

United Methodist Advocacy in Pennsylvania

November 30, 2017

On a national level, the GOP Tax Plan is the outstanding issue of the moment. It has passed the U.S. House and is under consideration in the Senate. At this writing, voting is expected to take place soon. The General Board of Church and Society reminds us that the United Methodist Church recommends that tax plans, 1) protect the poor and vulnerable, 2) strengthen and uphold values of our common live together, and 3) ensure burdens and benefits are shared equitably. If you have strong feelings about the tax plan being considered in the U.S. Senate, go to the websites of Senators Toomey and Casey to leave a message.

My report for this month is a little shorter than usual. Many of the items in this report are updates on topics that we have been following. Neither Pennsylvania legislative chamber met in voting session for more than two or three days. The House began to deal with amendments to a bill for a natural gas production severance tax—which will continue in December.

In November, I had the pleasure to preach at Calvary UMC in West Philadelphia, met with the Public Witness Commission of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches, and consulted at the Susquehanna Conference Center with the Mission & Outreach Team. On Nov. 22, I accompanied U.S. Rep. Doyle's staff-member for agriculture, Kate Werley, on a tour of the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank.

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HB1650

The Mission and Outreach Committee of the Susquehanna Conference has been watching House Bill 1650, *Closure of State Institutions for intellectual Disability*. FYI—At this time, the bill remains dormant in the House Health Committee.

Bishops Call for Action on Gambling Expansion in PA

The three Pennsylvania United Methodist Bishops—Bishop Johnson, Bishop Moore-Koikoi and Bishop Park—signed a letter during the second week of November, urging United Methodists to support the limited-time option for municipalities to deny mini-casino expansion into their communities. The letter originated with Bishop Peggy Johnson, EPAUMC, with the other two bishops quickly endorsing. Following is a web address where the letter can be viewed (copy and paste into your internet search box):

<http://methoblog.com/2017/11/bishop-calls-for-action-against-pa-gambling-expansion/>

Sin Revenue

Pennsylvania would be appreciative if its residents drink, smoke, vape, chew and gamble. At least, the state is depending on the revenue generated from the sin taxes levied on those sources.

The passage of the state’s revenue package in October marked the third time in less than two years that lawmakers have turned to vice to plug budget holes, consequently avoiding spending cuts, reforms, and potentially unpopular increases in sales and income taxes. “I don’t know what other sin we go to,” said state Sen, Scott Petri (R-Bucks). “Are there any sins we’ve missed?”

The only other taxes passed with the budget, which was approved at the end of October, were a tax on fireworks and an expansion of the sales tax to apply to online purchases.

Various vice-related revenues constituted better than 6 percent of the state’s income in the 2016-17 fiscal year, according to data from the Department of Revenue. “The last couple of years, that’s been the major area where the Assembly has been willing to raise revenue,” said Marc Stier, executive director of the Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center.

With the new legislation—the approval of internet gambling, mini-casinos, and video gambling terminals in truck stops—is expected to generate further revenue. But, there is no way to predict whether online gambling and mini-casinos will draw in substantially more players or just change the habits of people who already gamble.

But, like other sin taxes, the gambling package passed last month raises questions about how much money the state can really make from people’s vices, and exemplifies the legislature’s emphasis on such sources.

Sin taxes are unreliable, because they can act as disincentives, persuading some people to quit the habits that are generating the revenues. On the one hand, the tax is created to generate income, on the other hand, it discourages—intentionally or unintentionally—people from using. There is the bubble effect—the bubble can only expand so far before it breaks.

Sin taxes are easier to pass, because they don't affect all citizens, unlike an income or sales tax, said Bob Dick, a senior policy analyst at the research group, Commonwealth Foundation.

Sin taxes are regressive, meaning they are disproportionately borne by lower-income residents, the people least able to afford them.

Fund-Raiding Blocked

On Nov. 22, a federal judge temporarily blocked Gov. Tom Wolf and the Pennsylvania Legislature from forcibly taking \$200 million from a quasi-state agency, to help balance Pennsylvania's budget.

U.S. Middle District Chief Judge Christopher C. Conner issued a preliminary injunction barring the state from executing its threat to dissolve the Pennsylvania Professional Liability Joint Underwriting Association if it did not provide the money by Dec. 1.

