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19 North Main Street, Carbondale, PA 18407

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Next TV

The Broadband Cable Association of Pennsylvania has a new president. The organization's board named industry veteran *Todd Eachus* to the position, effective immediately. He's only the fourth president in the association's 64-year history, and succeeds *Daniel Tunnell*, who retired June 4. Tunnell has led the group since 2001. Eachus has decades of experience representing the cable industry before local, state and federal policymakers, serving as director of government affairs for several cable operators. He also has experience as the chairman of the Cable Television Association of Maryland, Delaware and the District of Columbia. – **Cablefax**

The bipartisanship didn't even last a day.

[Pennsylvania lawmakers reached a state budget deal](#) with the governor Friday — and by Saturday, Democrats and Republicans were already disagreeing over one small but politically charged item. The fight, of course, concerned [one of the most heated topics these days in Harrisburg and elsewhere: elections](#). It's not in the legislative text, but Republicans who control the General Assembly say the roughly \$40 billion budget includes extra money for the state Auditor General's Office, with the understanding that it will fund a new Bureau of Election Audits. Democrats say there's no such agreement, even informally, and that they oppose a new audit bureau.

While they await the signature of Gov. Tom Wolf, a Democrat, lawmakers are fighting over the basic facts of a bipartisan agreement they just struck. "I do not trust that the increased funding ... will be used on legitimate audits in the public interest, but rather on the continuation of partisan witch hunts that damage our political process and besmirch the integrity of the men and women of our county elections' offices," State Sen. Sharif Street (D., Philadelphia) wrote Monday in a letter to Wolf calling on him to veto the added money.

Wolf can decrease specific items in the budget, removing what Republicans say is informally earmarked for creating an audit bureau. It seemed unlikely Monday that the spat would sink the larger deal. But the fight comes as [some Republicans continue to call for a partisan audit of](#)

[Disney Plus and Verizon Trial 'Open Caching' Arrangement, Insist It's Not Paid Prioritization](#)

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[the 2020 presidential election](#) akin to [the widely derided review taking place in Arizona](#), and just days after the Republican-controlled legislature passed [a sweeping election overhaul bill](#) that Democrats decried as suppressive and Wolf has promised to veto.

The latest spat is about funding for the state's independently elected fiscal watchdog, [Timothy DeFoor, a Republican](#). His office was originally slated to receive \$35.7 million for the fiscal year starting July 1, but that got hiked to \$41.4 million. The additional \$5.76 million, Republicans say, includes \$3.1 million intended to fund the creation of the audit bureau. But Democrats say there was never any such agreement, and DeFoor's office said Monday that the money is for general operations. "There is no formation of a Bureau of Election Audits within the auditor general," DeFoor spokesperson April Hucheson said. "If the governor and the legislature were to decide that's a function they would like to see from the auditor general, and it's funded, we would implement it."

A spokesperson for House Speaker Bryan Cutler (R., Lancaster), the Republican leader who has championed the audit bureau, said DeFoor's office didn't yet know its part of the budget deal. Cutler [introduced separate legislation in May to create the bureau](#). He [touted the new funding in a statement](#) Friday as "rebuilding trust in elections." That trust has been eroded largely by [former President Donald Trump's false claims of a stolen election](#), which [Republican leaders in the state have amplified](#). GOP leaders in Harrisburg have at times shied away from the kind of partisan review being pushed by their most pro-Trump members, including [a trio of lawmakers who traveled to Arizona](#) earlier this month. But [a key Senate Republican overseeing election issues has backed the idea](#).

In an interview Sunday, Cutler called the budget deal a first step toward establishing the audit bureau, and that future legislation could codify it, including the Republican election bill. "The funding will be available, and I look forward to working with [Democrats] to create and work on the Bureau of Election Audits," Cutler said. Cutler said it would review future elections, not last year's, noting that voting machine data from November was already cleared so machines could be used in this year's primary. "The time to audit the past election" was last November, Cutler said. "My focus has always been forward, and ensuring that the elections cannot be questioned."

But the budget legislation doesn't explicitly provide for such a bureau, and Democrats quickly pushed back on the idea over the weekend. "There is no such office or authorizing language in the budget," said Lyndsay Kensinger, a Wolf spokesperson, adding that the administration would review the legislation before the governor signs it. "The Office of Auditor General is neither authorized by law nor qualified in practice to engage in 'election audits,'" said Bill Patton, a spokesperson for House Democrats. Sen. Jay Costa (D., Allegheny), the top Senate Democrat, said Monday that "it was not our understanding that an increase in the auditor general's line item was to be used for an election auditing department."

Senate Republicans on Monday agreed with Cutler that creating the bureau was part of the budget deal. "While the details of how the auditor general will use the funds to establish this bureau are to be determined, the affirmative vote in favor of the budget by the members of the General Assembly reflects acknowledgment and agreement to the funds," said

Erica Clayton Wright, a spokesperson for Senate Republicans. Beyond auditing election results, Cutler would like the bureau to review all elements of how elections are run, including equipment, policies, and procedures, and how money is spent. But the Pennsylvania Department of State, which oversees elections and is part of the Wolf administration, said such a bureau is unnecessary.

State law already requires counties to audit a sample of their ballots before certifying the results, and the state has been testing “risk-limiting audits,” a gold-standard statistical audit method for confirming that ballots match the reported results. “We fail to see how giving a single state official the authority to take custody of ballots and voting systems for the purposes of conducting an ‘independent’ audit is superior to the transparent and bipartisan process” that already exists, spokesperson Ellen Lyon said. “We also fail to understand why some politicians continue to impugn the integrity of county election officials — Democratic and Republican — after they admirably conducted a free and fair election amid historic election reforms and a global pandemic.” –

Philadelphia Inquirer

It's a shame there has to be a law that underscores the obvious, but a proposal wending its way through the state Legislature would codify what should have already been common practice — to let residents know in a timely fashion if there has been a data breach of their personal information.

The Senate Communications and Technology Committee voted unanimously recently to strengthen the Pennsylvania Breach of Personal Information Act. It would require state agencies, counties, school districts and municipalities to notify those affected by a data breach within seven days of the discovery. The state attorney general's office, or the county district attorney in the case of local issues, must be notified within three business days.

An amendment to the bill also requires that third-party contractors working for the state provide notification of data breaches, and that their contracts include acknowledgement of the requirement. The move comes on the heels of the controversy surrounding a contractor for the state Department of Health, Atlanta-based Insight Global, which was hired last July to conduct contact tracing of those who tested positive for the coronavirus. In February, it was reported that the company had stored residents' personal information on unprotected Google spreadsheets.

Health Department officials said security protocols were disregarded by some Insight employees, resulting in the leak of information such as a person's name, age, gender, sexual orientation and COVID-19 diagnosis. More than 70,000 people were affected by the data breach. Weeks passed before the Health Department or Insight made any move to inform residents of the data breach. A class-action lawsuit alleges that Insight employees knew of the unsecured spreadsheets as early as November and Health Department officials found out in February. Tightening the law that protects residents' personal information clearly is needed. – ***Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* editorial**



**Broadband
Cable Association
of Pennsylvania**

127 State Street, Harrisburg, PA 17101
717-214-2000 (f) 717-214-2020
bcapa.com

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