

News from the Legislature

Legislature Chooses Leadership

Following the recent elections, members of the New Jersey Legislature returned to Trenton last Thursday to select their leadership for the next legislative session beginning January 2012.

In the State Senate where Democrats are the majority party (24-16), Senator Stephen Sweeney (D-3) will continue to serve as Senate President, and Senator Loretta Weinberg (D-37) will serve as Majority Leader, her first term in that position. Additionally, Senator Paul Sarlo (D-36) will serve as Deputy Majority Leader and chair of the Budget and Appropriations Committee. Senator Nia Gill (D-34) will serve as President Pro Temp. Both Senators Sarlo and Gill will be serving their second terms in those positions.

"I am humbled that my colleagues have seen fit to honor me with another term as Senate President," said Senate President Sweeney. "I can promise the people of New Jersey that our commitment to creating jobs, revitalizing the economy and fighting for working class people will not end. I look forward to accomplishing great things in this upcoming session."

The Senate Republican Caucus chose Senator Tom Kean, Jr. (R-21) to continue to serve as Republican Leader, while Senator Diane Allen (R-7) will serve as Deputy Republican Leader. Rounding out the Senate Republican leadership team is Senator Kevin O'Toole (R-40), Republican Whip, Senator Robert Singer (R-30), Conference Chairman, Senator Christopher "Kip" Bateman (R-16), Deputy Conference Chairman, and Senator Anthony Bucco (R-25), the caucus' Budget Officer.

In the General Assembly where Democrats are also the majority party (48-32), Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver (D-34) will continue to serve as Assembly Speaker, while Assemblyman Lou Greenwald (D-6) will become the new Assembly Majority Leader. Additionally, Assemblyman John Wisniewski (D-19) will serve as a key Assembly Deputy Speaker, Assemblyman Vincent Prieto (D-32) will become the new Assembly Budget Committee chairman, Assemblyman Jerry Green (D-22) will continue as Assembly Speaker Pro Tempore and Assemblyman Gordon Johnson (D-37) will serve as Majority Conference leader.

"I thank my colleagues for showing me continued confidence and look forward to working with this new leadership team to make New Jersey a more affordable place for everyone to live and raise a family," Speaker Oliver said.

The Assembly Republican Caucus reelected Assemblyman Alex DeCroce (D-26) as its leader for his fifth consecutive term. In addition to DeCroce, Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (R-21) was reelected for his second term as Conference Leader and Assemblyman Dave Rible (R-30) was selected to serve his second term as Whip.

The announcement of the Committee Chairs for the 215th Legislature will be made in the coming weeks.

Sports Betting Backed by New Jersey Voters

New Jersey voters put their money down on the legal right to place bets on professional sports teams. The nonbinding referendum, and the only question to appear on the statewide ballot last Tuesday, was approved by a wide margin.

"The voters beat the over-under," said state Senator Raymond Lesniak (D-20), who has spearheaded the effort for sports wagering. "It was a bigger win than we expected. There's a strong momentum to fight the federal ban in New Jersey."

But it is only the first step in lawmakers' attempts to overturn a federal ban on sports betting.

Senator Lesniak plans to introduce legislation legalizing sports wagering in Atlantic City and at current and former horse racing tracks, and hopes to have it approved and on the governor's desk before the end of the year.

State Senator Jim Whelan, (D-2), chairman of the Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism and Historic Preservation Committee, and Senator Lesniak said the initiatives will now provide them with the ammunition they need when they once again take their argument to federal court.

Earlier this year, U.S. District Judge Garrett Brown dismissed a lawsuit brought by Senator Lesniak, Senate President Stephen Sweeney (D-3) and gaming advocates on the grounds that the state - through the Attorney General's Office - should have brought the suit.

Governor Christie refused to join in the suit at that time, saying the federal ban made the effort moot.

But last week the governor said he would fight for sports betting if a majority of voters approved the referendum.

Proponents of sports betting have said New Jersey is losing millions of dollars in potential revenue to offshore operations, organized crime and to the four states where that type of wagering is permitted in some form - Nevada, Oregon, Montana and Delaware.

In 1992, former U.S. Sen. Bill Bradley led the charge for the passage of the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act, which outlawed sports wagering in all states, but he grandfathered in the four states that had some form of it. It also gave states with casino gambling for more than 10 years - a provision inserted solely for New Jersey - a year to legalize sports betting, but New Jersey's effort died in the Legislature.

News from the Governor's Desk

New Law Will Allow Green Job Certification Programs at County Colleges and Vo-Tech Schools

Legislation sponsored by Senator Jim Whelan (D-2) to permit county colleges and vocational school districts to establish green job certification programs has been signed into law by Governor Christie.

The measure will allow county vocational school districts and county colleges to partner with private entities to develop and establish green job certification programs. Under the law, the college or vocational district would identify needed skills, develop training programs and train workers for green jobs in emerging industries such as energy efficient building, construction and retrofits, renewable electric power, energy efficient vehicles, biofuels and manufacturing that produces sustainable products and uses sustainable processes and materials.

"We have the ability in New Jersey to be an international leader in the green energy economy, by developing new technologies in the areas of solar, wind and biofuels. But in order to compete in the worldwide marketplace, it is critical that we have a highly-skilled workforce that is well trained," said Senator Whelan. "By allowing our colleges and vocational schools to partner with the industry, we will ensure that our residents have the skills necessary to compete in the 21st Century green economy, so that we can expand our renewable energy sector, spur job creation and fuel economic growth."

The law authorizes county colleges to review national standards established by various industries in developing green jobs certification program and to consult with the Department of Community Affairs in the development of such programs.