Conner's order puts the issue on hold until a federal trial can be held on the dispute. In granting the injunction, he noted the nonprofit association, though created by the state, does not receive state funding. It is financed completely by mandatory contributions from 621 medical malpractice insurers. None of the association's money is held by the state treasury.

The association filed suit soon after Gov. Wolf signed Act 44 on Oct. 30. Act 44 includes the demand for the \$200 million. The money is supposed to come from the association's budget surplus. The Legislature created the association in 1975 to provide medical malpractice coverage for hard-to-insure clients.

Act 44 states that there has been a decline in the need for the association's services and that the agency has more than enough money to meet its mandate. However, Judge Conner wrote, "All told, the association faces considerable financial harm." In granting the injunction, Conner promised to expedite the case to quickly reach a resolution as to whether the state has a right to take the \$200 million.

Federal Gerrymandering Case to Continue

On Nov. 7, a panel of judges denied a motion to dismiss a federal lawsuit challenging Pennsylvania's congressional district maps. The ruling, issued hours after the three judges heard oral arguments in Philadelphia, means the case can proceed to trial. The case was brought by five Pennsylvania voters against the governor and elections officials.

The motion to dismiss was submitted by Pennsylvania House Speaker Mike Turzai and Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati. Attorneys for Rep. Turzai and Sen. Scarnati contend that the legislative districts are lawful. But lawyers for the voters argue they were illegally drawn to favor one party over another.

The suit, *Agre v. Wolf*, seeks to have the map declared unconstitutional—the Elections Clause of the U.S. Constitution allows states to make decisions regarding voting, but not to insert partisanship when they do so.

This was the second time the suit survived a challenge. On Nov. 3, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito denied a request for a stay, also submitted by Rep. Turzai and Sen. Scarnati.

READ FURTHER IN THE FOLLOWING PIECE

Federal PA Gerrymandering Court Case

On Nov. 9, in relation to a federal gerrymandering case, the Pennsylvania Legislature's two highest-ranking Republican leaders were ordered to turn over documents related to the mapping of the state's

congressional districts. The case involves a lawsuit arguing that Republicans improperly used their role in administering elections to achieve partisan objectives. The case is scheduled to go to trial on Dec. 4.

A federal judge in Philadelphia ordered House Speaker Mike Turzai and Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati to produce communications they or aides had with the Redistricting Majority Project (REDMAP), the Republican Party's national redistricting effort after the 2010 census, as well as information used to develop the map. Rep. Turzai and Sen. Scarnati had fought disclosure, citing legislative privilege.

"We need to show that the people who drew the maps used partisan data," said Alice Ballard, a lawyer for the Pennsylvania voters who brought the suit. The outcome of the case could have a profound effect on elections in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania is a swing state where Democrats outnumber Republicans and have had a recent winning record in statewide contests, but hold a distinct minority in both chambers of the Legislature. In Congressional seats, Republicans won 13 of 18 elections in 2014 and 2016, while only receiving a little over 50 percent of the vote.

State Gerrymandering Court Case

A state-level court challenge to how congressional districts were drawn by Republicans six years ago will proceed on a compressed schedule, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled on November 9. This decision moves the case to the front of the Commonwealth Court's docket.

The Supreme Court's 4-3 decision overturned a lower court judge's ruling last month that put the dispute on hold. The order said the case "involves issues of immediate public importance" and gave Commonwealth Court until Dec. 31 to issue findings of fact and legal conclusions.

Plaintiffs say the result has made a mockery of the fair elections process, and they hope to use a battery of statistical measures to prove it. Time has been of the essence for the plaintiffs, because they hope to effect a change in the state's maps in time for the 2018 election cycle, beginning this winter with circulation of nominating petitions for party primaries.

"We are thrilled that Pennsylvania voters will have their day in court," said Mimi McKenzie, legal director of the Public Interest Law Center and part of a team that represents the plaintiffs, the Pennsylvania League of Women Voters and a group of people who live in each of the 18 congressional districts.

Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati and House Speaker Mike Turzai, the top-ranking Republicans in the Legislature, sought a stay in the case pending a U.S. Supreme Court ruling on a separate redistricting case from Wisconsin. They say they will defend the existing maps, which have been in place since 2012.

The defendants also include state elections officials, Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf and Democratic Lt. Gov. Mike Stack. Wolf's lawyers did not support the attempt to delay the case. Stack, a state senator when the districts were drawn in 2011, said his party was cut out of the process and accused Republican leaders of contorting boundary lines to retain a partisan advantage.

