

Rep. Tangretti Remarks

Delmont Lions Club

May 17, 1993

(Usual Greetings and Acknowledgements)

It's truly a pleasure to be here tonight with this distinguished and dedicated group of men who make up the Delmont Lions club.

Your organization, the Lions, is well named. The Lions -- like their namesake of the wild -- are active, not passive; they're daring, not timid; they are leaders, not followers; and they make themselves effectively heard when the occasion requires.

The Lions are part of the great American tradition of volunteerism, and our communities count among their blessings the work the Lions perform for the needy, for the visually handicapped, and for our young people.

As one who holds an office in government, I often encounter proposals of all kinds to involve the government in more and more areas of individual and community life.

That's one of the reasons our state budget is approaching \$15 billion a year and rising, by the way.

It seems there's no end to the inventive ways people can find to spend other people's money in a good cause.

And when I'm presented with another one of these proposals, I tend to think how fortunate we are to have people and organizations within our communities who are willing to do for themselves what government might otherwise be called on to do.

May that always be the case. And may we never take for granted the contributions of organizations like the Lions not only for the good they do but for the tax dollars they save through private, volunteer effort.

I would like to talk to you briefly about three topics I believe would be of interest to you. I'm referring, first, to the new program that has just begun for children's health insurance coverage.

Second, because many of you have an association with business, I want to mention the worker's compensation issue.

And then I'd like to talk about some developments involving the visually handicapped -- the leading charitable interest of the Lions.

As parents and as Lions, you are vitally interested in the welfare of children, as we all are.

Last year in the legislature has been characterized as "The Year of the Child" because of the health care initiative that was adopted to provide a measure of health insurance to children from low and moderate income families.

They are not people on the dole. These are families with one or more adult members who work for a living but who lack medical insurance as a benefit of employment and can't afford their own individual policies.

That program is now underway, I'm happy to report.

And for those of you who know someone who might be eligible for it, there's a toll-free number, 1-800-KIDS-105, where they can enroll their children in the program.

The number will connect callers with Blue Cross of Western Pennsylvania which is administering the program in our region of the state.

Services provided by the program include doctor's visits, preventive care, immunizations, up to 90 days hospitalization, dental, vision and hearing care, and prescriptions with a \$5 co-payment.

The program will provide free or subsidized health care insurance for children from families with incomes slightly above \$30,000, although the actual cost of coverage will, naturally, be determined by the family size and income.

The entire enterprise is underwritten by a two-cent-a-pack tax on cigarettes sold in the state which brings in more than \$20 million a year .

The revenues also fund a new state effort to recruit and train family physicians to practice in medically underserved rural and urban areas of the Commonwealth.

I'm not exaggerating when I tell you this program is viewed as a godsend by needy Pennsylvanians. You can imagine the anguish a parent suffers when a child needs medical attention and there's no way to pay for it.

There are times when you and I can get discouraged about legislative developments, usually when we read the Greensburg paper's editorials or glance at the Randy Bish cartoons.

But this is one case where we can be proud of an action by state government and where Pennsylvania's become a model for other states.

I'm happy to have been a co-sponsor of the legislation which was introduced by Allen Kukovich, and I believe it is one of the most worthy things our legislature has ever done.

I hope you'll help spread the word about the children's health program. I hope you'll take that message to the community, because it is news that will save lives and help children achieve their potential as healthy, productive human beings.

I wish I could say we've had as much success with resolving the worker's compensation issue. I wish I could say that, but I can't. Not yet, anyway.

It's not because we haven't made a good faith effort; four times in the past year or so the House has passed worker's compensation reform.

Four times the Senate has insisted on a different version.

Now, the issue is once again in the hands of a House-Senate Conference Committee to iron out the differences between the two chambers' bills.

I believe the House version, the so-called "Lloyd plan," named for my colleague from Somerset County, is good for business.

It would guarantee savings for business and pass on to them the savings that would result from reduced costs to insurers.

For instance, it would cut premiums by five percent for a company that begins or continues a workplace safety program.

Cost reductions would be achieved by capping doctors' fees at a percentage of the Medicare allowance for necessary treatments...by allowing businesses in a similar line of work to pool their insurance in group plans...by cracking down on fraudulent claims and practices... by encouraging greater competition among insurance companies...and by creating a Business Advocate office to represent employers in worker's compensation issues.

Unfortunately, you have a tangled knot of interests involved in the worker's compensation logjam, each one protecting its own turf, and the process drags on at a snail's pace.

Meanwhile businesses continue to pay the inflated 24 percent premium increase that was imposed last December and that the House bill would roll back.

In other words, I am as frustrated as the business community, and many of you are, at the intransigence the various interests have demonstrated on this issue.

After the fourth go round of casting my vote to solve the problem, I'm cautiously optimistic the current conference committee can come up with a compromise that will bring the issue to a fair conclusion.

Finally, as a newly appointed member of the House Appropriations Committee, I have the satisfaction of working even more closely and effectively with the Lions on state support for the Beacon Lodge and its programs for the visually handicapped.

Along with my support for the Beacon Lodge appropriation, I've also introduced legislation to address the financial needs of blind persons.

The bill would (here describe your blind pension legislation)...

I think it's very appropriate that the Lion's leading charitable effort deals with vision.

Your organization not only aids the sight of those with physical impairments...you also open the eyes of youngsters to the life that awaits them as responsible adults.

And you give vision and leadership to our

The Bible tells us, "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Many people in Pennsylvania...individuals and communities...owe a debt of thanks to the Lions for championing the importance of vision in all its meanings.

Thank you.