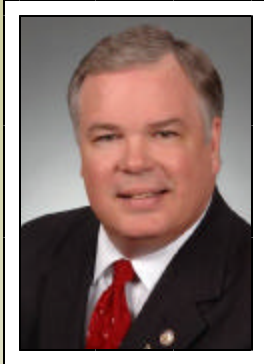




JOSEPH UECKER

SERVING THE 66TH DISTRICT



State Representative Joseph Uecker

Term in Office: 2nd
Hometown: Miami Township
Standing Committees:

- Commerce and Labor (vice-chair)
- Alternative Energy
- Health
- Local and Municipal Government and Urban Revitalization
- Public Utilities

Dear Neighbors:

With winter here and the holidays behind us members of the Legislature are hard at work on legislation. I am very proud of our work last year. My colleagues and I in the General Assembly passed one of the most fiscally conservative budgets in the last 40 years this summer, extending tax cuts to seniors and providing health care to children and seniors.

In addition to these efforts, I am proud to announce the Ohio Legislature just passed House Bill 372, legislation providing more benefits to Ohio's servicemen and women. Veterans choosing to live in Ohio would be exempt from paying personal income taxes on their pension benefits under the legislation. The bill also allows veterans six months upon returning home to renew any professional licenses that may have expired while they were serving, giving them the opportunity to go back to work sooner. House Bill 372 has now been signed into law by the governor.

Details on several of our 2007 accomplishments can be found inside this newsletter. As your state representative, one of my goals is to keep you informed about what is happening in Columbus, and this newsletter is one way for me to do just that. I hope you find it useful.

In addition to our legislative work, I am very proud of the level of service my staff provides to the citizens of the 66th District. I can be reached by phone at (614) 466-8134, by e-mail at district66@ohr.state.oh.us, or by writing me, State Representative Joseph Uecker, 77 South High Street, District 66, Columbus, OH 43215.

Sincerely,

Joseph Uecker
State Representative
Ohio House District 66



With hundreds of separate pieces of legislation to consider every year, legislators in Columbus need the opinion, advice and specialized knowledge of their constituents to guide them. It is impossible for any legislator to have detailed knowledge of the technicalities of every bill he or she must consider.

This means that even if you oppose a bill, legislators welcome your letters because you are providing them with knowledge they need to make well-informed decisions.

HELP WITH WINTER HEATING BILLS



With colder weather taking hold across the state, heating bills are beginning to rise for many consumers. Fortunately, there are a number of available options to assist homeowners struggling to pay their heating bills this season.

- Winter Reconnect Order:** the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio has again issued its annual winter reconnect order, which allows residential customers who have had their service disconnected or received a disconnection notice the opportunity to pay \$175 or the amount owed, whichever is less, plus a reconnection fee of no more than \$20 to restore or maintain their gas or electric service. The winter reconnect order may be used one time between now and April 15, 2008. There is no income eligibility requirement to use the reconnection program.
- Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP):** this program helps homeowners with incomes at or below 175 percent of the federal poverty line and have been disconnected or received a disconnection notice pay their heating bills. Customers can use HEAP one time per heating season.
- Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP):** an extended payment program for consumers with incomes at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty line. Most electric and natural gas companies are required to accept payment based on a percentage of an eligible household's income. Consumers are responsible for paying the remaining balance when they leave the program. A consumer can join PIPP at any time during the year.



For more information about any of these programs, contact your local utility provider or call the PUCO at 1-800-686-7826. You can also contact the Ohio Consumers' Council at 1-877-742-5622. ☞

PROVIDING SENIORS WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE AT HOME

Research shows that nine out of 10 older Ohioans would prefer to continue living at home, even when in need of long-term care. Offering our seniors the opportunity to live at home, independently, allows older adults the ability to remain in a familiar environment, surrounded by family, friends and the comforts of home. With that in mind, Ohio Medicaid offers consumers of care the opportunity to make the best and most appropriate care decisions through several special programs, known as home and community-based service (HCBS) waivers.

House Bill 119 – the state operating budget – continues our previous efforts to allow more Ohioans to receive the care they need while remaining in their own homes.

The PASSPORT program is a cost-efficient waiver program that allows older adults who do not need nursing home care with someone to assist them with daily activities, and provide the care they need to stay in their homes.

Services provided by PASSPORT include adult day care, home-delivered meals, personal care services and medical transportation among others.

Last year, a new assisted living waiver was made available to 1,800 individuals during the program's first year. Additionally, the budget provides for an additional 5,600 slots over the biennium.

The continued expansion of Medicaid waiver programs will help not only to ensure that older Ohioans and those with disabilities continue to receive the care and services they need but also make certain they are cared for in the manner they prefer.

By enhancing the delivery of home and community-based care services, members of the House hope to provide the comfort and peace of mind that comes with knowing Ohio's vulnerable citizens are cared for in the most efficient and preferable way.

Additionally, the budget includes an increase in the provider rates of 3 percent in each year of the biennium. This is the first increase in provider rates since 1998, ensuring a better product is available to those in need of care. ☞

A FEW ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 2007

IMPROVING FOSTER CARE

Earlier this year, state Representatives Jeff Wagner (R- Sycamore) and Courtney Combs (R- Hamilton) introduced House Bill 213, legislation designed to improve the training of foster parents as well as improve communication between government agencies and law enforcement in order to better protect children.