The case before the Commonwealth Court is expected to result in a civil trial with, at minimum, several expert witnesses called by both sides. The court's decision could range from upholding the existing map, to calling for an immediate redraw.

Federal CHIP

On Nov. 3, the U.S. House approved a bill to renew the expired Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), but the mostly party-line vote did not specify how the program would be funded.

CHIP provides health insurance to 9 million children, nationally, whose families earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but can't afford private insurance. The program had been left on the back burner this

fall, when its Sept. 30 deadline for renewal passed without action—as lawmakers focused on several unsuccessful attempts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act.

While lawmakers have now agreed to extend CHIP for another five years, they could not agree on how to pay for it. House Republicans and Democrats have different ideas on the matter. Each side accuses the other of seeking to sabotage the program.

The bill has been sent to the U.S. Senate, where further action might not come until December. It is expected that CHIP will be dealt with as part of the broad year-end spending package.

In regard to the 176,000 children enrolled in Pennsylvania's CHIP, state officials said the program has enough funding to keep operating until early February. But the state Department of Human Services will begin notifying families at least 30 days before the program would run out of funding.

Pennsylvania's CHIP program predates the national one, which began in 1997. The state's version was created in 1992, and was funded at that time by a 2-cent tax on packs of cigarettes. Today, the program is jointly funded through the state and federal governments. Washington has picked up a larger share of the tab since the Affordable Care Act was passed, with the federal portion covering almost 90 percent of the cost.

State CHIP

On Nov. 20, the Pennsylvania House voted unanimously to reauthorize the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), leaving the issue of providing medical services for transgender youth—that I covered in my October report—to a separate bill that won committee approval earlier in the day.

The House approved a version of House Bill 1388 that does not contain provisions regarding controversial gender reassignment surgery. The bill moved without addressing transgender concerns, so as not to jeopardize health insurance coverage for thousands of children enrolled in CHIP. There is an urgency factor, because the program faces a Dec. 31 expiration date. The CHIP legislation now goes back to the Senate, next scheduled to be in voting session on Dec. 11.

Passing a clean CHIP bill will let the House debate the issue of providing taxpayer dollars to cover medical care for transgender teens as a separate matter, said Majority Leader Dave Reed (R-Indiana). Rep. Reed referred to the newly introduced House Bill 1933, by Rep. Jesse Topper (R-Bedford), as a vehicle for this debate. The Health Committee approved Topper's bill by a 16-8 party line vote. Topper's bill would prohibit the use of taxpayer dollars to provide gender or sex reassignment surgery and gender or sex transition services under CHIP or Medical Assistance.

Rep. Reed and Rep. Topper are both United Methodists.

Currently, there are 174,000 children and teens age-19 and younger enrolled in CHIP in Pennsylvania. CHIP draws on federal and state monies to provide insurance coverage to children in families who earn too much to qualify for Medical Assistance, but cannot afford to buy private insurance.

Pornography Resolution

On Nov. 20, the House Health Committee approved by a 19-5 vote a resolution that condemns the free, widespread availability of pornography as a public health crisis. The resolution was sponsored by Committee Majority Chairman Matt Baker (R-Tioga).

HR519 notes that pornography use can lead to pornography addiction, the hypersexualization of teens, and other harmful social implications such as contributing to human trafficking, creating a toxic sexual environment, contributing to the objectification of women, and equating violence and sexual mistreatment with pleasure.

Rep. Baker said the thrust of the “public awareness resolution” is to condemn childhood exposure to pornography. "Due to advances in technology, young children are now exposed to hardcore pornography at alarming rates, with as many as 27 percent of older millennials reporting that they first encountered

explicit pornography before even reaching puberty," Rep. Baker wrote in materials accompanying the legislation. "The adverse public health effects of this are real and need to be confronted with education, prevention and research and policy change at the community and social levels to address this epidemic."

Some lawmakers noted the language of the resolution was so broadly drafted that it might infringe on First Amendment free speech rights.

The resolution had the support of the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference. In confirming the Catholic Conference's support for the resolution, spokesperson Amy Hill observed, "Modern technology has created a pervasive problem among young people and we do not really understand the real cost."

Resolutions do not have the force and effect of law. The Health Committee action moves the resolution to the full House.

Democratic National Convention Audit

On November 20, PA Auditor General Eugene DePasquale addressed two key points resulting from his audit of spending by the Host Committee of the 2016 Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia.

