



# Don White

STATE SENATOR



## Reports to the People

41ST SENATORIAL DISTRICT • WINTER 2008

Dear Friend,

**A**s we start a new year, I thought this would be a good time to update you on activities in Harrisburg and around the 41st Senatorial District.

As always, if you have questions about any state issue, call my Indiana Office at 724-357-0151/toll free 866-357-0151, my Kittanning Office at 724-543-3026/toll free 866-366-9448 (1-866-DON-WHITE), or my Murrysville Office at 724-327-2422/toll free 866-736-9448 (1-866-SEN-WHITE).

Sincerely, and best wishes for a happy, safe and healthy 2008.

### Senator White Rejected State Gas Tax Hike Proposal

**A** short-lived proposal for a 1-cent increase in a state gas tax didn't get a lot of coverage by the media, but it definitely caught the attention of Senator Don White. As Chairman of the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee, Senator White was poised in November to call on his committee to formally reject the tax hike before Governor Ed Rendell revoked the proposal.

"At a time when consumers are

being hit hardest at the gas pump by ever-increasing prices, the last thing the Administration needed to do was to increase this burden by imposing any increase in Pennsylvania's gas tax," Senator White said.

A board under the state Department of Insurance had called for the 1-cent gas tax increase to cover a shortfall in the state's Underground Storage Tank Indemnification Fund that could occur in 2015.

"The severity of the fiscal crisis facing the USTIF fund is not completely clear, but the potential deficit is something that could occur many years in the future. It never made sense to impose a 1-cent increase in Pennsylvania's gas tax to bolster the USTIF. I am glad the governor reversed his Administration's stance and made the right decision," Senator White said.

### Senate Approves Bill Encouraging Fire Company Partnerships

**T**he Senate approved Senate Bill 96, a measure introduced by Senator Don White to encourage regionalization and partnership efforts among volunteer fire departments.

"Senate Bill 96 does not mandate cooperation, but rather provides financial incentives for departments to be forward thinking – to look for ways to improve their response to emergencies and their capabilities once they get there," Senator White said.

"We have a patchwork of coverage across the state. Some areas are fortunate to have a number of fire departments, while in others the coverage is sparse. Looking closer, one area may be served by several pumper trucks, but lacks the

service of a ladder truck. Several neighboring departments may each have the equipment and resources to address hazardous materials emergencies, while in other areas that capability is far more limited," Senator White said.

"Through partnerships, those departments may be able to forgo the replacement of a worn out

pumper truck in one station in favor of purchasing a ladder truck that could be much more essential to the region," Senator White continued. "Through cooperation, stations would work together to develop a coordinated response team for hazardous materials emergencies that would eliminate the need for redundant equipment, freeing up essential funding for other purposes."



## Senator White Inducted Into DMVA Hall Of Fame

Senator Don White was inducted into the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Hall of Fame in 2007 in recognition of his tireless efforts on behalf of veterans and their families and members of the Pennsylvania National Guard.

“Senator White has been a true friend and solid supporter of veterans and members of the Pennsylvania National Guard ever since he arrived in Harrisburg,” said Maj. Gen. Jessica L. Wright, state adjutant general. “Whether it’s improving health and educational benefits for our soldiers, airmen and veterans, or securing funds to repair the swimming pool at our school for veteran’s children, we can always count on Don for his leadership and genuine concern.”

Since taking office in 2000, Senator White has been instrumental in the creation and passage of numerous pieces of legislation for service members and veterans. His legislative efforts have resulted in: extending health insurance benefits for military personnel who are full-time students at the time of deployment; extending educa-



State Adjutant General (Maj. Gen.) Jessica L. Wright congratulates Senator Don White after his induction into the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Hall of Fame.

tional assistance opportunities for National Guard personnel discharged for medical disability incurred in the line of duty; providing for group life insurance for Guard members and tuition costs and fees for children and spouses of deceased Guard members.

