

Senator Lloyd Smucker
Opening Statement – Public Hearing On Senate Bill 1080
May 25, 2011

As observers of the legislative process realize, the Intergovernmental Operations Committee is a start-up venture. Our primary charge is to explore the possibilities of cost-savings and efficiency to be derived from the consolidation of state agencies and programs.

The first question this always provokes is: will state departments be merged? The answer is no one seems sure when recommendations along those lines will come from the Corbett Administration. But we are assured they are digging through the pile of state boards and commissions to separate the necessary from the nice-to-have and from the nobody-knows-when-last-they-met.

In the meantime, there is nothing preventing us from looking for savings in our own backyard. The public is not giving any branch of government immunity from restructuring.

Senator Greenleaf has offered an intriguing plan for merging six independent legislative research and service agencies. On its face, this plan makes policy and financial sense.

This is not to suggest these entities have outlived their purpose. Nor that their performance or professionalism have been in eclipse. Rather, we are in a time when cuts are being made up and down the state budget. It may no longer be affordable or defensible to have separate entities doing missions that potentially overlap, or carrying out functions that can be better parked elsewhere in state government.

The purpose of today's hearing is to find out how this can work, how much it can save, and how it might trigger greater output from a streamlined operation. We appreciate that Senators Yaw and Robbins will give us special insight into the functions and value of two of these agencies. We also appreciate the participation of the executive directors, who face uncertainty now and uncomfortable decisions ahead, should this become law.

Years ago, a syndicated columnist by the name of Sydney Harris anticipated our current challenge when he wrote: "Our dilemma is that we hate change and love it at the same time; what we really want is for things to remain the same, but get better."

Extended economic and fiscal troubles make change imperative and inevitable. A budget deficit does not get better without dramatic steps that disrupt the status quo. So our overriding responsibility is to bring about change, in ways that are sensible, practical, and cost-effective.