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Conservative Critic Questions Resolution Praising PHEAA

The state House passed a resolution last week praising the state's student loan agency, but a critic questioned whether the action wasn't an effort to deflect attention from an examination of the agency's wealth.

Rep. James Roebuck, D-Philadelphia, a member of the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency's governing board, introduced the resolution commending the agency for promoting access to post-secondary student aid. The resolution also designates January as Financial Aid Awareness Month.

The resolution passed unanimously. It did not mention the study commissioned in June by the House Appropriations Committee to determine how much potential student aid money the agency may be sitting on. The study is expected to be completed any day now.

Matthew Brouillette, president of the conservative Harrisburg-based Commonwealth Foundation, remarked the fact that Roebuck had to introduce "a self-congratulatory resolution suggests that PHEAA must be really scared about the House investigations." Gabig seeks investigation into telephone campaign Rep. Will Gabig, R-Carlisle, has asked the state attorney general to look into automated calls placed to residents in his district in a campaign to generate opposition to some property tax relief plans under consideration.

According to Gabig, callers are told an impending vote could raise state taxes by \$3 billion and transfer the money to places like Philadelphia. The announcer then asks residents to push 1 if they want to tell their representative to vote 'no.'

Respondents who did so found themselves ringing into Gabig's Capitol office.

"In my mind, it constitutes harassment by communication," Gabig said, noting the warnings are not true and they are incessant, at least for his staff. Gabig estimated he had received hundreds of calls through Monday and yesterday, virtually shutting down other services in his office.

He's not the only one complaining.

Kevin Nulter of the House telecommunications staff said that 80 to 90 members from both parties received the automated calls allegedly generated by Premier Global Services.

A call to the company's Atlanta headquarters was not returned yesterday.

Noteworthy: The deadline for applying for the state's property tax and rent rebate program for claim year 2004 is approaching. Eligible low-income seniors and disabled Pennsylvanians have until Dec. 31 to apply for up to a \$500 rebate. Application forms are available at www.revenue.state.pa.us or by calling (800) 362-2050.