

Rep. Paul W. Semmel (R-187)

Oct. 20, 2000

Legislative Breakfast

Topics: USS COLE (moment of silence), Recent Legislation, Session Accomplishments

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**Good morning. And what a beautiful FALL morning it is. The crisp autumn morning air, Mother Nature's unmatched vibrantly painted landscape, and the warmth of autumn sunshine.**

**True, the things I just mentioned have nothing to do with legislation ... or do they?**

**I know it's only October, but a tragedy that occurred this month reminds me that giving thanks for life's bounty, for life in these United States ... and for life itself ... is something that should not be reserved for the annual Thanksgiving holiday only.**

**The suspected bombing of the Navy destroyer, the USS Cole that occurred Oct. 12, in Yemen, painfully reminds me that every day is a day to be thankful for the freedoms we enjoy.**

**Everyday is also a day to remember that the price of freedom is costly and often presents itself in blood-stained bills that arrive without notice.**

**The blood of two young Pennsylvanians  
mingles with the red hue of this latest bill.**

**Richard Costelow, 35, of Morrisville, Bucks  
County was among the 17 young men and women killed.  
His wife, three children, parents, and friends grieve.**

**Joseph C. Davis, 24, of Penn Township, York  
County, is among the 33 injured. Davis reportedly had  
been recovering at a military base in Germany after  
undergoing two surgeries on an injured leg, and was  
expected home this week.**

**Please, let's bow our heads in a moment of  
silence for these two and all those killed and injured.**

*(lead the moment of silence)*

**I am not certain, but I would like to believe that Richard Costelow enjoyed life in Pennsylvania, and that Joseph Davis will fully recover and remain a resident of this Commonwealth.**

**Clearly, no one ... elected officials or citizens such as yourself ... can protect the lives of everyone. In smaller ways to be sure, we all take whatever measures we can to help make life safer for our families, children, and communities.**

**Perhaps you or someone you know does this by volunteering to be a school crossing guard ... by joining a Neighborhood Crime Watch group ... or by the simple act of teaching your children fire safety during October's Fire Prevention Week, celebrated this year Oct. 8 through Oct. 14.**

**As an elected state representative, I help through legislation designed to improve safety in every community in the Commonwealth. ... in our workplaces, in our schools, in our streets ...**

**Legislative initiatives range from the just passed Dormitory Automatic Sprinkler System bill to increased penalties for criminals to increased funding for anti-school violence initiatives.**

**And our efforts are paying off. The 1999 PA State Police Uniform Crime Report, released this month, show that serious crime in Pennsylvania dropped 6.5 percent from what it had been in 1998. The report further showed that murders, robberies, and thefts had dropped to their lowest levels in more than a decade.**

**We also want to protect our children and teachers from acts of school violence. In the last five years, we have invested more than \$271 million in state and federal funds to prevent youth violence and to keep our schools safe places to learn.**

**Last week, on Oct. 9, more than \$14 million in state grants was awarded to school districts for school-safety related alternative education programs. This is only part of the total \$36.4 million earmarked in the 2000-2001 state budget for safe schools. Last year, you may recall, we enacted legislation that provided schools with \$20 million in school-violence prevention grants.**

**Our efforts to prevent violence and protect children have earned Pennsylvania the distinction as the “uncontested leader in juvenile crime prevention,” according to the National Center for Juvenile Justice.**

**Our safety efforts, however, go beyond the obvious area of crime.**

**This year’s budget called for the first-ever direct grant program to help Pennsylvania’s volunteer fire and ambulance companies. \$25 million will be awarded to companies whose highly-trained personnel save life and property.**



**By now, I am sure you can see, the safety of Pennsylvania citizens is a high priority in the General Assembly. And we address this priority without short-changing the many other issues confronting you and your families ... the economy, jobs, and health care.**

**While a Patient Bill of Rights remains a topic of national debate, Pennsylvania already enacted a Patient Bill of Rights in 1998 as part of major managed health care reform legislation.**

**Pennsylvania also leads the nation in having one of the best Children's Health Insurance Programs, CHIP, and one of the best and largest programs to assist seniors with high prescriptions drug costs, PACE.**

**We also are among the top three states cited as having the most generous tax forgiveness programs for low-income, hard-working families. As of this year, a two-parent working family of four earning \$28,000 or less, pays no state income tax, saving that family almost \$800 a year to funnel back into their household budget.**

**This year we offered a tax-relief package to families and businesses of over \$774 million.**

**This is the largest yearly state budget tax break in Pennsylvania history, and marks the seventh consecutive year we have lowered the tax burden for families and job-creating businesses.**

**This year, we sounded the death knell for the job-crushing business tax known as the Capital Stock and Franchise tax. Its phase-out begins this year and continues until it is totally gone.**

**Sometimes, the media and others criticize our efforts at making Pennsylvania a business-friendly state. Those critics pit family and individual tax breaks against business tax breaks as though they are NOT related.**

**They are very much related. Businesses provide jobs. Families need jobs. It's that simple. And those who try and pit our families and business community against one another engage in a very divisive, destructive game. Please, don't fall prey to their mischief.**

**Tax relief for everyone, families and business is the key to Pennsylvania's continued success.**

**By now, you might be thinking that I have strayed far from the path of safety. Not really. Studies show that in periods of high employment crime drops.**

**Happier, employed citizens are safer citizens.**

**In Pennsylvania, we are enjoying one of the best economic times the Commonwealth has known, and one of the lowest unemployment rates in decades.**

**Still, we know more remains to be done. We know important and complex issues such as spiraling drug costs need to be further addressed.**

**We know that health care in general, and long-term health care in specific require further attention.**

**We know that the personal safety of our citizens can never be taken for granted.**

**And sadly, despite all of our efforts ... as elected officials and as private citizens ... we know that some lives, such as the life of Richard Costelow, will be lost so that we can enjoy a beautiful fall day in a country blessed with freedom.**

**Thank you, and thank you for allowing me to depart from my usual legislative-only breakfast remarks.**

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