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BUDGETING THE BUDGET: AN ANALYSIS OF FOUR DAILY NEWSPAPERS' COVERAGE  
OF THE 2009/2010 PENNSYLVANIA BUDGET IMPASSE

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how different Pennsylvania newspapers and their statehouse reporters boiled down the complex issues surrounding the 2009/2010 state budget impasse and how that process has changed with the advent of new technology. Through a coverage analysis, it is apparent that reporters from the *The Patriot-News*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, and *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* faced significant and different challenges in covering a the 101-day budget stalemate, the longest in state history. Through an analysis of articles from May 2009 to August 2009 and interviews with reporters, this research analyzes and evaluates how these publications carved their own paths in covering the budget-related issues of state worker payless paydays, a personal income tax increase proposal, the effects on state-supported programs and services, and Gov. Ed Rendell's role in the debate. In an effort to provide comprehensive reporting of the contentious political deliberations surrounding the impasse, many reporters employed Internet blogs and social media sites like Facebook.com and Twitter.com to keep citizenry informed.

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## **PART 1** **INTRODUCTION**

In the summer of 2009, Pennsylvania state politicians engaged in heated debate over spending cuts and revenue sources for the next fiscal year while newspapers gave a play-by-play account of a contentious budget impasse that stretched 101 days beyond its July 1 deadline. What started as minor partisan disagreement would fester into the longest budget impasse in modern Pennsylvania history. Through countless stories and editorials, reporters in the capitol boiled down complicated processes and their implications for the Pennsylvania public, while captivating audiences amid a monotonous stalemate. With this in mind, analysis of the Pennsylvania budget stalemate in the summer of 2009 would be incomplete without the consideration of the role of statehouse reporters. “We need someone willing to translate Medicaid, school district funding formulas and personal income tax proposals for all of us to understand. This year's [Pennsylvania] state budget problems are the perfect example of why an active press corps is so important” (Krebs F03).

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how four different Pennsylvania newspapers and their reporters boiled down the complex issues surrounding the budget impasse and how that process has changed with the advent of new technology. By the end of August, Pennsylvania was one of two states without a budget for the next fiscal year. With money drying up at human service agencies, schools, and other state-funded entities, journalists were charged with not only boiling down the movements in the political process but also localizing the impact of these movements on readers in the coverage area. The manner in which reporters chose what to cover is also a key part in understanding the ins and outs of covering the state’s budget debacle. While newspaper reporters long ago covered, in depth, many of the sausage-making, blow-by-blow movements of the state budget, these reporters, with limited print space, were also charged with

using social media to enhance the news experience.

### **Methodology**

Four different newspapers' coverage of the following four aspects of the state budget from May through August 2009 will be analyzed in this paper. The issues are:

1) **State worker 'payless paydays'**: When the budget debate extended beyond July 1, the state lost its ability to spend money. With that, some 77,000 angered employees of the budget-less state were charged to work without pay until a budget passed. On July 31, state workers began to receive zeroed out-paychecks ("Payday delay?"). This prompted unions to rally in Harrisburg, deeming themselves "budget hostages," and eventually, on Aug. 5, Gov. Ed Rendell signed a temporary stopgap budget solely designed to pay state workers.

2) **Tax increase**: With Democratic leaders boosting a \$28.9 billion budget and a growing \$3 billion revenue shortfall, Rendell's administration was charged with finding a revenue stream to fund an out-of-balance budget. In late May and early June, Rendell began to tease the idea of a personal income tax (PIT) increase to reporters until, finally, on June 16, he proposed increasing the tax from 3.07 percent to 3.57 percent. Republicans were outraged. Arguably this was the largest issue surrounding the impasse, and many claimed the partisan bickering surrounding a potential tax-hike was the sole source of the stalemate. Democrats abandoned the proposal in August.

3) **State-supported programs and services**: After the passage of a bridge budget to pay state workers, many state-funded programs and services were forced to go without money while the impasse persisted. Day cares, school districts, mental health services, drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers, hospitals and other struggled to stay afloat, sometimes floundering in the

absence of state funds.

4) **Rendell's role:** In his seven years as governor, Rendell never produced a budget on time. It was predicted this year would be no different. The governor's approval ratings in July sank to an all-time low of 39 percent, with voters seeing him as most responsible for the state's budget mess, according to a Quinnipiac University Poll. Additionally, the media-savvy politician held press conferences nearly every day, pushing for the income tax increase and a \$300 million increase in education spending, which was met by strong Republican opposition. A lame duck governor entering his last year in office, Rendell lacked the clout he had carried in past budget talks ("Ideology and election stall deal" A1).

This thesis will address the following research questions:

- 1) How did reporters from four different newspapers - *The Patriot-News*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, and *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* - choose what stories warranted the most coverage?
- 2) How did the coverage of state worker issues, the personal income tax increase proposal, state-related programs and Gov. Ed Rendell compare between these four papers?
- 3) How has this process changed over time, with the advent of new technology?

Through a coverage analysis and interviews with reporters at these newspapers, this thesis will demonstrate the impact of technology on budget coverage and gain a greater understanding of the reporter's role in the 2009/2010 Pennsylvania state budget stalemate.

**PART 2**  
**PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW**

Between May and August, the *Pittsburgh-Tribune Review* printed approximately 300 articles mentioning or related-to the state budget, as shown by an archive search. The 150,000 circulation newspaper, with a conservative-leaning editorial page, also fed this coverage to 19 community newspapers and six dailies that are owned by the same company. The majority of this coverage was written by Brad Bumsted, the *Tribune-Review*'s capitol correspondent and a 26-year veteran of Pennsylvania statehouse reporting. In his weekly Sunday column, Bumsted provided commentary on the budget process - editorials that were generally critical of Rendell and House Democrats. While many papers like the *Patriot-News* focused on the step-by-step movement of the budget, the *Tribune-Review* coverage took those small movements in the budget and painted a larger picture, explaining what those movements meant to readers who might not have been familiar with the political process. "I kept an eye on the sausage-making, but I took a step back," Bumsted explained. "By and large, the big drama that has played out between Rendell and the legislature has been often times an A1 story."

**State worker 'payless paydays'**

Between May and August, an archive search shows 50 stories mentioning the state worker paycheck issue. The *Tribune-Review* used the state worker paycheck withholding story to paint a broader picture of the impasse, as shown by a lede in an article by Bumsted on June 30, the day before the budget deadline: "In a sign that state budget talks could drag on for weeks or months, Gov. Ed Rendell today announced that 10 banks and credit unions are offering no-interest loans and lines of credit for up to 69,000 state employees whose paychecks could halt July 17" (Bumsted, "Rendell lines up loans, credit for state employees"). While the story appears

to be about state workers, it isn't. It merely uses Rendell's announcement about state workers to forecast a long budget impasse. It goes on to discuss a potential 13,000 layoffs in the Pennsylvania system of hospitals, and quotes Rendell as saying budget talks were "productive." "Our readership is not overwhelmingly state workers, like it is in Harrisburg. I covered a few rallies and talked to rank-and-file union members and included it in some overall stories," Bumsted said.

One of these overall stories, published on July 7 and co-bylined by Bumsted and staff reporter Debra Erdley, features commentary by state workers in Pittsburgh about their frustration over the budget crisis. While bringing the issue down to a local level, it explains who will get paychecks on time, who won't, and why - from the legislators themselves to Liquor Control Board employees. "This was part of the overall picture between Rendell and the legislature - the workers claiming Rendell was holding them as hostages," Bumsted said. "It was prominent in my writing throughout July."

On July 15, Bumsted's story about the big state worker rally in Harrisburg is published. While it quotes a few Harrisburg state employees, the article quickly transition into a big-picture story about the budget: "While it was noisy outside and inside the Capitol with rallies by unions, arts advocates and the disabled, it was quiet on the negotiating front" (Bumsted, "Pennsylvanians rally for pay, support of arts").

While rallies were going on at the capitol in Harrisburg, *Tribune-Review* staff reporter Brian Bowling covered state worker protesting in Pittsburgh. The lack of impact of payless paydays to this paper's demographic is evident through this story, citing only 30 protestors, compared to the hundreds who rallied at the capitol in Harrisburg.

Bumsted also wrote several stories on the movement of the "bridge budget" bill to pay

state workers with fair, balanced, back-and-forth banter between both sides of the aisle. On Aug. 1, 2009, the *Tribune-Review* features a story on the bridge bill moving to the House on Aug. 2 (Bumsted, “House readies vote on bill to pay state employees”). Again, the lede of this story is about state workers, but the story flows into a wrap-up of where the budget stands - from the governor’s insistence on an increase in education funding to the governor’s spokesman saying the budget talks were “friendly and somewhat productive.” The state worker issue seems to be a vehicle used to bring up other budget developments.

On Aug. 5, the day after the House approved the temporary budget to pay state employees, Bumsted wrote another brief story with commentary from local legislators, including Republican Rep. Mike Turzai and Democratic Rep. Bill DeWeese (Bumsted, “Partial Pennsylvania budget to be signed”). The story ends talking about the conflict between House Democratic leaders and Rendell disagreeing over whether the personal income tax increase is “off the table.” By combining the state worker struggle with other budget issues, the *Tribune-Review* gives readers a good picture of the crisis, showing how all the issues surrounding the impasse are connected.