The DMVA Hall of Fame, established in 1998, recognizes unique and exemplary contributions to the

department and/or to the Pennsylvania National Guard. This award not only recognizes significant achievements, but also the honor and prestige an individual has brought upon the department, the Pennsylvania National Guard and its members. Election into the Hall of Fame is the highest honor bestowed upon an individual by the department.

## \$1.5 Million Grant Supports Downtown Revitalization In Kittanning

Senator Don White recently presented a \$1.5 million grant to the Armstrong County Commissioners for downtown revitalization projects in Kittanning, including the former Indiana University of Pennsylvania – Armstrong Campus building on North McKean Street.

The grant presentation was part of a special ceremony on October 31 at the former campus that included IUP President Tony Atwater handing over ownership of the building to Armstrong County for \$1.

“This state grant provides financial support toward the eventual reuse of this property,” Senator White said. “We all recognize the importance of revitalizing this property as it is truly at the heart of Kittanning’s downtown. It is essential that we fill this gap as soon as possible.”

More than 16,000 students attended the IUP-Armstrong Campus during its 43 years of existence on North McKean Street before closing on May 4, 2005, and moving to its current home in Northpointe, South Buffalo Township.

“The North McKean Street building will always hold a special place in the hearts of the people who attended classes there,” Senator White said. “Now, Armstrong County and Kittanning need to find a new purpose for this location and restore it to a

proper and productive place in the community.”

The October event marked the second time Senator White presented state funding for the IUP Kittanning campus. In July 2005, he presented a \$26,000 check to fund a study of potential uses for the IUP building after the Armstrong Campus completed its move to Northpointe.

## Be Red Cross Ready For Emergencies

**B**e Red Cross Ready, a new program developed by the American Red Cross in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security can help everyone prepare for emergencies and make their communities safer.

It’s important that you be prepared for possible disasters and other emergencies. Natural or human-caused disasters can strike suddenly, at anytime and anywhere. The following are three actions everyone can take that can help make a difference:

- **Get a Kit**
- **Make a Plan**
- **Be Informed**

For more information about *Be Red Cross Ready* visit [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) or contact your local Red Cross Chapter:

**ARMSTRONG COUNTY**  
(724) 763-2272

**BUTLER COUNTY**  
(724) 283-2810

**CLEARFIELD/JEFFERSON**  
(814) 765-5516

**INDIANA COUNTY**  
(724) 465-5678

**WESTMORELAND COUNTY**  
(724) 834-6510

## \$2 Million Grant Supports New Investments At Northpointe

Senator Don White presented a \$2 million grant to the Armstrong County Commissioners on October 25 to support the construction of a new multi-tenant building at the Northpointe Industrial Park in South Buffalo Township.

"I was extremely pleased to present this grant to the Armstrong County Commissioners to further the economic growth and expansion of the opportunities available at Northpointe," Senator White said. "This industrial park is a shining example of what can take place when there is good intergovernmental cooperation working in conjunction with private interests."

Senator White has been a strong supporter of the development of the industrial park which now houses a number of tenants including: Indiana University of Pennsylvania - Armstrong Campus, Mellon Bank, A.P. Services, Inc., NGP, Inc., Hydro-Lazer, Inc., Northpointe Technology Center (Sabeus, DRS Technologies, Boeing SVS, RAPT Industries, Lamination Technologies), and the Penn State University Electro-Optics Center.

"Buildings have been taken over almost as quickly as the county and the Armstrong County Industrial Development Corp. and private companies can put them up," Senator White said. "I'm confident that the new structure funded by this grant will enjoy the same success."

## Region Offers Views On Mine Reclamation Funding

Senator Don White hosted a community meeting last fall to give local residents an opportunity to tell state officials how to spend \$1.5 billion over 15 years to clean up abandoned mines.

"Everyone here and everyone in my district have been impacted in some way by the problems left by the coal mining of the past," Senator White told the audience at the meeting at the IUP Northpointe Campus. "This is going to take a lot of teamwork and effort to come up with solutions to deal with all the problems we've been left with."

