

No-tax promise follows Corbett

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across the Marcellus shale region in western and northern Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania voters, who elected Corbett by more than an 8-point margin over Democratic rival Dan Onorato, are divided over his performance so far, but 97 percent consider the state's budget problems serious and most prefer spending cuts over tax increases to offset any revenue shortfall, according to a Quinnipiac University poll released Wednesday. Corbett's 100th day in office.

"I told everybody last year what was going to happen, I keep my word," Corbett said in a recent interview in which he talked about the political challenges he faces, his leadership style and how his new job has changed his lifestyle.

The new governor is careful not to rule out anything—at least not publicly—as he prepares to begin negotiations with legislative leaders over the state budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1.

Corbett has said he would consider an impact fee on drilling companies to help cover such costs as local road damage caused by heavy trucks. But he stressed that important questions must be answered first—defining the "impact" it would pay for and deciding how it should be administered, for example—and said he will look to his Marcellus Shale Advisory Commission, headed by Gov. Jim Cawley, for recommendations on the issue.

Marcellus drilling "has been going on for four years and nobody's looked at it," he told The Associated Press. "We're going to take a reasoned, measured approach to how we do this."

Pennsylvania is the largest natural-gas state that does not tax gas production, and Corbett adamantly opposes levying any such tax on the multinational corporations and smaller companies that are expanding operations in the state.

"The basic argument is they're making a lot of money (so) let's tax them," Corbett told the AP.

"The drilling is the heavy capital investment. Once

that's done the gas keeps coming out of the ground," the governor said. "If we make it more expensive with a tax at this point... they can just leave the Pennsylvania (holdings) as an investment" and sell gas from established wells in states such as Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas until market forces make Pennsylvania gas more profitable.

"They're going to look at what gets to the market cheapest," he said. "We want them to be so invested here (that) it makes it harder for them to pick up their rigs and go away."

Corbett reiterated that the gas belongs to landowners that receive—and pay state taxes on—royalties from the companies that drill on their property. Similarly, the state receives leasing fees and royalties for drilling on state-owned land.

"The owner who's giving up the gas is being taxed. It is not Pennsylvania's gas unless it's on Pennsylvania's land," he said.

Corbett's detractors argue that a gas extraction tax could shore up state finances and sustain education and other important programs that could be devastated by budget cuts. The Quinnipiac poll found that 69 percent of voters support such a tax.

Christopher Borick, a political science professor at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, said the nearly \$1 billion that Corbett's campaign received from the natural-gas industry undercut his arguments that the pain of his budget cuts is equitably distributed.

"It simply doesn't fit with the public's perception of sharing the sacrifice," Borick said. "It's hard for the public to swallow and it's easy for the opposition to make the case that this is beyond a policy decision and that it's supporting the people who funded you."

Corbett said the 50 percent across-the-board cut in state aid he is advocating for 18 universities—more than any other governor has proposed this year—was partly intended to be a shot across the bow of the higher-education establishment that would trigger a public de-

bate. The cuts have sparked numerous protest rallies at the Capitol and on university campuses.

"Higher ed is discretionary money, really," he said. "I think it's time for a debate" over how much state taxpayers should contribute.

The governor bristles at critics who portray a proposed \$1 billion reduction in the appropriation for public schools as a cut in state aid. He said the state appropriation for 2010-12 actually reflects an increase to the 2008 level while federal stimulus money that propped up much larger appropriations in the past two years has dried up.

Corbett's deliberative, cautious style contrasts sharply with Rendell's ebullience and the feistiness of some newly elected GOP governors in other states. Sometimes it is surprisingly effective.

In his March 8 budget address, Corbett suggested that unionized teachers and other school employees voluntarily agree to a one-year salary freeze, which he said would save local school districts \$400 million. The state's largest teacher union, the Pennsylvania State Education Association, responded by urging its locals to enter discussions with school boards about a freeze in other cost-saving measures. As of Wednesday, more than 250 locals had begun those discussions, a PSEA spokesman said.

"He is working through his agenda in a much more measured way, but accomplishing many of the same things that other governors are having to battle for," observed Thomas Baldino, a political science professor at Wilkes University in Wilkes-Barre.

Not only does Corbett enjoy Republican control of the executive and legislative branches for the first time in eight years, but his roots are in western Pennsylvania like most of the Legislature's current top leaders.

Corbett described his relationship with Republican legislative leaders as "slowly growing."

"It's a different role for me. It's a different role for them,"

he said, adding that he intentionally kept a low profile during legislative hearings on his budget plan so as not to be seen as interfering.

"If I had to do it over again, maybe I would have called them and said we need to sit down and talk a little bit more," he said.

GOP leaders said they have a good rapport with Corbett, who worked in an office building across the street from the Capitol complex for six years before he moved into the statehouse.

