

COMMUNITY SERVICE UPDATE

by

HOUSE MAJORITY WHIP

BOB O'DONNELL

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I believe the first step in my job as your Representative is to listen. Listen to what people's problems are. Listen to the heartache or the joy behind each person's words. Listen to what is needed and what isn't working.

And then, working together, help people find their way toward a solution.

Sometimes this means helping someone find a job, sponsoring a class trip to Harrisburg or cutting through the red tape in a city, state or federal agency.

Sometimes it means speaking in front of a neighborhood group, seeking extra funding for a senior center or joining hands in the battle against drugs.

No matter what the request, the result is the same: by working together, we accomplish a lot. By joining forces, we strengthen our neighborhoods.

Let me share with you a few stories about our recent accomplishments.



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COMMUNITY SERVICE

Each year, working closely with my staff—Billie Carter at Greene Street; Barbara Williams, Ruth Wenger and Evelyn Taylor at my office in East Falls—we help hundreds of people solve a variety of problems. The problems are as different as the people who walk into the office and each is handled with the same amount of concern and commitment. Last fall, one particularly compelling story began to unfold.

The need for help. . .

In March of 1987, Reverend Phil Bryant of Stillman Street underwent surgery to remove a brain tumor. In addition to the trauma of his brain surgery, Rev. Bryant suffered from diabetes, high blood pressure, an enlarged heart, a heart murmur and seizures.

It was clear to him, as it was to his family, that he may never be able to return to the teaching job he loved. Accordingly, Rev. Bryant applied to the Social Security Administration for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). SSI is available to those who are unable to work due to a medical disability which has lasted or will last for 12 consecutive months.

Although Rev. Bryant's seizures were so severe they prevented him from going out in public, **his request for SSI was denied.** A request for reconsideration was similarly denied.

Discovering the process. . .

Frustrated and still weakened from his surgery, Rev. Bryant then called my office and asked if there was anything we could do to help him. It had now been six months since his surgery. In addition to his physical pain, he now had financial worries to contend with.

In tracking the process by which SSI requests are handled, we discovered that Rev. Bryant's request was denied because his doctor had not issued a formal statement declaring him to be "totally and permanently disabled."

Those four words, it turned out, had prevented him from receiving the help he so obviously needed.

Solving the problem. . .

Now that we knew what the root of the problem was, I spent one afternoon helping the Reverend fill out the necessary paperwork to start the process over again. This time, we worked with Rev. Bryant's doctors and hospital staff. We also contacted Congressman Bill Gray's office and asked that they keep on top of the federally-run Social Security Administration. In co-



ordinating these efforts, we made sure that all of the necessary paperwork found its way through the system without further delay. Earlier this summer, Rev. Bryant was finally approved for SSI.

Not long ago, I spoke with the Reverend again. Although he is still weak, he is no longer frustrated. In a world full of worries, he is now able to scratch one off his list.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Although many of the requests I receive are from individuals like Rev. Bryant, I am also frequently asked to sponsor community affairs.

The Whittier School. . .

This spring, I was particularly pleased to once again host the Whittier School's Fourth Grade class trip to Harrisburg.

Under the supervision of guidance counselor Annie Hyman and fourth grade teacher, Frances Williams, the 36 students were wonderfully prepared for their visit to the state capitol. I was especially touched by their enthusiasm and interest during our question and answer period.

Germantown Boys and Girls Club. . .

It has also been my pleasure to host several outings for the Germantown Boys and Girls Club this summer.

Program Director Bonnie Bell did a wonderful job organizing the two trips I sponsored. The first, a trip to the Philadelphia Zoo, was a welcome relief in the midst of our July heatwave.

The second trip, to the Franklin Institute, was also a big hit with the children.

HARRISBURG AND HOME

What I learn through my district offices shapes much of the work I do in Harrisburg. In listening to you over the past few years, I've learned that *notorious nuisance bars must be fought; that escalating automobile insurance rates must be curbed and boarding home regulations must be tightened.*

As the fall legislative session is about to begin, I would ask that you keep the lines of communication open. There's always someone listening on this end.

