls and do not necessarily have driver's licenses or have them with them at the polls. The Republicans claimed that they were only trying to prevent fraud, but could not point to one problem in Pennsylvania that would have been prevented by their bill. In fact, most of the little election fraud that does occur concerns absentee ballots, and these were not touched by the bill. The only result would have been frustration, long lines at the polls, and the general suppression of the urban vote.

Observers believe that H.B. 1318 served only one purpose and that was political – to suppress the Democratic vote and make it safer for Republican incumbents.

Fortunately, Gov. Rendell understands only too well the unfair political implications of H.B. 1318; he helped all the Democrats make sure that it will not become law.

But there is a happy ending for military and overseas voters, in spite of the political games the Republican majority have been playing with H.B. 1318. You may know that the administration was sued, because some of our citizens overseas did not get their votes counted in the 2004 presidential election. That will not happen again. Gov. Rendell and the court have agreed to have absentee ballots sent overseas earlier than required by Pennsylvania law, and if these ballots are not mailed at the earliest possible date, the secretary of State will seek court permission to extend the deadline for their return and counting.

Please contact us if family members are out of the country or even out of state and want to vote; we will make sure they get the paper work they need.



Rep. Josephs argues against legislation that would require voters to present identification each and every time they go to vote.

Public hearing on casino, gaming

The Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board is holding a series of public hearings on gaming facilities proposed for the state. All hearings are open to the public.

The Philadelphia hearing will be held from 8:30 a.m. until the last scheduled speaker has testified on April 10, 11 and 12 in Drexel University's main auditorium, 3141 Chestnut St., to discuss proposals from the following: HSP Gaming, Philadelphia Entertainment & Development, PNK LLC, Riverwalk Casino, Keystone Redevelopment, Chester Downs and Greenwood Gaming. Under state law, two gaming licenses will be issued in Philadelphia.

For more information, visit the Gaming Control Board's website at www.pgcb.state.pa.us and click on the "public input hearings" button at the bottom of the page.

Proposed 2006-07 budget boosts education, libraries; help for mass transit missing

On Feb. 9, Gov. Ed Rendell addressed the General Assembly to outline his proposed 2006-07 budget. For the third year in a row, the governor has proposed a budget that includes no new taxes. In fact, the governor's budget proposal includes targeted business tax cuts to help grow our economy.

However, the biggest gains in this budget would go to public education and our libraries, which suffered significant funding cuts several years ago.

THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET INCLUDES:

- A 5 percent increase – well ahead of the rate of inflation – for the state's basic funding for public schools. This would be the largest increase in 15 years.
- A 4 percent increase in state funding for special education.
- Increasing the Accountability Block Grant to schools from \$200 million to \$250 million, allowing at least 1,215 more children to benefit from pre-kindergarten, expanding full-day kindergarten by 2,500 children, and providing new learning opportunities for hundreds of thousands additional children.
- Expanding Head Start funding from \$30 million to \$45 million in order to serve an additional 1,540 children.
- A 4 percent increase in state funding for the State System of Higher Education.
- State-related universities like Temple also received budget increases.
- A 4.9 percent increase in available grants to students.
- A 5 percent increase for community colleges.

I am also pleased that, under the governor's budget proposal, public libraries would receive an increase of \$14.1 million, bringing their state funding to an all-time high of \$75.5 million. Public libraries are a valuable community resource. They help children learn outside the school environment and nurture a love of reading. They also help adults obtain the knowledge and tools to succeed.

New investment in biosciences should go further

When the governor unveiled his budget proposal, he announced the Jonas Salk Legacy Fund, which will dedicate \$500 million in matching grants to the state's leading bioscience researchers.

While this most certainly will help make Pennsylvania more attractive to the bioscience industry for stem cell research, I'm disappointed that his investment didn't go far enough.

When you compare Pennsylvania's efforts with that of California and even our neighboring states, our investment is hardly a drop in the bucket. If we seriously want to attract quality researchers, encourage our cutting-edge medical industry, and see the creation of thousands of high-tech jobs that will result, we must go further and commit our state to embryonic stem cell research and the great cures it can provide.

Most recently, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg donated \$1 million to Johns Hopkins University in Maryland for stem cell research.

Whether it's through a state commitment or a personal one such as Mayor Bloomberg's, the fact remains that New York, New Jersey, and Delaware have made an aggressive commitment to embryonic stem cell research that we in Pennsylvania have not made. It's time we rectified that.

We have an incredible collection of research facilities, biotech companies, hospitals, and universities in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and elsewhere – we have an ideal climate for the industry to take root and thrive. We cannot afford to fall behind other states that are aggressively investing.