"The governor answers his cellphone when I call. It's a great relationship," said Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarfone, R-Jefferson.

House Majority Leader Mike Turzai, who lives near Corbett's home in suburban Pittsburgh and has known him for 20 years, said their staff talk regularly.

"He's a new governor, but I'm a new majority leader," Turzai said. "Whenever you're in a new position it takes time to get to know the territory."

House Minority Leader Frank Dermody, D-Allegheny, said he has known Corbett for years and that "we've always gotten along," but that not taxing natural-gas drilling would be a mistake.

"The working poor will feel the pain of this budget," he said.

Corbett and his wife, Susan, who left her job as a vice president of the Gettysburg Foundation after the election, live in the sprawling governor's residence several blocks from the Capitol. They are still getting used to having a domestic staff to cook their meals and being under the surveillance of a state police security detail whenever they go out in public, the governor said.

"If it's the two of us together, we've got three people—two people behind us and another person in a car," he said.

To gain an extra measure of privacy in public, Corbett has learned to cover up his bright silver hair.

"The best way for me to go out is to wear a hat. They don't recognize me as much," he said. "His hair is very distinctive."



CAROLINE SUMMERS/Associated Press
RESIDENTS TOOK stock of the damage Wednesday after a tornado ripped through Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Storms kill 200

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By nightfall, the city was dark. Roads were impassable. Signs were blown down in front of restaurants, businesses were unrecognizable and sirens wailed off and on. Debris littered the streets and sidewalks.

College students in a commercial district near campus used flashlights to check out the damage.

At Stephani's Flowers, owner Bronson Englebert used the headlights from two delivery vans to see what valuables he could remove. The storm blew out the front of his store, pulled down the ceiling and shattered the windows, leaving only the curtains flapping in the breeze.

"It even blew out the back wall, and I've got bricks on top of two delivery vans now," Englebert said.

A group of students stopped to help Englebert, carrying out items like computers and printers and putting them in his van.

The storm system spread destruction from Texas to New York, where dozens of roads were flooded or washed out.

The governors in Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia each issued emergency declarations for parts of their states.

President Barack Obama said he had spoken with Bentley and approved his request for emergency federal assistance.

"Our hearts go out to all those who have been affected by this devastation, and we commend the heroic efforts of those who have been working tirelessly to respond to this disaster," Obama said in a statement.

Around Tuscaloosa, traffic was snarled by downed trees and power lines, and some drivers abandoned their cars in medians.

"What we feared today was massive damage on a scale we have not seen in Tuscaloosa in quite some time," Mayor Walter Maddox said.

University officials said there didn't appear to be significant damage on

campus, and dozens of students and locals were staying at a 125-bed shelter in the campus recreation center.

The Browns Ferry nuclear power plant about 30 miles west of Huntsville lost offsite power. The Tennessee Valley Authority-owned plant had to use seven diesel generators to power the plant's three units. The safety systems operated as needed and the emergency event was classified as the lowest of four levels, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission said.

In Huntsville, meteorologists found themselves in the path of severe storms and had to take shelter in a reinforced steel room, turning over monitoring duties to a sister office in Jackson, Miss. Meteorologists saw multiple wall clouds, which sometimes spawn tornadoes, and decided to take cover, but the building wasn't damaged.

"We have to take shelter just like the rest of the people," said meteorologist Chelly Amin, who wasn't at the office at the time but spoke with colleagues about the situation.

In Kemper County, Miss., in the east-central part of the state, sisters Florrie Green and Maxine McDonald, and their sister-in-law Johnnie Green, all died in a mobile home that was destroyed by a storm.

"They were thrown into those pines over there," Mary Green, Johnnie Green's daughter-in-law, said, pointing to a wooded area. "They had to go look for their bodies."

In Choctawhatchee County, Miss., a Louisiana police officer was killed Wednesday morning when a towering sweetgum tree fell onto his car as he was driving.

Johnnie Green, 9, was brought to a motor home about 100 feet away where campsite volunteer Greg Maier was staying with his wife. He went back to check on the father and found him dead.

Poll shows Pa. voters divided over Corbett

HARRISBURG (AP) — Pennsylvania voters are divided over Gov. Tom Corbett's performance, according to a poll released Wednesday.

The Quinnipiac University poll found that 39 percent of the state's voters approve of the job the Republican governor is doing, while 37 percent disapprove. Twenty-four percent expressed no opinion.

The results reflected a sharp increase in support for the governor, who held negative opinions of Corbett's performance. In a February survey by the same pollster, only 11 percent said they disapproved and 50 percent voiced no opinion.

The latest poll found 55 percent of women felt Corbett's proposed budget cuts are unfair, while only 45 percent of men felt the same.

Ninety-seven percent of the respondents said they considered Pennsylvania's budget problem somewhat or very serious, and a majority said they would prefer spending cuts over tax increases to offset any revenue shortfall. But 35 percent said Corbett's proposed cuts go too far, 31 percent said they are about right and 20 percent said they do not go far enough.