Yours very truly,

Bob O'Donnell

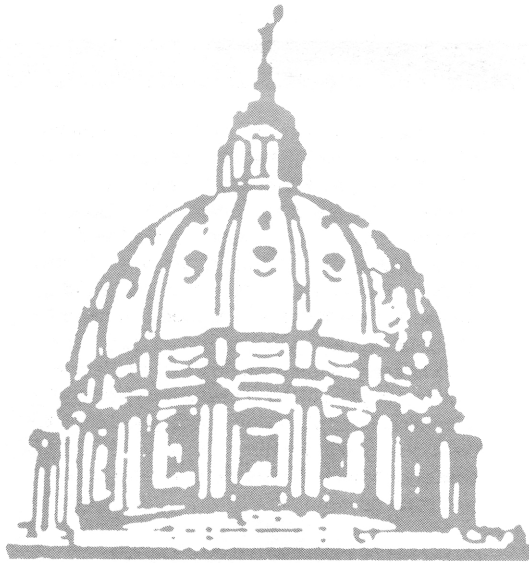
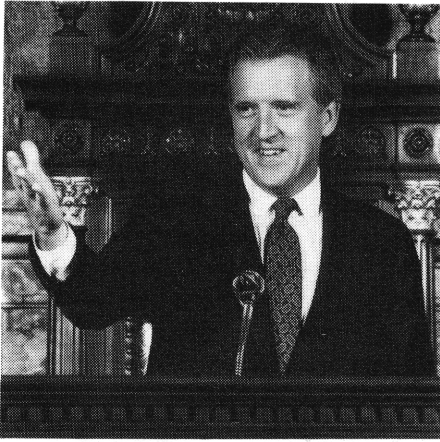




The fourth grade class of the Whittier School is welcomed to the capitol by State Rep. Bob O'Donnell.

REP. BOB O'DONNELL
House of Representatives
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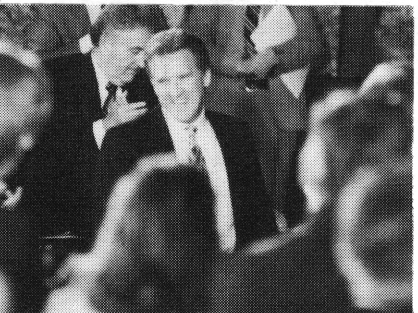
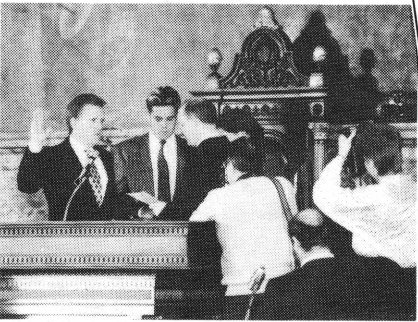


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SPEAKER'S REPORT



ROBERT W. O'DONNELL
 THE SPEAKER



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
 COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
 HARRISBURG

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Somehow change seems to occur when you least expect it... This past Dec. 26, the speaker of the House, Jim Manderino, passed away quite suddenly. The sad and unexpected death of my friend and colleague required that the House reorganize and on Jan. 23 I was elected speaker to replace Jim.

I felt a deep sense of gratitude and awe as fellow Philadelphia legislator Dwight Evans nominated me. With the unanimous support of the Democratic Caucus and the best wishes of friends and family around me, I began my tenure in this exciting new job.

Perhaps the most important thing about this position is the opportunity it creates for the concerns of Philadelphians to be heard elsewhere in Pennsylvania - to try to unravel some of the common webs of distrust which too frequently entangle this part of the state.

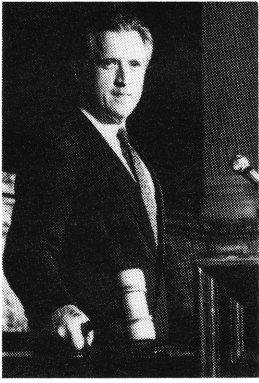
We face tremendous challenges here in Philadelphia and there is a tendency to get bogged down by the weight of those challenges. Yet each day there are quiet success stories being played out, whenever the collective talents of dedicated individuals, educators, businesspeople, community groups and elected officials are tapped.

I'd like to take a few moments to highlight some of our accomplishments from this past year, and also look ahead a bit to the challenges we face tomorrow.

Perhaps the best thing about the future is our ability to shape it together.

Sincerely,

Bob O'Donnell
 State Representative
 198th District



As I hit the Speaker's gavel for the first time in January, it almost seemed I could hear the echo of change ring through the House. Although we've made some major strides in Harrisburg in recent years, a number of pressing issues must be faced if we are to fulfill the promise that state government has made to care for the "health and welfare" of its people.

