



State Representative ★ ★ ★ ★

Sandra J. Major

Reports to the 111th Legislative District

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Right to Self-Defense Enacted into Law

Legislation that will further protect law-abiding citizens who use self-defense when faced with an imminent threat was signed into law on June 28.

Act 10 of 2011, known as the Castle Doctrine, clarifies state law so legal protection is afforded to law-abiding citizens who use lethal force in protecting themselves, their families and others while in their home, an occupied vehicle or anywhere they have a right to be, without first having to retreat.

The presumption would not apply if the person entering a home was another resident of the home; a law enforcement officer; or a parent, grandparent or other guardian removing a child from the home or vehicle. In addition, this legislation would not apply if a person was using his or her home or vehicle to engage in criminal activity.

It is important to emphasize that this legislation does not endorse unlawful aggression; it merely provides individuals with the necessary legal protection to respond to such aggression.

This proposal, which I co-sponsored and have supported in numerous legislative sessions, received strong bipartisan support when it passed the House and the Senate this session.



Rep. Sandra Major was present when the governor signed the Castle Doctrine into law. Pictured standing left to right are Reps. Scott Perry, author of the Castle Doctrine; Marcia Hahn; and Mike Turzai, majority leader of the House. Sitting left to right are Rep. Tarah Toohil; Gov. Tom Corbett; and Rep. Major.

2011-12 State Budget

A responsible and sustainable spending plan

Although crafting this year's budget proved challenging, the ultimate 2011-12 state budget passed the House on June 29, and was signed into law by the governor on June 30. The budget spends \$27.15 billion, which is approximately \$1 billion less than the 2010-11 budget, has no tax increases and no new borrowing. The budget is a responsible and sustainable fiscal plan that cuts wasteful spending and eliminates non-essential and duplicative programs while still funding our core government responsibilities.

Making education a priority

Basic education represents one-third of the entire state budget or approximately \$9.34 billion. Funding was increased for K-12 by \$230 million more than the governor's original budget proposal in March. The General Assembly, demonstrating its commitment to education, also dedicated \$12.5 million from each of the four caucuses to restore an overall total of \$100 million for the Accountability Block Grant program for school districts, which is flexible funding the schools can use as they see fit.

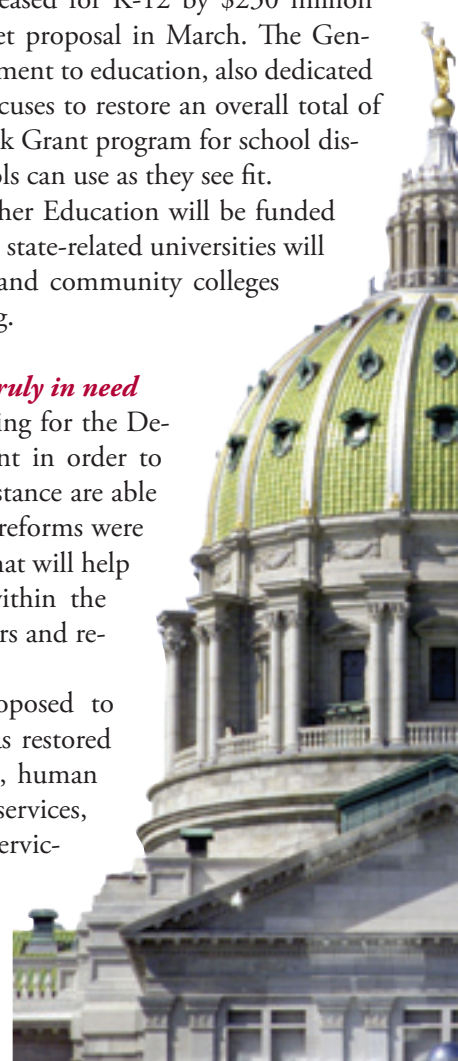
In addition, the State System of Higher Education will be funded at 82 percent of its current funding level; state-related universities will receive 81 percent of current funding; and community colleges will receive 90 percent of current funding.

Maintains safety net for those truly in need

The 2011-12 budget increases spending for the Department of Public Welfare by 1 percent in order to make sure those who are eligible for assistance are able to receive it. In addition, public welfare reforms were also passed along with the state budget that will help reduce instances of fraud and abuse within the welfare system, thereby saving state dollars and resources for those who are truly in need.

