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Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young, LLP
2005 Market Street
Suite 2600
Philadelphia, PA 19103-7018
215.564.8000 Telephone
215.564.8120 Facsimile
www.stradley.com

With other offices in:
Malvern, Pa.
Harrisburg, Pa.
Wilmington, Del.
Cherry Hill, N.J.
Washington, D.C.
New York, N.Y.

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One-on-One with Pennsylvania Speaker of the House Mike Turzai

Government Affairs News sat down with Pennsylvania Speaker of the House Mike Turzai (R-Allegheny), who was elected to that position in January, to discuss the current legislative session, pension reform and his plans for his role as Speaker. Rep. Turzai is now in his eighth term in the Pennsylvania House, representing the North Hills of Allegheny County.

Government Affairs News: What are the top three priorities for House Republicans this legislative session?

Speaker Turzai:
1. Wine and spirit privatization
2. Pension reform
3. Hold the line on General Fund spending to or under the rate of inflation

GAN: Of your top priorities, which has the best chance to pass the full legislature for Governor Wolf's consideration?

Speaker Turzai: Wine and spirit privatization

GAN: You have talked about how the pension and liquor debates are connected with respect to the budget. What do you mean by that?

Speaker Turzai: Cost drivers and revenue drivers are the key components to comprising a responsible budget. Privatizing liquor provides both a key revenue driver without raising taxes, while also netting cost savings by divesting ourselves of a business that has operating costs of more than $300 million a year. Moreover, liquor has additional revenue drivers by stopping border bleed that costs more than $300 million more per year in sales and lost taxes and many other revenue streams from which state stores are exempt.

On the issue of public sector pensions, no other cost driver in the Commonwealth has the ability to bankrupt our budget more than the unfunded liability skyrocketing under our pension obligations. It's unsustainable, it's

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incongruent with what private sector workers have and it's unconscionable to pass the debt to future generations.

GAN: Concerning pensions, Governor Wolf said during the campaign that he will give Act 120 (pension reform) the time to work. How did you react to that and how can you work with him to improve the condition of the Commonwealth's pension system?

Speaker Turzai: Even as it was being passed, Act 120 was always meant to be a temporary bandage, not a permanent tourniquet to a wound that is now hemorrhaging beyond either control. Act 120 is the road to Detroit – a cop-out that leads to bankruptcy and generational theft by kicking the can to future generations who will be left with more debt. The road to Detroit is a road where government defaults on its promises to those who have served their community – it's an unacceptable outcome. What is an acceptable outcome is to keep our promises to existing employees and transition new public sector workers into a plan more reflective of their private sector neighbors. It's fair, it keeps our promises and it keeps us economically viable for future generations.

GAN: During your swearing-in speech as Speaker, you reached out to Democrats by acknowledging their members and identifying with them from your time in the minority. How do you plan to operate as a leader of this Commonwealth while also being supportive of your own caucus? How will your role as Speaker be different from that as Majority Leader?

Speaker Turzai: There is much more that unites us than divides us. In my swearing-in speech I referenced Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" and, most importantly, it's leading character Atticus Finch who said, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

I haven't just talked about getting to know members, I have proactively reached out and will continue to meet with my Democratic colleagues. I have visited their districts, spoke with their constituents personally to understand the issues that face their families, and will continue to look for ways we can improve their lives in a bipartisan fashion. By doing so, we support good legislation, not just that of our caucus, and that is a difference between my role as Speaker and Majority Leader.

GAN: What factors contributed to your presiding over the largest House majority since 1958?

Speaker Turzai: Developing policies that added jobs, reformed government, didn't raise taxes, and supported Pennsylvania families by allowing them more freedom to spend their money and make decisions for themselves was instrumental. We listened to our constituents, learned what they needed and delivered relief, jobs and a real chance at prosperity.

GAN: With the demographics of the Commonwealth changing and armed with the largest majority since 1958, what regions of the state do you feel hold the best opportunities for Republican House pickups in 2016?

Speaker Turzai: I think the successful policies of the House Republican Caucus combined with the out-of-touch, tax-and-spend policies of the left make every region viable for pickups in 2016.

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People News

Stradley Ronon Chairman **William R. Sasso** was named a recipient of the Philadelphia Business Journal's Outstanding Directors Awards 2015 for his work with Children's Scholarship Fund Philadelphia. The awards honor Philadelphia-area directors who "regularly make impactful decisions that affect major companies and nonprofits."

Josh Shapiro was part of the team that helped to bring the 2016 Democratic National Convention to Philadelphia. Josh, who serves as chairman of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners, was quoted in the Philadelphia Inquirer as saying, "We showcased our infrastructure, fund-raising abilities and commitment to the Democratic Party. Whether it was Bob Brady's hugs, Ed Rendell's calls, there was a total team effort."

Andrew S. Levine was a guest on WHYY's Radio Times with Marty Moss-Coane, where he debated the pros and cons of pipelines in Pennsylvania with Maya Van Rossum of the Delaware Riverkeeper Network. In addition to his practice at Stradley Ronon, Andy is also a member of the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce's Energy Action Team. To listen to the broadcast, visit http://whyy.org/cms/radiotimes/2015/02/10/the-pros-and-cons-of-natural-gas-pipelines-in-pennsylvania/.

Partners **Andrew S. Levine** and **Joseph Donovan** discussed Marcellus Shale infrastructure in a Q&A with Energy Executive magazine. To read their thoughts, visit http://www.energy-executive.com/features/ contributing-writers/220-stradley-ronon-stevens-young-llp.

Partner **Catherine M. Ward** was recently recognized by Moorestown, New Jersey, Mayor Victoria Napolitano, who declared Feb. 9 a day for the township to honor Cathy. In a mayoral proclamation, Napolitano noted that Cathy "has been exceptionally dedicated to the Moorestown community through her immeasurable volunteer leadership and participation in sustainability efforts and activities."

Brett Schweiker joined Stradley Ronon as a government affairs consultant. He brings to client engagements in-depth experience gained from longstanding political and corporate relationships across industry sectors, including commercial real estate, banking, information technology/electronic payments, petrochemical and steel manufacturing.

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