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Inside the Capitol

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The new chair of the House Tourism and Recreational Development Committee said he will push for a House vote before the summer recess on requiring public schools to start classes after Labor Day.

Rep. Tom Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, said after a public hearing on the subject yesterday that he supports the proposal championed by Rep. Robert Godshall, R-Montgomery, and he believes most of his committee also backs it.

The bill is a priority of state tourism interests, who believe starting school in August unnecessarily curtails the prime summer travel season and costs them hundreds of millions in revenue and the state millions in taxes.

"I clearly believe that this does have legs," Tangretti said after yesterday's hearing. "I believe there is support in our committee and I believe I can convince our leadership that it's something that at the very least we ought to have the opportunity to debate."

Closed captioning offered on PCN The House of Representatives has begun offering closed captioning on video broadcasts of its sessions on PCN and elsewhere.

"It is time for this chamber, the 'People's House,' to take this significant step toward giving all Pennsylvanians access to the business we conduct here on their behalf," House Speaker Dennis O'Brien said.

He said it will help teach students with hearing loss about state government.

The Senate has had preliminary discussions about offering the service, said Senate Republican spokesman Erik Arneson. But he added Senate officials believe it would be better if PCN offered the closed-captioning for consistency, so that non-legislative programs also had closed-captioning.

PCN officials could not be reached yesterday afternoon for comment.

Noteworthy: Mayors in 19 cities will hold events today to urge the General Assembly to support an annual funding source for the state's 73 public transit systems.

Gov. Ed Rendell has proposed taxing oil corporation profits to raise $760 million a year to fund mass transit. Senate Republicans question whether the tax would raise enough revenue in the first year, but more disconcerting to them is a fear the tax will be passed along to consumers through higher gasoline prices.

Compiled by our Capitol Bureau Brett Lieberman of our Washington Bureau contributed.

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