

Concerned Citizens speech 11-29-2005

Do you remember what you were doing on July 7th, at 2 AM?

I will say with some degree of certainty that you were sleeping. And while you were asleep our elected officials in Harrisburg were taking something that doesn't belong to them, your money.

During the wee hours of the morning, on July 7th, while the rest of the world was sleeping our legislators gave themselves a record breaking 16% pay increase, with increases for committee heads reaching 35%. An unheard of amount. This on top of a pending raise based on the cost of living index which I will address later on.

Imagine you going to your boss and reaching into his or her bank account and taking a raise for yourself. You'd be arrested. Unfortunately, too often our elected officials treat our money with out regard to our wishes; they think their position as a representative gives them the right to take what ever they want with little or no respect for us the taxpayers. I for one am tired of this behavior.

While the constitution of the state of PA clearly states that the legislature can vote themselves a raise it as clearly stipulates that they cannot take it until the next election cycle. This was done so that the voters, you and I, can then either vote for or against those who voted for the raise. This time the greedy representatives in PA decided not to wait, they decided to help themselves to the money now. By granting themselves the right to use undocumented vouchers, let me restate that, undocumented vouchers, many of the legislators had begun to take, in advance, the raise they had given themselves. Just imagine, you file your taxes and claim deductions without documentation. How far do you think you would get? This, the use of undocumented vouchers, was clearly and intentionally done to circumvent the law. The 16 to 35% raise wasn't enough, they wanted it now, and many took it.

Needless to say this created a fire storm the likes of which those in Harrisburg had never seen. While the likes of Gov. Rendel, Speaker Perzel, and other tried to down play the issue the voters of PA became more and more outraged. Rendel praised the courage of the legislators for passing their own wage increases, can you imagine that, praising the 2AM passage of legislation while the rest of the world was asleep and I might add legislation whose primary purpose was not about pay increases. The raise issue was added at the last minute, done so that the public could not have any time to debate it, done to intentionally deceive the people of the state of PA.

Rendel was quoted as saying he was receiving more complaints about the cut in Library funding than the pay increases. Think about that for a moment, PA has cut funding to libraries, doubled the tax on cell

phones, doubled the tolls on the turnpike and increased the income tax on the people of this state, working people; people on fixed incomes alike are paying more. Perzels likened the legislator's salaries to that of migrant workers who milk cows and make, quoting him, "\$50,000 a year" The only problem with that statement is that it is a lie. Other representatives stated that they deserve the raise because of the long hours they work and because they are always on call. Yada yada yada. I say go get a real job. See how the rest of the people in your district live. Go work at a job sometimes two to make ends meet.

Prior to their just getting the most recent cost of living raise, they were making \$69,000 a year with full medical benefits, drug and eye wear benefits, a per diem when in session, a car allowance, and many drive expensive cars, a gas allowance, paid staff and district office, franking privileges, a private gym, a pension to die for and it goes on and on. Why do you think everyone wants the job and when they get elected no one wants to leave?

Well the outrage has reached a fevered pitch. Web sites have been created to denounce this pay increase, people have contacted their representatives, we are writing letters to the editors and finally and most important the voters are using their power to expel the scoundrels from office.

During this most recent election the voters took out their frustration on two state Supreme Court judges. While one made it, the other, Judge Nigro, was tossed. For the first time since 1969 when the state instituted the process of judge retention, a sitting judge was rejected. This has sent shock waves through the halls of Harrisburg. Because of this revolt by the voters the legislators have done an about face and rescinded the pay raise. They are very nervous and now looking to divert attention away from the issue by acting on real estate tax reform and a possible increase to the minimum wage. I am here to tell you it will not work. We have not and will not forget the theft by deception that they tried to pull off on the people of this state.

Rendel and the entire legislature need to be held accountable, period.

The pay raise was rescinded, however many of the legislators had begun to take their ill gotten gains by way of the undocumented vouchers. The money grubbers eager to enrich themselves at our expense have already taken tens of thousands of dollars and are not being forced to return it, even though the pay raise was revoked. How can this be allowed to stand? Why should they be able to keep money that isn't theirs? Pressure has to be placed on the Governor and your representatives to have this money returned to the state treasury where it belongs.

While we were asleep we were robbed.

In addition to this action by our illustrious leaders they, to add insult to injury, are getting a cost of living raise which they had the foresight to make a law back in the late 1990's. As I mentioned earlier

the automatic cost of living raise is a gift that keeps on giving, year after year, regardless of the health of the economy, cost of heating oil, gas, healthcare, or food. As we pay more for everything and the cost of items we need to live goes up those who serve us, work for us, are supposed to be looking out for us, will get more and more of our money. Rest assured our leaders in Harrisburg will get theirs even if it means increasing taxes to do it.. The rest of us are dammed. The nice feature of this cost of living increase is that it is based on the cola index for the city of Phila, not the PA's cola index. A clever maneuver seeing as how the vast majority of those in Harrisburg live out side the city of Phila and historically the cost of living in the rest of the state is much lower than that in the Phila's region. Last year for instance the cola in the State of PA was in the neighborhood of 2.5% and the cola in the city of Phila exceeded 5%. They took the 5%. How much did your Social security benefits increase this last year? How much did your pension benefits increase? And again this year they get their increase and they will get increases forever.

Next spring we will all have a chance to express our feeling with regard to these issues. We will have the opportunity during the primary to either support or not those who misused our trust. We will again have an opportunity in the general election in November. We at Citizens for Common Sense implore you to use your vote, use it wisely. Too often we vote for a party whether it be Democratic or Republican. We need to vote the person, the issues, and sometimes we need to vote just to send a message.