



Capitol Correspondence

from

State Senator

Daylin Leach



Serving Delaware and Montgomery Counties

Winter 2013

Dear Neighbor,

While we in Pennsylvania – and America at large – face a number of difficult problems, the most critical issue we have to deal with is the fact that our political system is broken. We are rapidly losing our ability to govern ourselves as a viable democracy. There are a number of reasons for this, including campaign finance rules that give a few very wealthy citizens a grotesquely disproportionate say in what happens in government, abuse of the rules – particularly the filibuster – which prevents the legislature from taking any action, and voter suppression efforts designed to stop people who don't vote "the right way" from voting at all. However, to me, the single biggest threat to our democracy is the destructive process known as gerrymandering.

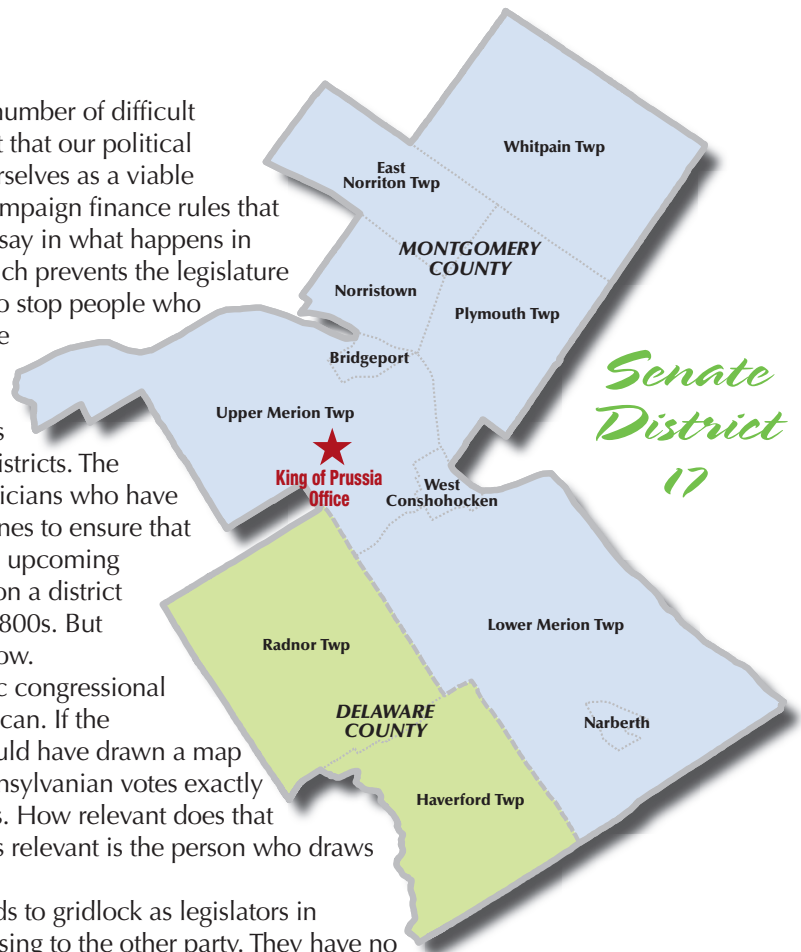
Every 10 years, the Constitution requires us to take a census and redraw the lines of our congressional and state legislative districts. The problem is that the people who draw the lines are the very politicians who have to live under the new districts. Not surprisingly, they draw the lines to ensure that they, and the candidates of their party, are guaranteed to win all upcoming elections. This is not new. The term gerrymandering was based on a district drawn by Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry in the early 1800s. But we've never been so aggressive or sophisticated about it until now.

In 2012, 90,000 more Pennsylvanians voted for Democratic congressional candidates than Republicans. Yet the delegation is 13-5 Republican. If the Democrats had controlled the last redistricting process, they could have drawn a map with a 13-5 Democratic advantage. Think about that: every Pennsylvanian votes exactly the same way, yet eight congressional districts would flip parties. How relevant does that make you as a voter? Not relevant at all! The only person who is relevant is the person who draws the lines.

