

Thursday, March 2, 2006

Department of Environmental Protection

Several Senators questioned Kathleen McGinty, Department of Environmental Protection Secretary, regarding the Commonwealth's current environmental condition and the outlook for the future.

Citing recent announcements by the Administration that the \$625 million Growing Greener II program was the "largest investment" in environmental protection by the state, Senator White, Chairman of the Environmental Resources and Energy Committee, said it actually was third behind the allocations made by Act 68 of 1999 and Act 90 of 2002, measures enacted by the Republican-controlled Legislature in conjunction with the Ridge/Schweiker Administration.

Senator White also asked why the hazardous sites cleanup program, which received short-term funding from the Legislature, was on hold until next year and why the only proposals presented by the Governor include increases in taxes and/or fees.

Senator White, citing potential problems in finding qualified mining inspectors, urged the DEP to work with community colleges and state system colleges to develop programs to train more people in that profession.

Senator Erickson said several states have insurance products to protect developers against the costs posed by unexpected remediation problems. He asked if that would be a viable approach for Pennsylvania to take in its on-going efforts to promote the redevelopment of former industrial sites.

Noting that construction work on Interstate 99 has been held up for more than three years as PENNDOT has been unable to move millions of tons of acid-bearing rock unearthed at the Skytop Mountain site in Centre County, Senator Corman urged Governor Rendell and DEP Secretary McGinty to take over the project. "PENNDOT is incapable of handling this problem," Senator Corman said.

Senator Rafferty discussed the nuclear power industry in Pennsylvania. He noted that most of Pennsylvania's facilities are 25 years old or older and asked what, if any, plans are in place to improve or upgrade those plants.

Senator Rafferty also asked whether the Department had studied the best methods of disposing methane gas generated at landfills.

Senator Waugh said prospective agriculturally-derived energy businesses are facing opposition from neighboring property owners. He asked whether the Renewable Energy Council should be more proactive in promoting those initiatives.

Senator Greenleaf discussed flood and storm water drainage problems in Southeastern Pennsylvania. Citing that in recent years serious flooding problems have involved streams going 10 to 15 feet over level and have resulted in fatalities, Senator Greenleaf asked Secretary McGinty what efforts are being made to correct those problems.

Appropriations Committee Chairman Noah Wenger, 36th District, noted the on-going efforts to promote bio-fuels production and use in Pennsylvania. Specifically citing the mixing of soy

bean-based fuel with traditional petroleum products for use in vehicles and as heating fuel, Senator Wenger asked if the Commonwealth is working with private industry to further promote those efforts.