First, the Auditor General said that he requested that the IRS review \$1 million in bonuses paid to DNC Host Committee staff. Because the DNC Host Committee was registered as a nonprofit under the federal tax exemption code, DePasquale said bonuses given to board members who were also paid staff, might have violated IRS regulations that bar any "private shareholder or individual" of a nonprofit from benefiting from its earnings. Determining whether [individuals] were paid bonuses as employees or as board members "was confusing enough that we forwarded it to the IRS..." However, DePasquale noted that public money was not used for the bonuses.

Former Gov. Ed Rendell, who served as chairman of the Host Committee—working for no direct salary—called the bonuses "deferred compensation" for the time some of the staffers worked for no or low pay.

Second, DePasquale said that his months-long review of the organizing committee's spending did not find that it had misused any of the \$10 million grant that it got from the state. He said the 26-page grant agreement with the Department of Community and Economic Development did not require the organizing committee to consume their privately raised funds before spending the state subsidy. "We see no legal recourse for the state to get any of that money back," said the Auditor General.

However, DePasquale incredulously asked, "Nobody has ever thought to say, 'Hey, use all the private money first, and then use the taxpayers' money? Nobody? Ever?'" He chided the state for not including a claw-back provision on the \$10 million grant, that would enable it to recoup funds that weren't needed. "The reality is there should be provision that says if you have enough private money, don't use the state money." DePasquale said that if the state had a claw-back provision in its grant agreement, all the surplus would've come back to the state. He asked that the state immediately start adding such provisions to all its grants.

The Host Committee's purpose was to fund-raise and organize the DNC. The committee raised \$86 million, of which the largest portion, \$10 million, came from a Pennsylvania grant. In addition to \$1 million in staff bonuses, the committee used its surplus to pay more than \$500,000 for municipal services and provided over \$1 million in grants to the Philadelphia School District and to charity.

In response to the Auditor General's report, state Senate Republican leaders called for a deeper investigation.

Cortes Resignation

Pedro Cortes, former head of the Pennsylvania Department of State didn't resign on his own, but appears to have been abruptly asked to leave by Gov. Tom Wolf. In an email Secretary Cortes wrote to the governor on the day of his resignation, he indicated he didn't know why he was being removed from

office. “I remain at a loss to understand why you would dispense with my services without sharing with me concerns you had about my professional performance or personal life.”

The governor’s office released the email in response to a public records request, by news media, for documents pertaining to Cortes’ resignation. The reasons behind Cortes’ dismissal have been a mystery. The Governor has been silent on the matter. Cortes, a longtime fixture in Harrisburg, has also not spoken publicly or responded to requests for comment.

The Department of State oversees elections, campaign finance, corporate filings and professional licenses, among other things.

Affordable Care Act Not Dead

Nearly two months after President Donald Trump pronounced Obamacare dead, saying, “You shouldn’t even mention it anymore,” millions of people nationwide are betting that it’s still alive. Total sign-ups for Obamacare individual insurance in the 39 states that use HealthCare.gov reached about 2.5 million during November.

Open enrollment will end on Dec. 15. Since there’s usually a surge of procrastinators at the end, what happens in the last week of sign-up season will be critical.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has estimated that 11 million will enroll in 2018, up from 2017’s 10 million, even as the period for sign-ups has been cut in half, to six weeks.

Enacted under former President Barack Obama, the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) offers subsidized private insurance to people who don’t have coverage on the job. This year’s enrollment numbers are being closely watched because of the Trump administration’s disdain for the program.

The Trump administration has stopped payments that reimburse insurers for providing lower copays and deductibles to low-income people, contributing to a spike in premiums. It has cut the sign-up season in half, slashed the advertising budget, and reduced the number of counselors who help consumers enroll.

Though federal Republican lawmakers are trying to undo the ACA, they do not have enough votes to repeal it and consequently, must continue to run the insurance program. However, the future of the ACA is uncertain.

Reducing House Membership

There is an initiative in Harrisburg to reduce the number of representatives in the state House. This would require a state Constitutional amendment. The process is already one-third completed.

Such legislation needs to pass the General Assembly twice in successive sessions. Then, it must be approved by voter referendum. Legislation has already passed the General Assembly once. In 2016, a bill passed calling for a reduction in the House of Representatives to 151 members—from 203.

