

10

August 12-22, 2005

THE SNOWBALL KEEPS ROLLING

After spending three days away from PACleanSweep, I had no idea what kind of shape it might be in when I returned. As it turned out, I had nothing to worry about at all. The snowball I rolled down the hill three weeks earlier was still rolling on - gathering mass and weight on its way down. It took me nearly a full day to catch up on the avalanche of emails that came in, the messages posted to the Yahoo! discussion group and the news accounts I missed during my absence.

I did take some extra time to send a personal note of thanks to anyone who wrote to express compassion for my father's welfare. There were quite a few of those, which was very touching. Some wrote with concerns of conspiracy theories by powerful folks using my family as pawns to "get to" me. "I believe this is an intimidation tactic to stop potential candidates and activists who defy their power. They're playing dirty. Anyone who stands up against them is up for scrutiny. This is too coincidental," read one of them.

I responded to those people by saying there were already enough actual conspiracies going on in Harrisburg without us fabricating any new ones. Those letters did serve, however, as a reminder that I was going up against the most powerful people in Pennsylvania. Occasionally that thought gave me pause. Not much - just a little.

I also jotted a general memo of explanation for my absence to the Yahoo! group, stating that everyone was OK and there was nothing to worry about. I also noted that the experience was harrowing, my family would deal with it as best as we could and I'd talk about the details of what happened in due time as the situation warranted.

Being unexpectedly dragged away from PACleanSweep for three days only reinforced that my plan of action for getting other people involved in the decision-making process was sound. Having completely caught up with what was going on, I sat back down at the keyboard and tapped out the message I intended to write before. I sent it out to the list of movers and

shakers I'd previously prepared.

Friends:

I'm writing because Operation Clean Sweep has become much bigger than one man can handle (at least if he wants to remain sane) and we are at a critical juncture. With over 40 County Coordinators and 2100 bona fide subscribers anxious to vote everyone out, one man's mistake could ruin the whole thing. We've come so far so fast that my original vision now needs the guiding hand of a few more level-headed and principled people.

I'm contacting you because either I know you personally, you've demonstrated zeal for OCS with some concrete actions or I've been impressed by your postings on the discussion group. Some of you I have never met, but you have communicated enough for me to have determined a certain level of commitment and personal principles. This is important, as opening up control of OCS to more people is a great risk. I've been putting it off as long as possible, but without risk there is no reward.

We need to think about raising money to operate. We need to form a political action committee. (PAC). This is not all that difficult, but we need to designate a chairman and a treasurer. Chairmanship can be an honorary or figurehead position of sorts. Treasurer is the more important position in any PAC, as strict bookkeeping practices must be followed and there are also reporting deadlines.

Handling money in this sense is extremely important, as this can be a subject of some VERY public scrutiny. It would be my first choice to find a CPA to serve as treasurer, but for now I would be satisfied with one of you who is willing to familiarize yourself with campaign finance law. We can always transfer treasurer duties to someone else later.

For various reasons which some of you are already aware, I personally want to have absolutely nothing to do with collecting or dispersing funds for OCS. I can assist, however, in keeping records and with understanding campaign finance law.

While not required by law, I firmly believe a Board of Directors of sorts is in order to make intelligent decisions and guide OCS to victory. I am asking for your help by serving on this BoD. Being we are scattered across the state, physical meetings may be difficult, although I believe an initial face-to-face for the BoD is imperative.

Although this is short notice, I would like all of this to happen before the end of August. Extreme situations require extreme action, and the growth of OCS has been nothing but extreme. I am open to suggestions on all of these issues and invite your concise input.

I will state the following for the record:

I have been involved in many organizations formed for various admirable and noble reasons. It has been my experience that due to varying personal styles, many of these organizations have lost much potency by getting bogged down in the minutiae of scheduling meetings, writing bylaws, debating policy and discussion of unimportant organizational details. I have gotten many headaches over the years from sitting around boardrooms "discussing" such things.

Under no circumstance will I allow that to happen with OCS and this

is why I have been so adamant about not getting others involved up until now. The OCS plan is simple and concise. There is no need for debate about our objectives, as I believe all of you 'get it'. If not, I'd be happy to clear any details up right now for you so we do not need to revisit them again later. My cell phone # is [number redacted]. If any of you have questions or reservations about what we're doing, either call me now to get a better understanding or do not volunteer.

Again, I've contacted you specifically because you have already shown me some reason to trust you. I believe that like me, you are a "doer" and not merely a "discussion/debate specialist." With the May primary fast approaching, we do not have time for much discussion, although some is required. Actions, not words, as they say. If words are needed, they must be very direct and to the point so as not to interfere with action.

Am I getting my point across? I hope so. I realize for some of you this would be a course into uncharted territory, but do not worry, there is enough of us to figure it all out. I would ask each of you to keep all of this in strict confidentiality until we hold our initial BoD meeting. Do not post anything on any discussion group regarding this.

Please respond via email with the following info if you are willing to "do" further by helping form the initial OCS BoD and PAC:

Name:
 Address:
 Phone:
 Primary Email (not the one you use for CC):
 Political Party Affiliation:

Please also include any thoughts you have about the PAC or BoD in CONCISE form.

