

LOCAL & STATE

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Pa. SPCA Officers To Carry Guns In 2009

STROUDSBURG, Pa. (AP) – Humane officers in Pennsylvania will soon start carrying guns as part of an SPCA policy change made to ensure officers' safety.

The Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals approved the decision recently and officers will be armed starting in January, chief executive Howard Nelson told the Pocono Record for a story Sunday.

"The animal abusers are already armed," Nelson told the newspaper.

He said two Stroudsburg-based humane officers will be the first to carry guns.

The officers will receive training before being armed and Nelson said the guns are to be used only for self-protection – not to euthanize animals.

A PSPCA board member who resigned in August had predicted the move in his resignation letter and said he thought it was a very risky decision.

"It is true that such arming is permitted by law, conditioned upon proof of completion of legislatively prescribed training," longtime member Richard Elliott wrote.

But Elliott said officers have other options, including batons and sprays, if they are threatened while conducting investigations or enforcement.

"I strongly feel that accomplishment of such arming is a recipe for tragedy and potential serious liability, at the very least," he wrote. "If our agents feel concern for their safety when out in the field, there are ample nonlethal means to allay such worries."

There is also legislation in the state Legislature that would give humane officers immunity from litigation. House Bill 2547 would grant humane police officers civil immunity when investigating animal cruelty cases.

Small Plane Lands On Pa. Turnpike Guardrail

NEWVILLE, Pa. (AP) – Pennsylvania state police say the pilot of a small experimental plane suffered minor injuries after his plane struck a tractor-trailer and landed on a Pennsylvania Turnpike guard rail during an attempted emergency landing.

Turnpike spokesman Carl DeFebo says the single-engine plane went down about 1 p.m. Thursday about 30 miles west of Harrisburg.

DeFebo says authorities received initial reports that the pilot had taken off from Carlisle, encountered an engine problem and tried to return to the airport.

State Police say the plane struck the rear of the truck and then skidded along the guide rail of the eastbound lanes. The truck's driver, 46-year-old William Keith Price of Gerrardstown, W.Va., was not injured.

The 54-year-old pilot asked authorities not to release his name.

State Wardens Seize 96 Dogs, Shut Down Penna. Kennel

EPHRATA, Pa. (AP) – State dog wardens have shut down a central Pennsylvania kennel and seized nearly 100 dogs there.

Officials say the 96 dogs seized Saturday are in good condition. The owner of the kennel in Ephrata had fought to keep his business running after the state revoked his kennel license last year.

On Dec. 6, a Lancaster County judge issued an injunction and gave Ervin S. Zimmerman 14 days to shut the kennel down.

The injunction came after wardens had cited Zimmerman for six violations of the dog law in November.

Messages left for Zimmerman by the Sunday News of Lancaster were not immediately returned.

McConnellsburg SADD Annual Fundraiser



Pictured above, left: Darren Hoffman, Melissa DeShong, James Andrews, Kady Kerlin, Brionna Johnston, Jessica Fish, Nancy Shearer, Kathy Kendall and Todd Beatty.



Pictured above, left are Princess McKayla Keefer, Kathy Kendall, Crys Hensley and Prince Dalton Garlock.



Pictured above, left are Princess McKayla Keefer, Kathy Kendall, Robert C. Snyder and Prince Dalton Garlock.

Snowball Raises \$10,100

McConnellsburg SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) held its annual Snowball on Saturday, December 13, 2008. The theme this year was "2008 Christmas Cruise." The students enjoyed music by Heart and Sound Production, had an opportunity to play "Rock Band," Dance Dance Revolution, get their pictures taken by Kristen Earley Photography, make their own music with karaoke and enjoyed Mrs. Susan Cabbage's tropical drinks.