If the same legislation passes both chambers of the General Assembly in the coming months, voters in 2018 could be presented with a ballot question in November asking for approval of this downsizing. Rep. Jerry Knowles (R-Schuylkill), is the primary sponsor of this legislation. He said that he has been assured by Republican leaders that the measure will move in the coming months.

Rep. Knowles said that if the measure passed quickly enough, it could end up on the ballot for the May 15 primary. But, he’d rather see it on the ballot in the fall, because in November 2018, voters will be electing the governor, a U.S. senator, all the members of the state House, and half the members of the state Senate. A high voter turnout is expected.

Knowles said House members now represent a little more than 60,000 people, on average. If the 52 seats are eliminated, the average House district would have a little more than 80,000 people in it. The ratio of House members to Senators would drop from 4-to-1 to 3-to-1.

If the General Assembly votes to put the question on the ballot next year and voters approve it, the reduction would occur during the redistricting process following the 2020 Census.

Judge Sides with “Sanctuary City” Philadelphia

On Nov. 15, a federal judge blocked the U.S. government from withholding a major grant that pays for public safety equipment. The purpose for withholding the federal grant is the allegation that Philadelphia is a "sanctuary city." U.S. District Judge Michael Baylson said in his decision that he weighed the public interest and possible harm that could come from withholding such funds.

Baylson is the latest of several federal judges to block efforts by the Department of Justice to withhold funding from sanctuary cities. The Justice Department is reviewing the Philadelphia ruling and determining the next steps, said spokesman Devin O'Malley.

"In Philadelphia, 2017 homicides have already eclipsed 2016's numbers, and so-called 'sanctuary policies' further undermine public safety and law enforcement," O'Malley said. However, Police Commissioner Richard Ross previously testified that U.S. residents are much more responsible for crime in Philadelphia than non-citizen immigrants. "There is no evidence in the record whatsoever that non-citizens in Philadelphia commit any more crimes than the citizens," wrote Judge Baylson.

Sanctuary cities limit cooperation with federal enforcement of immigration law. The Justice Department has threatened to cut off millions of dollars in grants to cities if they don't meet certain criteria for cooperating with immigration officials.

"Today's ruling benefits every single Philadelphia resident," said Mayor Jim Kenney. "Our police officers and criminal justice partners will receive much-needed federal funding, and our city will be able to continue practices that keep our communities safe and provide victims and witnesses the security to come forward."

Hunger Free PA

Following is an excerpt from a Nov. 9 press release by the Wolf administration:

Wolf administration joins experts in food symposium.

Today, Department of Human Services Acting Secretary Teresa Miller joined national experts and local cross-sector leaders to participate in a special hunger symposium, Hunger – The Gateway to Other Ills, discussing the health concerns and impact of food security for individuals throughout Pennsylvania. Research has shown that a person's health is 30% genetics, 10% what happens in the doctor's office, 20% social and environmental factors, and 40% individual behavior.

"Working with Governor Wolf and other state agencies, we are working to fight hunger," said Miller... These factors include things like employment, housing, transportation, and what we're here to talk about today - food security. Hunger has major impacts on health and development. We can't talk about hunger without also talking about poverty."

Low-income children are more likely to be food insecure, and food insecurity in households with children is associated with inadequate intake of several important nutrients, deficits in cognitive development, behavioral problems, and poor health. In Pennsylvania, we estimate that 1 in 8 Pennsylvanians lives below the poverty line.

In September 2016, Setting the Table: Blueprint for a Hunger-Free PA was developed to address hunger in PA, and as a response to Governor Wolf's executive order establishing the Governor's Food Security Partnership. The Partnership includes the departments of Aging, Agriculture, Community and Economic Development, Education, Health, and Human Services.

Since the release of the blueprint, the Wolf administration has completed key steps in eliminating food insecurities by:

- Allowing easier access to benefits through myCOMPASS PA mobile app;
- Increasing knowledge of summer feeding programs by mailing summer feeding postcards to all SNAP

recipient households with children;

- Expanding access to healthy foods with 160 Healthy Corner Stores throughout the state;
- Making access to employment and training services easier by establishing five 50/50 SNAP training sites;
- Distributing more than five million pounds of food to more than 850,000 low-income households through the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System;
- Growing food security programs in the Medicaid system; and
- Educating individuals and families on the necessary nutrition needed for a healthy life.

Miller spoke to the symposium...about closing the gap and addressing food security in the commonwealth.

