

Under the Dome with DeAngelo

*An Update on the New Jersey State Government by Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo
(November 2016)*

Welcome Back Under the Dome where fall has finally set in. But, residents will head out to the polls to elect a new president, federal Congressional representatives, local government and/or board of education members. Voters on November 8 also will have an opportunity to voice their opinion on statewide or local ballot initiatives.

The most talked about issue before statewide voters is whether or not to constitutionally dedicate gas tax funding to solely be used for projects undertaken through the Transportation Trust Fund. Despite some misinformation that claims that gas tax (that went into effect on November 1, 2016) would be repealed, that is not true. If the question fails, the gas tax rate would remain the same, unless another law is passed by the State Legislature and signed by the Governor. In addition, the funding could then be redirected for other state expenses other than roads by the current or a future Governor's administration.

Not since 1989 has there been a gas tax increase to construct and maintain New Jersey's roads, bridges, and railroads that are the arteries of our state. For decades, our state has failed to establish a reliable financial support system that our transportation infrastructure desperately requires. As a result, we have seen our state's roadways and rail lines crumble and allow potholes, aging bridges, and failing transit systems to become a serious safety concern throughout the state.

These broken roadways also impact our wallets as the United States Department of Transportation estimates the average driver in New Jersey spends \$601 a year in car repairs due to poor road conditions. With a necessary investment, we will make our transportation network safer, less destructive on our cars, more reliable for business, and an engine to bring new jobs into the state. New funding put aside in the Transportation Trust Fund will provide \$582 million for NJ Transit that will provide 1,394 new buses new track, overhead wires, signals, and electrical infrastructure upgrades along the Northeast Corridor. These incredible transportation needs are why we need to make sure that tax dollars are specifically dedicated.

What has been lacking, however, in the full explanation of the passage of legislation to secure the Transportation Trust Fund has been the relief will be given to New Jersey's seniors. Under the new law, seniors living on a fixed income by increasing New Jersey's income retirement exclusion from the current \$20,000 to \$100,000 of annual income. For joint filers, an estimated 204,000 senior taxpayers will have more money to pay for medical care, upkeep around their homes, and put away for a rainy day.

Additionally, low-income workers will now receive an added financial benefit. New Jersey's Earned Income Tax Credit program will increase from 30 to 35 percent the federal benefit. This benefit will help an estimated 552,900 New Jerseyans by giving them on average an additional \$255 on their annual tax return.

The second most talked about statewide ballot question, even though it is Ballot Question 1, asks voters to amend the State Constitution to allow additional casinos to be built in New Jersey outside of Atlantic City. If approved by a majority of voters statewide, the State Legislature would be authorized to pass laws to permit casino gaming in two counties outside of Atlantic County. The

two potentially new casinos would need to be at least 72 miles from Atlantic City and could not be located in the same county as one another. Funding from these new locations and existing ones in Atlantic City would be used for specific programs and property tax relief for senior citizens and disabled residents.

Furthermore, funding would be used to revitalize, stabilize and improve Atlantic City that is struggling because of competition from bordering states with gambling. The ballot questions also would set aside funding dedicated to in-state horse racing industry that is beneficial in supporting industries and open space preservation in many places in New Jersey.

The high-priced ads on network television as well as the mail pieces urging voters to “Vote No to North Jersey Casinos” is rumored to be funded through out-of-state casinos business interests. These interlopers do not take into consideration the number of jobs that northern casinos could bring to the region including construction jobs for them to be built and then employees of the venues once they are up and running.

The creation of gaming venues in Pennsylvania, Delaware and New York have poached gamers from New Jersey as well as keeping residents in their respective states who previously frequented Atlantic City as the gaming hub of our state. We need to find a way to bring those individuals back home and evolve the tourism draw of the Atlantic City region so that we can regain the lost revenue that supports critical programs. That is why it is important to support ballot question number 1 in November.

More locally, in Robbinsville, there is a local ballot questions that asks residents to support a 1.5 cent increase in local taxes per ever \$100 of their assessed property value. If approved, and the land subsequently preserved, Robbinsville would save an estimated \$1 million annually in essential services for every 100 undeveloped homes – approximately \$55 per home in town. Mercer County has identified \$2 million through the County Open Space Trust Fund that can be set aside to help offset projects specifically targeted for preservation in this ballot question.

Much attention has been given to the Edinburg Village/Washington Woods property that is an expansive 220-225 acres of land. This property represents only one of the two remaining large parcels of land in the Township that could still be preserved for open space. The other property that would be preserved was the home of the former Miry Run Golf Course that sat on nearly 200 acres.

I urge residents of Robbinsville to support this ballot question in order to preserve this land. In particular, the Washington Woods property is wooded, farmed and contains a tributary for the Assunpink Creek. Preservation offers an opportunity for trails to be connect among adjacent neighborhoods that are located near, and could connect a future County Assunpink Greenway to, the Robbinsville high school and middle school.

Please remember that when you go to the polls on Tuesday, November 8 to vote for your representatives on your choice to pull the levers for the ballot questions that are of significant importance.

I will see you back here next month Under the Dome!

Editor's Note: Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo (D-Hamilton) represents the 14th Legislative District which includes parts of Mercer and Middlesex counties. He can be reached at AsmDeAngelo@njleg.org; phone (609) 631-7501; www.WayneDeAngelo.com; Facebook: Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo; or Twitter: @DeAngeloLD14.