

# 2008 Pennsylvania, PA House District 171

## Candidates:

Joanne Tosti-Vasey, Democrat

Kerry Benninghoof, Republican

## Questions:

[Electricity Deregulation](#)

[Lottery Fund & Home/Community Care](#)

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Candidates were asked to check either the support or oppose boxes.

Supports     Opposes     The candidate chose not to mark a box

## **ELECTRICITY DEREGULATION**

**QUESTION:** Do you support or oppose legislation that will ensure that standard electric service is provided at rates that are cost-based and reasonable?



AARP supports



Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) supports

*Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) did not respond*

### **AARP RESPONSE:**

In the hope of encouraging lower prices, Pennsylvania adopted a law restructuring the state's utility industry to allow consumers to purchase electric services from competing suppliers, rather than through the traditional regulated monopoly. During the transition period to a competitive market, the state capped residential rates charged by the existing utilities. Deregulation has failed to produce any of the benefits its supporters predicted. Rates in Pennsylvania are predicted to **rise by 50%** once price caps are lifted. Similar price increases have been seen in other states with deregulated electricity markets. AARP believes that Pennsylvania should adopt restructuring reforms that are based on a portfolio of diverse contract terms and services, integrating energy efficiency and renewable resources as appropriate to ensure that standard electric service (known as Standard Offer Service) is affordable, available and reliable.

### **Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) RESPONSE:**

We need to take action before the rate caps expire. We need to reduce our consumption of energy as well as control the spiraling costs of home energy. The state government can help by reconsidering the rate cap removal. The deregulation of the electric industry was done in the belief that multiple companies would come in and provide more competition, thus reducing cost to consumers in the long run. This never happened. Windfall profits are inappropriate and need to be reined in. Offering smart meters, rebates for energy-efficient appliances, and a choice of rate plans so that people can plan when to use their electricity for such things as cooking or washing clothes would also help.

### **Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) RESPONSE:**

*Candidate did not respond*

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## **LOTTERY FUND AND HOME-AND-COMMUNITY BASED CARE**

**QUESTION:** Do you support or oppose using lottery revenues to expand existing home-and-community based care programs offered by local Area Agencies on Aging?



AARP supports



Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) supports  
*Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) did not respond*

#### **AARP RESPONSE:**

The Pennsylvania Lottery was established to generate funds to benefit programs for the Commonwealth's older residents. Since 1972, when its first game went on sale, the Pennsylvania Lottery has contributed more than \$17.4 billion to a wide variety of programs. Recently, because of new lottery offerings and changes in some of the programs the lottery supports such as PACE and the property tax/rent rebate program, the lottery has shown a significant surplus. Part of this surplus has been used for the long-term care Medicaid program, which funds mainly nursing home care, while another lottery program that provides home and community based care services through local Area Agencies on Aging has not seen an increase in funding.

AARP strongly supports the expansion of home-and-community based care services as an alternative to nursing home care. AARP believes lottery revenues should be used to expand existing lottery funded home-and-community based care programs instead of being diverted into the Medicaid long-term care program.

#### **Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) RESPONSE:**

Most people prefer to remain in their homes and communities as they age. Monies for care of both the elderly and the disabled should follow the people. Pennsylvania should be participating in the Federal "Self-Determined care" program where Medicaid monies follow the person and not the provider; this program permits Medicaid recipients to designate the location and allocation of treatment funds. Coupled with this program, we should use lottery funds to expand the home-and-community based care programs to help ensure that people receive the services they truly want and not be force to move into a nursing home.

#### **Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) RESPONSE:**

*Candidate did not respond*

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## **HEALTH CARE REFORM**

**QUESTION:** In the face of escalating costs, how would you reform the state's health care system to make it available, affordable and accessible for every Pennsylvanian?

Encourage employers to offer/expand coverage.



AARP supports



Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) supports

*Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) did not respond*

Subsidize the cost of private coverage for un-/underinsured.



AARP supports



Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) supports

*Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) did not respond*

**AARP RESPONSE:**

There are over 700,000 Pennsylvanians who are without health insurance in Pennsylvania. Various proposals have been made in the General Assembly this year to help more Pennsylvanians obtain health insurance and to ensure that insurance is more affordable for individuals and for businesses. AARP Pennsylvania supports measures to achieve access to affordable health care coverage for all individuals, an approach that would address the needs of those without public or private insurance or those at risk of losing coverage. Adequate health care coverage allows patients to receive essential treatment, including preventive care that can save the state millions of dollars.

AARP Pennsylvania supports incremental reforms that significantly improve coverage options for those without public or private insurance or those at risk of losing coverage. These reforms include encouraging employers to offer and expand coverage, and subsidizing the cost of private coverage for those who are uninsured, underinsured or at risk of losing coverage.

**Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) RESPONSE:**

All Americans should have access to quality, affordable health care regardless of where they live or their age income, employment status, or preexisting condition. Our health care system needs a comprehensive reform plan that gives everyone an equal opportunity to be healthy, without forcing anyone to give up the care they already have. I support quality affordable health care for all where you choose your doctors and service care providers. Health care that is privately provided and publicly funded to ensure access to health care for all. This is a *human right*. For business, this is a cost issue; for employees, this resolves the issue of health care mobility AND fills in the cracks (such as transplants) in the current system.

**Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) RESPONSE:**

*Candidate did not respond*

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## **PROPERTY TAX**

**QUESTION:** What do you propose to do to lower the property tax burden on older Pennsylvanians yet still provide support for our schools?

### **Broaden the method of financing public education**



AARP supports



Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) supports

*Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) did not respond*

### **Reduce burden of property taxes**



AARP supports



Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) supports

*Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) did not respond*

### **AARP RESPONSE:**

As the Commonwealth's support for public education has fallen to a statewide average of approximately 35% of a school district's budget, property taxes have become the main source of funding for Pennsylvania's schools. Disparities in funding across Pennsylvania mean that some school districts rely on local funding, mainly property taxes, for over 80% of the district's budget. AARP believes we should broaden our method of financing public education, taking some of the burden off the regressive property tax, which is the single-most burdensome tax for many low-income and older people, and shifting to less regressive taxes, which are better correlated with the ability to pay.

### **Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) RESPONSE:**

We need to provide an equitable education for all regardless of where one lives. It is unfair to burden property owners with 80% of education costs via property taxes. Yet, our poorer school districts must be equipped with the support and resources necessary to educate all of our students to their full potential. The state needs to step up to their Constitutional responsibility to assist school districts across the state. The state has just made a start in reallocating funds based on a formula to help struggling districts, but we need to do more. Also we need to work towards full-day kindergarten program and better support of higher public education so that families can afford to send their adult children to college or vocational training.

### **Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) RESPONSE:**

*Candidate did not respond*

## **CONSUMER PROTECTION**

**QUESTION:** Would you support or oppose the creation of an Insurance Consumer Advocate?



AARP supports



Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) supports

*Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) did not respond*

### **AARP RESPONSE:**

Insurance products have become increasingly complex and expensive. Currently, the Department of Insurance is charged with both regulating the insurance industry and protecting consumers, putting them at odds with both groups on certain issues. AARP supports the creation of an Insurance Consumer Advocate within the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office that would function similar to the Public Utility Commissions Office of Consumer Advocate and represent the interests of the consumer in hearings.

### **Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) RESPONSE:**

In Pennsylvania, we have advocates for children in the courts, advocates for patients in hospitals, and advocates for utility customers to help navigate the complexities of these institutions. Without an advocate, many of our citizens lose their protections and rights. And in the case of health insurance, maybe even their lives. Nineteen years ago, I had to have a bone marrow transplant, but was denied coverage by an insurance company. I was unable on my own to reverse this decision. I did get this decision reversed and am here today because I had a consumer advocate through the non-profit where I had purchased my group health insurance. An independent advocate within the Attorney general's office would provide similar protections to everyone in the state.

### **Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) RESPONSE:**

*Candidate did not respond*

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## **WINTER UTILITY SHUT-OFFS AND LIHEAP FUNDING**

**QUESTION 1:** Do you support or oppose requiring utility companies to get PUC approval before cutting off service to residential customers in the winter months?



AARP supports



Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) supports

*Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) did not respond*

**QUESTION 2:** Do you believe Pennsylvania should contribute state funds to the LIHEAP budget?



AARP supports



Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) supports

*Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) did not respond*

**AARP RESPONSE:**

Home energy costs make up a considerable portion of household budgets. Exceedingly volatile natural gas, electricity and fuel oil prices in recent years have significantly increased energy costs facing many consumers. Older Americans are particularly vulnerable to rapid increases in energy prices. Older low-income households spend a higher percentage of total income on energy costs than do other households. AARP supports state programs to address energy affordability including bill payment assistance programs for low-income residential customers; automatic enrollment of electric and natural gas customers into assistance programs; and prohibitions on utilities from disconnecting or refusing to reconnect electric or natural gas service to low-income households during times when weather conditions threaten health and safety.

**Joanne Tosti-Vasey (Democrat) RESPONSE:**

Prices for home fuel oil, natural gas, and electrical service have been rising and are putting a strain on our families and homes. People are currently seeing jumps in their utility bills that, in some cases, average several hundred dollars per month. People on fixed incomes simply can not afford to heat their homes and still feed their families at the same time. With the limited monies from the federal LIHEAP program, many people will not be able to make it through the winter. The state government can help by reconsidering the electric rate cap removal. They should also require utility companies to get PUC approval in the winter to cut-off services and contribute additional funds to LIHEAP.

**Kerry Benninghoof (Republican) RESPONSE:**

*Candidate did not respond*

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