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September 26 - October 14, 2005

ROCKING THE CAPITOL AND PLANING THE BOARD

The day of the big rally was finally upon us. Newspapers, bloggers and talk radio all over the state hyped it in advance. TV stations from Pittsburgh and Altoona planned to come to grab some footage. In addition to WHP-AM's Bob Durgin - who was scheduled to broadcast live from the top of the steps at 3:00 p.m. - Gary Sutton of WSBA-AM was already broadcasting from the steps when I arrived shortly after 9:00 a.m.

Carl Silverman arrived extra early to be certain the PACleanSweep booth was front and center midway up the steps on a landing, with our brand new banner hung proudly. Our name would surely be seen in nearly every TV shot of the event. He was instrumental in making the Kipona festival successful earlier in the month and would do the same for several events we participated in afterward. Other board members arrived throughout the day and although there was a little more tension than the first time we met in Philipsburg, we all got along.

Other organizations were setting up their booths as well. Gene Stilp was at the top of the steps inflating the 25-foot pig. At the bottom of the steps were a few port-a-potties. Someone decided to sell the naming rights to these and they had signs on them such as "Chip's Drips," "Mellow's Yellow" and "Cappy's Crapper" in honor of our esteemed elected officials. I recall Silverman mentioning something to me about this beforehand, but I wrote it off as juvenile.

After doing a stint on Sutton's show, I got a call from Laura Maillet of WLBR-AM back home in Lebanon County. She asked if I would do a live report. I did, but since it was early (the festivities were only slated to officially begin at 1:00 p.m.) there was little to report. I hyped what was going on, hoping a few listeners would get in their cars and travel the 25 miles to Harrisburg to join us. A block down State Street, KDKA-AM from Pittsburgh came in and set up camp at the Commonwealth Foundation to broadcast live throughout the day. PCN would be televising the event

statewide that evening.

There were only two downers for this rally. First, we didn't have the organizational power of the unions or the AARP to bus people in to bolster our crowd, so we were all in the dark regarding how many people would actually show up. Second, there were scattered showers forecast throughout the day, so our expectations were somewhat dampened - pardon the pun.

By the time 1:00 p.m. rolled around, however, enough people had come in and enough groups had set up booths to give the day the feel of a good old-fashioned fair. I'd already given a slew of interviews before the event started. Clearly, the rally would be Big News in the state for a day or two.

I brought photographer and friend Bruce Shannon along, expecting the day to provide some good opportunities. We'd be able to post any pictures online to show Pennsylvanians we weren't just a website and a silly notion to throw the bums out, but an actual movement. People are more apt to join a movement if they know others are involved. PACleanSweep had plenty of numbers to brag about, but pictures of actual people do a much better job of telling a story - seeing truly is believing.

I sent Shannon a couple blocks over to the federal courthouse, where the Dover School District/intelligent design case was being heard. I knew there would be national reporters over there, and it was my greatest hope to get the national media to start covering the story unfolding across Pennsylvania. We had a piece on the pay raise and PACleanSweep broadcast nationally on NPR and the occasional *Associated Press* story would pop up on newspaper websites elsewhere in the nation, but I wanted to see FoxNews, CNN, ABC, CBS and NBC camped out in front of our Capitol on a daily basis.

Unfortunately, what happens in Harrisburg does not sell advertising in Los Angeles, unless of course the latest blond-haired blue-eyed teenage girl to go missing hails from Harrisburg. Or the latest school shooting. Or the latest celebrity to fall from grace. Or in our case, the latest installment of the God v. Darwin affair.

It's a darned shame. So many people are fixated by the national news broadcasts, when national events really have little effect on our day-to-day lives at all. The real action is in state government - or better yet - your county and local government. That's the stuff that really impacts our lives, but it's not sexy enough to sell ads elsewhere.

I rarely even pay much attention at all to national news. I don't care

nearly as much about the crooks in D.C. as I do about the crooks right in my own back yard - and there's plenty of them. The states are way more important in my view. In fact, if a couple big states wised up and just told the feds to go take a flying leap it would suit me just fine. I don't mean a shooting war or anything like that, but a few states with their heads screwed on straight could really torque down on Washington.

Although Shannon went down to the courthouse and found a lot of really bored national reporters covering the intelligent design case, they couldn't leave their assignments to come over and cover some real news at the Capitol. From that day forward I vowed to make getting Pennsylvania's story on the national news part and parcel of the PACleanSweep mission. The people in Pennsylvania who were missing out were the ones who were attached at the hip to FoxNews, CNN and MSNBC. I wanted to wake them from their slumber.

I'm not sure how many people came to the rally. I think some people attend college to get degrees in how to count such crowds, but I'm not one of them. What I remember most about how many folks were there is from what I saw while giving my speech. The Capitol steps were packed and people were spilling out across Third Street. How many people is that? It made no difference to me.

I wasn't so concerned about how many showed up as I was about who was there. These were not labor union shills or AARP seniors bussed in to make it look impressive for the cameras. They weren't the flower-child types you might expect at a political protest. These were real people who took a day off work without pay to air their grievances. These were seniors who were mad as hell and drove a few hours to get here. These were regular working parents who brought their children. I was duly impressed.

