



# bits and bytes

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Today marked the first day in the annual three-week period of budget hearings and this year, Chairman Evans added a new element – testimony from citizens and community leaders. At select hearings, committee members will hear from outside panelists who will offer their observations about how budget and policy decisions made in Harrisburg effect the work that they do.

Gaming Control Board President **Mary Digiacommo Colins** and board members, **Raymond S. Angeli**, **James B. Ginty**, and **Gary A. Sojka**, as well as **Financial Officer Eileen McNulty**, testified before the House Committee on Appropriations and addressed the issues of revenue projection, licensing, and assistance for compulsive gamblers. Chairman Evans announced that he has asked Gaming Control Committee Chairman Harold James to look into the recent reports surrounding the licensing of Mount Airy Lodge and requested that members with questions about the matter, to hold them for the standing committee's hearings. Adding to the morning hearing were Mr. **Kim Hankins**, executive director of the Meadow's Standard Bred Owners' Association, which represents 600 horse owners, trainers, drivers and grooms and Mr. **Randy Bendis**, owner of Bendis Stables. Both gentlemen talked about the boost that slots gaming has given the horse racing industry in Pennsylvania. Mr. Hankins called Act 71, "the most amazing piece of legislation" and he said it has helped triple purses and attract new owners to the business. Local economic development is another benefit.

**Attorney General Tom Corbett** talked to the Committee about handgun policy enforcement, witness relocation, and the conviction rates of local and statewide task forces. Legislation about lost and stolen handguns; the issues of identity theft, illegal immigration, sexual predators, drug trafficking, and consumer protection all were discussed.

**Liquor Control Board Chairman P. J. Stapleton**, and board members **Tom Goldsmith** and **Robert Marcus** answered questions posed by the Appropriations Committee, ranging from privatization questions to the availability and selection of wines. State Police law enforcement issues and the use of Access cards and child support "epi" cards to purchase alcohol were raised. Chairman Stapleton said he would be supportive of legislative changes to prohibit such use.

From tainted meat to Pennsylvania's Dog Law, Agriculture Secretary **Dennis C. Wolff** fielded a series of questions to help members better understand the role of the Agriculture Department, which oversees Pennsylvania's number one industry. The state's 58,000 farm families produce \$4.6 billion dollars in agricultural products. With Gov. Ed Rendell's Energy Independence Strategy on the forefront of legislative discussions, you can expect to hear more about farming. That's because "ethanol is the next generation of fuel," Wolff tells us. And ethanol comes from products such as corn and switch grasses. These days, it's all very high tech. (And as for that tainted meat from California? "There's minimal risk," Wolff said.) Following Wolff's testimony, committee members heard from a panel with a range of agriculture related interests. The panelists were **Dr. Timothy LaSalle, CEO, the Rodale Institute, an advocate for researching the benefits of organic farming**; **Sheila Christopher, executive director PA Area Regional Food Bank, who provided sobering news about the increasing number of working families who rely on food bank services**; and **Greene County Commissioner Archie Trader**; **Brian Dietrich, Lehigh County farmer**; and **Mary Ann Warren, PA Association of Conservation Districts**, all of whom argued that some proposed Agriculture cuts should be restored.