“Food insecurity is an issue that has overwhelming impacts on so many parts of our society. The social determinants of health are too powerful for us to ignore,” said Miller...

For more information regarding the Blueprint for a Hunger-Free Pennsylvania visit: dhs.pa.gov/ending-hunger.

Terminology for...undocumented immigrant? Illegal alien? Unauthorized migrant? What?

I found the following article to be interesting and pertinent. I thought it best to use the author’s own words. The following piece consists of excerpts from a Philadelphia *Daily News* and *The Inquirer* article from Nov. 3, by staff writer Jeff Gammage:

During a court hearing over Philadelphia’s conduct as a sanctuary city, Justice Department lawyer Arjun Garg rarely veered from applying a two-word label to the people at the heart of the case — “illegal aliens.”

Philadelphia City Solicitor Sozi Tulante, standing six feet away in the same federal courtroom, never uttered those words... In court, he spoke of “residents” and “citizens” who might not have the necessary papers to be in this country.

These days, the terminology around immigrants — undocumented, illegal, unauthorized, unlawful, alien — has become as divisive as immigration itself. There’s little consensus on what to call a populace estimated at more than 11 million. Different people and groups use different terms, and accuse each other of deliberately choosing words that are too soft or too harsh.

“The language itself becomes part of the argument, part of the battle,” said David Spener, author of *Clandestine Crossings: Migrants and Coyotes on the Texas-Mexico Border*, and chair of the sociology and anthropology department at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas.

Spener prefers “migrants” because it implies long-term travel in different directions, including circles, as opposed to the straight, one-way trip indicated by “immigrants”...

The debate has sharpened during the last two years, largely driven by Donald Trump, who as a candidate and as president has described border-crossers as “illegals” and “illegal aliens” who foment “illegal immigration” to the United States...

Last week, outside U.S. District Court in Center City where the case was being heard, Justice Department attorney Garg declined to say why he chose “illegal aliens” as the correct term. But some conservative thinkers argue that phrase is exactly accurate, used in legal opinions and in reports by the Department of Homeland Security.

“The correct term is ‘illegal alien,’” Hans von Spakovsky wrote in the conservative magazine *National Review*. “The politically correct term ‘undocumented immigrant’ ... is a made-up term used by progressive groups and media sources to extinguish the line between legal immigrants and illegal aliens.”

For others, the phrase provokes a visceral reaction...

Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel famously said that no human can be illegal. Pope Francis refers to “migrants” and “refugees” and “our brothers and sisters.” And last year, the Library of Congress dropped “illegal alien” from its subject headings — angering conservative lawmakers who claimed the library had bowed to liberal pressure..

Being in the United States without authorization is a civil violation, not a criminal offense. Kevin Fandl, a former counsel to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, known as ICE, points out that drug dealers and other criminals are never identified as “illegals.”

The Temple University legal-studies scholar prefers “unlawful immigrants,” to mean people who are present without legal authority. The word “undocumented” is imperfect, Fandl said, because many people have documents, just not the correct ones.

The Associated Press eliminated “illegal immigrant” from its reports in 2013, saying “illegal” should describe an action, not a person. The Inquirer stylebook says no to the use of “aliens” and strongly discourages the term “illegal immigrant.”

Never, the stylebook warns reporters and editors, use “unauthorized immigrant” — the phrase chosen as accurate by the Pew Research Center in a revealing 2017 study on immigration. The center estimated the U.S. is home to 11.3 million undocumented immigrants, about half of them Mexican.

“Words are laden always with connotations,” said Spener, the Trinity University sociologist...

Property Tax Referendum Approved

On election day, Nov. 7, Pennsylvania voters overwhelmingly approved a referendum—amending the state Constitution—that might open the door to property tax relief.

The referendum has no immediate impact, but provides for an overhaul of the property tax system. It is now possible for state lawmakers to pass legislation allowing local governments to further limit or exempt property owners from paying property taxes on their primary residences. But, before that can happen, legislators will need to determine how to fund school districts, municipalities and counties currently funded by property taxes. Laws to provide replacement revenue would need to be enacted.

Efforts to eliminate property taxes have never been successful. Any Pennsylvanians who voted in favor of this referendum believing that their property taxes will disappear, are likely to be disappointed. Eventually, property tax reductions might occur in some locations. However, the ramifications of this action remain to be seen.