CITY FUNDING/HUMAN SERVICES

The first issue we must face squarely is proper funding for municipalities such as Philadelphia.

In the last decade, we've seen a dramatic decline in the level of federal revenue sharing for counties and municipalities. We now find ourselves with a set of mandates and requirements on local government that were established in a previous era when federal government could be relied upon to support those mandates. Today, the funding is gone but the mandates remain. More significantly, the social problems in municipalities such as Philadelphia have risen — not surprisingly, at about the same rate at which federal funding has decreased.

Many of the problems we have deflected to local government are essentially SOCIAL, not local problems which are the appropriate responsibility of municipal government.

We are left, then, with one partner in government who WON'T help, and a municipal government which CAN'T help, while a whole host of inner-city problems such as homelessness, the AIDS epidemic, funding for SEPTA and the drug crisis continue to escalate.

PARTNERSHIP FOR SUCCESS

Although these are certainly issues that the state Legislature has dealt with in the past, it's time for the state to take a more aggressive role in helping effect real change. As policymakers, we need to create a partnership for success in human resources and we must remain committed to genuine resolution of these terribly complex problems. We must not present solutions that are either fiscally unsound or innately unfair.

Our partners in this plan include our constituents, who as taxpayers must be committed to progress wherever progress can be made. The providers of these services are also critical partners. They must be committed to high performance standards similar to those maintained by businesses or athletes — they must be determined to WIN. Finally, the folks themselves who are most directly affected by these problems must become partners in their own recovery. Without them, no level of commitment by policymakers, taxpayers and providers will be sufficient.

IMPORTANCE OF INFRASTRUCTURE

In addition to the human challenges before us, we also must recognize that Philadelphia's success is contingent upon the success of its infrastructure,

which clearly includes our mass transit system. In this area, as well, the state must take an active role in forming a partnership for success.

One recent success story can be found in Chestnut Hill where renovation of the Cresheim Valley Bridge was completed this year. In this situation individual riders stepped forward in community meetings and voiced the need to rehabilitate an aging but necessary transit line.

Community leaders then defined the relevant priorities, organized their constituency and finally took their case to SEPTA and government officials. I was engaged in this process early on, just as local and federal officials were, to seek funding from state government.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

But if it is sometimes appropriate to rebuild, it is sometimes equally appropriate for state government to lend a hammer to break something down.

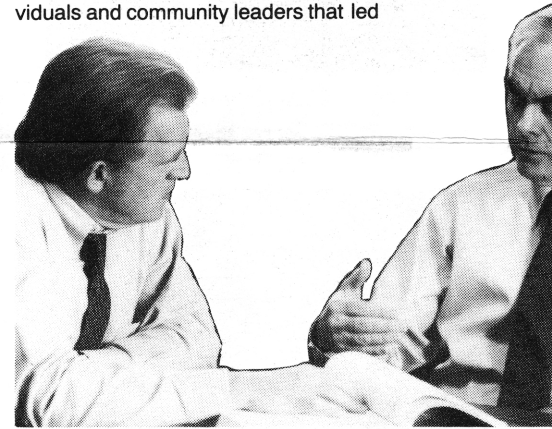
Several years ago, community leaders and individual constituents began to share their growing frustration with me over the difficulties they were having trying to shut down several "nuisance bars," where noise, drugs and crime threatened to become a permanent part of the neighborhood's landscape.

As I investigated the process in which such bars could be shut down, I discovered that

Philadelphia County, like all counties throughout the state, had a system in which only the district attorney could impose an injunction on such bars. Clearly, in a city in which the DA is handling an extremely high volume of criminal cases, it would prove helpful to arm residents themselves with the proper legal weapons needed to effectively fight this battle.

I subsequently wrote an amendment to our nuisance bar law which in effect gave citizens the right to petition the courts directly to have bars shut down.

Equipped with the proper legal tools, it was ultimately the energy and initiative of individuals and community leaders that led



PARTNERSHIPS AT WORK

Clockwise from top:

Budget negotiations with Governor Casey in Harrisburg.

Superintendent of Schools Constance Clayton visits the Cook Wissahickon Elementary School in Roxborough.

SEPTA General Manager Lou Gambaccini orchestrates the Cresheim Valley Bridge reconstruction in Chestnut Hill.





to success in this area. This past fall, Jim Adams of Mount Airy Block Leaders led the community charge into the courtroom to fight the owners of the Kent Tavern in Mount Airy. To the delight and credit of the community, following the hearing, the owners of the bar finally agreed to close their doors permanently.