I applaud the governor's leadership and efforts to restore funding and provide a record level of assistance for libraries.

Unfortunately, the governor's proposal does not include a solution to the funding concerns of public transportation, which reached the breaking point last year. Many agencies threatened service cuts, job cuts, and fare hikes, but the governor was able to utilize \$412 million in federal funding to help the state's mass transit agencies. We still need to find a sufficient, permanent funding source for mass transit, and I'm disappointed the governor did not address this in his budget proposal.



Rep. Babette Josephs reads to kindergarten children at Nebinger elementary school during PHILADELPHIA READ week.

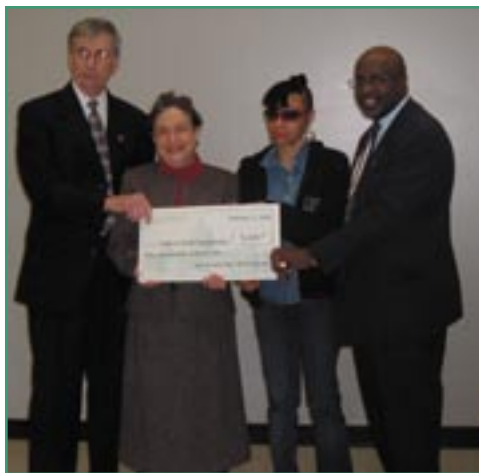
Reward offered for missing woman

State Rep. Harold James and I are contributing \$7,500 to the reward being offered for help in finding missing Philadelphia woman Taneke Daniels.

Taneke Daniels, who went missing last May, lived in James' legislative district and her family resides in my district.

Because Ms. Daniels' disappearance did not get much press attention, the police are having a difficult time finding out what happened to her. Rep. James and I hope that by enhancing the reward, more press will be generated, and someone will step forward with a significant fact that will lead to locating her. We are also assisting her family in using the resources available to help find her.

The reward is being offered for information that leads to an arrest of the person responsible for Daniels' disappearance. People with information are encouraged to call the Philadelphia Police Department.



John Apeldorn, president of the Crime Commission of Delaware Valley (CCDV), Rep. Babette Josephs, Gail Daniels (Taneke's mother), and Rep. Harold James. The representatives presented a check to CCDV to enhance the reward for information about Taneke Daniels.

Babette fights constitutional amendment that would hurt families

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create or recognize a legal status identical or substantially equivalent to that of marriage for unmarried individuals.”

Supporters of the amendment claim that same-sex marriage threatens traditional marriage in some manner which they cannot describe, but what the proposal really does is to treat some people as second-class citizens whose rights to love, to raise a family, to inherit, to visit a hospitalized loved one, and to provide benefits for a life partner will be obliterated. Observers have compared H.B. 2381 to our federal constitution where, to our ever lasting shame, slavery and the disenfranchisement of women were reinforced.

But the sweeping language of H.B. 2381 will hurt others as well. In Ohio, which passed very similar language, at least one court has refused to protect a domestic violence survivor against her abuser, because they were not a married couple. Legal experts believe that Pennsylvanians who have won partnership benefits at their jobs would be deprived of those rights even if they were secured by collective bargaining agreements.

Democrats have pointed out that proponents want H.B. 2381 on the ballot for the voters in the 2008 presidential election. They count on it bringing out the state's most conservative voters for the benefit of the Republican candidate.

Because of my effective commitment to civil rights for all, LGBT advocates have succeed in having this pernicious notion assigned to the House State Government Committee, where I serve as minority chair. We are working together to defeat the bill in the committee.

Update on property and wage tax reform

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memberships. The House amended the bill to exempt most of those items, effectively killing it.

Replacing the regressive property tax with an almost equally regressive sales tax on basic necessities is not my idea of reform.

Although the governor keeps saying that his plan will bring property tax relief to all Pennsylvanians, his statements are not entirely accurate. The current law calls for wage tax relief for all who work in Philadelphia – resident and non-resident wage earners alike. Presently, there is a lively debate in Philadelphia in which some argue for this strategy claiming that reducing wage taxes will bring so many new jobs and business opportunities to the city that Philadelphia's economy will improve enough to benefit everyone. Others say that we should be treated no differently from other homeowners and that Philadelphians who own property are disproportionately retired and more unable than others to pay increased real estate taxes that are coming to the region. Others think there should be mix of property and wage tax relief.

I favor a plan which gives tax relief to retired, disabled, and long time resident homeowners who meet certain income requirements, but I also believe that we must reduce the wage tax if we are to have the kind sustained economic growth that we need.

Most of the plans use the estimated \$1 billion per year the state is expected to receive when the slots gaming is fully operational in Pennsylvania.

