

“Straight From the Horse’s Mouth” – An Interview with Rep. Randy Vulakovich

By Eileen Anderson

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Last week we took a short trip to Erie and Presque Isle Downs. Neither of us gamble but we like to watch the horses run whether its evening races or morning workouts. They are exquisite animals. I only caught a glimpse of the Saturday morning workout; most of my time was spent fielding a return call from a rank and file lawmaker from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

The reason for our call was to discuss the opposition’s view of HB 2405 - Amendments to the Alternative Energy Portfolio Standards Act. The energy bill is too complicated to cover in this space but here’s bits and pieces of the rest of our “Q & A” conversation right from the horse’s mouth. This is what he said:

Primary Interests - Infrastructure improvements and government reform.

The Budget - There should be no “junk” in it. It should be transparent with nothing hidden. Pennsylvania must take a hard look at sales tax exemptions but now is not the time. Cigars and smokeless tobacco should be taxed. The cigarette tax can be raised to 10% but not higher because they are already taxed enough. Maintain the 1% vendors’ discount for sales tax.

Passage of the Pension Bill by the PA House – The rules created for new employees should go a little further but it’s great the bi-partisan bill passed. The bill smoothes the dramatic spike in the pension costs faced by the state and school districts and extends the payments over a longer time period.

State Debt - Borrow for infrastructure because the state needs it and there is something to show for the money spent.

Tax Increment Financing - Instead of picking winners and losers reduce the Corporate Net income tax to 7% so PA is competitive with others states. Continue the phase-out of the Capital Stock and Franchise Tax and move to a 100% Singles Sales Factor.

What Type of Constituent Communication Gets Your Attention? - A phone call has the most impact, followed by letters, and then email but it can’t be for email

About the Job - It takes an unbelievable amount of time. There is a lot of reading required to stay informed.

Marcellus Shale – Don’t enact a severance tax right now. Let companies recover their upfront costs. If they do damage to the environment they should clean it up. Then impose a severance tax. PA labor must be used with the exception of the drillers who are from out of state. PA companies must make some money.

The severance tax was intended to provide immunity from infrastructure damages to the environment. Strict regulations are needed. The tax must be used for what it was

intended and not taken for other purposes like to mitigate the spikes from pension fund.

Government Reform - The largest uproar in the PA House now is over the tax-free per diem payments lawmakers receive when they are attending legislative committee meetings or in session. The payment covers miscellaneous expense like meals, motels, travel and so forth. Many lawmakers game the system and collect the full per diem even though they have few expenses. They should have to show receipts for their expenses instead of just getting a flat amount of \$163 per day.

Favorite Projects – Grants for little leagues, firemen, police, cancer, and domestic violence.

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