Progress is also being made in several other nuisance bar cases, thanks largely to the determination of community leaders including Marilyn Shane of West Mount Airy Neighbors, Susan Simon of East Mount Airy Neighbors and Jerry Sellers of Concerned Neighbors of Phil Ellena.

IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Perhaps the greatest challenge we face as we approach the 21st Century is that of protecting the most important link to the future — our children. We can build a strong infrastructure and we can heal some of our social wounds but if we have not managed to educate our youth, we will fail in our most important mission.

As we sit down to constructive conversations, the first thing we need to do is recognize that we have never fully adjusted our school system to conform to modern society.

There are exceptions, of course, such as the computer programs that are now a part of the regular academic menu at so many of our elementary schools.

As we look ahead, it will be increasingly important to replace tired educational practices with energetic programs such as this. We need to keep in the FRONT of our minds the idea that what we are ultimately providing our children is the opportunity for a better life. By definition, that includes training them for jobs that will be available when they come of age.

OUR SHARED GOAL

There are no quick-fix solutions to any of the challenges we face together. But we have succeeded in the past whenever and wherever we have linked hands and held fast with a wall of human energy and imagination that could not be broken down.

We've fought nuisance bars together and we've fought insurance companies together. I'm confident that we can win the next few rounds as well, if we remain committed to our shared goal of caring for the health and welfare of all of our people.

KEY PROVISIONS OF THE NEW AUTO INSURANCE LAW:

I. RATE FREEZES, AUTOMATIC ROLLBACKS AND OPTIONAL COVERAGES

- Mandates a rate FREEZE, effective Dec. 1, 1989 and guaranteed through June 30, 1990
- Mandates across-the-board rate ROLLBACK, of 10 percent, effective July 1 of this year. The FREEZE then extends until June 30, 1991.
- A further mandated REDUCTION of 12 percent, (for a total of 22 percent) for those who choose to give up their right to sue except in cases where they are hit by a drunk driver, or are permanently disabled or disfigured
- A further LIMITATION on insurance companies ability to increase rates, extended through June 30, 1992 and then tied to Consumer Price Index.

• Provides that many types of coverage, formerly mandatory, become OPTIONAL, giving consumers far more choice in the type and range of insurance they want to buy. Consumers who opt to reduce or eliminate certain types of coverage will realize even more savings.

II. FURTHER COST SAVINGS OFFERED

- Premium reductions offered for those drivers with anti-theft devices, automatic seat belts and airbags.
- Permits the exclusion of minors or other person in household from an insurance policy if that person is covered under another policy.

III. PUNISHES IRRESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR

- Increases penalties for uninsured motorists

- Makes Insurance fraud a third degree felony
- Establishes "ambulance-chasing," as crime for the first time
- Establishes a penalty for frivolous lawsuits

IV. HEALTH CARE COST CONTAINMENT

- Limits medical costs resulting from automobile accidents

V. ESTABLISHES NEW 'CLEAN RISK' PROGRAM

- Makes it more difficult for insurance companies to arbitrarily place people in "assigned risk" category, instead creating a new "clean risk" program for drivers who have not previously been "at fault."

When this legislative session began, many folks made it clear to me that they had had it with their soaring automobile insurance rates. From community meetings to sidewalk chats, the outrageous cost of car insurance in Philadelphia was never far from the middle of a conversation.

As I began studying the problem, it became clear that our insurance system was in need of a dramatic overhaul, but I was determined that the overhaul was NOT going to come at the expense of the consumers this time. The goal, it seemed to me, was to reduce rates FIRST, and THEN build in the cost savings to

justify the rate reductions. In the past, we

**RELIEF FINALLY
OFFERED TO
PHILADELPHIA DRIVERS,
RATE REDUCTIONS
SIGNED INTO LAW**

had always hoped that the reforms would lead to savings, but those savings were

never realized. This time, we would MANDATE reductions, and then reign in an unbridled system.

When I was first elected Majority Leader, I was given the responsibility of setting the legislative calendar —so I was able to ensure that the cries for relief were heard. Last May I introduced the first of the insurance plans to be voted on, and the wheels for reform spun forward.

Now, less than one year later, we have driven automobile insurance reform to its only appropriate destination: reduced rates for every single driver in this state.



As Speaker, I had the distinct pleasure of joining Gov. Casey in signing the automobile reform package into law last month.



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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Details of new insurance law can be found inside.