Furthermore, funding that was proposed to be cut in the governor's budget plan was restored to areas of the budget such as hospitals, human services, burn centers, cancer screening services, trauma centers, obstetric and neonatal services, and domestic violence and rape crisis services.

For more information on the 2011-12 state budget, visit my website at RepMajor.com.



Governor Signs 'Clean and Green' Bill into Law

Gov. Tom Corbett has signed into law my legislation to address small noncoal surface mining on land enrolled in the state's Clean and Green program.

Noncoal surface mining generally refers to the mining of Pennsylvania Bluestone, which is a unique sandstone found only in Northeastern Pennsylvania – and primarily in Susquehanna County. It is used extensively as a building material and for adding architectural details to structures.

I drafted this bill in response to concerns from the Bluestone industry, county commissioners and county property tax assessment offices on how to properly assess land used for noncoal surface mining.

The Clean and Green program encourages preservation of agricultural land. Properties enrolled in the program are assessed and taxed based on their use value, rather than the higher market value. Under the law, if the use of the property changes, owners may be assessed roll-back taxes on all or part of the land.

The main concern for the Bluestone operators was that rolling back taxes on the entire parcel of land – as opposed to only the portion of land being used – was cost prohibitive to the industry.

Simply put, the new law will make sure land used for small noncoal surface mining will be treated the same as land used for wind energy or for oil, gas and coal bed methane exploration and extraction under the Clean and Green program.

The Pennsylvania Bluestone industry is an important job creator in the Northern Tier. My legislation will help level the playing field when it comes to assessments doled out under the Clean and Green program and support future growth of the industry.



Rep. Major's legislation to ensure land used for the mining of Pennsylvania bluestone (small noncoal surface mining) will be treated the same as land used for wind energy or for oil, gas and coal bed methane exploration and extraction under the Clean and Green program was ceremonially signed into law on July 27 by Gov. Tom Corbett. Joining her for the bill signing were bluestone industry representatives (standing left to right) Butch Coleman, Donna Coleman, Jennifer Schmidt, Todd Schmidt, Penny Greene, Ed Greene, Brigitte Evans and Marty Evans. Also pictured (seated) are Rep. Tina Pickett, a co-sponsor of the legislation; Corbett; and Major.

Marcellus Shale: The Next Step

Expected to be addressed during the Legislature's fall session is the issue of whether or not to tax or impose a fee on drilling in the Marcellus Shale.

While energy companies are already paying hundreds of millions of dollars in business taxes, many people believe that we should tax the natural gas as it's being extracted from the ground. This would be recurring revenue that could be used in a multitude of ways: the General Fund, property tax relief, environmental programs, transportation, etc.

Some believe that instead of a tax, companies should be assessed an impact fee every time a well is drilled. The charges would be higher for an impact fee, but the revenue would cease some time after the last well is drilled. Many believe an impact fee should be targeted to benefit the areas that are most impacted by gas drilling.

There are numerous proposals in the House and Senate that call for a tax or a fee, and they all differ on where and how the money should be spent.

The House Finance Committee held its first in a series of planned informational meetings on July 19 to study these proposals. The meeting gave House members who have introduced bills to enact taxes or fees on Marcellus Shale drilling sites an opportunity to address the committee and explain their proposals. I attended the meeting and came away with a lot of good information and feedback that I will use as I continue to consider the merits of the various proposals.

The following is a brief description of the House bills that have been introduced so far pertaining to an impact fee or severance tax:

- **House Bill 1671** – This bill would create a severance tax on the extraction of natural gas, which would then be used to reduce the current Personal Income Tax rate from 3.07 percent to 2.99 percent.
- **House Bill 1700** – This bill would create a graduated annual impact fee on each completed Marcellus Shale natural gas well with revenue being dispersed to local governments, county conservation districts, the Environmental Stewardship Fund, the Hazardous Site Cleanup Fund and the Motor License Fund to address the impact on state roads and bridges.
- **House Bill 1705** – This bill would assess a severance tax on natural gas extraction, with the revenue collected through the tax being distributed through a Property Tax Assistance Program to assist eligible applicants in the payment of property taxes.
- **House Bill 1715** – This bill, which I have co-sponsored, would enable counties to establish an impact fee on each unconventional natural gas well. Fees would be placed on each completed well according to a schedule, which would end once the well is taken out of production or in the 11th year after it has been constructed. The bill would prohibit the impact fee costs from being passed on to the property owner or the lease holder. The fee would be disbursed to the county that hosts the well; the municipalities in which the wells are located; the municipalities in which there are no wells but the local government is within a county which hosts the wells; school districts within a county hosting a well site; and the county conservation district.