Property tax is a predictable source of revenue, less susceptible to fluctuations in the economy than sales or income taxes. The things for which it pays tend to be essential. Sebastien Bradley, an assistant professor of economics at Drexel University, observed, “Virtually every state relies on property taxes to some degree. Nobody likes taxes, but as far as taxes go, property taxes are a pretty efficient way to raise revenue.”

State Sen. Michele Brooks (R-Mercer), said, "This is a major policy shift. The only piece people are talking about seems to be that it may remove property taxes. But, this homestead exemption legislation is the first piece to raising the personal income tax, increasing the sales tax, or taxing things that are not currently taxed."

Women Judges

Women swept Pennsylvania's statewide judicial races on election day, Nov. 7, in the one sector of state politics approaching gender parity: the appellate bench. Women candidates won all six appeals court seats in contention. Voters also retained two female jurists, as well as one male judge.

Going into the election, women held 53 percent of the 28 seats currently filled at the appellate level of the state judicial system.

While women have had success winning seats on the state Commonwealth, Superior and Supreme courts, they remain distinct minorities elsewhere in government. All three state row offices are held by men. Women represent less than a quarter of the state Legislature, and the percentage of women in the lower courts is only slightly higher.

Turzai Running for Governor

On Nov. 14, Pennsylvania's House Speaker Mike Turzai, announced that he will seek the Republican nomination to run for governor. This announcement has been long expected.

Rep. Turzai (R-Allegheny), 58, a social conservative, has been a leader of the anti-tax and austerity bloc in the state House. Turzai called himself a "reformer with results." But, he said, "to really make a difference you have to be governor, and you need a strong leader in that position." He will not run for his House seat if he wins the primary, and intends to remain speaker during the campaign.

Turzai, a lawyer and former county prosecutor, has been in office since 2001. In 2011 he became the House majority leader and in 2015 he took on the role of speaker.

Turzai plans to run on his record of helping block nearly all the tax increases sought by Gov. Tom Wolf, including a severance tax on Marcellus Shale natural gas production. This year, he led a revenue package that included massive gambling expansion and borrowing \$1.5 billion to fill a deficit—anticipated to cost taxpayers \$2 billion over 20 years. Budgets he has helped broker have drawn six credit downgrades for Pennsylvania, since 2012.

Also running in the Republican primary for governor are York County state Sen. Scott Wagner and two candidates from the Pittsburgh area, former health care systems consultant Paul Mango and attorney Laura Ellsworth.

Dean Running for Lt. Gov.

On Nov. 29, state Rep. Madeleine Dean (D-Montgomery) announced her candidacy for lieutenant governor.

Rep. Dean was elected to the House in 2012. The issues on which she wants to focus are education and the economy. Dean said she will work to increase funding for the state's public schools and to increase the minimum wage throughout the state.

Before becoming a representative, Dean worked as an attorney and a teacher. "I see the opportunity in it—an opportunity for me to expand my public service and an opportunity to do good work on a broader scale," she said.

Rep. Dean is the third woman to announce her candidacy for the Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor. The other two women are Army Veteran Aryanna Berringer from Murrysville and Chester County Commissioner Kathi Cozzone.

Also running are Lt. Gov. Mike Stack, Braddock Mayor John Fetterman and Lancaster County Commissioner Craig Lehman.

During primary elections, candidates for lieutenant governor are chosen separately from candidates for governor.

Fetterman Running for Lt. Gov.

On Nov. 14, John Fetterman, mayor of Braddock Borough, in southwestern Pennsylvania, announced his candidacy for lieutenant governor.

Mr. Fetterman, whose efforts to turn blighted Braddock around, have sometimes drawn national media attention. News stories often feature his tattoos—one for every resident murdered during his tenure as mayor—under headlines like "Mayor of Rust."

Fetterman ran for U.S. Senate in 2016, and finished third in a four-way Democratic primary. He only received about 20 percent of Democratic votes, but won in Allegheny County.

This time, Fetterman will be running in the Democratic primary against incumbent Lt. Gov. Mike Stack, one-time congressional candidate Aryanna Berringer, Chester County Commissioner Kathi Cozzone, Lancaster County Commissioner Craig Lehman and state Rep. Madeleine Dean of Montgomery County.