House Bill 213 expands the list of offenses that would prevent an individual from becoming a foster or adoptive parent to include repeat drunk driving, permitting child abuse and cruelty to animals. The bill also requires potential foster parents to submit to an FBI background check prior to becoming certified and again when they apply for renewal. This will catch any new transgressions that occur between the two applications.

House Bill 213 passed the Legislature earlier this year and has been signed into law.

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

According to a recent report, it has become clear there are many school teachers across Ohio with clear shortcomings. In an article earlier this fall by *The Columbus Dispatch*, since the year 2000, at least 85 educators have had sex with students. Additionally, nearly one in four teachers who emotionally, physically or sexually abused children still holds a teacher's license and even more disturbing is the fact that more than 20 educators kept their licenses for at least two years after being charged with felonies against children.



As if this is not bad enough, in many of these cases parents, other school districts, the state or even the district itself was not informed of these situations or the severity of the educator's crimes. It is essential that we keep bad apples out of the classroom and if there are instructors or administrators in the system with slightly tarnished records, it is the right of the system, the state and the parents to know their background.

Under current Ohio law, teacher misconduct should be reported to the state and requires the district to keep teacher records and personal information. Districts wishing to hire an employee or instructor should have access to these records; however that is not always the case and occasionally bad teachers slip through the cracks.

Therefore, my colleagues and I in the Legislature recently passed a bill to address these issues and help protect our children from unfit adults.

The measure has been passed by the Legislature and signed into law by the governor.

PREVENTING IDENTITY THEFT

Identity theft represents a serious and growing problem in Ohio and across the nation.

House Bill 46, legislation introduced by Representative Jimmy Stewart (R- Albany), provides protection from credit theft or misuse. The legislation allows for individuals to freeze their credit. Anyone can implement a freeze, even those who are not a victim of identity theft. This ensures that individuals can protect themselves from even the potential threat of identity theft. Additionally, under the provisions in the bill, victims would only pay \$5 for a temporary thaw and \$5 to unfreeze. This is comparable to what other states have done, and is even lower than several other states.



House Bill 46 provides individuals with the protection necessary to ensure their credit – and ultimately their financial security – are safe not just now, but more importantly in the future. Stolen and tarnished credit can affect an individual's credit score, the interest rates on their loans and their ability to obtain new, quality loans in the future.

House Bill 46 passed the House earlier this year.

IMPROVING OHIO'S BUSINESS

CLIMATE

Over the past few years, the Bureau of Workers' Compensation scandal clearly demonstrated a need to increase efficiency, decrease costs and combat fraud, waste and abuse in Ohio government. This is exactly the sort of problem that cannot be ignored and needed to be addressed by the Auditor of State and the General Assembly.


That is why we worked together to introduce and pass House Bill 166, legislation that would reform the internal auditing function of state government. Previously in Ohio, internal audits of state agencies were conducted by each agency separately.



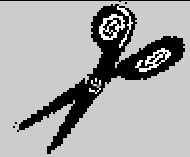
House Bill 166 increases accountability in state government by consolidating the internal audit function for the state of Ohio and creates the Office of Internal Auditing to coordinate internal auditors and the position of Chief Internal Auditor to oversee the office and the internal auditor's findings.

The bill also creates an internal audit committee to review internal audits of various state departments. The committee will be comprised of financial experts and CPAs with the background and experience necessary to properly identify poor controls and standards. The Internal Audit Committee will be responsible for enforcing tighter internal controls and reviews of internal policies.

We believe that these steps will put into place the proper checks and balances necessary to prevent another BWC-like scandal from occurring in the future.

House Bill 166 passed through the Legislature earlier this year and was signed into law. 

CONTACTING YOUR STATE GOVERNMENT:



HELPFUL STATE TOLL-FREE NUMBERS

Attorney General Consumer Protection	800-282-0515
Child Support Hotline	800-686-1556
Crime Victim Assistance	800-582-CVSS
Home Energy Assistance Program	800-282-0880
Legislative Information	800-282-0253
Medicaid Consumer Hotline	800-324-8680
State Highway Patrol (Highway Help)	877-7-PATROL
Tax Questions	800-282-1780
Travel and Tourism	800-BUCKEYE
Unemployment Hotline	800-251-OBES
Utility Consumer Complaints	800-282-9448
Workers' Compensation	800-OHIO-BWC
Ohio Web site	www.ohio.gov
House Web site	www.house.state.oh.us

CONSTITUENT SERVICES

It is important for me to hear the opinions and concerns of constituents in the district.

You can reach me by mail, phone, fax or e-mail. My staff or I will assist you in any way we can.

77 South High Street,
District 66
Columbus, Ohio 43215-6111

Columbus Office:
(614) 466-8134

Columbus Fax:
(614) 719-3966

E-mail:
district66@ohr.state.oh.us

HOW TO
WRITE
YOUR LEGISLATOR

Every legislator considers many bills on a wide range of subjects. Therefore, the first essential aspect of an effective letter to a legislator is a specific reference to the particular bill which interests you. The second important element is a brief description of the effect the bill's provisions will have on you. The third component of a convincing letter is your advice to your legislator as to how you think he or she should vote on the bill. ☞

