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**County Council Continues Its Irresponsible Voting**

Hard on the heels of its repugnant and indefensible vote to smear W and K Steel by designating it as a “sweatshop”, County Council has added to its irresponsible record by voting unanimously for a resolution urging the Port Authority (PAT) to spend all the recently received bailout money by June 30 to avoid impending service cuts and layoffs.

There are several problems with the resolution beginning with fact that the Southwest Pennsylvania Commission (SPC)—in approving the additional \$45 million in support—stipulated the money must be spread out over the next 18 months, something PAT management has honorably decided it must do. Council has opted to go along with union demands that PAT abandon their obligation to the SPC and use all the money quickly to avoid the March cuts in the almost certainly vain hope the Legislature and Governor will come up with more money for the coming fiscal year.

With this vote Council has once again demonstrated its inability and unwillingness to use good judgment in the face of strident union calls for it to act on the union’s behalf. Council has made no effort to understand the root causes of the transit agency’s financial problems and falls lock step in line with union rhetoric that it is the state’s fault.

The Allegheny Institute has repeatedly shown over the years the underlying causes of PAT’s financial woes. Besides management’s insatiable desire to spend money on big projects, there are operating cost problems stemming largely from the extremely high labor compensation costs, a rising tide of health care costs for active and retired employees, and inefficient operations due in major part to work rules agreed upon under threat of a strike.

This reality means that when revenue shortfalls occur PAT management has only two options, ask the state for more money or initiate service cuts and layoffs accompanied by fare hikes. Uncorrected, that path leads eventually to the demise of the agency.

Asking the state for more money at this time is unlikely to get a favorable reception. When the Governor is having to pare back state spending in very large chunks, the possibility of squeezing more money for PAT into the budget seems extraordinarily fanciful. Beyond that, what kind of message have the union and the Council sent in this

latest resolution urging PAT to dishonorably ignore the provisions the SPC placed on the money?

But even more important, a hefty fraction of the members of the General Assembly understand the root causes of PAT's problems and as such will be extremely unwilling to send money collected from taxpayers around the state to subsidize further the expensive and inefficient operations at PAT. There is a growing recognition that the old game of tossing more dollars at the transit agency in hopes it will get its act together simply cannot continue.

If County Council wants to focus on helping ensure that County residents have access to affordable transit service there are things it can do. First, it must abandon its servile attitude toward the transit union and decide to do what is best for residents and taxpayers. Second, it should ask the Legislature to allow PAT to declare bankruptcy in order to get relief from the backbreaking burden of legacy costs that are consuming an ever increasing share of revenue and making it impossible to maintain or improve service. Third, Council should support earlier efforts by PAT management to institute outsourcing. Fourth, Council should encourage PAT to allow regional transit agencies to offer service in the County where it makes economic sense and offers more and better service to residents. Fifth, Council should support legislation that would outlaw strikes at public transit agencies.

It is time for Council to meet its obligations to the citizenry of Allegheny County and stop the grandstanding that appeases unions. It could begin by investigating why it is that other regional transit agencies are not constantly in financial crisis. They will not like the answers but it would be instructive for them. They will find labor costs are far lower than PAT's. They will learn that outsourcing is used extensively and strikes are not an issue. Just the exact opposite of the situation in Allegheny County. Sadly, Council is unlikely to make the effort to research the regional agencies. However, it is a virtual certainty that legislators from around the state will do that research and it will provide them with many questions for PAT apologists and lobbyists when they come hat in hand to the Capitol.

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**Jake Haulk, Ph.D., President**

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