

Week of March 28, 2016

**PSTAP LEGISLATIVE UPDATE – HARSIBURG HEADLINES**

**GOVERNOR WOLF VETOS THE FISCAL CODE**

Last Monday, Governor Wolf formally vetoed HB1317 (Fiscal Code), which provides the formal instructions on how to spend the funds appropriated in the 2015-16, $6 billion General Fund budget that the Governor allowed to become law absent his signature. As a result, over $400 million is school funding may be at risk. Republicans argue that $150 million of the overall spending plan required the fiscal code to be enacted in order for the Governor to spend it. As a result, Republicans maintain that the $150 million in public education funding is essentially frozen. The veto also nulls another $289 million budgeted for school construction and renovation funding projects. Governor Wolf, who insists the 2015-16 budget does not balance and does nothing to close a large structural deficit, reiterated that he will continue to release funds available, while the legislature decides whether to take official action to override the Governor’s veto of the fiscal code.

**MEDICAL MARIJUANA VOTE UP IN THE AIR**

The state Senate could take up SB3 next week when they return to session but there is speculation as to whether the Senate will amend the bill requiring it to go back to the House for a concurrence vote. SB3, which passed the House by a vote of 149-43 on March16th, was amended with what some Senators deem vague language that allegedly creates technical issues further complicating the state's ability to establish a medical marijuana program on a timely basis, which in turn, would delay patients' access to the medicine. As it stands now, the state’s medical marijuana program would take two years to get up and running. Patients would be allowed to obtain medical cannabis products from dispensaries if certified by a doctor to be suffering from cancer, HIV/AIDS, Lou Gehrig's disease, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord damage, epilepsy, inflammatory bowel disease, neuropathies, Huntington's disease, Crohn's disease, post-traumatic stress disorder, intractable seizures, glaucoma, sickle cell anemia, autism and severe, chronic or intractable pain. Patients would be able to use cannabis in pill, oil or liquid form but smoking the plant would remain illegal. If the state Senate approves the bill without changes, the measure would go to Governor Wolf, who has said he'll sign it. If the Senate further amends SB3 to address the technical issues it maintains the House created with its changes, the bill would bounce back to the House for approval of the Senate’s revisions.

**PLENTY OF VOTER PARTY SWITICHING IN PENNSYLVANIA**

According to recent voter registration statistics obtain by the Pennsylvania Election’s Bureau, Pennsylvania voters are switching party affiliation at a rate not seen in years, if ever, to cast ballots in the hotly contested Republican and democratic primary elections. Specifically, 245,000 registered voters have switched this year, or 3 percent of the state's 8.2 million registered voters. Among those making a switch, about half became Republicans, according to state statistics as of Monday. One-third became Democrats and the rest joined a minor party or registered as unaffiliated. Some politicos attribute the increase in party switching to PA’s online voter registration but others report that Pennsylvania voters wanted to beat the voter registration deadline so they can vote in the state and federal primaries that will be held on April 26, 2016. In Pennsylvania, closed primaries are open only to the party's registered voters and, historically, races tend to be settled by the time the state's relatively late primary election date arrives. This year, contested primaries, particularly the closely contested Republican race, are driving up voter interest.

**PENNSYLVANIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION SCHEDULE:**

**2016 SENATE SESSION SCHEDULE**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **April** | 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13 |
| **May** | 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18 |
| **June** | 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 |

**2016 HOUSE SESSION SCHEDULE**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **April** | 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13 |
| **May** | 2, 3, 4, 16, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25 |
| **June** | 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 |

**HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE SCHEDULE**

The House Finance Committee will be holding a joint public hearing with the House Education Committee on April 5, 2016 at 9:00 a.m. in Room 205 Ryan Office Building to discuss the issue of EITC & OSTC programs

The House Finance Committee will be holding a public hearing on April 19, 20016 at 10:00a.m. at Temple University Center City in Philadelphia on HB 1871. HB1871 would amend the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to permit the City of Philadelphia to impose taxes for the benefit of the City of Philadelphia on real estate used for business purposes at a tax rate that exceeds the tax rate applicable to other real estate. Supporters of the bill maintain that in order to grow the number of jobs in Philadelphia, wage and business taxes must be reduced and shifted to a greater reliance on the real estate tax for businesses.