Comments from the Book Review Editor

This issue of COMMONWEALTH presents five book reviews, all concerning aspects of Pennsylvania government and politics. Two reviews deal with the state’s largest cities: Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. From the Outside In: Suburban Elites, Third-Sector Organizations, and the Reshaping of Philadelphia, by Carolyn T. Adams, examines how Philadelphia managed to reverse its economic and social decline by engaging “third sector actors.” In Devastation and Renewal: An Environmental History of Pittsburgh and Its Region, the editor, Joel A. Tarr, gathered essays that review how Pittsburgh’s growth affected the city’s and the region’s environmental quality and the steps that were taken to reverse the terrible consequences of decades of air and water pollution from the coal, steel, and manufacturing industries.

Three reviews concern the state’s politics and its tendency toward corruption. In Keystone Corruption: A Pennsylvania Insider’s View of a State Gone Wrong, Brad Bumsted reflects on his many years reporting from Harrisburg, where he observed too many of the state’s elected officials failing to serve their constituents honorably. On the Front Lines of Pennsylvania Politics: Twenty-Five Years of Keystone Reporting, another journalist, John M. Baer, covers much the same territory but from a somewhat more sympathetic perspective. William Ecenbarger’s Kids for Cash: Two Judges, Thousands of Children, and a $2.6 Million Kickback Scheme chronicles in great detail one of the state’s most tragic scandals. And finally, Harold Gullan’s Toomey’s Triumph: Inside a Key Senate Campaign offers a thorough account of the 2010 Senate race between Toomey and Sestak.

Anyone who has lived in or studied Philadelphia long enough to see it transition from a large, severely struggling, shrinking, East Coast city to a growing, shiny, and lively cosmopolitan metropolis worthy of emulation today has to wonder: “How did they do it?” In her book *From the Outside In: Suburban Elites, Third-Sector Organizations, and the Reshaping of Philadelphia*, Carolyn T. Adams answers that exact question. She also explains that anyone studying Philadelphia’s revival should be careful about defining who they are when asking about those responsible for the city’s resurgence. Recent scholars and advocates for regional thinking have been shifting their sights away from metropolitan government and toward governance by coalitions, alliances, networks, nonprofits, public-private partnerships, subgovernments, districts, and special purpose authorities. This is the Third Sector of the title, outside the private and the public sectors, but still acting as change agents for the public at large. Adams refers to this process as a “stealth regionalism…increasingly incorporating outside interests into the process of restructuring the city” (p. 2).

According to Third Sector actors, Philadelphia government is inefficient, corrupt, and slow; remove its influence and the trappings of machine politics, and the region can thrive. Politicians need to distribute as many benefits as possible to their immediate constituents, and as such, they operate on a narrow time horizon with a short-term goal of surviving through the next election. Of course, Philadelphia isn’t the only city to suffer from the by-products of nineteenth- and twentieth-century party politics. Third Sector organizations experience no such shortcomings, which has led to a trade-off of comprehensive planning at the local level for other benefits better accomplished by outside forces. Two policy domains that are traditionally under local control have drawn a lot of outside interest: land use and public education.

Undeniably, Philadelphia is important to the health of the region, and so it is no special curiosity that organizations and interests with access have seized the opportunity to influence its economic life. Yet, where does this leave city government and the preferences of the citizens who reside there? Do projects and revitalization that benefit the region as a whole improve the lives of everyday Philadelphians? In the case of immediate investment, yes; but as to when and where this investment takes place, not so much.

In the first chapter, Adams explores the circumstances surrounding transportation in the region. The Vine Street Expressway eased the flow of traffic through the city, but removed sections of the surrounding neighborhoods against the desires of their residents, and served to wall off the northern boundary of the central city. The Southeastern Pennsylvania
Transportation Authority (SEPTA) directed investment to public transit within city boundaries, but at the expense of the city’s representation on the (disproportionately suburban) board that controls funding allocations. In a chapter dedicated to the educational landscape, she explains how suburban investment in the growth of charter schools (and to some extent, parochial schools) has removed financing from and sometimes the existence of the traditional neighborhood school itself, especially in predominantly poor and minority areas. In its place, these outside forces combine to dictate land use as well as education policy, with charter schools disconnected geographically from the communities of their students. In other chapters, Adams also explores large economic growth projects such as the Center City District, the Convention Center Authority, and community development nonprofits. Ultimately, the role of Third Sector organizations in combination with the city government must strike a balance between regionalism and the ability of citizens to direct their futures. The reader is left to decide whether growth and economic investment are beneficial, and for whom.