For more information about Pennsylvania's abandoned mine reclamation program, visit [www.depweb.state.pa.us/abandonedminerec](http://www.depweb.state.pa.us/abandonedminerec)

Northpointe and its tenants have benefitted from several previous state grant and loan programs:

**April 26, 2001** – Senator White announces that the Armstrong County Industrial Development Council will receive a \$1.1 million PIDA loan to acquire three acres and build a 20,000 square-foot facility that is now home to the Keystone Enterprise Manufacturing Alliance.

**December 2002** – Senator White presents three grants for projects in Northpointe:

- \$950,000 for a multi-tenant, 30,000 square-foot office building;

- \$750,000 as the final installment of the state's \$4 million commitment for infrastructure development;
- \$350,000 to develop a fiber optic access conduit between Northpointe and the Norfolk & Southern Railroad in Freeport.

**July 14, 2005** – Senator White presents two checks totaling \$66,000 to Armstrong County. The County received a \$26,000 check to fund a study of potential uses for the old IUP building after the Armstrong Campus moved to Northpointe and a \$40,000 check to help pay for signs along Route 28 to identify Northpointe.

## House Action Needed On "Blues Merger Oversight"



Senator Don White, Chairman of the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee, questions executives from Highmark Inc. and Independence Blue Cross during a recent committee hearing. He is joined by his colleagues (l to r) Mary Jo White, Bob Robbins and Bob Regola.

**I**n an effort to prove that the third time is a charm, the Senate approved three bills intended to provide state oversight of proposed mergers involving non-profit health insurance companies, according to Senator Don White, Chairman of the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee.

Senator White has pushed for all three bills and is the prime sponsor of one of the measures. The need for state oversight is critical since Pennsylvania's two largest health care insurance providers, Highmark Inc. and Independence Blue Cross, have announced plans to merge operations. Such a merger could have significant impact on the

availability, costs and quality of health care available to all Pennsylvanians.

A key provision within the three bills is a requirement that any merger involving the "Blues" be subject to approval by the Department of Insurance.

"It is extremely unfortunate that this issue is still unresolved. We have been working for months to put this regulatory oversight in place. This issue is much too important to be allowed to languish," Senator White said. "The Senate has approved this oversight on three occasions and we are still waiting for the House to take the appropriate and necessary step of forwarding it on to the Governor's desk for enactment."



## HUNDREDS HELP HONOR JIMMY STEWART STAMP DAY

Senator Don White and Indiana County Board of Commissioners Chairman Rodney Ruddock (left) were among the officials and hundreds of local residents participating in a very special ceremony on the first day of issue for a US Postage Stamp honoring Indiana native Jimmy Stewart.

## Clock Strikes Twelve For MCARE Abatement

Midnight on December 31 not only capped off 2007, but marked the end of a program that Pennsylvania instituted to help health care providers in high-risk fields meet their state-mandated medical malpractice insurance requirements, according to Senator Don White, who serves as Chairman of the Senate Insurance Committee.

After five years, the MCARE (Medical Care Availability and Reduction of Error) abatement, which helps physicians in high risk fields, such as neurosurgeons and obstetricians, pay all or a portion of their medical malpractice insurance premiums, expired December 31.

"The Senate did its best to preserve this important program. We passed reauthorization bills twice (including one introduced by Senator White) only to see those

measures derailed by the Administration and the House Democratic leadership," Senator White said. "As we go into 2008, practitioners in high-risk fields are looking at anything but a happy new year."

While the MCARE abatement is now over, the program itself continues on.

"The state will continue collecting the 25 cent-per-pack tax on cigarettes and the MCAT fees tacked on to motor vehicle violations. We will continue to build on a surplus. We just won't be providing assistance to doctors who are facing a huge spike in their insurance costs," Senator White said. "In essence, we are right back to where we were six years ago when those costs were driving many of those highly-skilled physicians out of business or out of Pennsylvania."



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