

# **DOUG REICHLEY**

**For**

## **STATE HOUSE**

In the last week, the residents of the Parkland and the East Penn School Districts have been rudely awakened by reports in the morning newspapers that property taxes in both of those districts will increase in the coming year. Parkland residents will pay more than \$100 more next year in increased school property taxes, while people living in the East Penn District will see a \$147 jump in their school property taxes starting next year. While the reasons attributed for these increases range from extra costs for staffing to the need to expand current school facilities, one thing is constant – a total disregard for the taxpayers.

I opened my campaign with a call for a mandatory 10 – 20% cut in school district property taxes on both residential and commercial properties. I advocated this rollback because I know a simple fact which seems to have escaped the school directors for these two districts – that the property owners are fed up and have had too much with the disregard the school boards seem to have for the average homeowner in this area. These two school boards are the same bodies which denied the homeowners the right to choose on a referendum whether to fund our schools from property taxes or to switch to an income tax base to support public education. I know from speaking with voters in this legislative district that I am not alone when I say enough is enough.

What is even more troubling than the mere fact of the proposed increase in school taxes is the reasoning which is offered to justify these tax hikes. At the public meetings in which the tax increases were revealed, the overriding explanation for these higher taxes was a combination of surprise, poor planning or both. In the Parkland School District, enrollment has increased 40% over the last ten years, thus necessitating a need for more staff. If these enrollment trends were clear for the last ten years, why weren't contingencies made for further staffing needs in previous years rather than engaging in luxurious building projects? At the East Penn School Board meeting this past Monday, plans were revealed to increase property taxes to cover the costs of new construction to begin this fall. But this is a district which just completed a major building renovation campaign, and did not include any classroom expansion of the recently renovated high school. If everyone else in the Emmaus and Lower Macungie area saw the degree of development taking place, how did the school district miss all those homes going up and figure they would not need extra classroom space? The building plan also calls for \$6 million in new athletic fields and \$4.5 million for a new amphitheater? Why are these projects needed now and why at these costs?

It is the continuing lack of communication and apparent disregard for the homeowners which has poisoned the relations between the school districts and the residents, and which leads me to believe it is even more imperative to pass property tax reform when I am elected to the State Legislature. In addition, I will push for the passage of House Bill 2442 which expands the tax forgiveness program here in Pennsylvania for those on the lower end of the economic scale. Under this legislation, the state would reimburse qualified claimants for any increases in school

property taxes up to \$500 per year. These reimbursements would apply to individuals and families who qualify for the state personal income tax forgiveness program, and would cover only a primary residence. I want to stress this program would not affect or replace the current property tax/rent rebate program which already exists for senior citizens. Eligibility for personal tax income forgiveness is based on the claimant earning income within what is described as the “poverty” limit, beginning with an income of \$6,500 for an individual and \$13,000 for a married couple. Within this definition, “income” does not include unemployment compensation, social security, pensions, or other retirement income. These qualified income levels increase with the number of dependents an individual or family claims on their tax returns, up to a maximum family income for 100% tax forgiveness of \$47,000 and partial tax forgiveness for families earning up to \$49,250.

A base year for tax forgiveness would be established, and any increase in the school property tax beyond the base year amount would then be subject to reimbursement from the state to the qualified individuals. In an economy which is still recovering from recession, this program will most directly assist those who are caught in a financial downturn. This legislation would also benefit senior citizens who are on fixed incomes and are being squeezed by the ever higher cost of medical care. It is not a windfall, but a helping hand from the state meant to help those most in need of tax relief.

My proposal is also consistent with my pledge to always think of taxpayers first in making economic decisions. The bottom line is clear – if the residents of the 134<sup>th</sup> State House District want a fiscal watchdog in Harrisburg helping to protect their interests, I am their man. As the only candidate endorsed by the statewide taxpayer protection group Citizens Against Higher Taxes, I have been recognized as the only candidate who will protect taxpayers. The other candidates have shown either a proven history of increasing taxes, or have publicly advocated an increase in the state income and sales taxes. The taxpayers of this district need someone to watch out for their best interest. The taxpayers need Doug Reichley in the State Legislature.