Adams’ book is vital reading for anyone interested in the economic development of cities, the potential for regional cooperation, and the role of politics in the process of both. Scholars and practitioners in politics, planning, education, nonprofits, and urban development will find this case study highly instructive and illuminating.

Michelle J. Atherton, Associate Director of the Temple University Institute for Public Affairs


All cities as they grow and evolve will directly modify the surrounding landscape and impact their local and regional environments. Very few cities have had such a dramatic impact on their local landscape and influenced the environment to the extent that Pittsburgh has during its over two centuries of growth and evolution. Devastation and Renewal: An Environmental History of Pittsburgh and its Region, edited by Joel A. Tarr, contains ten chapters that discuss how the landscape and location of Pittsburgh (situated at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers, and mouth of the Ohio River) affected its development into a city that was a central link for trade between the coastal Atlantic cities and the western frontier during the 1800s. The city became an industrial powerhouse with its regional deposits of coal, oil, iron, and sand. But with the growth of trade and industry came destruction to the environment. While pollution was used as a measure of strength for an industrial city during the Industrial Era, pollution also impacted the health and welfare of people living in the city and its local and regional environment. The financial costs to
provide city residents with clean air and water and to reclaim and protect the environment from further pollution are considered in many chapters.

The book focuses on air and water pollution with discussion on how industrial, political and social decisions, land use, and waste impact air and water pollution. Specific chapters for water pollution include the historical development of the water treatment and distribution system that delivered clean water to city residents in the early 1900s and the decision to design a combined (storm water and domestic sewage) sewer collection system to treat wastewater in the mid-1900s. Another chapter provides a historical analysis of the environmental damage caused by acid mine drainage and how this drainage was ultimately regulated, not because of environmental harm or to protect citizens, but because another powerful industry was impacted, namely, the railroads, as the mine drainage polluted the railroads’ specifically designated water reservoirs.

Chapters on air pollution include environmental degradation to the surrounding area and decreased health of city residents due to industrial smoke. They describe how the city reduced smoke emissions mainly by creating smoke control ordinances from the early to mid-1900s to reduce industrial and residential pollution from burning natural gas as well as coal. By the late 1900s, the city recognized that it needed to improve the appearance of buildings by cleaning the smoke residues if it were to attract new businesses. One chapter provides an analysis of the 1948 Donora air pollution disaster when emissions from a zinc smelter were atmospherically trapped for several days, leaving hundreds of people suffering from breathing-related illnesses and causing twenty deaths. This disaster led to health-based regulations to control air emissions at the federal level.

Another chapter offers a historical description of the transformation of the Nine Mile Run Valley. It was one of the last undisturbed areas in Pittsburgh with access to the Monongahela River and a vision of becoming a park, but it was ultimately used as a dumping ground for slag wastes produced by iron and steel manufactures. In the late 1900s, the Nile Mile Run slag piles were converted to residential areas and parks, but the valley is permanently transformed and scarred by the remaining slag.

The final chapter is an essay by Samuel P. Hays, an environmental historian and long-time resident of Pittsburgh, on how city leaders overstate their environmental accomplishments, back legislation with limited power to regulate environmental issues, and have no holistic environmental vision for the city and region. To date, compromises have been made that balance economic, political, social, and environmental needs, which often produce less than ideal results.