The middle school had its Snowball from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and at 4:00 p.m. the students crowned their new princess – McKayla Keefer and prince Dalton Garlock. Last year's princess, Kylie Pine, and prince, Forrest Plessinger, received the honor of crowning this year princess and prince. The students voted on raising money for two community organizations: the American Cancer Society and Save the Old MHS Building Fund. Each middle student was given approximately three weeks to raise money for these community organizations. Princess McKayla Keefer and Prince Dalton Garlock raised the most money. Their court consisted of Caitlin Lynch, Destiny Lynch, Samantha Bottenfeld, Forrest Plessinger and Hannah Ott. Together, the whole middle school collected at total of \$4,500, with \$ 2,400 going to the American Cancer Society. (Crys Hensley accepted the check for the American Cancer Society,) and \$2,100 going to the Save the Old MHS Building Fund. (Robert C. Snyder, representing the old MHS building, accepted the check.)

McConnellsburg High School enjoyed the Snowball from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. and at 9:00 p.m., crowned the new queen, Brionna Johnston, and king, James Andrews. Their court

consisted of Kady Kerlin-Seville and Evan Lynch, Emily Watkins and Jordan Bolinger, Melissa DeShong and Darren Hoffman, Sara Brady and Devon Petty-John, Mariah Shimer and Paul Strait, Taylor Morton and Ron Snyder, Angie Baughman and Jesse Wible. Together, these eight couples raised a total of \$5,600 for their voted-on community organizations. A total of \$4,200 was collected for the American Cancer Society. (Mrs. Nancy Shearer, representing the ACS, accepted the check.) and a total of \$1,400 was collected for the Save the Old MHS Building Fund. (Paul Johnston accepted the check for the old MHS building.) These eight couples should be commented on their excellent effort to help others!

Together, the the two schools collected \$10,100, with \$6,600 going to the American Cancer Society and \$3,500 going to Save the Old MHS Building Fund.

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What's Public And What's Not Under New Pa. Law

Examples of information that the government must make available to the public under Pennsylvania's new Right-to-Know Law, and examples of government information that will remain private:

Public

- Legislative records, including financial information and e-mails between lawmakers and lobbyists. The Legislature was exempt from the previous Right-to-Know Law.
- Financial records of judicial agencies, which were previously exempt from the Right-to-Know Law.
- Financial and other records of community colleges.
- Financial and other records of the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association.
- Name, position, salary and other compensation, employ-

ment contract and length of service of any public official or agency employee.

Documents reflecting final action on a public employee's demotion or discharge.

Grant applications.

Documents presented to a quorum of an agency for discussion at a public meeting.

911 time response logs.

Bids and requests for proposals on public contracts, including unsuccessful proposals, once the bids have been opened.

Traffic reports.

Certain records held by government contractors performing governmental functions.

Name, cause and manner of death of an individual.

Real-estate appraisals, environmental reviews, audits and evaluations related to an agency's lease, acquisition or dis-

posal of real property once the agency makes a decision.

Private

Social Security numbers.

Driver's license numbers.

Home, cellular or personal phone numbers.

Personal financial information, such as credit cards, bank account and financial statements.

Home addresses of law-enforcement officers and judges.

Recordings and transcripts of 911 calls, unless a court or agency deems the release in the public's interest.

Medical, psychological or disability records that identify individuals.

Records that identify people who apply for or receive social services.

A minor's name, home address and date of birth.

Appeal Denied In Pa. Electronic Voting Suit

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) – The state Supreme Court denied an appeal by the secretary of the commonwealth in a lawsuit filed by a group of Pennsylvania voters who say electronic voting machines violate state election code.

The ruling this week clears the way for the Commonwealth Court to determine whether touch-screen machines violate the state code.

"It allows, finally, the courts to review whether the secretary of the commonwealth complied with his obligation to ensure that the Pennsylvania system of vot-

ing is reliable and safe," Michael Churchill, an attorney for the 25 voters who sued in August 2006, told The Philadelphia Inquirer.

The suit asks the Commonwealth Court to decertify direct recording electronic voting machines used in 50 of 67 counties.

The lawsuit says the machines are flawed, that they drop votes and register votes for the wrong candidate, and violate the state election code requirement to have a physical record of each vote.

A spokeswoman for Pedro Cortes, the secretary of the commonwealth, told the newspaper

that Cortes was disappointed the Supreme Court did not hear the appeal.

