



Frank
Burns
State Representative
72nd Legislative District

535 Fairfield Ave.
Johnstown, PA 15906
(814) 536-8400

119 S. Center St.
Ebensburg, PA 15931
(814) 472-8021

112-A Munster Road
Portage, PA 15946
(814) 736-7339 or (814) 736-6452

405 Park Ave.
Patton, PA 16668
(814) 674-5675

Website: www.pahouse.com/Burns • facebook.com/RepFrankBurns

August 2017

Burns urges lawsuit against 'Big Pharma' for role in opioid crisis

Consequence for overdose victims: Mandatory treatment

Among the first to recognize the devastating impact of opioid addiction and abuse in Cambria County and across Pennsylvania, Rep. Burns started this legislative session by asking Attorney General Josh Shapiro and Gov. Tom Wolf to sue big pharmaceutical companies for their role in promoting the crisis.

Rep. Burns was pleased that within months, Shapiro announced that he was joining a consortium of state attorney generals who are investigating "Big Pharma" for possible unlawful practices in the marketing and sale of opioids.

In the meantime, Rep. Burns has introduced H.B. 1501, which would require drug overdose survivors to seek addiction treatment within 30 days, as a means to prevent repeat overdoses. After hearing from first responders that some opioid addicts are being revived multiple – and in some cases, dozens of – times with Narcan, Rep. Burns believes it's imperative to get them off drugs completely.

"Attorney General Josh Shapiro is a former House colleague of mine, and I'm glad to see him on the same page as me when it comes to investigating the role 'Big Pharma' has played in the costly opioid crisis that's devastating so many families."

– Rep. Burns

Because he doesn't think taxpayers should pay to clean up a corporate-inspired mess, Rep. Burns advocates that any money received from suing the pharmaceutical companies should be used to pay for the required addiction treatment called for by his bill.

Complete and up-to-date information on Rep. Burns' fight against opioids is available on his website www.pahouse.com/Burns and his Facebook page www.facebook.com/RepFrankBurns.

FRANK BURNS, MEMBER
72ND LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT
DISTRICT OFFICES:
535 FAIRFIELD AVENUE
JOHNSTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA 15906
(814) 536-8400
FAX: (814) 533-2368
119 S. CENTER STREET
EBENSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA 15931
(814) 472-8021
FAX: (814) 472-1965
112-A MUNSTER ROAD
PORTAGE, PENNSYLVANIA 15946
(814) 736-7339 OR (814) 736-6452
FAX: (814) 736-3239



House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

HARRISBURG OFFICE:
324 MAIN CAPITOL
P.O. BOX 202072
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA 17120-2072
(717) 712-8056
FAX: (717) 712-3955
COMMITTEES
NORTHWEST DELEGATION, CHAIRMAN
COMMERCE
CONSUMER AFFAIRS
LIQUOR CONTROL
TOURISM & RECREATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
VETERANS AFFAIRS & EMERGENCY
PREPAREDNESS

February 13, 2017

Josh Shapiro, Attorney General
Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General
16th Floor, Strawberry Square
Harrisburg, PA 17120

RE: Lawsuit against pharmaceutical companies for promoting opioid crisis

Dear Attorney General Shapiro:

As we all know, Pennsylvania is facing a widespread opioid drug epidemic. Families are losing their loved ones to this dangerous and often-fatal drug – and we as a Commonwealth need to explore all avenues at our disposal to solve this problem and hold all perpetrators accountable.

I urge you to file a lawsuit against any and all pharmaceutical companies responsible for this crisis because of their negligence in informing consumers of the dangers of these types of drugs and their ruthless promotion of their use. "Big Pharma" is lining its pockets and the wallets of doctors who prescribe these medications, while the number of people addicted and affected in the Commonwealth continues to rise.

I firmly believe the cost to government and taxpayers of this widespread problem will only continue to increase unless we act on the supply end. Any monies that are received from this lawsuit should and would be best used for drug, alcohol and mental health treatments.

In Pennsylvania alone, there were over 10 million prescriptions for opioids issued in 2015. This helps create an opioids and heroin crisis that too often results in tragic ends, tearing families apart and causing countless overdose deaths.

It is my sincere hope that your administration will augment the Commonwealth's drug-fighting efforts by filing a lawsuit against these companies, thus helping bring this epidemic to an end.

Sincerely,

Frank Burns
State Representative
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Law enforcement updates

Burns leads Blue Lives Matter Caucus, effort to make assault on law enforcement a hate crime

As founder and leader of the House Blue Lives Matter Caucus, whose Democratic and Republican members coalesce on legislation of importance to law enforcement, Rep. Burns continues pressing for passage of his H.B. 158.

Rep. Burns' bill would elevate assault on a law enforcement, corrections, probation or parole officer to the status of a hate crime. His bill would stiffen penalties for assaulting such officers, making the offense one degree higher than current law. A crime that is a first-degree misdemeanor, for example, would become a third-degree felony.

"We can — and we should — change the law to add employment as a law enforcement officer to the categories of race, color, religion and national origin currently protected by the state's hate crime statute," Rep. Burns said. "Regardless of party, we need to show these officers we've got their backs."

House Bill 158 currently is under consideration by the House Judiciary Committee.