Of course this leads to more than malapportionment. It leads to gridlock as legislators in districts that are safe for their party don't have to worry about losing to the other party. They have no incentive to look moderate or reasonable. Since they can only lose in a primary, their incentive is to demonize the other side and refuse to compromise, leading to the gridlock and inability to get things done that we see now.

I have introduced comprehensive redistricting reform legislation, but it will only move if you get involved, educate yourself and your neighbors, and demand that your politicians end the horrible process of gerrymandering. Our future as a democracy depends on it.

Follow Me @





Legislative



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PACE/PACENET Form
Reduced Auto Registration Form

VOTER

Registration • Election Calendars
Applications for Absentee Ballots • Voter ID

Alternative Energy Portfolio Standards – S.B. 1171

I recently unveiled new legislation that would amend Pennsylvania's Alternative Energy Portfolio Standards at a press conference held in the state Capitol Building. Speakers at the press conference included Rep. Vitali, sponsor of companion bill H.B. 100; Tom Schuster from Sierra Club; Khari Mosely from Blue-Green Alliance; Bruce Burcat from Mid-Atlantic Renewable Energy Coalition; and Christina Simeone from PennFuture.

S.B. 1171 would require that electric energy distribution companies sell a larger percentage of electricity made up of alternative energy sources such as wind and solar photovoltaic. The standards have not been amended since 2007, and it is time that we update them and invest in Pennsylvania's economy and environment.

The bill would nearly double the amount of renewable energy generated in the state, including tripling the amount of solar power. A 2010 report by the Political Economy Research Institute and the Center for American Progress estimated that efforts focusing on production of renewable energy could create up to 2 million jobs nationwide.

Additionally, the study noted that clean energy investments create 16.7 jobs for every \$1 million in spending. In contrast, the report said, fossil fuel spending generates only 5.3 jobs for every \$1 million spent. Clean energy investments create nearly 3 times more jobs for people with college degrees and nearly 4 times more jobs for people with high school degrees or only some high school education.



Featured Nonprofit Organization

The Women's Resource Center

The Women's Resource Center (WRC) in Wayne has a mission to "support women, strengthen families and build community through information, referral, counseling, legal, and educational services."

The WRC has been serving women in the Delaware Valley for over 36 years, and the group has helped many women make informed life decisions and achieve their goals.

The WRC is located at 113 W. Wayne Avenue in Wayne, and can be reached by calling (610) 687-6391. For more information, including services and hours of operation, visit the organization's Web site at www.womensresourcecenter.net.

Thank you to the Women's Resource Center for all you do for our community!



e Update



■ Early Voting - S.B. 1152

The 2008 and 2012 elections provided excellent examples of what can happen when voter participation is high. Long lines led to voter fatigue and in some places the inability to process the unusually high number of voters. Some outlet is needed to relieve the pressure on polling places. Since Pennsylvania requires an excuse to get an absentee ballot, the only other way to expand voting opportunity is through early voting.

In order to provide that relief from lines and encourage Pennsylvanians to vote, I introduced Senate Bill 1152 to provide for early voting. This bill will provide for polling places to be open across the Commonwealth during the two weeks prior to Election Day. No excuse would be required to vote early and the polling places would be public and centrally-located, just as they are on Election Day.

Early voting sites would be open eight hours each week day and a total of eight hours each weekend during the two weeks leading up to Election Day. No one voting early would be allowed to vote again later, just as absentee voters are barred from voting on Election Day, and results of early voting would not be tabulated until after polls close to prevent early returns from influencing later voting.

Voting is the bedrock of our democracy and anything we can do to expand the percentage of our population that participates is good policy.

■ Repeal Voter ID - S.B. 543

During the past several elections, Pennsylvanians have been laboring under a half-implemented Voter ID law. When it passed, the law required everyone to show a form of ID when voting and included a “soft rollout” period for the first election after passage. This rollout was meant to alert people to the fact that they now needed ID to vote but would not prevent anyone from voting if they could not produce identification. Due to court challenges of that law, we have been rolling this law out for years.