### **Tax increase**

“There’s a definite anti-tax feeling in western Pennsylvania. This was what all my e-mails and phone calls were about. Everybody cares about it,” Bumsted said. This sentiment is reflected in the *Tribune-Review*’s stories of the personal income tax increase battle, as it was the paper’s most frequently covered aspect of the budget impasse. The paper’s coverage of this issue - mentioned in about 90 stories - really begins on June 5, 2009, with a story about House Appropriations Chair Dwight Evans touting a personal income tax increase as “necessary to help

erase the state's \$3.2 billion deficit” and Rendell’s spokesman saying the increase is a “last resort” (Bumsted, “Tax increase needed to erase state's \$3.2 billion deficit: Evans”). The next day, the paper publishes another story - similar to those across the state - about Rendell’s announcement that he would support a 3/10 of a percentage point increase in the income tax. Meanwhile, while there’s no movement in the income tax story, the *Tribune-Review* kept it alive and in the news with two stories chronicling the efforts of local Rep. Daryl Metcalfe of Cranberry - considered one of the most conservative members of the legislature - to hold an anti-tax rally. For a story on June 17, Bumsted paired up with staff reporter Mike Wereschagin in Pittsburgh to illustrate the local distaste surrounding Rendell’s pushing of the income tax increase, which he formally proposed at Westinghouse Electric Company’s new headquarters in Cranberry (Bumsted and Wereschagin, Pennsylvania Gov. Rendell says income tax increase a must”). The story quotes residents as well as local legislators. Wereschagin and Bumsted provide more localized perspective on the income tax increase on June 22, with a story quoting only Rep. Dan Frankel of Squirrel Hill as supporting the idea (Bumsted and Wereschagin, “Pittsburgh-area lawmakers unsure about raising state income tax”). On June 30, the *Tribune-Review* published an entire article based on local senior Democrat Rep. Joe Markosek of Monroeville saying Rendell is “significantly short” of the needed votes to raise the income tax 16 percent (Bumsted, “Gov. Rendell ‘short’ on support for Pennsylvania income tax hike”).

The *Tribune-Review* during July features some interesting enterprise stories with a local angle surrounding the PIT. For instance, one on July 13 details the organized efforts of about 60 Blue Dog Democrats, mostly from western Pennsylvania, in derailing Rendell’s proposal.

While each newspaper takes its own stab at when the income tax increase proposal is “dead,” the *Tribune-Review* takes the Republicans’ word for it, and their “this-will-never-

happen” attitude toward the tax increase is eventually realized with an article on July 9 - much before other newspapers declared the plan’s passage impossible. After House Minority Leader Sam Smith announced the proposal was dead in the Capitol rotunda, the lead on Bumsted’s July 9 story read: “House Republicans today wrote an obituary for Democratic Gov. Ed Rendell’s proposed increase in the state income tax” (Bumsted, “Increase in state income tax dead”). In the story, Rendell’s spokesman calls Smith’s declaration “premature,” but the headline on the *Tribune-Review*’s story makes it sound like the proposal was completely eliminated, when other newspapers don’t show the proposal as “off the table” until August.

On Aug. 4, when most papers ran stories about the income tax increase being “off the table,” the *Tribune-Review* echoed their earlier story. In the article, House Speaker Keith McCall says Democratic leaders told the Blue Dog Democrats that, “We have taken (an income tax increase) off the table, and it hasn’t been under consideration for a month” (Bumsted, “Higher Pennsylvania income taxes quashed”). This first quote of the story, in a way, justifies the *Tribune-Review*’s seemingly premature discussion of a dropped income tax increase strategy.

### **State-supported programs and services**

“There was some budget fatigue among editors. They didn’t want budget stories everyday, and I didn’t want to do stories about every interest group worried about its cuts,” said Bumsted. But, in a sea of hundreds of publicity-hungry interest groups, the choice of who to cover wasn’t easy. The lack of coverage of special interest groups is evident in May and June, when groups were rallying against cuts. However, special interest groups make a re-appearance in the *Tribune-Review* when the budget deadline has passed, and human services agencies were waiting on money from the state. “Rendell switched hostages. He paid the workers, but then

these social services became the new hostages,” Bumsted suggested.

The dilemma faced by school districts trying to make budgets without knowing how much money they’d receive is first covered in the *Tribune-Review* on July 12. The story, which briefly touches the issue of schools waiting for their money, included a *Tribune-Review* survey that warned homeowners that one-third of Allegheny County’s school districts were raising their property taxes (“Kurutz, Districts struggle to fund schools”). Another story, which wasn’t covered by a lot of other papers, provided a broad overview of a lot of agencies by detailing the state’s inability to release “hundreds of millions” in stimulus funds to interest groups because of the state budget holdup (Roche, “Without budget, state cannot allocate hundreds of millions”). Covering a broad range of topics, the story gives examples of stimulus money that the impasse held hostage including \$20 million for summer youth programs, \$418 million to \$700 million for school districts, and \$1 billion for highway projects. An Allegheny County human services official is quoted as saying, “At this point, all the programs are running. I don't think people realize how much of a big deal the budget impasse is.” But by August, as evidenced by the *Tribune-Review*’s budget coverage, the urgency among agencies kicked in.

On Aug. 8, the *Tribune Review* does an enterprise story on the Observatory Hill Early Learning Child Development Center, which receives state funds to subsidize child care for low-income families. The center faced the possibility of closing in mid-August if the state didn’t pass a budget. The story quotes two local mothers. One, Theresa Scott, says that if the day care closes, she won’t be able to work, because she can’t afford daycare anywhere else nearby (Weigand, “Budget impasse threatens children’s daycare”). While similar childcare centers across the state faced the same problem, the *Tribune-Review* made the state budget a more personalized, local issue by featuring this day care and giving it a face, instead of rattling off numbers provided by

politicians in Harrisburg.

The *Tribune-Review* seems to focus its interest on how child services are impacted by the budget, as there is little specific attention paid to anyone else. The issues surfaces again in an Aug. 12 publication as Bumsted pairs up with Pittsburgh-based staff writer Debra Erdley. This is essentially the same story written over again, but with quotes from a different daycare - Today's Tot (Bumsted and Erdley, "Impasse could end day care for many children"). While this story incorporates more numbers and quotes from politicians, it adequately expresses the individual pain felt by childcare providers in the Pittsburgh area. Another story, on urgency felt by pre-K and kindergarten programs shows up on Aug. 27. With stories like this, Bumsted said, the *Tribune-Review* got an edge on budget coverage over its competitor, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. "[The *Post-Gazette*] covers more of the sausage-making - the blow-by-blow of this billion and that billion," Bumsted said. "It's good to add voices of real people and work with a reporter in Pittsburgh who will double byline and go to a daycare center. Sometimes they'll just deal with the press conference, not show the story behind the story."

### **Rendell's role**

It's not surprising that the *Tribune-Review* - more so than other papers - tends to frame Rendell as the culprit in the budget mess. This idea was emphasized by Bumsted's weekly Sunday column, which generally included stabs at the governor. For example, Bumsted's column on June 14 which pokes fun at Rendell's press office for sending out news releases about the draconian effects of Senate Bill 850. "Based on the rhetoric, one would think the state is on the verge of a nuclear winter. How many hundreds of employee hours and state tax dollars went into preparing these news releases, which are all aimed at spending even more of your tax dollars?"

Bumsted says in his column (Bumsted, “Rendell’s propaganda machine”). The next week, Bumsted’s Sunday quotes the Pennsylvania Republican Party chairman taking another stab at Rendell. Bumsted’s Aug. 2 column, “Through the eyes of an angry taxpayer” is probably the most venomous. The entire column is based on the anger of one man - J. David Truby, a retired Indiana University of Pennsylvania professor. “For whatever it’s worth,” Truby, 71, wrote in an e-mail, “the small town and rural mood is that if folks had a large gallows and hemp rope, it is certain that chronic liar Fast Eddie, Ronald Buckwalter and Vincent Fumo would figuratively swing in the breeze” (Bumsted, “Through the eyes of an angry taxpayer”). Essentially, this is a letter to the editor in column format. “ I wanted to give his whole view of this whole budget mess, and how this is just -in his view - institutional thievery, and that these people are out to get reelected,” Bumsted said.

Some of the stories themselves slant negatively against the governor. For example, a headline on July 6 reads, “Ohio governor fights tax hike for budget deficit, unlike Rendell.” The entire story compares Rendell’s actions to a democratic Ohio governor who is facing a large deficit, but is holding the line on no tax increases. Every time Rendell says an off-color remark, the *Tribune-Review* is there to pick it up. For instance, when Rendell compares a gassing scene from the 1964 James Bond movie “Goldfinger” to the two televised meetings of the budget conference committee, the newspaper publishes a story dedicated to the inappropriateness of the comment (Boyer, “Rendell’s ‘Goldfinger’ crack no laughing matter for Republicans”). The *Tribune-Review*’s staff editorial, published the next day, said the comment created “widespread bipartisan outrage” and jokingly suggests that, “The governor should be dragged from his office and taken to the banks of the Susquehanna River. There, his head should be held underwater one minute for each and every percent of the 16 percent increase he proposes in the personal income

tax. Just drop him in after he passes out at the 5 percent mark. Funn-eee stuff, eh? (“Rendell’s ‘humor’: homicidal jocularities”).