Brian Whitman, Professor, Department of Environmental Sciences and Engineering, Wilkes University

Pennsylvania has a unique and impressive political history that includes such monumental events as the creation and signing of both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. While the Commonwealth will always be associated with these landmark political documents, Pennsylvania also has a legendary history in another realm of the political world—corruption. From the political machines that dominated both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh throughout much of the twentieth century, to scandals that rocked the state government in Harrisburg during the 1970s, the Keystone State has a long and inglorious history of governmental malfeasance. Unfortunately for Pennsylvania’s residents, corruption is not an artifact of a bygone era, but remains alive and well in the 15 years since the turn of the twenty-first century. Journalist Brad Bumsted deftly describes the sordid political events that have recently occurred in his book Keystone Corruption: A Pennsylvania Insider’s View of a State Gone Wrong. Bumsted, a veteran Capitol reporter for the Pittsburgh Tribune Review, thoroughly unpacks the wave of political scandals that rocked the state between 2007 and 2015. Throughout this well researched and referenced book, Bumsted provides both a comprehensive description of the array of corruption that evolved during the turbulent five years that are examined as well as valuable insight about the underlying institutional and cultural factors that provided fertile ground for the growth of such abuses.

In Keystone Corruption Bumsted effectively uses his early chapters as a prelude to the more contemporary scandals that are his ultimate focus. He seamlessly reviews over a century of political corruption, highlighting some of the most egregious cases and ethically challenged characters of the twentieth century. While fans of political history may want even more detail about the events and players in these many scandals, Bumsted moves the reader quickly to his primary focus: the rash of serious corruption cases beginning around 2007. His best work comes when he is dealing with some of the most colorful characters of the era including Vince Fumo, Bill DeWeese, John Perzel and the imminently entertaining Orie family. At times the characters are so over the top that you have to remind yourself that the accounts are not fictional. Bumsted relies on both his own insider’s experience and solid research to explain how personal ambition and hubris, along with poorly designed institutions and a troubled political culture, can produce the intensity and scope of corruption that took place in the Commonwealth during this period.

Bumsted’s concluding chapter calls on some of the state’s major political figures and good government advocates to offer prescriptions for decreasing
political corruption in the Commonwealth, and they deliver well-reasoned and largely attainable ways that Pennsylvania can begin to limit the abuses that have become a hallmark of its political culture. However, as one finishes *Keystone Corruption*, it’s hard not to think that the scandals chronicled in this impressive work may now serve as a prelude to yet another period of corruption and scandal that has transpired since the book was published. From statewide elected officials such as Rob McCord and Kathleen Kane, to city governments in Reading and Allentown, corruption appears to be alive and well in the birthplace of American democracy. While this may be good news in terms of material for Bumsted’s next book, the latest round of scandal certainly tears at the fabric of Pennsylvania’s already tattered political environment.

Christopher P. Borick, Professor, Department of Political Science, Director, Polling Center, *Muhlenberg College*


Nothing and no one are beyond John M. Baer’s critique. A journalist for more than 40 years, Baer has written on disasters, terrorist acts, scandals, politicians, and sports figures. However, it is Pennsylvania politics where he excels, fitting for a man born in the state’s capital. His book, *On the Front Lines of Pennsylvania Politics: Twenty-Five Years of Keystone Reporting*, is one part autobiography, one part history lesson and all parts storytelling on Pennsylvania’s most prominent politicos. “Covering politics in Pennsylvania is like going to the circus every day,” (p. 13) and Baer introduces readers to the state’s political ringmasters, jugglers, and clowns.

Baer divides the book into seven chapters, beginning with his love for Pennsylvania and its politics and concluding with a reflection on Pennsylvania’s political landscape. In “The Keystone State I Know and Love,” he reviews the state’s “history and politics” (p. 15) and foreshadows the political foibles, tragedies, success stories, and corruption found in coming chapters. Baer also introduces readers to the dark cloud seemingly fixated over Pennsylvania that prevents its politicians from succeeding nationally. He recognizes the state’s idiosyncrasies, as well as a “custom of corruption,” and a “custom of being non-progressive, anti-reform and holding one of the nation’s worst records in terms of women in elective office” (p. 21).

“How Pennsylvania (and I) Got from Thornburgh to Casey” provides a whirlwind trip from the 1978 election of Richard L. “Dick” Thornburgh in the Republican gubernatorial primary through the 1986 gubernatorial race between Republican Bill Scranton and Democrat Bob Casey. In
particular, Baer highlights three items that helped elect Casey: eleventh hour advertising, broken promises, and a national media spectacle focused on Scranton’s admission of recreational drug use and his refusal to name the drug(s). Casey’s election leads to Baer’s heftiest chapter: “The Casey Years (and Lots of Political Doings).”