Ultimately, if state government is to shoulder a larger share of education funding to replace local property taxes, we must find other revenue streams. It would also help if the federal government would provide its fair share of funding for the mandates it has imposed on local school districts through the No Child Left Behind Act. In the end, we must come up with a system of funding public education that maintains our commitment to our children and is more fair to Philadelphians than the one we have now.

PACE/PACENET

The state offers low-cost prescription drug assistance for low-income senior citizens through PACE and PACENET. You must be at least 65 to be eligible. For more information, visit <https://pacecares.fhsc.com> or call PACE at 1.800.225.7223, or my office at 215.893.1515.



At the Academy House for a Harrisburg Update meeting - Stanley Field, Rep. Babette Josephs, and Rena Field.

Sign up for do-not-call list

Pennsylvania's Do-Not-Call list helps keep telemarketers from calling you. This service is completely free. Once you register your phone number, telemarketers will not be allowed to call your home. Your information will remain on the list for five years. You also can register your cell phone number.

Call 1.888.777.3406 or visit www.nocallsplease.com to enroll. The law also prohibits telemarketers from preventing their names and telephone numbers from showing up on your caller-ID machine.

Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program

Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program is open to seniors 65 or older, widows and widowers 50 or older, and disabled Pennsylvanians 18 or older with an annual household income of \$15,000 or less. Applicants can exclude 50 percent of Social Security or federal railroad retirement benefits in determining total income eligibility.

The rebate of up to \$500 is based on your *total* income. Applications and inquiries about claims may be made by calling my office at 215.893.1515 or the Department of Revenue's toll-free number, 1.888.PA.TAXES (1.888.728.2937). The deadline is June 30.

Free tax help

Free tax preparation is available through ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) and the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Preparation program. ACORN can electronically file current year taxes for you. Please call ACORN at 215.765.0042 for an appointment and to find out what information you need to bring with you.

Higher emissions standards protect our quality of life

There is a bill (House Bill 2141) before the General Assembly that would overturn the state's current vehicle emissions standards in favor of the less restrictive federal standards. In 1998, Pennsylvania, like all other states, had a choice: to follow the federal vehicle emissions guidelines or adopt the more stringent California standards. We chose to follow California's model, which I believe is the right route for Philadelphia and Pennsylvania as a whole.

Since as much as one-third of the emissions causing ground-level ozone pollution comes from vehicles, implementing the stricter standards will provide thousands of tons per year more ozone-producing emission reduction than the federal program and will reduce toxic pollution. Protecting clean air will reduce asthma and other respiratory problems, keeping health-care costs down.

Not only will complying with the stricter standards maintain and improve our city's quality of life, it also will save consumers money. Automakers have said that vehicles will not cost more because of the stricter standards, plus the vehicles will be more efficient in their operation, saving owners as much as \$7 a month in operating costs.

Additionally, most of the Northeast Corridor, including New York and New Jersey, have opted into the California standards, which will contribute to cleaner, healthier air for Philadelphia. I will keep you posted on the status of this legislation.



Mr. Groundhog, Rep. Babette Josephs and Lou Coffey at the CCRA Groundhog Day Dinner.

Medicare doctor directory

Medicare's Participating Physician Directory is available on the internet at www.hgsa.com. At the site, click on "For Health Care Professionals," then under Self Service Options, click on "MEDPARD." If you do not have access to the internet, please call my office at 215.893.1515, and we will look up the information for you.



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Rep. Josephs invites you to reprint items from this newsletter. Please give credit to Rep. Josephs.

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!

The deadline to register to vote in the 2006 spring Primary Election is Monday, April 17 at 5 p.m. The primary election is Tuesday, May 16. In countries all over the world, voters braved gunfire and threats. We can do no less. If you will be 18 by the day after the primary (May 17), have moved, or have just become a citizen, you should vote. You can get a form from my office by calling 215.893.1515 or visiting my website at www.babette.org.



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Rep. Babette Josephs hosted a weatherization workshop at Vare Recreation Center to help people learn how to conserve energy. With her is Henry Will the workshop instructor.

Simple ways to save on your energy bills

The energy conservation workshop I hosted in February offered some valuable energy-saving tips. They are easy to do and will help reduce your energy bills, so I am passing them along to you:

- Lower your thermostat setting at night or while you're away from your home.
- Set your water heater to 110 degrees.
- Install radiator reflectors and bleed your radiators.
- Seal those leaky windows by using caulk, caulk rope, plastic storm windows and tighten the window locks.
- Seal drafts around doors by attaching door sweeps and using a V-seal.
- Replace your furnace filter every 90 days.

Visit www.ecasavesenergy.org or call 215.988.0929 for more tips and explanations on how to reduce your energy bills.

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