Governor's Marcellus Shale Advisory Commission Releases Recommendations

The Marcellus Shale Advisory Committee, led by Lt. Gov. Jim Cawley and comprised of Corbett administration officials, representatives of the drilling industry and statewide business groups, and leaders of several environmental groups and local government associations, released its final report on July 22. The comprehensive plan contains 96 recommendations for responsible natural gas drilling in the Commonwealth.

Some of the key recommendations include:

- Tougher regulations for drilling.
- Stricter penalties for violations.
- Promoting the use of natural gas vehicles.
- Increasing the distance between gas wells and streams, private wells and public water systems.
- Posting more information online for the public.
- Training Pennsylvanians to work in the industry.
- Assisting Pennsylvania companies to do business with the natural gas industry.

To view the entire Marcellus Shale Advisory Committee report, go to my website at RepMajor.com.

Welfare Reforms Address Cases of Waste, Fraud and Abuse

For years, my colleagues and I have called for reforms within the state's Department of Public Welfare (DPW), particularly following documented instances of waste, fraud and abuse.

As part of this year's budget and our effort to control government spending, an array of welfare reforms were implemented with the state's Welfare Code.

With these reforms, we are seeking to ensure that only those who are eligible for assistance receive assistance and to restore integrity to the system.

The reforms would authorize random drug testing for welfare applicants who have been convicted of a prior drug felony; require the use of a fraud detection program that would run welfare applicants' information through an income eligibility verification system before providing benefits; provide cash benefits based on a person's county of residence in order to prevent "benefit shopping," where people apply for welfare benefits in a county other than the one in which they live in order to receive higher payments; and change the fraud-laden special allowance program under the Department of Public Welfare.

The final budget includes about \$400 million in welfare savings, and these reforms will help ensure the department has the ability to achieve that goal.

Designer Drugs Known as 'Bath Salts' Placed on State's Controlled Substance List



I am pleased to report that the governor has signed into law legislation to ban the sale of street drugs commonly referred to as "bath salts."

Now known as Act 7 of 2011, the new law adds the chemical compounds that make up bath salts to the state's controlled substance list.

Criminal activity and violent behavior are on the rise in connection with the use of bath salts, which can cause higher blood pressure, increased heart rate, psychosis and a tendency to engage in aggressive behavior.

Compounds found in these new bath salts have already been banned in Europe, as well as several states throughout the country.

I am hopeful the new law will help reduce access to these dangerously addictive drugs and provide law enforcement with the backing it needs to do its job.

A grant seminar featuring State Fire Commissioner Ed Mann for volunteer fire and ambulance organizations was hosted by Rep. Major on April 21. Pictured left to right following the event are John Michaels, a firefighter with the Harford Volunteer Fire Company; Mann; Major; and Rick Moser, chief of Harford Volunteer Fire Company.



Rep. Major recently read the book "Whose Shoes? A Shoe for Every Job" to school children at Forest City Pre-K.



Reps. Major and Tina Pickett presented citations on the House floor to Elk Lake High School boys' and girls' state champion cross country teams. Pictured left to right are Major, Speaker of the House Sam Smith, Mike Bedell, Maria Trowbridge and Pickett.



Rep. Tina Pickett joined Rep. Major in presenting a condolence resolution honoring the late Kenneth B. Lee, who served as speaker of the House, to his wife, Marjorie. Speaker Lee passed away on Dec. 23, 2010. A special House ceremony honored Lee and his contributions to the General Assembly.

Lawsuit Abuse Reform Measure Signed by Governor

Legislation that reforms the way in which liability lawsuits are handled in Pennsylvania was recently signed into law.