"On the bright side," said Cortes' spokeswoman Leslie Amoros, "the paucity of problems with voting systems over the past few elections, including the recent presidential election, shows that the plaintiffs' fears are grossly exaggerated."

In a majority decision in April 2007, a court panel threw out the secretary of the commonwealth's arguments and agreed that flaws in the electronic machines might constitute a violation of the state election code.

Pa. Legislature's Chairmen Prepare For New Session

By Mark Sciforo

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) – Nearly 4,500 bills were introduced during the two-year legislative session that ended last month, but only 292 laws were signed – and about a quarter of those were routine appropriations bills.

Those are long odds for lawmakers hoping to get a favorite bill passed, particularly given that the General Assembly's agenda is largely driven by the majority leaders and governor.

Committee chairmen, however, claim significant advantages.

They control the calendar and can shepherd legislation through hearings and the amendment process. Other committee members tend to show them deference, and the chairmen have clout with leaders to get a floor vote. And while a bill is being debated, their specialized knowledge comes in handy when they face questions and opposition.

But there are limits to what higher rank will help them do.

"In the long run, you have no more influence than any other person in the entire world about how any individual member is going to vote," said Rep. Babette Josephs, D-Philadelphia, chairwoman of the State Government Committee.

When the new session starts in a few weeks, Josephs and the other chairmen want to hit the ground running.

Josephs wants to make it easier for minority- and women-owned businesses, and small businesses generally, to obtain state contracts. She plans to address campaign finance reform and will be looking for ways to improve voting, whether through early voting or the use of mail-in ballots.

"I believe that, in a democracy, the more people who vote, who participate in that way, the better the result," she said.

Rep. Ed Staback, D-Lackawanna, wants to let the Game Commission consider Sunday hunting. But his top priority for the Game and Fisheries Committee is to toughen penalties on poachers who illegally kill deer, bear, turkey and elk.

"It's getting worse on an annual basis," he said. "Especially commercial poaching, where people are coming into the state from outside – New York, West Virginia, Delaware, Ohio."

Senate Judiciary Chairman Stewart Greenleaf, R-Montgomery, expects to respond to the results of a soon-to-be-completed study of wrongful criminal convictions. He also wants his

committee to address the parole of violent offenders considered to be at a high risk of reoffending.

"We have 46,000, 47,000 inmates in our state prisons, and we release 16,000 each year," he said. "It's a major job that they're doing, and no question, there have been mistakes made when there are that many people going in and out of the system."

House Transportation Committee Chairman Joe Markosek, D-Allegheny, said his panel will spend the coming months developing a list of "shovel ready" infrastructure projects to benefit from an expected influx of federal stimulus money.

He also plans to work on a bill to deal with the distractions that can make drivers, particularly teens, unsafe behind the wheel.

Rep. Bud George, D-Clearfield, said the House Environmental Resources and Energy Committee will take up the looming spike in electricity rates tied to the expiration of regulation-era rate caps. His committee also will be working on water quality and other issues raised by the boom in exploration of the Marcellus Shale natural gas formation.

"Pennsylvania is really the only gas-rich state that does not tax the extraction of natural gas," George said. "This is ridiculous, especially when the state is facing up to a \$2 billion shortfall."

Sen. Jeff Piccola, R-Dauphin, who is assuming the chairmanship of the Education Committee following the death of Sen. James Rhoades, said his first order of business will be to improve the accuracy of school districts' reporting on violent incidents on campus.

He also expects the committee to examine funding equity issues and revisit the decade-old charter school law. The state's tight finances will limit what the committee can do, he said.

The chairmen's priorities will have to compete with the wants and needs of the rank and file and their leaders' agendas. The goals of Gov. Ed Rendell will be outlined in his annual February budget address.

Steve Crawford, the Democratic governor's legislative affairs secretary, said he will be pushing the Legislature for action on the electricity rate spike and health coverage for the uninsured.

"Everybody thinks that in his final two years he's going to go shopping for rocking chairs," Crawford said. "That's not going to happen – we're shopping for running shoes."



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