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## **GOP senator backs funding for project at airport**

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*Reading Eagle: Jeremy Drey*

**This Reading Regional Airport site in Bern Township is slated to become a research park.**

A Republican state senator from Montgomery County said Friday that he would do all he could to work with the Democratic senator from Reading to make sure Berks County gets the \$2 million it needs for a research park in Bern Township.

However, no such commitment was made by the House Republicans during a two-hour meeting at Reading Regional Airport.

State lawmakers representing Berks were invited to the meeting by the Berks County Industrial Development Authority and the county commissioners to garner support for the funding request.

Sen. John Rafferty said he and Sen. Michael A. O'Pake, who did not attend the meeting, voted for a \$600 million appropriation for the Redevelopment Capital Project Fund, so they will have some say in who gets the money.

Gov. Ed Rendell has control of half the fund. The Democratic and Republican caucuses in the Senate and the House will decide which projects receive the rest.

The industrial development authority needs \$2.6 million to buy 155 acres from the airport authority. The airport property was recently deemed unsuitable for aviation-related purposes by the Federal Aviation Administration.

Current plans are to build a business park suitable for research on food products, one of the county's largest industries. It is expected to create about 2,000 high-paying jobs.

"The money is there," Rafferty said. "I feel you should use it in an advantageous manner. I voted for RCAP partially because of the need for the economic development derived from it."

Sen. Mike Folmer, a Lebanon County Republican, said he voted against the redevelopment fund, so he is unlikely to have any say in how it is spent.

Sen. David G. Argall, a Schuylkill County Republican who did not attend the meeting, has indicated his support.

But Republican Reps. Samuel E. Rohrer of Robeson Township, Jim Cox of Spring Township and Jerry P. Knowles of Schuylkill County said they're in the same position as Folmer because they voted against the fund.

Rohrer said the Republican House delegation would have to get together and discuss whether they would be willing to at least provide written support of the project.

Democratic Reps. Dante Santoni Jr. of Reading and David R. Kessler of Oley Township said they support the funding.

Rep. Gary Day, a Lehigh County Republican, also attended the meeting, but did not say where he stood.

All the economic development agencies in the county and the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry have put the research park at the top of the local development project list.