

STOP Group Gains Ground

(Continued from Page A1)

led by Sen. Sean Logan (D-45), introduced a bill based on the STOP proposal to eliminate property tax for homeowners.

The legislation calls for a 1.55 percent increase in the state's income tax, a 1 percent increase in sales and use tax, and a 2 percent increase in real estate transfer tax to help make up for the \$6.2 billion collected annually in home property taxes in Pennsylvania. Savings gained by cutting the current property tax system's administrative costs would also contribute.

"STOP brought a reasonable, realistic plan for eliminating the property tax in Pennsylvania," Logan said.

The plan is aimed at "eliminating, not reducing," the property tax, he noted, differentiating between the STOP proposal and

Gov. Ed Rendell's plan to reduce the tax.

The state income tax would increase from 2.8 percent to 4.35 percent and sales tax for most areas of the state would rise to 7 percent under the new proposal.

STOP members live mainly in the western part of the state. They say property taxes are forcing some Pennsylvanians off their properties, especially elderly residents on fixed incomes.

Many STOP members come from the Pittsburgh area (Allegheny County), where recent property tax reassessments prompted homeowners to take action and form the grassroots coalition.

Bob Logue, a Pittsburgh-area radio personality, heads the STOP group.

"The property tax is harmful to Pennsylvania," Logue said at the press conference Tuesday at

the Capitol where the legislation was introduced.

Logue and about 10 STOP members joined Sen. Logan and other members of Congress at the unveiling of the legislation, known as Senate Bill 717.

Pointing out that groceries, clothing, and medicines are not taxed in the state, Logue wondered why Pennsylvania continues to tax another basic need — shelter.

According to Sen. Logan, whose district covers parts of Allegheny and Westmoreland counties, potential benefits of SB 717 include savings of \$61.3 million of property tax rebates from the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program.

Those savings would allow 71,000 more seniors to qualify for PACE, the state's prescription drug program, Logan said.

Commercial and industrial properties would continue to be taxed under the new bill — an annual revenue of \$3.1 billion.



Bob Logue is joined by other STOP members at the introduction of a new Senate Bill to eliminate the Pennsylvania property tax.

For farm owners, that means the commercial part of their operation would still be subject to property tax, but the homestead itself would no longer be taxed.

Senators co-sponsoring the bill include Jack Wagner (D-Allegheny), Jane Clare Orié (R-Allegheny, Butler, Westmoreland), Gerald LaValle (D-Beaver, Lawrence), Jay Costa, Jr. (D-Allegheny), Richard Kasunic (D-Fayette, Somerset, Washington,

and Westmoreland), John Wozniak (D-Cambria, Clearfield, Somerset, and Westmoreland), Anthony Williams (D-Delaware, Philadelphia), and Don White (R-Armstrong, Indiana, Jefferson, Westmoreland).

Rep. Marc Gergely (D-Allegheny) was also on hand at the press conference to announce his plan to introduce similar legislation in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

Wolff Confirmed As Ag Secretary

(Continued from Page A1)

and the department staff, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) will continue to further the interests of Pennsylvania agriculture.

In cooperation with Governor Rendell's Plan for a New Pennsylvania, Wolff intends to invest in educational initiatives and economic development programs.

"Under my watch, I will work to enhance the profitability of the farm — whether the farm is small, medium, or large — and to ensure that agricultural entities have access to the economic development programs of the commonwealth, just as other businesses have," Wolff said. "Agriculture is a business without walls, but it is every bit a business."

Lancaster Farming spoke with Wolff about the confirmation Wednesday afternoon. According to Wolff, Gov. Rendell's proposals, scheduled to be in place by the end of the fiscal year (end of June), call for a property tax break for farmers of about 30 percent, Wolff noted. Wolff also pointed to the business loan programs available to farmers.

Regarding the initiatives in place for dairy Cooperatives Working Together (CWT), Wolff noted that PDA remains "supportive of that concept, and we will help however we can," he said. Wolff noted the dairy industry in the self-help program remains "in their own hands."

With tough economic times, we must continue to "live within our means, operate more efficiently, and get the most out of every dollar we spend," he said. In light of the budget crunch felt at the state university level, PDA understands the implications but continues to "appreciate the Extension Service and how critical it is to the farmers of Pennsylvania."

Wolff told Lancaster Farming that a new Farm Show executive director may be appointed within the next week as they continue to review candidates from a variety of backgrounds, he noted.

Wolff also said that he will work with the education community to enhance the awareness of the next generation about current farm practices and the viability of agriculture to all communities.

"In addition, I want to build strong partnerships with government to ensure that Pennsylvania agriculture can continue to grow and meet the demands of the consumers," Wolff said.

Wolff is involved in agriculture on and off the farm. As owner of Pen-Col Farms in Columbia County, a 600-acre, 500-head Holstein dairy cattle operation, Wolff has specialized in purebred Holstein genetics. To aid in the development of the international market for dairy genetics, Wolff has entered into joint ventures in Wisconsin and the United Kingdom.

Wolff has used his expertise in many forms. He has served as a member of the state USDA/Farm Service Agency, the World Trade Organization, and the Pennsylvania Animal Health and Diagnostic Commission. He also was on cooperative boards of directors and the Pennsylvania Dairy Stakeholders. Wolff also serves on the Penn State University Board of Trustees and is involved in many community organizations.

Wolff is known around the world for his agriculture work. In 1994, he was recognized as Master Farmer. He acted as a representative in conferences in New Zealand, Australia, Chile, Argentina, and Canada, and received the Leadership Central Penn Award.

Pennsylvania's 59,000 farm families continue to keep agriculture a leading economic enterprise in the commonwealth. With more than \$4 billion in cash receipts, Keystone farmers and agribusinesses are also the leading agricultural producers in the northeastern U.S.

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