

Preface

The activities of state governments have always been important to the functioning of the American federal system. However, recent partisan gridlock in Washington, D.C., has placed states at the forefront of policy making as the national government maintains the status quo. This reader has been designed to show the activities of one state, Pennsylvania, on important contemporary issues. The best articles from recent issues of *Commonwealth: A Journal of Pennsylvania Politics and Policy* have been updated and provided with additional content to further explore their topics. Education, health care, the effects of an aging population, and tax policy are among the important issues that are explored in this book. The intent is to help Pennsylvania citizens understand not just the content of policies but also the processes and politics that go into the passage of laws and their implementation.

Overview of the Journal

Commonwealth is a peer-reviewed, online-only journal that publishes original research on political and policy topics of importance to Pennsylvania and contiguous states. It provides political scientists and experts in related disciplines such as law, economics, history, and public policy with a periodical to advance scholarship in their fields. The journal is also intended to inform political actors and governmental policy makers about the political, structural, and historical contexts for decision making and options for improving public policy outcomes on a wide variety of topics. Issues cover general-interest pieces, applied research, practitioners' or experts' analysis, research notes, essays, and book reviews.

Commonwealth is a joint publication of the Pennsylvania Political Science Association and Temple University Press with the assistance of the

Pennsylvania Policy Forum and Temple University's Institute for Public Affairs.

Organization of the Book

Each chapter is headlined by an article from an earlier edition of *Commonwealth*. A number of the articles have been updated to reflect policy changes through mid-2017. These are followed by additional content designed to help citizens and students more fully explore the topics raised in the articles. After each article is a series of discussion questions prepared to promote critical thinking about the policy issues raised by the authors. The questions are followed by a “*Commonwealth* Forum” providing pro-con perspectives on an issue that is related to the topic of the article. Finally, several sources of additional information are provided to continue the exploration of issues raised in the forums. Since Chapter 3 is itself a *Commonwealth* Forum, there is no separate pro-con section. The additional content was researched and written by the editors of this volume, not the authors of the articles.