"The reason I am running for lieutenant governor are the exact reasons I came to Braddock back in 2001"—to fight for progressive issues including a higher minimum wage, better police-community relations, and marijuana legalization, he said. "I'm going to be going out all across Pennsylvania, campaigning [in] many of these forgotten places—second-chance cities, whatever you want to call them—that have become my professional passion," he told a crowd of 100 supporters in Braddock. Fetterman told reporters he had no intention of changing his style, or his address. "I'm always going to live across the street from a steel mill," referring to the Edgar Thomson works, near his home.

Stack Reelection Bid

On Nov. 21, Lieutenant Governor Gov. Mike Stack announced that he will run for reelection. Mr. Stack, 54, of Philadelphia, made his announcement to a gathering of supporters in the Philadelphia mayor's reception room.

He said he looks forward to working on educational equality, criminal justice reforms, raising the minimum wage and other issues important to working families in Pennsylvania.

Mr. Stack was in the news this spring because of a controversy that arose around complaints about mistreatment and abusive language used with staff at the lieutenant governor's residence by Stack and his wife Tonya. This situation resulted in a strained relationship with Gov. Tom Wolf. Wolf called for the Office of Inspector General to investigate the complaints against Stack as well as pull the staff out of the lieutenant governor's residence and take away the Stacks' 24-hour state police protection.

During his announcement, Stack said, "This year has been difficult for my family and me but we're emerging stronger and healthier and we are committed to make sure that everyone in Pennsylvania receives the same kind of support that we've received during our challenges."

Stack served in the state Senate for 14 years before winning election as lieutenant governor in 2014. He said he felt comfortable about his prospects for this election. Stack's competition in the Democratic primary for lieutenant governor include one-time congressional candidate Aryanna Berringer, Chester County Commissioner Kathi Cozzone, Braddock Mayor John Fetterman, Lancaster County Commissioner Craig Lehman and state Rep. Madeleine Dean of Montgomery County.

Bartos runs with Wagner

Montgomery County real estate investor Scott Bartos is abandoning his campaign for U.S. Senate to run for lieutenant governor, as GOP gubernatorial candidate Scott Wagner's running mate.

Nominees for governor and lieutenant governor appear together on general election ballots in Pennsylvania, but run separately in primaries. But, Wagner and Bartos cast themselves as a team in a joint news release, November 9.

"(Bartos) is a great guy who wants to change the way Harrisburg works," Wagner said. "He'll help me take on career politicians." Wagner and Bartos have positioned themselves as political outsiders.

Democrats Choose Lamb

On November 19, Democrats from Allegheny, Greene, Washington, and Westmoreland counties chose Conor Lamb to run in a March 13 special election, for the 18th Congressional District seat, vacated by Tim Murphy. At the nominating convention, Mr. Lamb was chosen by 554 county committee members on the second ballot, over six other contenders.

The 33-year-old Lamb is a former federal prosecutor and Marine Corps veteran, attempting his first bid for political office. He is a member of a prominent Allegheny County political family.

Lamb criticized Washington Republicans for their tax proposal, cutting healthcare amid an opioid crisis, and failing to pass an infrastructure bill. He said that the Republican tax plan, passed by the U.S. House of Representatives, would benefit the top 1 percent of income-earners at the expense of middle-class Americans. If elected, Lamb said he'd focus on jobs and infrastructure.

Republicans Choose Saccone

On November 11, Republicans from Allegheny, Greene, Washington and Westmoreland counties, chose state Rep. Rick Saccone (R-Allegheny) to run in a March 13 special election, for the 18th Congressional District seat, vacated by Tim Murphy. At the nominating convention, 200 party representatives selected Saccone from among three candidates.

The other candidates included state Sen. Guy Reschenthaler of Jefferson Hills and state Sen. Kim Ward of Hempfield.

Touting his support for President Trump, Saccone said he would get his message and agenda out to voters who are “worried about the direction our country is heading.” He said his agenda includes lowering taxes, reducing government spending and regulation, repealing and replacing Obamacare, supporting conservative Supreme Court justices, rebuilding the nation's military, protecting unborn children and reforming the VA Health Care System.

Saccone, 59, of Elizabeth Township, spend much of an Air Force career in South Korea. He lived for a year in North Korea, representing an international organization building nuclear power plants. After returning to the U.S., Saccone received a Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh and teaches political science part-time at Saint Vincent College. He volunteered for an assignment with the Army when America went to war with Iraq, and served in Baghdad as a senior counterintelligence agent identifying and interrogating insurgents, according to his website.

Dai Morgan