One unique Aug. 2 story, however, framed Rendell as a state’s chief executive in the middle of a budget fray - a story that wasn’t duplicated by any other Pennsylvania newspapers. The story idea came to fruition when the governor singled out Bumsted at a press conference. “At a news conference, the governor had challenged me to come up to his residence and see how few calls he got from legislators on information about the budget. He asked me to work out with him while I was there,” Bumsted said. In an exclusive interview with Rendell, Bumsted provides, what he calls in the article, a “rare behind-the-scenes look at the governor’s activities in the midst of the worst budget crisis since 1991” (Bumsted, “Rendell asserts need for more school spending”). The story personalizes Rendell, mixing facts and statistics of the budget with intimate details of the governor’s life: “After the workout, [Rendell] headed to the patio with an armful of paperwork and a diet cola. Rendell wore a faded blue Nemaocolin Woodlands polo shirt, white shorts and black loafers. The dogs alternately rolled in the mulch and jumped in the pool.” This story framed Rendell’s character, allowing him to respond to criticisms, instead of describing him as the lame-duck, evil spending machine that most of the *Tribune-Review* stories portray him as.

While his newspaper seems critical of the governor’s spending and proposed tax increases, Bumsted said Rendell’s interaction with the press was unparalleled by any public official he’s ever seen, holding press conferences nearly every other day during the summer. “He is absolutely, bar none the most accessible governor in modern Pennsylvania history,” Bumsted said. “He’ll take just about any question. There’s almost nothing he won’t answer.”

**PART 3**  
**THE PATRIOT-NEWS**

Publishing from the heart of Pennsylvania's state capital, Harrisburg's *Patriot-News* by far provided the most comprehensive coverage of the nuts and bolts of the budget battle, spearheaded by reporters Jan Murphy and Charlie Thompson. Any news even slightly connected to the stalemate brewing within walking distance of the newspaper's Market Street office was usually awarded a prominent placement on the front page. In the days leading up to the constitutional deadline, the *Patriot-News* also displayed a consistent A1 graphic of a calendar telling readers how many days the state had been budget-less. For better or worse, the story was beaten to a pulp with front page consistency, eye-catching graphics, and bulleting. The paper even goes as far as publishing comments and rants from anonymous screen names copied from their online product, Pennlive.com. An search of the paper's archives also reveals an overabundance of news analysis pieces, where reporters add depth to the issues by asking their own questions like, "Are payless paydays illegal" or "Is there a leadership crisis in Harrisburg?" or "Is Vince Fumo's absence a factor in the stalemate?" The doom and gloom, whether truth or fiction, is evident. For the *Patriot-News*, the state budget conundrum wasn't just an issue, it was THE issue, as displayed by about 650 articles, shown by an archive search, published between May 1, 2009 and Aug. 31, 2009.

**State worker 'payless paydays'**

State workers are a key demographic of the *Patriot-News*, which publishes in Cumberland, Dauphin, Perry, Lebanon and York counties - the region surrounding the state capital. The paper first mentioned the possibility of "payless paydays" for state workers on Thursday, May 14, 2009, 48 days before the constitutional budget deadline ("Payday delay?"

A1). From there, coverage of the issue seems to dwindle until July 1, when state employee horror stories with blunt headlines like “Payday pain” are plastered across the front page of the paper - emphasizing the very local impact the impasse has on some 77,000 commonwealth employees. That day, the *Patriot-News* published a story accompanied by average Joe state worker responses to the question, “What do you plan to do if you have to work several weeks without receiving pay?” The responses reveal the stories of likely *Patriot-News* readers who, living paycheck-to-paycheck, worry they won’t be able to afford major car repairs or gas to get to work. A strikingly similar article, almost a repeat of the July 1 story, appears on July 9. Headlined “Struggling state workers decry ‘hostage’ status,” the article describes people “on the brink of financial disaster” with personal narratives from people ineligible for the emergency loans, expressing his dislike for the legislature and the governor (“Struggling” A1). Yet another on July 18, 2009, paints a picture of low morale “hanging over tens of thousands of workers” who are forced to temporarily work for free (“Pay deferral” A1). It’s these types of stories that, during these couple of months, crowned the *Patriot-News* as a town hall for angry state workers. It’s the same story of martyred and alienated employees, told by different faces, dozens of times.

When local effort was made to assist state workers with no-interest loans and food bank donations, the paper performed a key function of newspapers, coming to the aid of its readers by sharing “how to get help” blurbs for those in crisis. It is these type of stories that exhibit a genuine concern for readers by telling them need-to-know information, rather than big-picture issue stories. For example, one on July 6, 2009, the paper’s local section printed an article entitled, “Where can state workers get help?” The story accumulated nitty-gritty specifics and contact numbers for the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank and financial establishments offering lines of credit and loans (“Where can state workers get help?” B1). These types of stories, which

reach out to the demographic, are absent from many of the other news outlets covering the budget. In July alone, at least three articles are written on local food banks stepping up to meet state worker needs.

The next wave of state worker-related coverage came from the venomous rallies held by enraged unions on the *Patriot's* home turf. The paper's coverage of the initial July 14 rally was quite comprehensive, running in the same issue as several letters to the editor authored by state workers, claiming illegality in withholding paychecks. Another rally story, published on July 29, is nearly a replica of the previous rally story, with workers begging for a stopgap and telling their individual stories of woe. Each time a paycheck was missed, the *Patriot-News* was there to remind everyone. For example, a news analysis on July 24, 2009 - the day 44,000 employees received their last paycheck before the stopgap was introduced - a front page, banner headline article asks, "With their salaries on hold, will state workers start slacking off on the job? The question arises as they take another hit today." Through reading the article, it becomes clear that the question of slacking off was likely posed by the newspaper itself. The actual news - a wave of state workers getting their last paycheck - is blown to another level with a string of unconnected quotes examining the possibility of state workers loafing on the job ("With their salaries on hold" A1).

While employee layoffs continued to keep state workers in the news, the momentum behind the *Patriot-News* coverage of state worker payless paydays was abruptly halted when Rendell signed the "bridge," or stopgap budget, on Aug. 5. However, the comprehensive stories the *Patriot-News* provided surrounding the state worker paycheck snafu gave a human face to the budget issue, while pleasing a large demographic in the coverage area. State worker or not, *Patriot-News* readers were given almost too much information to make an informed decision on

the issue, as evidenced by dozens of letters to the editor regarding state worker payless paydays.

### **Tax increase**

In May, the contentious issue of what would become a Rendell administration proposal to increase the state's percent personal income tax was sparsely alluded to in four articles, as revealed by an archive search. On May 28, 2009, weeks before Rendell actually proposed the tax boost, the *Patriot-News* started printing stories quoting Senate leaders claiming an income tax increase would be necessary to fund the governor's \$29 billion budget plan. Democratic leaders, like Rep. Dwight Evans, D-Philadelphia, rattled off non-answers about income tax increases to the paper's reporters, saying "budget talks in the next few weeks will hash out the details of what is needed to make the governor's plan work" ("Show us the cash" A1).

According to a *Patriot-News* archive search, the income tax increase issue gained traction in June, with about 40 stories mentioning the inevitable Democrat proposal. The *Patriot-News* does an excellent job of foreshadowing this sense of inevitability. For example, this lede, from a June 2 issue, represents one of many from the *Patriot* that predicts the PIT hike: "State government revenue continued to collapse in May, leading some legislators to suggest that an increase in the state's 3.08 percent personal income tax rate next year might be unavoidable" ("State's revenue hole" A1). As the issue explodes, the *Patriot's* follow ups of every mentioning of the PIT echoing from the governor's mouth at his news conferences are exemplary. A June 3, 2009, fleshes out an entire story based on the governor's brief mentioning that the PIT is not "off the table" ("Rendell: Tax hike" A1).

A June 6 development in the issue, covered by the *Patriot*, was also repeated in similar stories by newspapers across the state. In an interview with KDKA in Pittsburgh, the governor

said he still didn't want an income tax increase, but if it was required, the hike would be temporary. When the governor finally proposed a 16 percent income tax increase on June 16, Ledes like this one mainly focused on Republican criticism: "Gov. Ed Rendell effectively hit the snooze button on the state's budgetary alarm clock by calling for an increase in the state's personal income tax so close to the clock's July 1 deadline, Senate Republican leaders say" ("Will tax-hike plan blow the deadline?" A1). However, while it begins with Republicans, the story provides some excellent back-and-forth banter between Republicans and Democrats, showing a fair and balanced view on the story.

In July, the *Patriot* undertakes some interesting angles and enterprise stories surrounding the income tax increase. One on July 5, 2009, takes a step back at a national perspective, examining how other states have handled revenue shortages during tough financial times. "Seven - California, Delaware, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, and Wisconsin - have raised personal income taxes, mostly on higher-income households. Four - California again, Massachusetts, Minnesota and Nevada - raised sales tax rates" ("Rendell pushes" A1). Another, less newsworthy, but very creative idea printed by the *Patriot-News* was a Sunday, Aug. 9, 2009, showed a list of revenue sources, including the personal income tax, and their projected incomes. Called the "budget puzzle," the article lists the contact names and numbers of legislative leaders, asking readers to send them their solution on how to fill the then-\$2 billion gap between the House and Senate proposals ("What's the solution?" A2). This novel approach to news coverage is something that isn't and likely wouldn't be seen in any other paper, but is another attempt to draw attention to the budget crisis and get readers involved and interested.

By Aug. 4, the income tax increase appeared to be off the table, as published in a *Patriot-News* question and answer style article. Still, in one instance, the *Patriot-News* editors

interject themselves into the income tax/revenue crisis in a unique A1 article on Aug. 10. Though it's questionable whether the beat and city desk editors of a newspaper should be injecting their opinions on this topic, they nonetheless offer their solution to the crisis which includes "no income or broad sales tax increase, but we include targeted sales tax increases on things people could do without" ("Solving the state budget crisis" A1). Here, for all of their readership to see, they basically admit their opposition to the tax as a solution to the budget crisis. While it is unclear whether anyone in the Pennsylvania public actually cares what the Harrisburg paper's editors would solve the crisis, it is stories like this that helped the *Patriot* keep the budget and income tax proposal in the news on slow news days, while giving readers a greater understanding of the issue.

