**Opinion**

**Make State College a ‘Safe Zone’ for rights**

by Nancy Kranich

Over the summer, Congress debated the merits of renewing certain provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act, scheduled to sunset at the end of this year. Although Congress seems inclined to retain the wartime powers that violate some of our most revered freedoms, it may add some limited safeguards that require the FBI to demonstrate that records subpoenaed from libraries and bookstores are at least relevant to a terrorism investigation. But even if Congress corrects some of the excesses of the PATRIOT Act, the government can still search your home without telling you, label you a terrorist if you belong to a politically active group, monitor your e-mails and the sites you visit on the Internet, take away your property without a hearing, and spy on you, even though you are an innocent American exercising your rights under the U.S. Constitution.

As Americans fight to promote democracy abroad, what can local citizens do to protect their precious freedoms at home? Here in Centre County, we must call on local officials to pass resolutions that endorse efforts to make our communities both safe and free. In an unprecedented expression of local democracy, seven states and nearly 400 communities have already passed resolutions upholding the basic freedoms of their 62 million residents. Nine of these communities are in Pennsylvania, including Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Reading, Erie and York.

What’s more, organizations as diverse as Bob Barr’s Patriots to Restore Checks and Balances and the ACLU have joined with groups such as the National League of Cities, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Realtors, the National Association of Manufacturers, the Financial Services Roundtable, the Bill of Rights Defense Committee and the American Library Association to call for major reforms to this federal law.

Why do we need to take local action regarding the USA PATRIOT Act and related measures? Local resolutions carry more weight with federal legislators than phone calls and letters. During congressional debate to amend the PATRIOT Act, legislators from districts where communities passed local resolutions opposed extension of the sunset provisions at a rate of four to one.

**Take Action: Defend the Bill of Rights**

- Sign a petition to keep the Centre Region Safe and Free at: http://www.aclupsu.com
- Urge your township supervisors or borough council members to pass a resolution declaring your community a Safe Zone for the Bill of Rights.
- Get involved. Join the Centre Region Bill of Rights Defense Committee. Write to BORDC at: crbordc@adelphia.net
- Call or write Senators Specter and Santorum and Rep. Peterson. Tell them you are concerned that the USA PATRIOT Act and related measures keep us neither safe nor free.

Proposed development will harm Academy Street

by Paul Painter

There is increasing concern in many local communities about the pace and scope of new housing developments. This is not just a local matter, but also one with national implications. Recently, in the color magazine section of The New York Times (Oct. 16, 2005), it was noted that the population density of New Jersey now exceeds that of India and China and that statewide restrictions on new developments may soon be instituted. Centre County in general and Harris Township in particular do not have a problem of that magnitude, but we do have communities with historic value whose character and quality are being threatened by new developments. One such area is Academy Street, in the heart of the historic district of Boalsburg.

Presently, there are 23 houses on (South) Academy Street, which slopes strongly up a ridge to a private road. (There are three additional houses above this private road.) This is a small yet vibrant neighborhood, one that is presently safe for children, including the Boy Scouts, who use the Lion’s Club building located on this street. A proposed development at the top of Academy Street, with more than 30 new houses, will more than double the amount of traffic using the road. For a number of reasons, the street is not built or designed to safely handle this amount of traffic. Freedman’s Street is a historically road of narrow dimensions; at the intersection with Main Street it is only 19 feet 3 inches wide. Even ordinary vehicles (let alone trucks or utility vehicles) have difficulty entering and leaving the road at the same time as a result of this inadequate road width. Although not required to widen this road to 24 feet (the nationally recognized minimum safe width), the township should certainly avoid exacerbating a safety problem by increasing the traffic flow on a road that is not designed to handle it.

There is the additional serious problem that Academy Street will be connected to the even denser development of Springfield Commons. This will open up an attractive short cut to the residents who live near this connection, increasing two traffic hazards. Pedestrians already have a difficult time with cars on Academy Street, because the only places to “get out of the way” are the setback areas on each side of the road. With additional traffic, a road not designed for anything but a small number of residents will become alarmingly dangerous. Increasing the traffic flow on Academy Street will also adversely affect the heart of historic Boalsburg Village.

In addition to traffic concerns, Academy Street has a history of problems during major storms and extended periods of rain that coincide with snowmelt. For example, after the remnants of Hurricane Ivan passed through, Academy Street literally looked...