

Message from the Chair

June 12, 2007

Re: Beyond the budget hoopla

Dear Colleague:

As of today, we have 2½ weeks before the end of the fiscal year. I am fully aware there is much gossip and speculation about the status of budget negotiations. For our freshman and newer members, please understand that at this time of year, such talk is part of the Harrisburg parlor game. It is a game that is played with speculation, innuendo and assumptions but typically not facts.

I have been open and forthright about the process in my individual discussions with you and when talking to the caucus as a whole. I am fully aware that not every member is comfortable with every idea on our budget plate. To be frank, there are some ideas I support more fully than others.

But I want to be very clear: My job as Appropriations Chairman is to guide this process for the Democratic Caucus. My job is to fight for every dollar I can to support the programs we as Democrats believe help build strong communities:

- Increased funding for education;
- Investments in economic development;
- Healthcare for all;
- Job training programs;
- The arts and culture;
- The environment;
- And perhaps, most importantly, a steady stream of funding for transit and roads/bridges.

Prior to Memorial Day, our Caucus passed House Bill 1286 which set our spending priorities with regard to the General Fund Budget. By doing so, **we sent a clear signal to the state Senate that we will start negotiations from that position.** Any proposal in which the starting point is less than that will TAKE THE STATE BACKWARDS.

As we engage in budget negotiations, we must look to the future, not to the past. As Democrats it is our responsibility to determine how this state will look, not just a year or two from now, but 20 years from now.

I cannot in good conscience support draconian proposals that would slash nearly \$500 million dollars from the general fund. Doing so would be more than irresponsible: it would simply shift the budget problems we have to next year or the year after. And in doing so, it would leave hundreds of thousands of our youngest citizens, our most vulnerable citizens and our senior citizens without the programs they deserve.



Rep. Dwight Evans, Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
Miriam A. Fox, Executive Director
717-783-1540
<http://www.hacd.net>

To that end, I also have decided to stand firm in my position that this budget will NOT be done unless we find a solution that provides a steady stream of funding for our transit systems and for repairing our roads and bridges. I believe that if we procrastinate, we will not resolve the problem in the Fall, nor will we tackle it in 2008. And inaction on our part will only compound the problem.

I understand that the budget process can be excruciating at times. But keep in mind that Governor Rendell was elected with overwhelming public support. Our polling data and anecdotal evidence both suggest that the public will support bold ideas to move this state forward. And our mandate from the voters is to make responsible choices that will strengthen our Commonwealth.

I will talk more about the budget process during caucus in the coming days. In the meantime, I urge you to remain faithful to the ideals of our party; committed to the caucus; and confident that we will negotiate a budget which shows Democrats understand what it means to invest in people and in Pennsylvania.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "L. O'Neil", is located in the lower right quadrant of the page.