Of course the underlying idea behind the law – that in-person voter impersonation is a major problem tainting our electoral process – is flawed. Not only is this not a problem in Pennsylvania since it almost never happens, the “solution” that the law imposes is worse than the problem it seeks to fix. The people in society least likely to have ID are the elderly, students and the poor, and the worst thing we can do is exclude those populations from our democratic process.

Because this is a solution in search of a problem and because it hurts so many citizens and prevents them from exercising their right to vote, I introduced Senate Bill 543 to repeal the Voter ID law. It is unfair to voters in Pennsylvania to make them wait for the court challenges to declare this law unconstitutional. It is better to repeal the law now, as it is a misguided policy, and end the uncertainty that too many citizens have about their ability to vote. That is why I introduced S.B. 543 and I hope you will join me in pushing for its passage.

Visit the link below or scan this QR code on your smart phone to watch my Ted Talk on redistricting reform.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBS2qDCFzD8>



■ Redistricting - S.B. 532

As you may know, gerrymandering – the process of drawing the political boundaries in our state – has always been around. However, with the advent of computers capable of predicting party performance down to the block, and with the increasingly brazen gerrymandering that people in both parties are engaging in across the country, we have reached a point in America where our democracy is becoming more and more meaningless.

Nationally, out of 435 congressional seats, 400 seats are considered completely non-competitive. The incumbent has either no challenger whatsoever, or a token opponent unable to raise money or otherwise run a meaningful campaign.

In Pennsylvania, out of 203 state House seats, fewer than ten are considered truly “in play” during a given election cycle. The re-election rate exceeds 98 percent in both bodies. Over 90 percent of our citizens live in districts where their votes for the state House and Senate and the U.S. Congress will never matter. Voters no longer choose their legislators, the politicians who draw the lines do.

To end this practice I have introduced Senate Bill 532. The purpose of the legislation is to reduce the opportunity for gerrymandering and to increase the possibility of once again having competitive elections in our Commonwealth.

My bill presents some new ideas and is inspired somewhat by legislation passed in Iowa, where they’ve removed politics from the redistricting process. As a result, four out of five congressional seats there are competitive. That is more competitive seats than there are in New York, Illinois and California combined! Essentially, my bill would convene a commission outside of the legislature to draft and propose the redistricting plan. The discussions of the commission would be made public and the legislature would have to vote on the plan with no amendments.

If these reforms are enacted, incumbents will still have a huge advantage over their challengers. However, the voters would justifiably have more confidence that the system wasn’t completely rigged from the beginning. Please join me in supporting reforms that will strength our democracy and inject accountability into the political system.



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Around the District

■ 5th Annual Kids' Fair

My 5th annual Kids' Fair was a great success again this year thanks to the families that attended and the sponsors that helped make it possible.

Guests at the event were able to meet with representatives of federal, state and local agencies, while the kids were entertained by face painting, zoo animals, and special guest appearances. McGruff the Crime Dog appeared courtesy of the Upper Merion Township Police Department, Buzzy the Bee from B101 Radio was present, and Rosemont College's The Raven entertained adults and kids alike. Additionally, two lucky families won free passes to Sesame Place.

Special thanks to Mercy Suburban Hospital for co-sponsoring and providing volunteers for the event, to the Elmwood Park Zoo for hosting, and to all the vendors for donating their time and resources to the event.



Join
SENATOR DAYLIN LEACH

for a free screening of



Saturday • January 11
10:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Bryn Mawr Film Institute
824 West Lancaster Avenue • Bryn Mawr

How do GMOs affect our children, the health of our planet, and our freedom of choice?

Q&A Session with Panelists
to be Held Immediately Following the Film.

SPACE IS LIMITED

Please RSVP to Sarah Charles at scharles@pasenate.com or call 610-768-4200.