As a seasoned political reporter, Baer knows the players in Pennsylvania’s political game. “The Casey Years,” as well as “The Ridge Years,” read like a Who’s Who of modern Pennsylvania politics: H. John Heinz, Harris Wofford, Frank Rizzo, Mark Cohen, Arlen Specter, Lynn Yeakel, Mark Singel, Tom Ridge, Rick Santorum, Ernie Preate Jr…the list and accompanying stories seem almost endless. Were it not for Baer’s concise, narrative writing, a reader easily could become lost.

“Ridge to Washington; Rendell to Harrisburg” begins on September 11, 2001. With Tom Ridge comfortably into his second term as governor, change was imminent. Less than two weeks after the terrorist attacks in New York City, Washington D.C., and Shanksville, Pa., President George W. Bush tabbed Ridge as the nation’s “anti-terrorism czar,” a “no-win job” but a “very big deal” nevertheless (p. 94). Ridge accomplished what few Pennsylvania politicians could achieve in all of U.S. history: ascend to global visibility. Ridge’s transition from Harrisburg to Washington was not without controversy. His security plans were vague; his family lived in the governor’s mansion—at the expense of taxpayers—after he was no longer governor; and the color-coded Homeland Security Advisory System “was instant fodder for comics” (p. 100). Lieutenant Governor Mark Schweiker assumed responsibility for running the state, but not for long. Democrat Ed Rendell defeated Republican Mike Fisher to become the state’s next governor.

In the book’s final chapters, “The Rendell Years (and Other Fun Stuff)” and “Ed Departs, Corbett Arrives and 2010 Brings a Surprise,” readers again are privy to Baer’s wit and political acumen. Baer recalls Rendell’s notoriety as “an epic eater” (p. 116), but the commentary is not a personal attack. The governor had racked up nearly $76,000 in food bills during his first 11 months in office. Baer also addresses Rendell’s penchant for high speeds—some topping 100 mph—on the Pennsylvania turnpike, and several scandals and controversies that surfaced late in his tenure. Baer concludes with a brief introduction to Rendell’s successor, Republican Tom Corbett, whom Baer describes as “the anti-Ed (Rendell)” (p. 148).

On the Front Lines is neither a book simply on Pennsylvania politics, nor is it the musings of a veteran political journalist. Rather, Baer takes the best of both to create a witty, yet poignant retrospective of 25 years of Pennsylvania politics. Those familiar with the state will recognize the names and personalities and appreciate more fully, the sometimes-only-alluded-to backstories of politicians and events. Yet even the unacquainted
can enjoy a glimpse into the circus and appreciate “the agony and ecstasy of covering Pennsylvania politics” (p. 7).

Kalen M.A. Churcher, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication Studies, Wilkes University


In the fall of 2009, veteran journalist William Ecenbarger was asked to fill in for an ill *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter at the first hearing of the Interbranch Commission on Juvenile Justice. The commission was created to investigate the “kids for cash” bribery and extortion scheme in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, in which thousands of kids were sent to a private detention facility in exchange for millions of dollars paid to two county judges.

Ecenbarger stayed with the story for the ensuing two and half years, resulting in this riveting American tragedy, part true crime and part essential public policy debate. Faithful to his journalistic principles, Ecenbarger provides the facts and lets readers develop an appropriate sense of horror on their own. And that does not take long.

The story starts with simple tales of everyday kids who made kid mistakes and who had to appear before Juvenile Court Judge Mark Ciavarella. Hiding behind a self-proclaimed “zero tolerance” policy, Ciavarella denied them due process, including the right to counsel, and ordered them to be shackled on the spot and hauled away to a for-profit detention facility. For that, he and his president judge were richly compensated.