### **State-supported programs and services**

The *Patriot-News* did an excellent job of chronicling the local significance of the state budget stalemate to local agencies and schools who receive state funding. Beginning in early May with a series of briefs on school districts raising taxes because of uncertainty about state funds, the *Patriot* employs non-political beat writers to chase budget-related stories in their specific municipal coverage areas. They follow up in June with an in-depth story detailing how districts in Carlisle, Mechanicsburg, Central Dauphin, Northern York, and Harrisburg were dealing with uncertainties in their budget ("Schools form plan B for budgets" A3). The article is paired with an info box which breaks down big numbers in an easy-to-understand fashion. For example, this entry on Harrisburg shows those living in the school district how the budget stalemate will trickle-down to them:

"Harrisburg School District Budget total: \$147.4 million What they budgeted: \$53.3

million Gov. Rendell's budget figure: \$53.2 million Senate Bill 850: \$51.2 million Tax increase: The 6.1 percent tax increase raises the district's property tax rate to 25.2 mills. The owner of a home assessed at \$50,000 will pay \$1,260 in property taxes. Deducting the \$446 credit from state gambling proceeds lowers that bill to \$814 (“Schools form plan B for budgets” A3).

The impact on education in general also a primary focus of the *Patriot*'s coverage. A July 16 in-depth article discussed the inability of a House Democrat budget proposal to indicate a revenue stream for the funding of public higher education with the lede, “Bracing for a 2,000-student spike in enrollment this fall, Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) President Edna Baehre wanted to bang her head against the wall.” While the story features cool, calm responses from local state-related institutions like Shippensburg University, Baehre continues to rant throughout the article about the “threat” to public education and how the proposal would force HACC to potentially double tuition costs (“Budget talks put squeeze on nervous local colleges” A1). It’s interesting to note the headline “Budget talks put squeeze on nervous local colleges: HACC's president calls the Dems' plan a "major threat" that could double tuition and cause her school to turn students away.” While the story quotes John Cavanaugh, chancellor of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, saying that the proposal was just part of the negotiating process and that there was no need for “knee-jerk” reactions, the headline, perhaps sensationalistic, focuses on the “sky is falling” dynamic emphasized by Baehre.

In an article on Aug. 3, 2009, the *Patriot-News* summed up the hassle for human services agencies waiting for money using this lede: “At local agencies that receive state money, the state budget crisis has officials close to pushing panic buttons.” Like many of the stories before it, the article puts a local perspective on a broad range of agencies playing the waiting game by quoting

a Dauphin County commissioner, the director of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Project Share food bank in Carlisle, the Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign director and the Pennsylvania Community Providers Association (“Lack of cash could clip human services” A1). Some of the advocacy groups provide a local angle and time frame on the story, with Pennsylvania Community Providers Association director Susan Blue warning that mental health agencies could probably last through September without a budget.

As in other papers, the emphasis on potential program cuts and the inability of the government to disperse funds to special interest groups and human services agencies doesn’t begin until after the budget deadline has passed. Starting with July 1, the *Patriot* amps up its coverage of agencies waiting on state funds, with advocacy groups warning of doom and gloom. For example, on July 1, the paper runs a story on how the Senate Republicans’ proposed cuts to Medicaid would force Pennsylvania hospitals to layoff 13,000 employees (“We’re...waiting on the budget” A8). The story discusses impact to local hospitals like Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, Holy Spirit Hospital and the Good Samaritan Hospital.

While it wasn’t necessarily front page news, the *Patriot* even covers the impact felt by state-related entities that aren’t in the coverage area. For example, when Rendell called for a 10 percent cut in the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission’s budget, the historical sites slated to close included museums mainly in the Pittsburgh area (“Pacts aim to keep sites open” A3). Still, the *Patriot* covered the issue with vigor, giving readers a perspective on what was happening throughout the entire state.

Another story on July 15, focuses on potential cuts to arts programs and its impact on the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra and other local cultural events. Another on July 22 discusses a Senate Republican proposal to eliminate the annual \$1.2 million Harrisburg receives each year to

provide fire protection at the Capitol complex. The blackfly-control spraying program along waterways will be suspended for 31 counties beginning in September if no state budget was put in place, an article on August 21 warns. The *Patriot* was truly comprehensive in its coverage of the impact on state and local agencies and served their readers by demonstrating, in their eyes, how the state can quite literally fall apart when the legislature can't pass a budget.

### **Rendell's role**

The *Patriot* seemed to enjoy questioning Rendell's role in the budget as shown in the July 19, A1 story "Do we have a leadership crisis, too?" In the absence of former power players senators Vincent Fumo and Robert Jubelirer, the story criticizes lawmakers and Rendell for failing to get the job done. It points out how Rendell can't even get the support of his own Democratic House Caucus for his personal income tax increase, asserting that even the governor's policy secretary Donna Cooper has greater influence in the administration's decisions.

Rendell's "lack of clout" is cited yet again on Aug. 9 in an article quoting the Pennsylvania legislative correspondents' go-to political science man for news analysis pieces, G. Terry Madonna, a Franklin and Marshall College professor and pollster. Twice, the article mentions Rendell's lack of power. "There also is the lame duck governor who some said lacks the clout he carried into past years' budget talks," the author writes in the middle of the story. At the end of the story a paragraph again cites, "Rendell, as a lame duck, doesn't pose the same threat to Republicans he once did, Madonna said" ("Ideology and election stall deal" A1).

A May 28 story focuses on Rendell's inability to tell Republicans, specifically Senate Appropriations Chair Jake Corman, where the revenues will come from to fund his \$28.9 budget

proposal. Because Rendell's budget was introduced in February, by the end of May, it was already \$2.3 billion out of balance. This story popped up around the time just before Rendell was throwing out pieces and details about the eventual proposed income tax increase. When this story, which is overwhelmed with Corman quotes, printed, Rendell can't give any answer to the GOP question, perhaps making readers question his leadership abilities ("Show us the cash" A1 ).

Another story on June 16 focuses around Rendell's lame duck governor position, but this one, at least gives him a chance to rebut it, even quoting Corman half-complimenting the governor on his tactics: " 'The governor uses the bully pulpit pretty well. He knows how to make a case for his ideas. He's very good at that. He concerns himself a lot with public relations, taking his case to the people ... I don't know if that's really a helpful way of showing his resolve. We are a three-legged stool. It takes a compromise by all three parts of the state government to come to an agreement ...,' Corman said" ("Lame duck? Rendell powers on" A1 ).

**PART 4**  
**PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE**

The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* published about 200 articles pertaining to the budget process between May and August 2009 with most of the coverage authored by capitol correspondents Tracie Mauriello and Tom Barnes. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* is a 200,000-plus circulation newspaper and the largest daily newspaper serving the Pittsburgh area. While the *Post-Gazette*'s budget coverage focuses on many of the same topics as other papers, Barnes said he kept his articles interesting by emphasizing the in-fighting between the governor and the legislature, mainly Republican Senators. For Mauriello, sifting through press releases and notes while choosing what to feed readers about the budget was a thoughtful process. "To me, covering the budget and writing about it are two different things. I cover a lot of things just so I know what's going on. The more crap you put out there, it dilutes the good stuff. I try to give readers the most important, bottom-line information without all the process," she said. "There were a lot of budget proposals out there, but if we're covering stuff we know isn't going to happen, then I don't think we're serving anybody."

**State worker 'payless paydays'**

The *Post-Gazette* first mentions the state worker debacle on May 16 in an article by Barnes that plays up the drama at the capitol. "The budget conflict between Gov. Ed Rendell and state Senate Republicans in turning uglier. The Democratic Rendell administration yesterday intensified criticism of the \$27.3 billion budget that the Republican-controlled Senate recently approved along party lines, saying it could lead to the demise of key programs and perhaps even force 300 military veterans out of state homes" (Barnes, "State budget battle intensifies" B2). At the bottom of the story, the article describes how the previously described partisan politics are

dragging 78,000 state employees into the budget fray. But it's only briefly mentioned, as it is with many *Post-Gazette* articles. "I think the *Patriot-News* did the best job of covering this, and rightly so," Mauriello said. "Most state workers are in Harrisburg, not Pittsburgh."

Still, the *Post-Gazette* still gave readers information about state worker payless paydays, often wrapping it into larger stories. Another story by Barnes on July 3 has a similar dramatic lede, emphasizing the partisan bickering more so than other news outlets: "The Rendell administration says it's tired of seeing Republican lawmakers standing on the sidelines and throwing grenades at the governor's proposal for a 2009-10 state budget" (Barnes, "Rendell challenges Republicans" B1). Again, in the last paragraph of the story, Barnes discusses the state worker issue as a way to show just one of the early consequences of missing the budget deadline.

A July 18 article by a Pittsburgh-based staff reporter in the *Post-Gazette* gives a face to Barnes' nameless state workers, leading with a local Department of Revenue employee worried about making ends meet (Silver, "Budget impasse puts state workers in bind" A1). Another on July 25, also written by a Pittsburgh-based reporter, discusses local state workers receiving 80 percent of their paychecks and going to take out loans. Both of these, while fairly descriptive stories, leave out a detail that might be helpful for putting the issue into perspective: How many state workers are there in the Pittsburgh metropolitan area?

