

Text of Gov. Rendell letter to Senate members regarding legislative session schedule.

Text of July 28 letter.

To the Members of the Senate:

I understand that the Senate has returned this week to Harrisburg to vote on school funding legislation and then to recess until the fall. I hope that you will extend both your session and your agenda. In addition to reemphasizing my position on education funding, I want to call to your attention the other unfinished work that needs to be addressed by the General Assembly before it ends its summer session. This work includes:

- Enactment of not only increased funding for basic, special, and vocational education but new and proven school programs that will give our children the tools they need for a brighter future. No state budget for Fiscal Year 2003-04 should be considered complete unless it contains a substantial down payment on educationally-enriched early childhood programs, effective interventions for struggling students and schools, enhanced staff development and improved educational technology.
- Completion of the historic progress that the House and Senate have made over the last few months in making property tax relief a reality. With a few revisions that I will share with caucus leaders, I believe that [Senate Bill 100](#) as passed by the House provides our Commonwealth with the blueprint we have long sought for comprehensive local tax reform.
- Resolution of House and Senate differences on the legalization, regulation, and taxation of expanded gaming in Pennsylvania so that I can sign legislation that will provide funds to reduce property taxes beginning next July 1. Because the property tax relief provided in Senate Bill 100 requires voter approval this fall, efforts to resolve the gaming issue should not be delayed.
- Enactment of a \$5 billion economic stimulus program to create jobs and revive communities across the Commonwealth. Further delays in enacting this program will only mean unnecessarily lost opportunities to attract new investment and put Pennsylvanians back to work.
- Completion of the state budget for the fiscal year that began July 1. Enacting a state budget is our most important and our most basic responsibility, and the General Assembly should not leave Harrisburg without completing this work. Although most state agencies have their appropriations for the new fiscal year, the legislature still has not acted on revenue measures needed to fully fund the budget I proposed on March 4, let alone, the new revenues needed to fund our proposed investments in education, tax reform, and economic stimulus. Timely action is also needed on the proposed nursing home assessment if we hope to avoid substantial cuts in nursing home MA funding this fiscal year. Every day that goes by without the legislature acting on the pending proposals for tax and fee increases will require us to lower state revenue estimates and could lead to deeper cuts or higher taxes in the end.
- Restoration of the most painful cuts in human services programs that were enacted last March, before the federal government's unexpected increase in aid to the states. Because the new federal aid is only temporary, we should only restore service cuts in the context of a completed state budget that adequately addresses all of our most important needs,

including education, and that each is adequately financed so that what we restore this year does not have to be cut again next year. Some of the most critical cuts include drug and alcohol and mental health programs and mass transit subsidies. This important work should be finished now so that we can avoid inflicting unnecessary hardships on thousands of our most vulnerable citizens in the weeks and months ahead.

- Enactment of legislation to create and fund the MCARE abatement that will provide short term insurance relief to Pennsylvania physicians - preserving access to medical care for our citizens.
- Enactment of bipartisan legislation that has passed the House and will expand prescription drug coverage for low-income senior citizens.
- Appropriation of the resources needed to fully fund the state's historic new collective bargaining agreements and to maintain the solvency of the Commonwealth's Employee Benefits Trust Fund.

Resolving these issues will require difficult decisions, and it is always tempting to put such decisions off, but delay will only compound the problems we face. I ask you to stay in session and to work with your House counterparts and with me over the next few weeks to address these important issues so that together we can carry out our responsibilities to the people of Pennsylvania. Together, I believe we can enact these changes and dramatically improve the quality of life for our state.

Sincerely,

(signed "Ed")

Edward G. Rendell
Governor

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