

House of Representatives

Week in Review

For the Week Ending: Friday, June 25, 2010

[News Items From the House](#)

- **Legislators Urge Action on Delaware River Recreation Area**

A group of state legislators, whose districts border the Delaware River, are urging action to create a massive new recreation area along the waterway.

State Rep. Tom Kovach (R-Brandywine Hundred South), one of the prime sponsors of House Concurrent Resolution 51, said it's intended to spur Delaware's involvement in a fledgling project to create the Tidal Delaware River National Recreation Area. Running from Delaware City north to Trenton, the 72-mile section would promote important cultural, historical, and recreational points of interest.

U.S. Reps. Robert E. Andrews (D., N.J.) and Allyson Y. Schwartz (D., Pa.) are expected ask the National Park Service to study the concept.

"Once I heard about this initiative, I wanted to help move this process forward with Delaware representation," Rep. Kovach said.

The resolution, which has passed the state House of Representatives, asks the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) to work with Delaware's Congressional delegation; the National Parks Service; and New Jersey and Pennsylvania officials in facilitating the project.

Patrick Starr, senior vice president of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, which is actively promoting the proposal, welcomed the action. "The Delaware River is a wonderful resource that unites Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware and I'm thrilled the First State is interested in being an equal partner in this process. This is an exciting project that holds the promise of creating additional economic and recreational opportunities for citizens in all three states."

There is ample precedent for the concept. Rep. Kovach said there are 17 national recreation areas around the country, ranging from the Golden Gate in San Francisco to Gateway in North Jersey and New York City. "I'm excited that

Delaware could be part of the partnership to create the 18th with our own Delaware River," he said.

"My district includes Battery Park and other historical attractions," said State Sen. Dori Connor (R-Penn Acres). "What a lot of people don't realize is that even though a significant part of the watershed is urban and suburban, the river supports a wide range of aquatic life and dozens of species of fish. Hopefully, this initiative will educate people about what they have in their own backyards."

Sen. Catherine Cloutier (R-Heatherbrooke), who is also sponsoring the resolution, said the project holds a great deal of promise. "Creating this area would promote existing Delaware venues and potentially enhance tourism as well as create new, low-cost and nearby recreational opportunities for our residents," she said. "If there is a downside to this, I'm not seeing it."

Supporters note that the creation of a recreation area would not impact dredging operations, nor would it interfere with Delaware's control over any aspect of the river.

Rep. Kovach said the establishment of a national recreational area would change public awareness of the river – the value of which cannot be underestimated. "Fox Point State Park, which runs along the river border of my district, was historically a destination recreational area but was then turned into a dumping site. Now it's been returned to one of the most beautiful public spaces in New Castle County. It shows how negative perceptions concerning the river can be turned on their head when we make a concerted effort to preserve and maximize this wonderful resource."

• **House Republicans Dismayed at \$214 million Spending Increase in New Budget**

Republican leaders in the Delaware House of Representatives are reacting harshly to a \$214 million spending increase contained in the new \$3.305 billion state budget.

The \$213.7 million jump is 6.46 percent more than the current Fiscal Year 2010 budget that will soon expire.

House Minority Leader Dick Cathcart (R-Middletown) says the new budget contains a spending increase nearly three times the hike contained in the proposed budget Governor Jack Markell unveiled in January. "We have gone from an \$80 million increase contained in the governor's recommended budget to a budget that's nearly \$214 million higher than the one it'll replace. It's just insane to me," he said.

In a prepared statement, State Rep. Dennis P. Williams (D-Wilmington North), the co-chair of the budget-writing Joint Finance Committee, called the increase “inevitable.” Rep. Williams cited a \$35 million expenditure to restore a two-and-a-half percent state employee pay cut as one of the items driving the budget higher. State employees absorbed the cut last year as part of a plan to bridge a large revenue shortfall and enact the current budget.

Rep. Williams also cited the loss of \$105 million in federal stimulus funds that the state had to replace with money from Delaware taxpayers.

However, State House Minority Whip Dan Short (R-Seaford) said that justification points out a basic difference in ideology on spending. “I would like to see us take a different tact, where we remained constrained in our spending and made a renewed commitment to downsize our government through attrition. It would really be nice to say we saved some money.”

Rep. Short added the new state budget for Fiscal Year 2011 contains \$123.5 million in federal stimulus money – funding that is not expected to be available next year.

Additionally, both Reps. Cathcart and Short point to the latest state revenue forecasts as good reason to be fiscally conservative. According to a report issued June 17th by the Delaware Financial Advisory Council (DEFAC), revenue for the current and upcoming fiscal years was virtually flat, increasing by only a combined \$2.1 million from the previous report a month earlier. According to the Controller General’s Office, state revenue estimates have grown by about \$77 million since last June – about a third of the spending increase included in the new budget.

Rep. Short says it seems that whenever the state finds money there’s an unhealthy compulsion to spend it. He says he fears the state is digging itself into a hole by drastically increasing expenditures, while both relying on temporary federal stimulus money and betting the economy will recover quickly.

