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**Pennsylvania News**

## Specter secures federal funds for bridge work

Wednesday, February 18, 2004

By **ALYSSA YOUNG**  
The Express-Times

Under pressure from U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter, top officials Tuesday pledged to work together to repair sinkholes that plague property along a 1.5-mile stretch of the Bushkill Creek in Stockertown, Tatamy and Palmer Township.

Standing near the ruins of the Bushkill Street bridge that crumbled into a sinkhole in October 2000 and is surrounded by fresh craters, Specter, R-Pa., put officials on the spot until someone made a commitment to the project.

"We don't have the president here, or I'd ask him," Specter said.

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The senator visited the Stockertown-Tatamy bridge about 11 a.m. Tuesday after a brief appearance at the nearby northbound Route 33 bridge, which was damaged by a sinkhole last month.



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Specter and Federal Highway Administrator Mary Peters were there to announce that the federal government on Tuesday morning authorized the use of emergency funds to pay 90 percent of the cost to replace the Route 33 bridge -- the maximum amount federal law allows. PennDOT expects the total replacement cost to be about \$6 million.

Behind the podium where they stood flanked by local legislators and other officials, only the bridge's piers remain. Workers used a large machine to chip away pieces of its northern abutment.

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Secretary Allen D. Biehler said Nyleve Bridge Corp. of Emmaus may be able to finish building a new bridge a month or two sooner than originally expected, thanks to Specter's quick action to secure federal funding.

PennDOT had estimated construction would take until the end of the summer.

Biehler and Lt. Col. Thomas Chapman, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Philadelphia district, said they will hammer out an agreement for the Army Corps to fix existing sinkholes in the area if the state accepts liability for any future outbreaks.

No agency has been willing to take responsibility by signing a cooperative agreement with the Army Corps. The technical hurdle has blocked an areawide repair.

When Specter asked Northampton County Executive Glenn Reibman if the county would sign on, Reibman said the county does not have enough money to foot the bill to fix future sinkholes.

Specter then turned to Biehler, seeking state support.

Chapman said the terms of the Army Corps' standard agreement conflict with provisions in Pennsylvania law and do not allow the state to partner with the agency for projects like this.

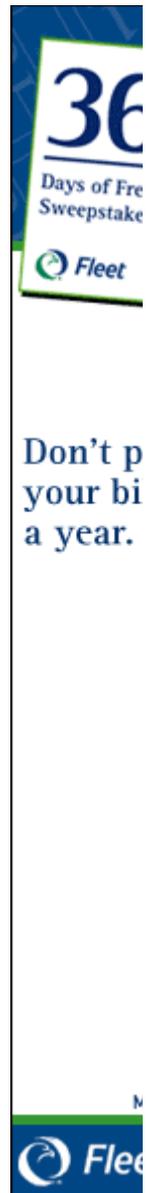
Also, PennDOT's jurisdiction is limited. It is responsible for work only on its roads or in its rights of way.

But Biehler and Chapman said Tuesday they will try to amend the agreement to overcome those issues, as the Army Corps has done in Delaware.

Chapman said he hopes state agencies and the U.S. Senate Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee, of which Specter is a senior member, will support a large-scale sinkhole study by the Army Corps.

The Army Corps already is conducting a feasibility study to develop alternatives for restoring the bed of the Bushkill Creek between Hercules Cement Co. in Stockertown and the borough of Tatamy, project manager Brian Mulvenna has said. Northampton County agreed to support that study.

Specter said he will help the Army Corps get the authorization it needs from the federal government to do repair work beyond the banks of the



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Bushkill Creek. Permission must come in the form of a Water Resources Act, Chapman said.

Linda Ludicello, a member of a neighborhood association called The Brookwood Group that monitors the sinkholes, urged officials to find their trigger and stop them from swallowing up any more taxpayer money.

"We've gotten everybody together," Ludicello said after the discussion at the Bushkill Street bridge. "We'll take it from there."

U.S. Rep. Pat Toomey, Specter's challenger in the state GOP primary for the U.S. Senate, also attended Tuesday's announcement on Route 33.

Toomey said he could not visit the Bushkill Street bridge in Stockertown on Tuesday but plans to see it in the future. Toomey said he intends to try to make replacing this bridge a higher priority for PennDOT.

PennDOT has said it expects to receive bids for the work at the end of this year and start construction in 2005.

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