

Legislative Interview – Pennsylvania Representative Jim Struzzi
Monday, March 8, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom

Section Leaders:

1. Act 77 – Aida Shotts
2. Redistricting Reform - Sara Steelman
3. Judicial Districts - Stanley Chepaitis
4. Legislative Rules - Vicki Stelma
5. Open Primaries – Kay Smith
6. National Popular Vote Compact – Ellen Chinn
7. Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative - Cindy Rogers
8. Legislative priorities for 2021 – Misty Nocco
9. Public School Funding - Susan Welsh

Note-takers: Joyce Rizzo and Anne Simmons

“Chat” facilitator: Cindy Rogers

Participants: 27

1. Section 1: ACT 77 – Aida Shotts

- a. What specific changes to Act 77 would you support?
- b. What changes would you oppose?
- c. Would you support the pre-canvassing of absentee and mail-in ballots?
- d. Would you support the elimination of secrecy envelopes?

Representative Struzzi:

There are a lot of questions and concerns about this bill. There was a lot of confusion because of information sent out by third party organizations (prior to Election Day). The constituents were confused. The county election bureau needs to clean that up; Who is mailing out information?

I definitely support pre-canvassing. It passed in the House and there was no action in the Senate (prior to Election Day). Results are wanted on Election Day. This delay caused people to question the integrity of the system. Moving forward there is a need for changes, a need for bipartisan support, and also, a need to examine voter ID.

I am fine with the removal of secrecy envelopes. There is a need to propose pre-canvassing in 2021.

2. Section 2: Redistricting Reform – Sara Steelman

- a. Have you had a chance to review LACRA, the Legislative and Congressional Redistricting Act?
- b. Will you plan to support it?
- c. Do you have any further thoughts on redistricting reform?

Representative Struzzi:

I am familiar with LACRA. Redistricting is more political. The LACRA bill seems like common sense, a good piece of legislation. I plan to read the bill and possibly sign-on.

League member: Will you agree to add a fifth person who is a citizen to the Redistricting Commission? The courts usually make the Chair of the Redistricting Commission the fifth person and therefore, it is a partisan committee.

Representative Struzzi:

I will support a fifth person on the redistricting committee who is not a member of the legislature. Redistricting is a new experience for me.

3. Section 3: Judicial Districts – Stanley Chepaitis

- a. What can you tell us about HB 196 and the motivation behind it?
- b. Are you concerned about the way it would threaten the independence of our judiciary? Why or why not?
- c. Do you plan to vote for the judicial district amendment HB 196 if it comes up for another vote?

Representative Stuzzi:

HB196 sort of one of those things that we did not get a lot of information about. It is more political from where I sit; I care about helping people locally here. The way it was explained to me was that we need a more diverse geographical representation. I do not know if it will come up again this year; Since it came up... I have received a lot of feedback (The implication was that constituents were against HB 196.) I do not know if it will come up again; Not sure if it will come up again for a second vote.

League member: Justices do not represent specific districts. They represent all of the people of Pennsylvania.

Representative Struzzi:

That is how it was presented to us; How the argument was presented to us. I do not know the motivation behind the bill.

League member: There is so much acrimony about this Supreme Court decision.

League member: This is not a fair representation of an area.

League member: This is a form of gerrymandering.

League member: This is not good government; I am concerned about our system of checks and balances. Many perceive this as simply a “power grab”; Taking powers away from the judicial branch and executive branch by the legislative branch.

4. Section 4: Legislative Rules – Vicki Stelma

- a. Why would HB 196 pass without any expert testimony or clear public support, while redistricting reform bills, with clearly documented public support, never received a vote? Would you support rules to make sure bills with bipartisan support receive a vote in committee?
- b. Would you support rules that ensure bills voted favorably from committee with bipartisan support receive a vote on the floor?
- c. Would you support a commission to study the rules and recommend changes?
- d. What specific changes to the rules or to committee composition would you want to see?

Representative Struzzi:

I support bipartisan bills moving forward; Ensure they move forward. We vote on rules once every session. I was new last year; This year I get it. There should be some consideration of bipartisan bills. I am not on that committee; I do not know what kinds of discussions go on in their committee meetings. We may need a commission to study the rules; They come to us quickly; I need more time to study the rules, the rules proposal.