On July 28, Mauriello covered the state worker rally on the capitol steps in Harrisburg, focusing on a group of 150 people who rode in from Pittsburgh for the event. "I tried to find the human interest things to keep it interesting by talking to state workers who were worried about getting their paychecks. They were working 40 hours a week and going to a food bank to feed their families," Mauriello said. This story, like similar stories in other papers, gives a human perspective to the state worker issue starting with the lede: "Eleven-year-old Sandria Hull needs

shoes for cheerleading practice. Her brother needs to have a cavity filled. But both will have to wait, said their mother, Dawn Crum, a **state** corrections officer. Her last paycheck was \$1,000 short and her next check may not come for weeks” (Mauriello, “State workers rally for budget passage“ B1). “The *Patriot* wrote about [state workers] every time someone sneezed on that issue,” Barnes said. “I care about it some, but it wasn’t a top issue. After the rally, in terms of news, all they were saying was ‘we want our money.’ It really wasn’t newsy after that.”

State workers alone, weren’t the story, Barnes said. A few stories in August lump state workers in with Rendell’s signage of a “bridge” budget. Barnes’ lede on an Aug. 6 story reads, “A lot of budget hostages - most of the state’s 77,000 employees - are being released” (Barnes, “Skeleton budget will pay state workers” B1). It’s also interesting to note that - not that readers would notice - but several of the *Post-Gazette*’s other articles cite 78,000 state employees. Others cite 77,000. Which is it?

State workers appear as martyrs again in a story on Aug. 6 where Mauriello writes how House Democrats paid themselves a week before state employees were supposed to get their checks. On this day, this story wasn’t duplicated by any of the other papers. These types of stories are favorites of *Post-Gazette* readers, Barnes said. “Anything about legislative perks - salaries, WAMs, legislative grants, per diems,” he added. “Every since the pay raise fiasco in 2005, people really care about any money issues surrounding the legislature.” Hence, this story appears on A1.

### **Tax increase**

The *Post-Gazette* was aggressive on this issue, publishing nearly one article per day in June either mentioning a personal income tax increase as a source of revenue or developing what

would eventually become Rendell's proposal for a 16 percent PIT increase. "I got a lot of calls and e-mails about this," Barnes said. "People were always screaming about Rendell and getting mad at the legislators, so tax issues were big." Barnes previews the income tax increase on May 22, earlier than most newspapers. The story, with the headline "State's income tax rate eyed for budget deficit," quotes activists from the left-leaning Budget and Policy Center saying a tax increase is necessary while quoting Delaware County Republican Rep. Mario Civera explaining how much revenue could be generated from a 1/10 percentage point increase (Barnes, "State's income tax rate eyed for budget deficit" B1). While the headline is a bit speculative, considering the contents of the story, the article is ahead of the game, beating every other Pennsylvania paper to the punch.

Barnes writes a good piece on June 3, foreshadowing Rendell's eventual push for a tax hike by quoting the governor high in the story saying, "At this stage, nothing is off the table. Everything has to be looked at. We will do what is necessary" (Barnes, "All options open to plug budget gap, Rendell says" B1). Hereafter, the potential for an income tax increase is mentioned in every story surrounding the state budget until the story of the official announcement is published on June 17.

The beginning paragraphs on the June 17 don't just announce the 16 percent tax increase. Instead, they keep it interesting, showing how the announcement has a larger place in the drama playing out in Harrisburg, representing it as fuel for the fire in a lengthy impasse that would soon follow. The lede is a reflection of this. It reads, "Gov. Ed Rendell's call for a "temporary" three-year increase in the state income - tax rate has shifted Harrisburg's already contentious budget battle onto new and even rockier terrain" (Barnes and O'Toole, "Rendell: Raise income tax" A1). As all reporters at all papers reported on this announcement, the *Post-Gazette* lede is

probably the best in illustrating the place of the income tax increase in the larger scheme of the budget and going above and beyond the obvious, which readers could easily get from by reading the headline.

On June 19, Barnes writes a story encompassing all of the different groups of people rallying against the tax increase - from Blue Dog Democrats to regular people to Senate Republicans. The story begins with an average citizen. While the story doesn't give a strong voice to those in cohorts with Rendell, it works by briefly explaining the governor's viewpoint in the fourth graph: "Mr. Rendell said the increase would only be "temporary" - for the next three years - and would generate \$1.5 billion a year in additional revenue. This would help erase the state's current \$3.2 billion budget deficit, he said" (Barnes, "Opponents lining up against Pa. tax increase" A1).

The Democrats get their voice in plenty of other stories. The tax hike issue trudges on in the *Post-Gazette* with more back-and-forth between different parts of the legislature. One on July 3, Barnes gives a picture of the infighting occurring in the legislature and the Democrats' challenge to Republicans to come up with a responsible budget without a broad-based tax increase. "If they think they can balance a budget without new taxes , let them show it to us ... So far, the governor is the only one who has produced a balanced budget," said Steve Crawford, Rendell's chief-of-staff, in Barnes' article (Barnes, "Rendell challenges Republicans to balance budget without tax hike" B1). Barnes also quotes Republicans touting Senate Bill 850 as the answer to the governor's challenge.

The *Post-Gazette* also does a good job of illustrating how the PIT increase was used by Rendell as a tool to hold the higher education budget hostage. On Monday, July 13, the House Appropriations Committee accepted a \$27.8 billion budget that left out \$1.2 billion in higher

education funding, which was moved to a separate fund (Mauriello, “In state budget Neverland, college students get a hook” A1). The story, written by Mauriello, describes the Democrat plan to fund higher education through a bunch of new taxes and the Republican party’s insistence that they will stop any tax increases from coming to fruition. The *Post-Gazette* covers every movement of this budget, from its inception by the Senate Appropriations Committee until it’s death in the Republican-controlled Senate.

When the tax increase is taken “off the table,” the *Post-Gazette* publishes, comparably, one of the better articles on the decision. The story, by Barnes and Mauriello, credits the stoppage of the proposal to the Blue Dog Democrats, which a lot of newspaper don’t do, and lists the other revenue sources, including a sales tax increase, that are still on the table (Barnes and Mauriello, “Proposal to hike Pa. income tax increase ‘off table’” A1). This story quotes legislative leaders saying that the decision to take the PIT off the negotiating table is prolonging the impasse and will create problems for counties and school districts waiting for their funding - an idea that sets the tone for the next few weeks of coverage.

### **State-supported programs and services**

The uneasiness among school districts is the first group publicized by an article by a freelance writer in the *Post-Gazette* on July 9. The situation among many of the districts in the article lent to a good story. While some stories about schools from around this time claim that districts weren’t yet pushing panic buttons, the *Post-Gazette* clearly puts the alarm felt by superintendents on the table, using a stronger tone: “But the one thing most districts have in common is finance managers and superintendents who are irate at Harrisburg” (Faulk, “State budget woes put school districts on edge” S1). The story includes a useful breakout box of all the

districts in the South Hills area with information on how much money they're expecting from the state.

While these interest group stories are largely absent in most of July. They reappear in August after Rendell has passed the bridge budget to pay state workers and fund basic functions of government. The next story, published Aug. 11 in the *Post-Gazette*, focuses on college students waiting for their state financial aid from the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA). While it is an interesting story, there doesn't seem to be any urgency on the part of the colleges, as many of them told the *Post-Gazette* they would credit the predicted award amount to the student's account. The basis of the story is that, "With classes just weeks away, some anxious parents have begun contacting financial aid offices" (Schackner, "State collegians scramble over grants" A1). However, the story only uses one example of a local parent and student waiting for \$3,800 in PHEAA funds. More individual examples of this would have made the story more interesting and helped illustrate the anxiety among parents that it claims exists.

One day later, on Aug. 12, Barnes wrote a "talking heads" story, talking to various county government advocacy groups about their struggles to fund human services programs without state funds. The sources mainly come from the County Commissioners Association, an aide to Allegheny County Executive Dan Onorato, and a Senate Republican spokesman. In the story, a Butler County Commissioner warns, "a total collapse of the human service ... delivery system appears to be imminent" (Barnes, "Rendell's budget veto hurts Pa.'s 67 counties" B1). Here, double-bylining with a reporter in Pittsburgh to talk to local agencies feeling the pain would have done the story more justice.

On Aug. 14, a Pittsburgh-based reporter writes a front page story that talks to four different day care providers struggling to keep their doors open without state funds. This one is

more than just a “talking heads” story, and provides a human angle at the source of the pain while mixing a slew of good statistics for a more broader picture: “The taxpayer-funded subsidies provide child care for about 130,000 children statewide. Even before the budget stalemate, a typical waiting list of about 6,000 families swelled to a record 16,000 who are looking for help this year” (Crompton, “Day care operators ‘dangling by a thread’ without Pa. funding” A1).

On Aug. 25, Barnes’ Aug. 12 story gets expanded upon. Barnes teams up with Jonathan Silver in Pittsburgh to convey the impasse’s effects on social service agencies on a more microscopic level in a lengthy front page story. The story lumps a lot of different services together, telling of contingency plans for a local literacy council, a group that provides meals to the elderly, the United Way and the Allegheny County Department of Human Services. “We kind of wrapped this stuff into one or two stories,” Barnes said. “I just didn’t sense there was quite these were quite as much of hot button issues as gambling or taxes. I could be wrong, but I didn’t sense that delays in funding to mental retardation programs or drug programs have quite the same importance to people.” At the bottom of the story is a budget summary of recent progress: “Also, Mr. Rendell said he and the Republicans are making some progress on a “spend number,” meaning the bottom line of the new budget . He said it could be in the range of \$28 billion for the fiscal year that began July 1. That’s less than the \$28.9 billion Mr. Rendell originally proposed in February and more than the \$27.3 billion bottom line of Senate Bill 850” (Barnes and Silver, “Budget impasse hurts social agencies” A1). This story comes full circle and communicates the assumed “pain” briefly touched on in the Aug. 12 article.