Russ Diamond, founder
 Operation Clean Sweep

Twenty-one people were included on the list of recipients of this letter. Although I knew a committee of that size would be far too many to be efficient, I was confident the number would be pared down by the time we actually got around to doing anything. Now I just had to wait and see who responded in a positive manner. Meanwhile, I needed to put together a speech worthy of the upcoming PA Press Club luncheon.

While I worked toward the fruition of those two objectives, there was no dearth of activity on the anti pay-raise front. The Yahoo! group continued to crackle with irate voices reeling from the antics of the Political Class. In addition to our planned Kipona booth, another group that popped up after the pay raise - rockthecapital.org, a joint effort between *Patriot-News* columnist Pat Carroll and activist Eric Epstein - was planning a rally on the

Capitol steps for September 26th to protest the pay raise.

The rally date coincided with the legislature's first day back on the job since leaving town after their middle of the night payjacking vote. WHP-AM's Bob Durgin planned to deliver his "Petition of Rejection" and broadcast live from the protest. PACleanSweep would have a booth at the rally along with most of the other organizations that were part of our budding reform coalition.

The scandal surrounding the extravagant PHEAA retreat at Nemaocolin Woodlands was coming into full bloom. More details about specific individual legislative board members were slowly coming to light with each generating a mini-bloom of outrage on its own. It also didn't help that the wealthy Hardy family of Fayette County owned the resort and were regular contributors of scads of money to the Political Class. On top of this, Nemaocolin was in the running for one of the lucrative resort slots monopolies created by the state with a stroke of a pen in 2004.

A pattern was beginning to develop. I'm not sure if anyone else noticed it at the time, but it was there nonetheless. One reporter somewhere in the state would put out a piece that briefly gave some facts about some situation the legislature was involved in. Because of the newfound connectivity provided to citizens by the internet, that piece would create a spark of outrage across the Commonwealth. Just when you thought the spark was about to flicker out, new related details would come out regarding this legislator or that legislator, which would in turn spawn more outrage and some local media focus on whichever legislators were involved. These local reports got posted to the internet by someone in the area who was already ticked off about the pay raise. Once posted, anyone in Pennsylvania who cared to pay attention would take their turn swiping at it.

It occurred to me that because both the pay raise outrage and the PHEAA retreat outrage developed slowly enough and produced a pattern that was decidedly noticeable, perhaps if enough of these stories were strung together in consecutive order, we just might be able to stretch this whole business out and keep people interested long enough to make it to the primary election in May 2006. There was certainly no guarantee it would happen, but if you had a clear understanding of how the pattern of outrage developed, you might even be able to insert new information into the mix on slow news days to keep it all afloat.

Pennsylvania's next bloom of outrage came from a report of an upcoming trip to Seattle scheduled for 100 or so legislators and staffers to attend a five-day affair sponsored by the National Conference of State Legislatures, which was partially underwritten by corporate interests. In addition to helping to stretch the outrage field by adding a new junket to the mix, this one was widely reported *before* it actually occurred, stretching

the field even further.

This fact put legislators on the defensive beforehand, requiring an attempt to paint the affair in a positive light and to justify their attendance on the taxpayer dime. Most claimed it was an opportunity to gain knowledge and passed the event off as a trade show for lawmakers.

I've been to trade shows in my own industry. If a particular conference is a dud, I don't attend the next year. In my opinion, the members of the General Assembly clearly were not in the habit of bringing home tidbits of expertise and tricks of the trade from this annual event to improve the lives of Pennsylvanians. If anything, they were going to these conferences only to attend seminars with titles such as Midnight Voting 101, An Introduction to Fleecing Taxpayers and Legalized Gaming Monopolies and You (a.k.a. A Piece of the Action).

Most of the major media outlets actually sent reporters to Seattle to cover the event, as they realized that readers and listeners would now buy a newspaper or tune in to hear the gory details. In other years this event would have only warranted a brief mention, but in the post-pay raise era it could be Big News.

I recall getting a late-night call from a reporter who was hiding in the shadows in Seattle to cover our esteemed elected officials in action. The seminar fare at the event included continuing education classes that would help legislators who also happened to be lawyers maintain their law licenses. This type of session had been added to the conference "to draw more legislators to the annual event," according to an *Associated Press* report. The reporter spotted a state Representative sign into one of these 60-90 minute sessions and duck out just a few minutes later, never to return. Apparently just signing in sufficed to qualify someone as having attended. Although I'm sure the lawmaker skipped the meat of the program, he could now go home and state with confidence that he was actually in the room.

The same AP report also made particular mention of the facts that not a single Pennsylvania delegate to the event attended a seminar titled "'Winning the battle without burning the battlefield,' which focused on how to combat negative press and political campaigns," and that the "conference also features a slew of social events on the side, including evenings of live jazz, wine tasting, boat rides, fireworks and trips to the Space Needle."

Debra Erdley of the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* gave us a glimpse of what conference attendees from other states thought about their Pennsylvania counterparts: "I can't believe Pennsylvania," said one Florida lawmaker. Another from Idaho said, "Your people have some problems. I think there ought to be a revolt." Erdley also reported that Bucks County state Representative Dave Steil shouted, "Geez, give us a break!" in