League member: Shouldn't you know more about the rules?

Representative Struzzi:

I try to understand opposing viewpoints. I represent everyone in this county. Listed to everyone's views

5. Section 5: Open Primaries – Kay Smith

- a. Do you have an opinion about open primaries?
- b. Do you have a preference between open or hybrid primaries?
- c. Would you support one or both of those options?

Representative Struzzi:

I do not have a problem with open primaries. There is an increasing number of people disenfranchised from both parties.

6. Section 6: National Popular Vote Compact – Ellen Chinn

- a. Are you aware of the push for 270 by 2024?
- b. Would you support Pennsylvania's adoption of the compact?

Representative Struzzi expressed that he is aware of the push for 270 by 2024 but is not sure what his opinion on the matter is. He is registered to attend a conference in May on the Electoral College and believes that there will be discussion on the National Popular Vote Compact and intends to learn more about it. He can't really say at this point whether he would support it or not.

He responded to a question that he received many calls about the integrity of the 2020 election. His view is that the results should be examined to make sure that every legitimate vote is counted.

League member: How do you feel about so many presidential elections where the person winning the popular vote is not elected president?

Representative Struzzi: I receive calls from lots of people. Let's do the due process. People will believe what they want to believe. I did not say anything publicly one way or the other.

7. Section 7: Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative - Cindy Rogers

- a. Should Pennsylvania join RGGI? Why/why not?

Representative Struzzi is opposed to RGGI because of how it affects the residents of his district. He said that the Governor did not receive input from the General Assembly on this initiative. He has talked to manufacturers who say they will move to another state if PA joins the collective. He thinks that the initiative only looks at the environmental effects and not the economic effects on the state. He said that PA is an energy exporter and tax revenues would plummet.

He believes that a transition from fossil fuels is necessary but wants it to be done without taking away the jobs that exist in this sector. PA needs a balanced portfolio of energy – fossil fuels, solar, hydro and bio-digestive. He stated that PA does not currently have a comprehensive energy policy and that this should be a priority – to look at a future taking into account both economic and environment effects.

8. Section 8: What are your own legislative priorities for the session ahead? – Misty Nocco

1. Fix the economy –PA lost 500,000 jobs permanently during the pandemic.
2. Get people vaccines against Covid-19.
3. Address mental health issues coming from the pandemic. Overdoses have doubled in the county.
4. Legislation to address the problem of people with mental health issues coming into emergency rooms at hospitals and having no place to send them for treatment.
5. Legislation to help IUs receive governmental stimulus aid. IUs have not gotten any funding aid in the last two stimulus bills.
6. Bill to help entertainment venues get stimulus aid.
7. Cody’s Law – assaults on disabled individuals.

9. Section 9: Public School Funding – Sue Welsh

- a. Would you support holding charter schools to the same education funding formula that is applied to students in the traditional public schools? Why or why not?
- b. Would you support legislative efforts to create fairer cyber charter tuition rates? Why or why not?
- c. How do you plan to increase the state share and decrease the local share to fund public schools?

Representative Struzzi would support holding charter schools to the same education funding formula that is applied to students in the traditional public schools. He absolutely supports a flat tuition rate for charter schools. He has spoken with school superintendents in his district who say they are losing money to charter schools. He believes that the tuition rates for charter schools, both cyber and brick-and-mortar are bloated, and that profiteering occurs. He also sees a need to reduce property taxes.

He feels that state funding for higher education is inequitable. He said that state funding for Pitt, Penn State, Temple and Lincoln University is used to offer discounted tuition which gives them an unfair competitive advantage over the 14 universities in the State System of Higher Education.

Closing comments: Anne Simmons

Many of us strive to be “problem-solvers” rather than “problem-creators.” Throughout the Legislative Interview, Representative Struzzi stated that there are many issues that he did not have opportunity to study in-depth. Therefore, moving forward the League of Women Voters of Indiana County will focus on providing more information about the priority issues for the current legislative session to Representative Struzzi.