People inside the Capitol were peering out windows. On a balcony over the entrance, someone appeared. The crowd oinked and booed. This crowd was lively. They had signs, too: "YOU WORK 4 US" "PIG - Politically Incested Government" "DOWN WITH LEECHES" "YOU'RE MILKING US DRY" "PA LAWMAKERS SUCK" All the signs were homemade - no fancy pre-printed models for this crowd. It was grassroots politics at its best. How many, I thought, wanted to come but couldn't get the day off work?

The giant pink pig was right next to the speaker's podium. As the various reform activists began to gather to deliver their messages, a guy in a tie came out of the Capitol to survey the crowd. When he turned back around to leave, I saw it was Mike Long, chief of staff to Bob Jubelirer and brother-in-law of Chip Brightbill. When he walked by he greeted me. It was almost like a brush with Darth Vader in "The Empire Strikes Back," even though I was the one who had taken to dressing in all black back then. Long

represented everything that was wrong in the building behind us. I'm not quite sure what the crowd would have done if they'd known it was him.

Gene Stilp spoke first and served as a cheerleader to fire up the crowd. Kathleen Daugherty of Democracy Rising PA followed Gene. Tim Potts took his turn at the mike. He introduced our rally cry - a great roadmap for the coming months: "Repeal! Repay! Reform! Or Resign!" During Tim's speech, two protesters hefted an effigy in the air and tarred and feathered it. It was a fitting display of citizen outrage, but I felt bad because it took attention away from Tim's words, which deserved as much attention as anyone else's.

Barry Kauffman of Common Cause served as the MC for the speakers, and he gave me one of the nicest introductions I've ever had. I walked up to the lectern, took a good hard look at the crowd and pulled my speech out of my jacket pocket. I wanted to light this crowd up a notch or two.

I, do solemnly swear, that I will support obey and defend, the Constitution of the United States, and the Constitution of this Commonwealth, and that I will discharge the duties of my office with fidelity.

I am citizen of this Commonwealth and my office is the Chair of PACleanSweep. I felt it was important to take this oath today, because I'm here to defend my Constitution. Your Constitution.

The Constitution is the fundamental law of the Commonwealth. Every member of the General Assembly has taken the same oath to defend the Constitution that I just took a moment ago.

But an integral part of defending something is enumerating any offenses against that thing and naming its offenders.

Legislative leaders changed the meaning of Act 44 - the pay raise bill - by altering it at the last minute, a violation of Article III, Section 1 of the Constitution.

They inserted the now infamous "unvouchered expenses," a violation of Article II, Section 8.

Robert C. Jubelirer, John Michael Perzel, David J. Brightbill, Robert J. Mellow, Samuel H. Smith and H. William DeWeese: you have committed offenses against the Constitution and against the people. Your services are no longer needed.

Members of the General Assembly who voted 'yes' on the unconstitutional pay raise are guilty of violating the Constitution.

Members who voted 'no' are guilty of not immediately enumerating the offense or naming the offenders.

I only wish I had time to name every last one of them today.

Ladies and gentleman of the General Assembly: you have ALL committed an offense against the Constitution and against the people. Your services are no longer needed.

The Governor and the Chief Justice have conspired with the

legislature on this pay raise, a violation of the SPIRIT of the Constitution.

Edward Rendell and Ralph Cappy: Your services are no longer needed.

But before we take any action, let's look beyond the pathetic excuses they've offered for the pay raise and examine what they've actually accomplished here in their ivory tower.

Have they successfully addressed property taxes? The health care crisis? Our failing schools? Our crumbling infrastructure? The exodus of educated young people? Our pitiful business climate and our economy?

Some people think we're "throwing out the baby with the bath water" by going after every single one of them next year. But take a look around, folks. What baby, I ask? In Pennsylvania, there is no baby!

So what HAVE they done? They've lined their own pockets. They've granted themselves benefits far greater than we could ever hope for. They've squirreled away 135 million of YOUR dollars for their self-aggrandizement.

In short - they fiddled while Pennsylvania burned.

Article I, Section 2 states that only the people can alter, reform or abolish this government. But how do we do that?

The petition drive Bob Durgin has orchestrated is an outstanding effort, but chances are the lawmakers will ignore it.

Gene Stilp has rightfully filed a lawsuit which should be a slam dunk, but Ralph Cappy's corrupt court will probably turn him away.

Others would choose to alter the Constitution, but what good is that - if elected officials fail to read, much less follow the one we already have?

I'd prefer impeachment, but there is no way to impeach them all in one fell swoop. We're left with only one legal option: the people's impeachment - elections. But elections require candidates.

PACleanSweep is the ONLY organization working to raise candidates to challenge every last one of these offenders in 2006.

Don't rely on the political parties - they're part and parcel of how we got stuck with THIS bunch. And we're not here today as Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, Greens or members of the Constitution or Reform parties.

We come here as Pennsylvanians united against a common enemy, because this is not a matter of right or left - it's a matter of right or wrong. It's us against them. The governed v. the government. The taxpayers v. the tax spenders.

I invite you to join PACleanSweep because we're looking for founding fathers for a NEW Pennsylvania.

I was full of fire and brimstone. It was like a revival meeting. They were yelling and screaming in response to my declarations. Each response that came fired me up even further. It was an incredible experience. I did goof and cite the wrong section of the Constitution when I talked about unvouchered expenses. I had it right in the text, but I just said the wrong thing. No one noticed. Even I didn't notice until I saw the replay on PCN.