Another update on the school situation comes Aug. 26. It draws attention to a heightened urgency as begin to borrow millions of dollars in anticipation of the new school year. At this

point, schools have just missed their second state subsidy payment - a fact that is used as a news peg. This time, the Pittsburgh-based reporter talks to some of the poorer schools, including Duquesne School District, which receives 75 percent of its funding from the state, and Clarion School District, which receives 80 percent of its funding from the state (Chute, “Schools borrow funds as state cash flow stalls” B1).

### **Rendell’s role**

The *Post-Gazette* seems to focus less on Rendell and more on caucus leaders and local lawmakers, emphasizing infighting in the legislature. The paper doesn’t seem to take any slant toward deeming Rendell a strong or weak leader, but every time he meets with people, it seems specifically important.

For example, this June 15 story previews a meeting of Rendell’s cabinet: “High noon on Wednesday. That’s when Gov. Ed Rendell will convene an ‘emergency’ meeting of his cabinet to discuss the current budget crisis and whether tax increases and/or more spending reductions will be needed to balance the fiscal 2009-10 budget, which takes effect July 1” (Barnes, “Governor calls emergency meeting on budget crisis”). Another on July 31 previews Rendell’s meeting with Dwight Evans and Dominic Pileggi.

One story on July 24 examines Rendell’s excellent use of media get his point across, mentioning 13 interviews with state television stations. “There was no cost to those news interviews, but he also used \$15,000 in his political campaign funds to put a 2.5 minute budget-related videos on the Web sites of 10 Pennsylvania newspapers, including the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and papers in Erie, Scranton, Allentown and elsewhere” (Barnes, “Rendell sells budget via media spree” B1).

However, other than these few articles, there is less attention paid to things Rendell says, and more attention paid to legislative processes, meetings and bipartisan argument.

**PART 5**  
**PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER**

The city of Philadelphia had their own concerns when it came to the budget - interests that differed from those emphasized in the other three newspapers represented in this thesis. As part of budget negotiations, the city was seeking permission for a one percent increase in its 7 percent sales tax, which was already one percent higher than the rest of the state (not including Allegheny County). “This became a real political football,” said Angela Couloumbis, one of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*’s three legislative correspondents. “It got dragged on and on. [Philadelphia] Mayor [Michael] Nutter was up in Harrisburg all the time. It just got very ugly.” From May through August, Couloumbis was joined by fellow reporters Mario Cattabiani and Amy Worden - the largest of any news outlet’s Harrisburg capitol bureau, excluding the Associated Press. Their articles, with exceptionally strong, well-worded ledes, usually landed on the front page of the local (B) section in the 288,000 circulation daily newspaper.

While giving insight into some of the less-stimulating political processes involved in the budget, the *Inquirer* takes an exceptional approach to budget coverage, mixing in many lighter, feature stories and personality profiles of key figures like Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi and Policy Secretary Donna Cooper with very Philadelphia-focused news stories. “The biggest issue for us was trying to show people how this affected their lives,” Couloumbis said. “They care about the politics and machination, but they care most about how it affects them. That’s what drove our coverage.”

**State worker ‘payless paydays’**

Couloumbis writes one short, to-the-point article on this on May 14 that lands on the front page of the local section, quoting a local union president, an AFSCME director, a Senate

Republican spokesman and Rendell's press secretary. "We don't have a large percentage of these workers in the Philadelphia area, but this issue represents the human toll, so we really tried to give it good coverage," Couloumbis said.

The issue is brought up again in a June 19 article discussing Rendell's potential consideration of stopgap legislation solely to pay state workers. The lede captures all of this, including essentially explaining what a "stopgap" is: "With the prospect of a timely budget passage dwindling, Gov. Rendell said yesterday that he would consider endorsing a rare stopgap budget to keep government operating beyond the fiscal-year deadline in 12 days" (Couloumbis and Worden, "Rendell might back stopgap budget" B1).

On July 17, the first partial paycheck day, the *Inquirer* publishes another story, which was based off the day's press conference. While the beginning chronicles the timeline of partial paychecks to no paychecks, there's an interesting quote from Rendell starting in the fifth paragraph and ending with an interesting tidbit about his personal budgeting: " 'As much as I care about our employees, I don't care about them quite as much as I do . . . the millions of children in this commonwealth who need the opportunity to produce at their full potential,' said Rendell, who is among those who will see their paycheck chopped next week. Rendell, who is paid \$174,914 annually, said he never looks at his check because he uses direct deposit and his wife, Marjorie, handles the family finances" (Couloumbis and Cattabiani, "'Payless paydays to begin today'" B1).

While articles on political processes lump in the state worker paycheck debacle as part of the larger issue, the next state worker-only story by Amy Worden on July 26 revolves around state employees seeking aide from food banks and credit unions. This one takes a more personal approach leading with, "As a caseworker for the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare,

Charlotte Dorfman spends her days evaluating applications and determining whether people are eligible for food stamps or cash assistance. Now Dorfman says she is a step from landing on the other side of the desk at her office in Darby. ‘I’m looking at no paycheck’ this week, Dorfman, 56, said last week. ‘That sent shivers down my spine’” (Worden, “Paychecks stalled, state workers seek help” B1). This story also includes the trials of a mother of six trying to feed her family on food bank handouts, who is considering setting up a Salvation Army-style stand outside Wal-mart to request help for state workers.

The state worker rallies weren’t big news for the *Inquirer*. One on July 29, which primarily quotes workers from Centre and Clearfield counties, landed on page B5. The stopgap story, part of the state worker debate, seems to be the primary focus.

Another story on July 28, is seemingly a re-write of July 17 story, leading with Rendell’s intentions to enact stopgap legislation with a small development in a timeframe for the signage of the bill (Coulombis, “Rendell considers stopgap budget during impasse” B1). It was these small developments, Coulombis said, that were challenging to make interesting over and over again. “It’s incredibly difficult to give perspective on something like this during a stalemate. You feel like it’s Groundhog Day everyday. You have to give a fresh twist to it. Sometimes nothing would happen, but the editors still wanted a daily report to sum it up,” she added. This time, the fresh angle was an incorporation of some of the political drama and Rendell’s animosity toward the Republican Senate: “[Rendell] was openly critical of the GOP senators yesterday, accusing them of ‘living in a fantasy land’ and saying that they were refusing to give an inch on any of their positions. ‘They have to absolutely have a reality check,’ Rendell said during a news conference in the Capitol. ‘There’s pain here. There’s pain for everybody. And they’ve got to start absorbing some of it. They’ve got to do things that they don’t like. I’ve done things that I

don't like.'" (Couloumbis, "Rendell considers stopgap budget during impasse" B1).

A final story on the stopgap legislation appears on Aug. 5, when the bill is expected to be signed. This time, the reporters quote political scientists who disagree on how the stopgap legislation will affect the larger budget debate. One believes the measure will take the pressure of making a permanent decision, while the other says the pressure is still on.

### **Tax increase**

The first story foreshadowing the PIT increase appears on May 30 on the front page of the local section, quoting House Majority Leader Todd Eachus saying he would look at an income tax hike as potential option. The story is really about the deficit hitting the \$3.2 billion mark, as the lede includes information about a growing revenue shortfall and that started the conversations about the potential income tax increase (Worden, "Projected Pa. budget gap grows to \$3.2 billion" A1).

"The income tax issue was huge. Most people outside of the capitol only care about how the budget is going to impact them," said Couloumbis. "This was the de facto pocketbook issue before the governor decided he was going to abandon it." This is reflected in the *Inquirer's* comprehensive coverage of the issue throughout June and July. In the June 11 issue of the *Inquirer*, there's a story about Rendell's announcement that a hypothetical tax increase would only be temporary. The lede really captures Rendell's hesitance to delve into specifics: "Gov. Rendell said yesterday that if he had to resort to pushing for a hike in the state's personal income tax, he would want the increase to end after three years. But he was cagey when pressed to give details, saying only that such an increase was 'a serious' proposal..." (Couloumbis, "Rendell says tax-hike plan temporary" B1).

While most of the state government news in the *Inquirer* usually goes on B1, the June 17 story about Rendell's formal proposition for an income tax increase lands on A1. The lede, written by Couloumbis and Worden is tri-fold, announcing Rendell's proposal, foreshadowing a stalemate, and foreshadowing it's eventual demise: "Gov. Rendell's proposal to increase the state income tax to cover a gaping deficit ran headlong into a Republican wall of opposition, proving quickly to be a new flash point in an already contentious budget process" (Couloumbis and Worden, "Rendell calls for state income tax hike" A1). This is what separates the *Inquirer* from the other three newspapers - strong ledes, even stronger writing, and the ability to convey the big picture of a budget issue in a 30-word lede.

Another story on June 23 expands upon the shaky support for the tax increase. The story quotes Democratic leadership in favor of the plan, describes Republican opposition and mentions uncertainty over whether rank-and-file Democrats would stand behind the governor.

