

Progress 2022

By Rep. Dan Moul (R-Adams)

Just as Pennsylvania is beginning to emerge from the dark days of the COVID-19 pandemic, mandates are being lifted and cautious optimism is moving us to get out and resume our former lives. But as the clouds are lifting, and our economy is starting to recover, we are reminded once more that we are not out of the woods.

On Feb. 8, Gov. Tom Wolf presented his final budget proposal, which is far more outrageous than his previous seven. At a time when our economy is still dealing with the effects of worker shortages, supply chain interruptions and rising inflation, the governor is proposing record state spending. Wolf's budget plan would increase spending by \$6.2 billion over the current year or about \$17 million more of your tax dollars per day!

Fortunately, the governor's budget address marks the start of the annual budget process. While Wolf can spend his time in financial "fantasyland," it is the responsibility of the General Assembly to hold spending in check and we intend to do so.

Currently the House and Senate Appropriations committees are conducting budget hearings with officials of state departments and agencies to determine what expenditures are necessary. It is our job to determine how to fund the core functions of state government, most notably education and human services, which account for roughly three-quarters of the state budget.

At a time when Wolf is promoting record spending, his administration's 5-year outlook projects expenses to rise an average of just 0.9% per year through 2026-27. This is grossly out of line with the forecast by the Independent Fiscal Office (IFO), an independent, non-partisan agency within state government, which projects average spending growth of 3% per year for the same period.

The governor was also generous with your tax dollars during the past year when he unilaterally offered 70,000 state employees up to 5-days of paid time off or a cash payout for getting the COVID-19 vaccine. The state Treasury estimates this bonus program could cost Pennsylvania taxpayers more than \$100 million. Administration officials say the program has spent about \$45 million so far, but actual figures will not be available until the end of the year. Clearly, this is no small expenditure and, once again, the governor acted to spend your tax dollars without consulting the Legislature.

Over the course of the next four months, the General Assembly will pore over the governor's \$43.7 billion budget proposal, assess actual needs, and adjust spending accordingly. As chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, I will pay particular attention to the line items affecting our farmers and rural residents.

I was surprised and disappointed to learn that Wolf's proposed 2022-2023 budget would cut funding for the Pennsylvania Animal Health and Diagnostic Commission, which facilitates in-state research, testing and surveillance of livestock and poultry diseases. This funding is crucial to the prevention and eradication of animal diseases, such as the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). HPAI outbreaks cause entire flocks to be destroyed, which can have a devastating impact on Pennsylvania's poultry industry and economy. The commission's expertise, testing labs and ability to identify outbreaks before they spread, not only protects animal health, but our food supply. Since food insecurity is a priority of the Wolf administration, I am baffled the governor is not making animal health a top priority.

As one who grew up on a farm in rural Adams County, I feel privileged to have a role in shaping policy to help Pennsylvania farmers. As chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee I am currently working with state agriculture officials and Pennsylvania's milk producers to put whole milk back on the school lunch menu.

I am also a member of the Local Government Commission, which works to develop legislation to assist and improve local governments. More recently, I was appointed to serve on the board of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, which addresses issues impacting rural communities and the people who live there. This includes broadband access, which enables farmers, students, local governments, and others to take advantage of information and technology. Other concerns include opioid abuse, available housing, jobs, even airports just to name a few. Solutions to these and other issues will be part of the discussions in this year's budget negotiations.

It is the Legislature's top priority to draft a budget that addresses the core functions of state government, and that will be our primary focus over the coming months. Our deadline to produce a final budget is June 30.

I will provide updates throughout the budget process on [facebook.com/RepMoul/](https://www.facebook.com/RepMoul/) and in my weekly emails. Sign up at RepMoul.com. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, or you need help with any state-related matter, please contact my district office at **717-334-3010**.

Thank you for the honor of serving as your state representative!

Dan

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