

News for Immediate Release

Nov. 8, 2018

Auditor General DePasquale Slams Susquehanna River Basin Commission's \$1,001 Booze Bill, Extravagant Food Expenses, Staff Perks

Susquehanna & Delaware River Commission Audits highlight need for new agreements; accountability

HARRISBURG – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today released separate performance audits of the Susquehanna River and Delaware River basin commissions that emphasize the need for better accountability and transparency.

“These commissions play an important role in ensuring quality drinking water is available in the five states that depend on these two rivers,” DePasquale said. “I expect both panels to operate with the same degree of crystal-clear transparency that we hope to see in our tap water.”

The commissions are federal-interstate compacts charged with preserving water supply and quality, managing drought and flood conditions, and preserving water-related recreational opportunities. In addition to receiving significant taxpayer support, the fees charged by the commissions ultimately impact the rates that many Pennsylvanians pay for municipal water and other services.

In particular, DePasquale pointed to an audit finding that the Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) spent over \$1,000 on alcohol for meetings.

“When it comes to publicly-funded entities, there’s really only one pot of money,” he said. “It’s absurd to think that any public entity would consider buying alcohol to be an appropriate expenditure.”

DePasquale also panned the SRBC for “extravagant” food expenses, noting of the SRBC’s total \$16,259 food and gratuities expenses related to meetings, the commission could not provide itemized receipts for \$14,072 in food expenses, which included appetizers, filet mignon, salmon, and Maryland crab cakes, along with side dishes and desserts.

“It really begs the question: what’s going through your head when you decide to use public funds for such ridiculous meals? Did anyone even consider brown-bagging their lunch, as so many hardworking Pennsylvanians do every day?”

DePasquale also noted auditors reviewing SRBC spending found \$14,048 in questionable costs associated with rewards and perks for employees, including:

- Monetary and gift card rewards of \$8,031;
- A staff holiday party expense of \$3,074;
- A staff picnic costing \$1,585;
- A \$100 gift card purchase for a wedding gift;
- Bereavement donations totaling \$800; and
- Flower purchases totaling \$458 for Administrative Professionals Day.

“This goes back to my one-pot argument when it comes to spending by agencies that receive public funds,” DePasquale said. “These panels are not private businesses; they are governmental bodies that must be accountable for every last penny that they spend.”

The audit of the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) showed it was unable to provide itemized receipts for \$472 in payments to restaurants.

The audits also recommend that both commissions overhaul their longstanding and out-of-date agreements with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The SRBC's Memorandum of Understanding with DEP is nearly 20 years old; the DRBC's Administrative Agreement with DEP is more than 40 years old.

"Not only do the commissions need wholly updated agreements, they also need additional written operational guidance in coordinating with DEP to preserve our water supply and quality," he said.

Both audits show that most signatory parties to the commissions, including Pennsylvania, are not making agreed-upon financial contributions, with the federal government making no payments in nearly a decade. There was one exception: the state of Delaware has met its financial obligations to the DRBC.

In the 2016-17 fiscal year, Pennsylvania's support for the SRBC totaled \$473,000, an underpayment of \$318,250. Pennsylvania's funding for the DRBC totaled \$434,000, which is \$459,000 less than the agreed-to amount.

The SRBC's membership includes Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York, and the federal government. The DRBC's members include Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and the federal government.

The audits, authorized by the 2017 state budget (Act 44 of 2017), covered July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017. The audit reports for both commissions are available online at www.PaAuditor.gov:

- [Susquehanna River Basin Commission audit report.](#)
- [Delaware River Basin Commission audit report.](#)

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