



STATE SENATOR

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# Environmental UPDATE

FROM STATE SENATOR  
**JOHN RAFFERTY**

FALL 2006

## Preserving Open Space Improves Quality of Life

**P**ennsylvania is the leader in preserving open space with more than 2,925 private farms and 332,000 acres protected through the Farmland Preservation Program. Additionally, the state has protected more than 3.5 million acres for state parks, forests and game lands.

This year the General Assembly approved hundreds of millions more in funding for open space and farmland preservation, including:

- \$230 million to the Department of Environmental Protection for mine reclamation and brown-fields remediation.
- \$217.5 million to the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, including \$100 million for state park/forest improvements and \$90 million for open space conservation.
- \$80 million for farmland preservation.
- \$50 million to the Department of Community and Economic Development for Main Street and downtown redevelopment related to smart growth.

One way we can preserve open space is by working to develop our downtown areas and cities. I have

worked closely with state, county and local governments and developers to expand economic development in cities and boroughs like Pottstown and Coatesville. We have secured millions of dollars in grants to clean up 'brownfield sites' and jump-start a number of development projects. One such project is the Schuylkill Riverfront Academic and Heritage Center, which is being developed in partnership between the Montgomery County

Community College and the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Association. It will be located at the former PECO site in Pottstown across from the West Campus facility. In addition to obtaining funding for the expansion of the Community College, I was able to secure a considerable state grant for the Schuylkill Riverfront Academic and Heritage Center. These projects enhance the quality of life in our communities.



*Senator Rafferty tours the French Creek Ridge Vineyards in Elverson, which uses solar energy in their operations.*

## Protecting Our Environment

In May, I held a third environmental roundtable at Ursinus College. I met with builders, environmental and conservation organizations, educators and state and local governments to discuss a number of important environmental initiatives. These include a bill I will be introducing in the near future to encourage the protection of riparian areas along our state waterways. It is important that we utilize riparian buffers to protect the Commonwealth's rivers and streams.

Clean water is crucial to public safety and quality of life. Those who intentionally pollute our streams and water should be held accountable. I am introducing legislation to increase penalties for any person or municipality who negligently or intentionally violates any provision of the Clean

Streams law. The bill also extends the statute of limitations for such crimes to five years from the time it was committed. Those who violate the law could be charged with a third-degree felony and face fines of up to \$50,000 and prison sentences of up to seven years.

Finally, on a related issue, I voted against legislation that would have derailed plans to require state power plants to reduce mercury pollution beyond weaker federal standards. Given the public health and environmental threats posed by mercury in

Pennsylvania, we need the strongest possible rules and standards in place to protect against mercury exposure.



Senator Rafferty participates in a Senate hearing, which he requested to focus on the problem of radiation in PA landfills.

## Rebate Program Encourages Purchase of Hybrid Vehicles

The Alternative Fuel Vehicle Rebate Program is offering rebates of up to \$500 to Pennsylvania residents who purchase hybrid, bi-fuel, and dual-fuel vehicles after July 1, 2006. Applicants must submit a completed rebate form no later than six months after purchasing the vehicle.

The application must include a copy of the valid Pennsylvania vehicle registration, a copy of the dealer invoice and proof of the vehicle purchase. More information on the state's Alternative Fuel Vehicle Rebate Program is available at [www.dep.state.pa.us](http://www.dep.state.pa.us), keyword "Alternative Fuels."

## Alternative Fuels Program

Alternative Fuels Incentive Grants are available to school districts, municipal authorities, political subdivisions, nonprofit groups, corporations or partnerships for costs associated with buying or retrofitting vehicles that use alternative fuels and refueling equipment. For more information on the program and to find out if you qualify contact:

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection  
Bureau of Energy, Innovations, and Technology Deployment  
PO Box 8772  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8772  
(717) 772-8912

## Harnessing Renewable Energy

One way we can protect our environment is to harness state resources to further develop markets for sustainable energy sources. This fall, I plan to introduce legislation that will provide sales tax exemptions for the purchase and use of solar energy systems for heating and cooling.

By encouraging the use of clean, renewable sources of energy, Pennsylvania can create reliable sources of affordable energy, clean our air and waterways, and cut down on greenhouse gas.

## Protecting Children from Environmental Hazards

Toxins in the environment can affect children differently than they do adults, and in many cases be far more serious if exposure occurs. I'm working with the Berks County Environmental Advisory Council and Kutztown University to establish the Institute for the

Advancement of Children's Environmental Health to broaden the understanding of how exposure to toxins affects young people and find solutions to protect children from environmental harms through education, outreach and research. I've also worked with local legislators

to secure a state grant of \$30,000 to help kick-start funding for the Institute, with the majority of the funding coming from private donors. It is my hope that the Institute can help to identify threats posed to children and to find ways to protect them from harm.

## State Senator John Rafferty 44th District

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