How could this happen? Ecenbarger places some of the blame on the confluence of a corrupt political culture and a well-intentioned juvenile justice system that favors secrecy. Ecenbarger tracks the history of Luzerne County, home to hardworking immigrants with an old-country respect for politics and government. Public corruption and organized crime formed an early and comfortable relationship here, but regular folks chose to focus on the good and ignore the bad. It is a community where a politician can stumble, but still get a good word for a long ago kindness.

Ecenbarger also shows how the American juvenile justice policy has resulted in a more tolerant system for kids. Even the lexicon in juvenile court sounds not so bad. There are delinquents instead of criminals, hearings instead of trials, adjudications instead of convictions, and placement instead of imprisonment. And since juvenile court proceedings are not public, for the protection of the juvenile, hard facts rarely emerge.

The public policy discussion here is punctuated with additional examples of the evil in Ciavarella’s courtroom. These vignettes are reminders that this
is first a story about kids. And, ever the solid journalist, Ecenbarger follows through to the ongoing tragedy, the residual trauma suffered by kids and their families.

The development of the conspiracy is detailed at a deliberate pace, showing how even the most repugnant crimes often have a mundane beginning. But as the pace quickens, the end comes swiftly for the conspirators, with authorities, the press, and the judges’ cohorts and victims coming at them from every direction.

Ciavarella’s jury trial is described in detail, showing how a fair trial can be granted to someone who systematically denied others the same. When Ciavarella finally takes the stand, Ecenbarger wisely switches to the trial transcripts, letting Ciavarella’s own words sink him.

After his conviction, Ciavarella refused to accept responsibility, but he understood his standing in the community, as the leader of “cash for kids.” Lashing out at the prosecutor, he said, “Those three words made me the personification of evil. They made me the anti-Christ and the devil.”

This book strikes a compelling balance between true crime and public policy, and Ecenbarger ends where he started, at the Interbranch Juvenile Justice Commission, and its proposed reforms. And he closes with a discussion of public attitudes regarding juvenile crime, which Ecenbarger likens to a pendulum swinging between “the goals of child welfare and community safety.”

As for all those kids whose lives were easily traded for cash by an avaricious judge, Ecenbarger does not limit his criticism of criminal justice policy to Luzerne County or Pennsylvania, but he does blame “the pervasive belief that more people need to be locked up.” As he says, “Retribution trumps rehabilitation every election day. Thus it is that America, with only 5% of the world’s population, is home to 25% of its prisoners.”

Joseph Sabino Mistick, Professor, Duquesne University School of Law


The 2010 Pennsylvania U.S. Senate race was a bittersweet moment in my life and career. Arlen Specter, the man who had long been my personal political hero, faced his Waterloo in the Democratic primary after nearly forty years in public service. I grew up in a house where my father—a yellow dog, McGovern Democrat—religiously crossed party lines every six years to return Specter to the Senate. As a junior at Thiel College in 2001, I interned for Specter on Capitol Hill, doing policy research on education and small business issues, answering constituent mail, and taking notes at hearings.

I penned a guest op/ed for the Philadelphia Daily News in the closing days of Specter’s Senate service about his illustrious and occasionally
controversial career. I wrote that “perhaps the most essential element of the Specter legacy is that he provided equal treatment for every Pennsylvania citizen, showed equal concern for each of the state’s 67 counties and considered the importance of every citizen’s views regardless of his political party identification.”1 Like many Pennsylvania political observers, I anticipated a Specter versus Toomey rematch from the 2004 Republican primary, which was one of the most dynamic political contests in Pennsylvania history. However, an historic electoral earthquake shook Pennsylvania on May 18, 2010, as the hard-charging Congressman, Joe Sestak, defeated Specter in the Democratic primary by approximately 8%.