Unfortunately, Pennsylvania has one of the most hostile-to-business tax and regulatory environments in the country. Two-thirds of small business owners say they make business decisions to avoid lawsuits, 23 percent say those decisions have forced them to cut employee benefits, and 11 percent say those decisions have forced them to lay off employees.

Up until the new law, Pennsylvania still retained what lawyers call full "joint liability," which meant that if a lawsuit named multiple defendants, the one with the deepest pockets can then be held liable for all of the plaintiff's damages, even if this solvent defendant's actions had little to do with the injuries alleged.

A state's civil liability laws are almost always considered by business executives who make expansion and relocation decisions. It's simple: Legal liability costs scare jobs away.

With this new law, we are seeking to prevent abuse of the legal system, thereby encouraging employers and businesses to keep jobs, create jobs and attract more jobs. Under the Fair Share Act, a defendant will be held responsible only for his or her proportionate share of the total damages awarded to compensate a plaintiff.

We must stress that our goal is not to deny anyone with a legitimate claim the right to seek compensation. Rather, we are attempting to rid our legal system of the frivolous lawsuits that are delaying justice for those who truly deserve it.



Deadline to Apply for Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program Extended

The deadline to apply for the state's Property Tax/Rent Rebate program has been extended to Dec. 31.

Eligible participants can receive a rebate of up to \$650 based on their rent or property taxes paid in 2010. The program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians who are 65 years or older, widows and widowers 50 years or older, and those 18 years or older with disabilities.

Eligibility income limits are set at the following levels, excluding 50 percent of Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, and Railroad Retirement Tier 1 benefits:

- \$0 to \$8,000, maximum \$650 rebate (homeowners and renters)
- \$8,001 to \$15,000, maximum \$500 rebate (homeowners and renters)
- \$15,001 to \$18,000, maximum \$300 rebate (homeowners only)
- \$18,001 to \$35,000, maximum \$250 rebate (homeowners only)

Residents are reminded to provide all the necessary income, property tax or rental information required to process claims quickly and accurately.

Property Tax/Rent Rebate claim forms are available by contacting my offices or by visiting my website at RepMajor.com.

Mobile Vet Center Makes Monthly Visits to Tunkhannock

In an effort to better serve veterans in the 111th Legislative District, a mobile vet center makes regular visits to Tunkhannock each month with a stop at Route 29 and Route 6 By-Pass in Tunkhannock, across the street from Gay's True Value.

Some of the services provided through the mobile vet center include:

- Individual and group counseling.
- Marital and family counseling.
- Bereavement counseling.
- Medical referrals.
- Assistance in applying for VA benefits.
- Employment counseling, guidance and referral.
- Alcohol and drug assessments.
- Information and referral to community resources.

Appointments for mobile vet center services are not required.

Information on the dates and times of the center visits is available by contacting my district offices or by visiting my website at RepMajor.com or my Facebook page at [Facebook.com/RepMajor](https://www.facebook.com/RepMajor).



Reps. Sandra Major and Karen Boback have secured regular visits from the mobile vet center to assist veterans in the Tunkhannock area. Pictured from left are Boback, Joseph May, Gretchen Bentler, Mark Burrier, Major, Wyoming County Commissioners Anthony Litwin, Stark Barrton, and Tom Owens.

Satellite Office Hours Available in Lakewood

In an effort to provide more convenient services to residents in the Wayne County portion of the district, I generally hold satellite office hours on the second Thursday of each month from 10 a.m. to noon at the Preston Township Building on Crosstown Highway (Route 370) in Lakewood.

Dates are subject to change, so please contact my offices or my website at RepMajor.com to confirm.

WHAT MY OFFICE CAN DO FOR YOU...

Please do not hesitate to contact the district office for assistance with any state-related matter.

- Car registration, special tags, handicapped placards and license applications.
- PACE/PACENET applications.
- Information on financial assistance for higher education.
- Birth certificate applications.
- Pennsylvania income tax forms.
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate applications.
- Requests for literature of all kinds – bills, regulations, statutes, senior citizen information, student aid information, etc.
- Citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for notable local accomplishments and family milestones.
- Tours of the State Capitol for individuals or groups.
- Complaints and problems with insurance companies.
- Fishing and hunting information.

Contact Representative Major

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