Calls by Reps. Cathcart and Short to curtail state spending and to draw down the state employee workforce by not replacing 500 workers, who retire or otherwise leave state service, have been ignored by the Markell administration. The State of Delaware is the state’s largest single employer with more than 30,000 workers. The modest reduction (less than 1.6 percent of the total) would save \$13 million the first year and \$24 million annually.

- **New Bill Could Create Hundreds of Sustainable Jobs**

What some industry experts are calling “the smartest state film incentive program” in the country has bipartisan backing in the House of Representatives.

Supporters say the new legislation (House Bill 490) could create hundreds of sustainable, “recession-proof” jobs.

“This creative business development legislation has broad support among Delawareans and Delaware businesses,” said Rep. Tom Kovach (R-Brandywine Hundred South), the bill’s lead sponsor. “From our Delaware small businesses in the service industry, to the City of Wilmington, to builders and contractors, to labor unions, to hotel and restaurant owners, to the arts community, we have seen a consistent outpouring of support.”

“The film industry is recession-proof, provides high-paying direct jobs, and creates countless opportunities for small businesses and the tourism industry,” said Rep. Helene Keeley (D-Wilmington South), a prime sponsor of the bill.

Unlike film incentives in other states, the proposed program would not require Delaware to spend money. Rather, the legislation would allow the state to use some of its idle property as collateral for bank loans to film projects that have met rigorous criteria, including pre-sold distribution contracts.

This new bill replaces a similar measure introduced last year (House Bill 250).

Some of the highlights of the legislation include:

- It could potentially generate \$50 million for Delaware's economy, mostly by stimulating job creation;
- It would create a system by which veteran producers and film financiers act as advisors; and
- It would potentially attract top talent and high value film projects to Delaware.

“The bottom line is, if we pass this bill before the end of session, we will help create new jobs and facilitate a new industry in Delaware at a time when jobs and industry growth are desperately needed,” Rep. Kovach said.

Around the Hall ***(Briefs from Legislative Hall)***

Retiring Rep. V. George Carey Honored

For the first time in 26 years, the 36th District will have a new state representative this fall. State Rep. V. George Carey (R-Milford) announced earlier this year that he would not seek reelection to the seat he has held since 1984. As the 145th General Assembly winds down, Rep. Carey's colleagues took a few minutes to pay homage to the Sussex County legislator. A working farmer, Rep. Carey's agricultural experience made him a sought after asset for regional and national organizations interested in crafting farm policy. Rep. Carey was also a driving force behind the creation of the Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Program, which since its inception nearly 20-years ago has permanently preserved more than 65,000 acres of farmland and other open space. A member of the influential Joint Bond Bill Committee, Rep. Carey played a key role in successfully securing state funding for the Delaware Veterans Home.

State Rep. Pam Thornburg Recognized for Service

State Rep Pam Thornburg (R-Dover West) was recently recognized for her 10 years of service to the people of the 29th Representative District. Rep. Thornburg announced earlier this year that she will not seek reelection. The western Kent County legislator was lauded for successfully sponsoring new laws to preserve Delaware's agricultural land and forests. In addition to being an advocate for the rights of property owners, Rep. Thornburg was also a leading proponent of efforts to encourage the use of sustainable energy in the First State.

House Pays Tribute to Legislative "Giant"

The members of the State House of Representatives' recently paid tribute to one of their best known and most active colleagues, who is leaving the chamber after 34 years of service. State Rep. Bill Oberle (R-Beecher's Lot) has held 24th Representative District seat since 1976. The Newark-area legislator was 27-years-old when he won his first term in office during the nation's bicentennial. Among Rep. Oberle's many achievements is the law that legalized slot machines in Delaware (the Horseracing Re-Development Act); the mandatory seatbelt law; the Blue Collar Jobs Act; and the law that set the DUI blood alcohol threshold at .08. During his tenure, Rep. Oberle served as Minority Whip ('83-'84), Majority Leader ('84-'87), and co-chair of the budget-writing Joint Finance Committee. State House Majority Leader Pete Schwartzkopf (D-Rehoboth Beach) called Rep. Oberle a "giant" in the General Assembly that cannot be replaced.

Bill Passed to Create Vietnam Veterans Day in Delaware

Paul Davis of Woodside, president of the state council of the Vietnam Veterans of America, took to the floor of the Delaware House of Representatives to thank

its members for approving a bill to honor Vietnam Vets. Passed unanimously, House Bill 472 seeks to designate March 30th as “Vietnam Veterans Day” in Delaware, which would be commemorated by ceremonies honoring those U.S. military servicemen and women who served in the Vietnam theater of operations from 1961 through 1975.

Miss Delaware Recognized for Courage & Determination

Miss Delaware Kayla Martell was recently recognized in the State House of Representatives’ chamber for her courage and determination, as well as her outstanding community service. Ms. Martell suffers from alopecia areata, an autoimmune disease in which the victim’s immune system attacks the hair follicles, causing partial or complete baldness. There is no cure and no known cause for the ailment that will affect nearly two-percent of all Americans at some point in their lives. Despite her ailment, Ms. Martell was recently crowned Miss Delaware on her fifth attempt at winning the title. Among her activities, Ms. Martell mentors young girls with alopecia areata and visits schools encouraging students to be more tolerant of those with differences.