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Looking at the winners, losers in Pennsylvania’s \$50.1B deal



Gov. Josh Shapiro signs the fiscal year 2025-26 budget surrounded by General Assembly members on Nov. 12 at the Capitol in Harrisburg. The state budget had been due June 30, and Pennsylvania the final state in the country to approve a funding deal. PROVIDED BY PACAST

Shaprio signs budget

Matthew Rink and Bethany Rodgers USA TODAY NETWORK – PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania lawmakers reached a deal on a state budget on Wednesday, Nov. 12, to end a four-month stalemate that held up critical funding to school districts, local governments and other agencies. • After reaching a deal with Gov. Josh Shapiro, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives voted 156-47 on the \$50.1 billion spending plan. The GOP-controlled Pennsylvania Senate followed suit, approving the budget bill 40-9. • Neither Democrats nor Republicans came out as clear victors in the nearly 20-week budget battle, which extended well past the June 30 state-mandated deadline. Democrats secured reforms to cyber charter school funding to ease the burden those schools place on public districts, while Republicans forced the state’s exit from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, an 11-state compact aimed at reducing carbon emissions from energy producers.

Shapiro, a Democrat, talked about the challenges of reaching an agreement. “Pennsylvania is one of just a handful of states with a divided legislature, and it takes a majority of votes in the Republican-led Senate and the Democratic-led House to get a budget to my desk,” Shapiro said. “It requires all of us to compromise, have tough conversations and ultimately find common ground. I worked hard all summer and fall to get leaders in the General Assembly to come together and hash out their differences.”

“As (Lieutenant Gov. Austin Davis)

said, we stayed at the table, refusing to accept inaction and rejecting short-sighted attempts to cut health care services and slash critical initiatives, because my top priority was delivering a budget that makes a meaningful impact on the good people of Pennsylvania,” Shapiro continued. “And today, because we held the line — alongside my colleagues here in the House and Senate — and stayed at the table, and demanded a serious budget that addresses our needs ... today I am about to sign into law a budget that delivers for Pennsylvanians and builds on the progress we’ve made so far.”

Here are some of the winners and some of the losers of the new budget:

Winners in the PA state budget

Public schools: The passage of any budget will relieve commonwealth school districts that have been strained by billions of dollars in delayed state payments over the four-month impasse. Advocates for public education also had other reasons to celebrate the

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Something to Think About
Debbie Kulick
Guest columnist

Temple leads an interfaith prayer ceremony

As times change and many of our former resorts become new again in different ways, it is nice to see just what may be transpiring with them. One that has gone through a variety of transformations before finding its new purpose is the former Fernwood Resort.

Today it is the home of the Jinyin Temple. It is a Buddhist temple dedicated to promoting world peace and spiritual development by embodying and communicating the teachings of the Buddha.

Just last month the Temple shared with local government officials and clergy their fall celebration.

On Oct. 5, 2025, amidst the golden glow of autumn, the sacred grounds of Jinyin Temple came alive with banners, lotus lanterns, and the resonant sounds of bells, drums, and solemn Buddhist chanting. With reverence and joy, the temple opened its doors for the 2025 Mid-Autumn Festival Celebration and World Peace Prayer Ceremony, a grand interfaith gathering.

The celebration was hosted by The World League of Sino Esoteric Buddhism Associations together with Jinyin Temple, with support from the Sino Esoteric Buddhism Association (Canada), Arsha Vidya Gurukulam Yoga Retreat Center, Bushkill Community Church, Chestnut Retreat Center, East Stroudsburg Presbyterian Church, Temple Hased, and the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Poconos. It brought together the mid-autumn tradition of reunion with a shared spirit of compassion and peace. Nearly 200 dignitaries, faith leaders, and community members joined in a solemn assembly that crossed national and religious boundaries to pray for peace.

His Holiness the Vajra Master Jinke Xuanlei sent a letter of blessing, delivered to the assembly by his

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Epstein survivors seek accountability

Erin Mansfield
USA TODAY

Lisa Phillips felt sick to her stomach. She stood on the east side of the U.S. Capitol on a clear fall day as one woman after another described how Jeffrey Epstein sexually abused them. They were groomed as teenagers and young women under the guise that they would just be providing massages to an older man. They said they were scared of saying anything for years. Phillips looked down at her phone,

then across the way at her friends, then back to her phone. She took deep breaths. She adjusted her shirt, moved her shoulders back, and stood up tall. Finally, she stepped to the podium. “I stand here today for every woman who has been silenced, exploited and dismissed,” Phillips said. “We are not asking for pity. We are here demanding accountability, and I’m demanding justice.” Phillips set aside the speech she’d prepared. Instead, she would take back power for herself, the women who spoke

before her, and the women who would come after her. They had spent years finding their voices, and this was the first time so many had come together in person. “I would like to announce here today us Epstein survivors have been discussing creating our own list,” she said. “We know the names. Many of us were abused by them. Now, together as survivors, we will confidentially compile the names we all know.”

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Lisa Phillips speaks during a news conference to discuss a bill directing the release of the remaining files related to Jeffrey Epstein. JONATHAN ERNST/REUTERS FILE

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