'Push out the Pusher' campaign still going strong



Since its inception in 2014, Rep. Burns has helped sponsor the "Push out the Pusher" campaign involving Cambria County Crimestoppers, which has resulted in nearly 400 arrests and paid out more than \$14,000 in tip line rewards.

Rep. Burns continues believing in the program, regarding it as a vital tool in the arsenal to rid our communities of drugs and the people who deal them. The program currently offers a maximum \$8,000 tip line

reward. You can report drug activity by calling (800) 548-7500 **and you will remain anonymous!**

"It's been effective in helping get heroin and other dangerous illegal drugs off our streets," Rep. Burns said. "Now the focus is shifting toward getting drug dealers to turn in each other."

Anyone who wishes to obtain a "Push out the Pusher" yard sign is asked to contact Rep. Burns' Ebensburg office at (814) 472-8021.

Stopping import of illegal drugs goal of Burns resolution

Closing a dangerous loophole in federal shipping law that allows illegal drugs to reach U.S. soil is the driving motivation behind Rep. Burns' H.R. 325, which is currently under consideration by the House Human Services Committee.

The resolution urges Congress to approve the Synthetic Trafficking and Overdose Prevention (STOP) Act, to crack down on illegal importations like that of fentanyl, a deadly synthetic opioid often made in Chinese laboratories.

"An estimated 340 million packages enter the United States each year without crucial information about origin, destination and contents," Burns said. "By requiring this electronic customs data to be sent in advance for postal shipments from foreign countries, we could better enable customs agents and Drug Enforcement Agency officials to seize packages of illegal drugs."

Just as we must better monitor our borders to cut down on illegal immigration, Rep. Burns believes we must be equally protective when it comes to keeping illegal drugs from coming in through unchecked packages.

Stiffer penalties for animal abuse under 'Libre's Law' supported by Burns

As an animal lover and pet owner, Rep. Burns is pleased to report that Libre's Law — which stiffens penalties for abusing or neglecting pets and animals — was signed into law last month by the governor.

Rep. Burns supported this bill in the House of Representatives and is glad we are sending a message of intolerance on this front. He's pictured here with one of his furry friends, during his office's annual Pet Food Drive that benefits the Cambria County Humane Society.

Prior to the signing of Libre's Law, Pennsylvania was one of three states without a tough stand on animal cruelty. The new law addresses such things as heinous abuse, outside tethering of dogs, and immunity for veterinarians and humane society officers when reporting animal cruelty issues.

It also increases the penalties for animal abuse, allowing felony charges to be filed for things other than animal fighting and killing endangered species.



Burns takes oath as major in Pa. Civil Air Patrol

In May, Rep. Burns joined other legislators being sworn in by Col. Gary L. Flemming, Commander, to the rank of major in the Pennsylvania Civil Air Patrol.

The ceremony took place in the Capitol, and Rep. Burns is proud to hold this

honorary rank in an organization that just last year celebrated its 75th anniversary of volunteer service, sacrifice and love of county.

For those old enough to remember the 1970s hit television show M*A*S*H, which

starred Alan Alda as Korean War surgeon Hawkeye Pierce, Rep. Burns expects a little ribbing now that he also holds the title of Maj. Frank Burns, another character from the show.



Fast Facts:

- 85 percent of all Cambria County crimes are drug- or alcohol-related, according to District Attorney Kelly Callihan.
- 10 million opioid prescriptions were written in Pennsylvania in 2015, nearly the same number as the state's 13 million population.
- 30 percent of the babies in the Johnstown area are born addicted to drugs, according to Dr. John Chan, head of neonatal/prenatal medicine at Conemaugh Memorial Medical Center.





State Representative
Frank Burns
 P.O. Box 202072
 Harrisburg, PA 17120-2072

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Martin Joseph Davis Memorial Bridge dedicated by Burns

After Rep. Burns succeeded in having the necessary legislation passed and signed into law, he helped dedicate the Martin Joseph Davis Memorial Bridge (formerly the State Route 36 Bridge over Chest Creek) on June 10.

Born on Aug. 25, 1947, Davis graduated from Cambria Heights High School in 1966. He entered the Army on Nov. 14, 1967 and served as a specialist 4th class with B Company, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry, 196th Infantry Brigade. He died during hostile action in Quang Tin province, South Vietnam, on Aug. 2, 1968.

In addition to Davis' surviving family members, the dedication ceremony included honor guard participation from:

- Fox-Peale American Legion Post 506, Carrolltown**
- Walter McCoy American Legion Post 614, Patton**
- John White Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 779, Patton**
- John Lippie Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4315, Ashville**
- Patrick D. Riordan Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1586, Hastings**
- Ream Miller Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7783, St. Benedict**

Burns again refuses to accept paycheck until budget is completed

Once again, Rep. Burns is refusing to take a paycheck as long as the current state budget remains unaccompanied by an approved revenue plan. That work was unfinished as this newsletter went to print

He's taken this position in all recent budget cycles — most notably during the budget impasse of 2015, when he was one of only nine legislators to forego a paycheck for several months.

For Rep. Burns, it's a matter of leading by example. He knows that you don't get paid if you don't finish your job, and he doesn't expect to be treated any differently even when the holdup is protracted wrangling among the powers that be.

Rep. Burns also believes that the House should be in session every day until a funding package is hammered out, which should have been done when the 2017-18 fiscal year started July 1.