More than 60 percent said they oppose Corbett's proposal to slash spending for universities and support a new

tax on companies drilling for natural gas on the Marcellus shale region in northern and western Pennsylvania.

"Although (Corbett's) numbers are not impressive by traditional standards, they are a good deal better than many of the new Republican governors around the country who are offering a similar approach of no new taxes and large spending cuts," said Peter A. Brown, assistant director of the Connecticut-based university's polling institute.

The telephone survey of 1,366 registered voters was taken in the week that ended Monday. The sampling error margin is plus or minus 2.7 percentage points.

IUP appeals tax decision on Robertshaw

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hood will be receiving one for at least \$100,677, based on the district's current millage rate. The building carries an assessed value of \$892,970.

While Medvetz and the school district recognize that most of the building probably can't be subjected to property tax, the part housing the incubator can be, they say.

University attorneys, however, argue that the building can't be taxed at all because it

belongs to the university, which is a part of the commonwealth, and therefore is immune to local taxes. Moreover, they say that one of the university's missions is to aid in economic development, a mission the incubator helps fulfill.

Originally the university and the State System of Higher Education were to have appealed the decision to the county's tax assessment appeals board. However, the hearing was postponed several times, and, in the end,

the university filed its petition in Commonwealth Court. It argues that the appeals board isn't the proper place to settle the matter because it's a local entity and it doesn't have the authority to rule on whether state property can be subjected to taxes.

The court's decision holds consequences elsewhere in the university.

Medvetz has said he'd like to put the Kovalchick Complex and Athletic Complex on the tax rolls.

But as far as the Robert-

shaw Building goes, the money at stake becomes a lot more important.

The county, the school district and the university face an uncertain financial landscape. IUP is looking at a \$19 million deficit and is considering layoffs. Indiana Area is looking at a \$900,000 deficit and is considering layoffs and a 5-mill tax increase. The county, meanwhile, has reached a 25-mill tax barrier and can't raise taxes any higher without getting a judge's permission.

County names more task force members

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this month on a proposal to drill for gas in the recreation and conservation zone near Yellow Creek State Park. Those speaking at the hearing represented groups concerned about environmental safeguards, those advocating strong property rights, and those predicting Marcellus shale will be an economic engine for Indiana County for years to come.

Some of those in the third group, Frick said, also expressed an opinion that county leaders would be foolish if they did not find a way to appease opposing groups and capitalize on the opportunity.

Frick said he hopes the task force, with representatives with varying interests, will be

able to suggest ways to capitalize on the Marcellus shale opportunity while monitoring exploration and production, and "do it right.... That way, everyone will win," he said.

Also at their meeting Wednesday, the commissioners approved a grant agreement between the state and county that will provide nearly \$2.1 million to help pay some or all of the child care expenses for working parents.

The level of assistance is based on the parents' income eligibility as determined by the Child Care Information Services office in Indiana.

Bonni Dunlap, executive director of the County's Department of Health and

Community Action office to be the county's Fair Housing Officer.

His duties will be to investigate complaints of housing discrimination.

Designated Dunlap as the county's coordinator for child care services. She will receive complaints from residents having difficulties accessing county services and programs.

And Robert Maryasi, the county's chief clerk, said May 10 is the final day to apply for an absentee ballot for the May 17 primary election.

Applications for an absentee ballot are available in the Voter Registration Office in the courthouse, or may be printed from the county website at www.countyofindiana.org.

Newest members

New members added to the Indiana County Natural Gas Task Force are:

■ Dreama VanCise, as a citizen member

■ Sara Steelman, citizen

■ Susan Wheatley, citizen

■ Mary Roland, Pennsylvania American Water Co.

■ Mark Sloan, IEME Homer City Generation

■ Rob Nymick, Central Indiana County Water Authority

■ Robert Fyock, Indiana County sheriff

■ Ed Nehrig, Indiana County Planning Commission

■ Dave Wallace, Superior Well Services

■ Amara Poole, Indiana University of Pennsylvania faculty, anthropology

■ Brian Okey, IUP faculty, geography and urban plan-

ning

■ Nate McElroy, IUP faculty, chemistry

■ Tom Miller, Friends of White Wood

■ Brian Cope, Friends of Yellow Creek

■ Ashley Joa, IUP ECO Club

■ Pat Scanlon, Yellow Creek Conservation Association

■ Jim Ray, citizen

■ Jody Rainey, Cherryhill Township Volunteer Fire Department

■ John Kanyan, Indiana County Transit Authority

■ Mike Knapp, Knapp Acquisitions & Production

■ George Lenz, citizen

■ James Bernard, citizen

■ Michael Moyer, Environmental Service Laboratories Inc.

■ Sharon or Richard Santos, citizens