July is filled with news analysis pieces, reflecting the lack of breaking news regarding the tax increase proposal. On July 6, Mario Cattabiani and Couloumbis publish a piece on how Rendell's math surrounding the income tax increase revenue doesn't quite add up - a fascinating and humorous story that wasn't duplicated by any other papers. "According to Rendellian math - grudgingly confirmed by his aides - the list of those who would not pay the added income taxes include Pennsylvanians in diapers and Pull-Ups, those behind bars, and those on the unemployment lines hoping to pay taxes again sometime soon. In all, roughly 6.6 million Pennsylvanians - or about half the state population - now pay income taxes, and they would all pay the higher rate. 'That's five of 10 - absolutely accurate,' Rendell press secretary Chuck Ardo said, doing his best to hold back a smile. It is, his critics say, typical Rendell - skew the numbers to make the point, the whole truth be damned" (Couloumbis and Cattabiani, "In budget rhetoric,

do Rendell's numbers add up?" B1). While the story is critical of Rendell, allowing Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati to call Rendell a snake oil salesman, it injects some humor into the income tax increase debate and puts some meaning behind the numbers - which often don't tell the whole story - that legislative leaders and the governor feed to the public.

Another interesting story appears on July 14. The article, written by Couloumbis, describes the governor's Youtube.com video campaign, which features a "somber-looking Rendell explaining why his proposal to raise the state's personal income tax is necessary" (Couloumbis, "Taking the budget battle to cyberspace" B1). It also discusses the Republican videos which use the imaginary "Joe the Taxpayer" to mock Rendell's insistence on an income tax increase.

On July 29, Cattabiani profiles Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi, poking good-natured fun at his monotone voice, general boringness and ability to barricade Rendell's income tax proposal. The writing in the story is so engaging and witty that a reader might forget that they're actually reading about something as dull as an income tax increase. "With a kind-looking face and thinning gray hair, he is an unlikely, albeit unflappable, front man for such a hard-line defense. Still, Pileggi has been able to hold a diverse caucus of moderates and conservatives from each corner of the state to the same antitax script," the article reads (Cattabiani, "'Cool Hand Dom' a key figure in budget drama" B1).

"We tried to profile people who were deeply involved in decisions to give readers a glimpse of the people who are making the news," Couloumbis said. "I think people find those kinds of stories more telling in certain respects than a story that says 'legislative leaders met with Gov. Rendell and didn't make any decisions'."

It is these fresh angles that define the *Inquirer's* coverage of the sometimes-dull personal

income tax increase debate. The *Inquirer* gives the need-to-know information about the crucial purse strings issue while rekindling the story, keeping it alive through fascinating, well-written enterprise pieces that make learning about the budget a treat for readers.

### **State-supported programs and services**

An initial May 6 story about special interest groups flocking to Harrisburg really stands out as particularly creative, turning an annual reality of the budget process into a fascinating phenomenon, especially in the lede: “It’s an annual event, not all that unlike those migrating swallows and monarchs. Every year about this time, they descend on the green-domed state Capitol, attracted by mid-spring pheromones given off by the process of allocating state-budget dollars” (Cattabiani, “Annual battle for the bucks” B8). It’s a short story, but without getting into the gripes and moans of specific interest groups, it captures the atmosphere of a mid-budget season capitol, which is inundated with hospitals, schools, counties, and advocates all lobbying for a chunk of state funds.

The *Inquirer* wrote a few but didn’t dwell on stories about services waiting for funds. The few that were written weren’t given good placement in the paper. The first story, authored by Couloumbis and Worden, appears on July 3 on page B3. The short story centers around elderly care services that are anxious about delayed medical assistance payments in a budget impasse. It focusing on a small, family-run nursing home in West Philadelphia (Couloumbis and Worden, “Budget fight may affect health-service providers” B3).

The next on July 11, titled, “Pennsylvania county officials alarmed by GOP budget plan,” is also short and to-the-point. Then, in August, instead of writing about each individual type of service provider, the *Inquirer* publishes a story on Aug. 2 about a selection of different human

service agencies pushing panic buttons - from nonprofits to counties to school districts. The story quotes youth service directors, advocacy groups, county commissioners, and day cares and gets the point across in one foul swoop. Another on foster families appears on Aug. 20, followed by another all-encompassing update on human services on Aug. 21.

As far as updates on specific programs and services, coverage in this area seems much weaker than the rest of the newspapers - for better or worse.

### **Rendell's role**

“Obviously, he is Philadelphia’s former mayor,” said Couloumbis. “Anything he said was important.” Thus, the *Inquirer*’s coverage of the state budget seems to pay the closest attention to the utterances of the City of Brotherly Love’s ex-leading man, giving him a larger role in the budget dispute where other newspapers would dismiss most of his press conferences as political garbage.

The *Inquirer* publicizes things Rendell says where other newspapers wouldn’t publish even a brief. For example, this June 3 story on Rendell’s plan to allow 30,000 seniors to enroll in the state’s prescription drug program, PACENET, is given B1 coverage and is littered with quotes from people praising the governor’s generosity during the state’s financial crisis.

In addition, the *Inquirer* covers Rendell’s proposed cuts to his own budget proposal. The governor’s proposal, which he presented in February, was essentially a suggestion/proposal for lawmakers. Rendell’s budget wasn’t a bill and held no real power on its own, although the House Democrats reflected some of his suggestions in their House Bill 1416. However, whenever the governor announced he was going to “cut” from his own budget proposal, the *Inquirer* covered it. The story ledes: “After weeks of internal debate, the Rendell administration yesterday

proposed to lop \$500 million in spending from 229 programs in order to help balance the recession-ravaged budget for the forthcoming fiscal year. The latest rounds of cuts, which Gov. Rendell described as “significant, severe, and painful,” come to the top of the administration’s push to raise income taxes by more than 16 percent to fill a \$3.2 billion budget hole” (Cattabiani, Worden and Salisbury, “Rendell proposes more Penna. budget cuts” B1). A story like this really gives more weight to Rendell’s suggestions, which were just that - suggestions. While other papers wrapped this into a larger budget update, the *Inquirer* gave it its own coverage, catering to their readers who probably have an even more special interest in anything the governor says.

Another example is a July 24 article Couloumbis wrote about Rendell claiming the budget would be done as early as next week (Couloumbis, “Rendell optimistic on budget” B1). The rest of the article that follows are quotes from other legislative leaders who are correct in their disagreement. While it’s obvious to the rest of the world that the budget wouldn’t be finished for a long time, the *Inquirer* still publishes this story about Rendell’s optimism, which other newspapers only briefly mention.

The governor’s rants and raves about the budget process are also given ample space, while this one is given slightly poorer placement on page B8. Whether this type of story is actually “news” is questionable, but it certainly gives Rendell a spot in the limelight: “For the second day in a row, Gov. Rendell chastised a legislative committee tasked with negotiating the state budget , saying it needed to stop trying to score political points and focus on ironing out differences. ‘This shouldn’t be theater. This shouldn’t be a circus. This shouldn’t be just trying to make points,’ a visibly frustrated Rendell told reporters yesterday at the Capitol. ‘We need to get down and work on the very difficult choices we have to make’” (Couloumbis, “Rendell voices budget frustrations” B8).

Rendell's almost daily press conferences made it easy to write these stories and cater to Philadelphia readers, said Couloumbis, who used to cover the state capitol of New Jersey. "No reporter likes to give props, but he is more accessible than any governor," she added. "Some reporters would joke like, 'Stop, we don't want to see you anymore.'"

## PART 6 CONCLUDING ANALYSIS

While choosing which newspaper covered the budget “best” is largely a matter of individual preference, I would argue that the *Patriot-News* provided the most comprehensive view of the issues surrounding the state capitol in the months leading up to a final agreement. To an outsider, it might seem like the *Patriot* beats the budget battle to a bloody pulp, exhausting the twists and turns of the political process over and over again in a somewhat redundant manner - blasting it across the front page day after day. However, considering the *Patriot*'s duty as the reigning newspaper of the state capitol, this media outlet catered excellently to the politically conscious population of state workers living in the Central Pennsylvania, with impeccable attention to details. Whether it was state worker payless paydays, gambling, library funding, human interest stories or larger issues like the tax increase proposal, every *Patriot* story, at one time or another, gives voices to every entity that had something to say about the impasse, giving readers different angles from which to make their own decisions. The *Patriot* also reigns when it comes to analysis pieces that focus on the below-the-surface causes of the budget mess forcing readers to ponder unanswerable questions like: “Is there a leadership crisis in Harrisburg?” “Are payless paydays illegal?” “Is Fumo’s absence a factor?” Questions like these get the readers thinking. Additionally, between May and August, the *Patriot* publishes pieces that are a step ahead of everyone else, foreshadowing and predicting the next move in the legislature: “Will this finally be the year Rendell gets a budget on time?” “Will this tax-hike plan blow the deadline?” As seen by the analysis, the *Patriot* delved deeply specifics that weren’t crucial to the majority Pennsylvanians, like the exact distribution dates and amounts of state worker paychecks. But when it comes to catering to a specific demographic, the *Patriot* does it best.

In addition, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*'s “less is more” approach takes the monotony of a

stalemate and turns it into a fascinating, fast-paced issue interrupted with the occasional feature profile or analysis piece, making readers actually want to learn about the budget. Of the four Pennsylvania media outlets presented in this paper, the *Inquirer* published the fewest stories on the budget battle, but the information they did publish was just enough to keep readers in-the-know without giving them a budget overdose. For example, tightly written budget updates let readers step back and get a view of the big picture by combining good background information with recent movements in the process, showing how all the issues - from state worker paychecks to county sales taxes to gambling - are all, somehow, interconnected. Also the *Inquirer's* close following of issues like the sales tax increase for Philadelphia and Mayor Nutter's trips Harrisburg gave the *Inquirer's* coverage a very area specific, Philadelphia touch, where other papers' stories could be written anywhere in Pennsylvania and have the same effect. The *Inquirer's* focus didn't lie in how the budget would impact the state. The questions answered were truly, "How will this affect Philadelphia?" or "What will Philadelphia get out of the final agreement?"