The 2010 general election was set. In one corner was Sestak, who, in his initial congressional run in 2006 and during the campaign against Specter, demonstrated an indefatigable fighting spirit and an uncanny ability to appear to be in multiple places at once, crisscrossing Pennsylvania as if it were the size of Rhode Island. In the opposite corner was Toomey, a former member of Congress and Club for Growth CEO. No matter the occasion, Toomey always seemed to cautiously choose each word uttered during a speech as he carefully explained positions on major policy questions. Toomey is and was the quintessential conservative in both the pursuit of policy as well as temperament and personality, a cross between Cal Coolidge and Bill Buckley. John Baer, the dean of the Capitol press corps in Harrisburg, once observed that “Toomey is controlled, concise and sounds sensible. Contrast that with the angry-older-GOP of Mitch McConnell, John McCain and John Boehner.”2

Enter Dr. Harold I. Gullan, author of Toomey’s Triumph: Inside a Key Senate Campaign, a thorough and thoughtful appraisal of the Toomey-Sestak race from the vantage point of a historian and political observer with unique behind-the-scenes access to one of the campaigns. Gullan has an abundance of experience in analyzing and writing about historically significant political campaigns as he did in The Upset that Wasn’t: Harry S. Truman and the Critical Election of 1948.

In Toomey’s Triumph, Gullan dedicated many hours observing and interviewing the core of Toomey’s campaign team. This book isn’t so much an assessment of Pat Toomey and Joe Sestak as candidates as it is a careful documentation of Gullan’s encounters with the individuals charged with steering the ship for Team Toomey. His analysis of the central nervous system of the campaign itself takes readers far behind the scenes to understand why the Toomey campaign employed certain strategies and messages and why such devices were developed and deployed.

Among the many attributes that made Gullan’s The Upset that Wasn’t such an important contribution to presidential campaign history was the author’s attentiveness to the political strategies employed by each
candidate, the personal lives and political careers of the contenders, and his understanding of how often the most powerful explanatory technique for assessing campaigns requires peeling back the proverbial political onion to examine the behind-the-scenes calculations of the candidates and operatives. Readers of *Toomey’s Triumph* will be glad to know that Gullan brings the same focus in this book.

Gullan astutely noted that the 2010 U.S. Senate race presented Pennsylvania voters with a unique opportunity to choose between two candidates embodying a genuine devotion to policy goals and ideological commitments that went much deeper than basic partisan divisions. Neither Sestak nor Toomey attempted to sidestep their respectively liberal or conservative records, and both men presented themselves in starkly different terms as individuals and as policymakers. Gullan paints remarkable pictures of Toomey and Sestak who gave Pennsylvanians a crystal clear choice between candidates with divergent platforms lacking significant overlap. The critical lessons learned through Gullan’s behind-the-scenes access to Toomey’s organization is what makes *Toomey’s Triumph* so valuable for those interested in electoral politics, or as a supplemental text for a course in campaign and elections or Pennsylvania history and politics.

Perhaps the greatest weakness to *Toomey’s Triumph* is that Gullan did not devote enough time covering Joe Sestak. Despite the fact that 2010 was a banner year for Republicans around the country and Pennsylvania, Toomey defeated Sestak by a mere 80,229 votes out of 3,977,661 cast (or just 1.02%). Meanwhile, Dan Onorato, the Democratic gubernatorial candidate lost to Republican Tom Corbett by 357,975 votes (or 8.98%). At the end of the day, three main stories emerged from the 2010 senatorial race in Pennsylvania. The first was the close of the Specter era, second was Toomey’s victory, and third was Sestak’s narrow defeat in a year when Republicans rode an electoral wave across the nation. Gullan did well in covering the importance of the first two items, but perhaps shortchanged the final component of the story. Gullan’s readers are left with a fairly clear understanding of how and why the Toomey campaign’s strategy was determined and implemented. Given the nature of this race, readers would certainly benefit from a deeper analysis of how and why Sestak and his campaign came so close to realizing victory in a year that was historically detrimental for Democrats. Similarly, James Michener’s *Report of the County Chairman* presented an account of the Kennedy campaign in 1960 in Bucks County that did not necessarily shine a light on the inner workings of both the Kennedy and Nixon campaigns, yet remains a crucial course for those seeking to understand Pennsylvania politics at the regional and grassroots levels. The absence of a detailed analysis of the strategy development and implementation by the Sestak campaign should not deter
potential readers from assessing—and enjoying—Gullan’s work, especially since Pennsylvanians may get to experience a Toomey-Sestak rematch in November 2016.

**Nathan R. Shrader**, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Millsaps College

**Notes**