Between the two Pittsburgh papers, the "better" budget coverage is really a matter of preference. While the *Tribune-Review* included more human impact stories, the *Post-Gazette* provided more sophisticated insight into the political process with blow-by-blow updates of growing partisan tension and political machination. A reader of the *Post-Gazette's* budget updates would probably need to be more knowledgeable about the political process and jargon, whereas a *Tribune-Review* reader could understand the basics of the budget without knowing much about state government. Both papers used Pittsburgh-office reporters to show local impact.

### Use of social media to report the budget

According to a May 2009 survey by *American Journalism Review*, there are about 355 full-time newspaper reporters at the nation's state capitols - a 32 percent decrease from six years ago. "Many people running newspapers say they still want to cover state government. But as the news industry contracts, they feel forced to abdicate that role due to economic pressures" (Dorroh, Gsell and Skowronski 23). In Pennsylvania's state capitol newsroom, the number of reporters has dwindled over 10 years from 35 to 19 (Krebs F03). This weakening of the newspaper industry, combined with a shrinking news hole, has many still-standing, one-to-two-man capitol bureaus harnessing the power of technology and digital media to better communicate with readers. Such was the case, this year, with the 2009 budget standoff.

"If the governor was talking about the income tax increase at noon, in the old days, there was nothing newspapers could do with it besides wait until the next morning," said Tom Barnes, of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. "Now we can zap it out on the internet, and I like that."

In the Pennsylvania capitol, the *Allentown Morning Call*'s John Micek posts lengthy daily updates to his blog, Capitol Ideas. Similarly, the *Patriot-News*, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and *Philadelphia Inquirer*'s statehouse reporters all post to their own blogs.

"The blog was a real pain during the day, but in the end it was helpful," said Angela Coulombis of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, who posts to the blog Commonwealth Confidential. "It crystallizes your thoughts and your thinking. You go to the press conference and write-up what was said on the blog, and you have six paragraphs of your story already written. It helps you think through how you can tell the story differently in the next day's paper."

Other reporters find different ways to reach a technologically savvy audience. Tracie Mauriello of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* used Twitter to post nitty gritty details and boiled-down

news of the budget debate - minutiae that would be axed by any editor. Twitter, created in 2006, is a free social networking site that allows users to post 140-character messages, known as “tweets,” to groups of designated “followers.” “The tweets can be sent from and received by any kind of device - desktop, laptop, BlackBerry, cellphone. It's like instant messaging or text messaging, but one-to-many, instead of one-to-one. Twitter has grown with astounding speed, attracting 17 million visitors in April, an 83 percent gain over the previous month, according to the research firm comScore” (Farhi 30).

Mauriello used the social media site to give realtime updates of Rendell press conferences and meetings that wouldn't necessarily make the paper.

“People on Twitter want those little nuances. They're following the budget very closely. They want to know every twist and turn, so I'm feeding them different information than what a regular reader wants,” she said. This was specifically helpful in covering the budget conference committee, which, for the first time, brought budget negotiations to a very public stage. “I did a lot of Tweeting from there. People wanted the play-by-play of what was going on,” she added.

Mauriello said Twitter was also an outlet for disgruntled state workers to communicate to reporters. “There's a small core of state workers really following Twitter posts and interacting a lot. We could see what their frustration was in a way that we don't really get to hear from our readers,” she said. “I also used Twitter to help other reporters find sources.”

While people contend that the advent of new technology is killing traditional newspapers, in recent years, social media sites like Twitter and Facebook have become staples of political reporting and journalism as a whole. One hundred and ten members of the U.S. Congress - roughly one in five - have Twitter sites (Doyle “What's your lawmaker up to?"). According to *American Journalism Review*, some well-known news-media names have Twitter followings that

are almost as large as the circulation of their newspapers or viewer ship of their TV show (Farhi, 27).

“Twitter can be a serious aid in reporting. It can be a living, breathing tip sheet for facts, news sources and story ideas. It can provide instantaneous access to hard-to-reach newspapers, given that there’s no PR person standing between a reporter and a tweet to a government official or corporate executive. It can also be a blunt instrument for crowd sourcing ... Imagine the torrent of data that would have been available to the *Times* had Twitter been around on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001” (Farhi 30).

More often than not, social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are outlets for politicians and advocates to communicate with reporters, whether they intend to or not. In one documented budget-related case, House Democratic Caucus Secretary Rep. Mark Cohen, using his Facebook and Twitter pages, leaked the abandonment of the personal income tax increase before it had been formally announced. The Harrisburg-based news site and wire service, Capitolwire.com, says, “Monday night at 9:25 p.m., Cohen wrote on his Facebook page, either during or after a House Democratic leadership meeting: ‘PA House Democrats are feeling a sense of futility in state budget negotiations, as Republican negotiators constantly repeat that they will not support any tax increase whatsoever to erase a \$3.3 billion budget deficit caused by the international recession’s lowering revenues and increasing demands for public programs. Passage of the Re[p]ublican budget, with further spending cuts, is now on the table.’ ...Also on his Twitter micro logging page, Cohen wrote at about 2:30 p.m. on Monday afternoon: ‘PA House Dem. leaders weigh possibility of Repub. no-tax increase state budget with \$3.3 billion in spending cuts. Public anger predicted’” (Decoursey).

“There’s only so much you can do through Twitter,” said Couloumbis. “I don’t think

Twitter really does anything for the reading public. I think it does stuff for the people who are part of the political loop, but for real people, it doesn't tell you much.

As part of that political loop, legislative correspondents often documented how the budget battle played out on the Internet. An article in the *Allentown Morning Call* on June 15 cited budget arguments between two legislative aides - avid Twitterer Steve Miskin, the chief spokesman for House Minority Leader Sam Smith, R-Jefferson, and Bill Thomas, a press aid to House Majority Leader Todd Eachus, D-Luzerne. According to the article, Miskin, in addition to sparring with Democrats, is "mostly trying to reach journalists with his posts - a tactic he claims is effective because he's since been contacted by curious political reporters" (Micek, A1). The story continues to discuss Eachus spokesman and former newspaper reporter Brett Marcy, who urges online followers to watch video feed of a meeting of the state House Appropriations Committee. "Marcy said he sees Twitter as an extension of the Democrats' media operation. And he recognizes that he's targeting a specialized audience" (Micek, A1). As many politicians and press secretaries began using the micro-blogging service to talk about the budget, journalists picked up on it, looking at Twitter as a both a disseminator of information and a reporting tool.

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## Appendix A

### Academic Vita of Lauren Marie Boyer

#### Personal Information

Email ID: lmb5122@psu.edu

#### Education

Major: Journalism

Minor: Communication Arts and Sciences

#### Thesis Information

Thesis Title: Budgeting the Budget: An Analysis of Four Daily Newspapers' Coverage of the 2009/2010 Pennsylvania Budget Impasse

Thesis Supervisor: John J. Curley, Distinguished Professional in Residence

#### Work Experience

Dates: May 2009-August 2009

Title: Reporting Intern

Description: Covered state politics from the capitol newsroom for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Patriot-News*, *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, *Allentown Morning Call* and *Capitolwire.com*.

Institution: Pennsylvania Legislative Correspondents' Association, Harrisburg, PA

Supervisor: Charles Thompson

Dates: May 2008-August 2008

Title: City Desk Intern

Description: Wrote more than 70 articles in 15 weeks as a general assignment reporter for a 96,000 circulation (140,000 on Sunday) daily metropolitan newspaper.

Institution: *The Patriot-News*, Harrisburg, PA

Supervisor: Cate Barron

Dates: April 2008-December 2009

Title: Freelance Reporter

Description: Served as a general assignment correspondent for a 25,000 circulation daily newspaper covering borough council meetings and Penn State events.

Institution: *The Centre Daily Times*, State College, PA

Supervisor: Teresa Bonner

Dates: April 2008-December 2009

Title: Writing Tutor

Description: Peer-edited English essays for an alternative admission program for Penn State students with past academic difficulties due to socioeconomic disadvantages

Institution: Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

Supervisor: Bao Ming Li

Dates: May 2007-December 2009

Title: Freelance Reporter

Description: Covered Penn State University and State College events for a 96,000 circulation (140,000 on Sunday) daily metropolitan newspaper.

Institution: *The Patriot-News*, Harrisburg, PA

Supervisor: Cate Barron

Dates: July 2006-April 2008

Title: Senior Reporter

Description: Produced five articles per week related to university administration, campus policy, police and courts for a 20,000 circulation college newspaper.

Institution: *The Daily Collegian*, University Park, PA

Supervisor: John Harvey

Dates: May 2007-August 2007

Title: Public Relations Intern

Description: Coordinated media events, wrote press releases and created brochures and marketing material for in-house hospital clients.

Institution: Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, Hershey, PA

Supervisor: Matt Solovey

#### Grants Received:

Pennsylvania Women's Press Association Scholarship, 2009

S.W. Calkins Memorial Award for journalism at Penn State, 2009

David and Mary Lee Jones Scholarship for journalism at Penn State, 2008

Donald E. Allen Memorial Scholarship for journalism at Penn State, 2007

Members First Federal Credit Union/Robert P. Regan Scholarship, 2007-2009

Postmark Federal Credit Union Essay Contest Scholarship, 2006 & 2008

#### Awards

Katey Lehman Writing Awards First Place in Journalism, 2009

Pennsylvania Newspaper Association Keystone: 2<sup>nd</sup> place ongoing coverage, 2007

Dean's list

#### Professional Membership

Phi Beta Kappa honor society