

# Pay hikes raise complaints

By: **ALISON HAWKES** (Sat, Jul/23/2005)

## A CITIZENS' REVOLT?

Pennsylvania is normally such a well-behaved state. No scrappy referendums to toss a governor out of office. No sweeping demographic changes to upset the political apple cart.

Folks in these parts seem to diligently vote the incumbents in and take what's dished out to them. Could that be about to change?

Shift screens to Operation Clean Sweep, a citizen-led initiative with a bold — some would say impossible — mission to toss every last politician out of office and start anew. Its logo is a picture of a sheep inside a red circle with a line through it. "Because taxpayers are not sheep," it states.

This all started Monday because of — you guessed it — the 16 percent to 34 percent pay raises that lawmakers voted themselves before heading into summer recess.

"Are you outraged at the recent legislative pay raise? Are you fed up? Are you genuinely ready to make a real change in Pennsylvania? If so, this is your chance to set things straight ..." reads the mission statement at [www.pacleansweep.com](http://www.pacleansweep.com).

Russ Diamond of Annville, Lebanon County, said he started the site after his apolitical nephew complained about the pay hike. "I thought, if he thinks this way, how many other people in the state are so fed up they want to do something about it?"

People were upset after the last major pay raise in 1995, but anger fizzled out. This time, Diamond says the anger will last because of the power of the Internet.

The initiative has spurred on a number of Web logs. Check out <http://genestilp.blogspot.com> or <http://donpalesky.blogspot.com>. And a Yahoo group with 151 members has signed on.

Here's some of the uncensored outrage there: "We should look at this as using a Raid spray for insects, and wipe all the liars and cheats out in a sweeping statewide petition campaign," writes someone who goes by the name Oblekr.

"Their [sic] counting on us to forget the raise when the next election comes around. THEIR [sic] WRONG!!! How could anyone forget such a slap in the face ... ," said John from Somewhere, PA.

There's talk of a march on Harrisburg and debate about whether all the lawmakers up for re-election next year must go.

That argument is worth exploring. Doesn't experience count for anything? What about the 102 souls who voted against the pay raise? Maybe there's a nice lawmaker who has done something good?

Diamond says, steel your heart.

"I look at what things they're doing that I'm satisfied with, and it's not much," he said. "If you get a whole slew of freshmen up there and they do nothing all year long, we're better off. It won't be worse."

### **CAPPY'S CALLING**

Unusual and unexpected as it was, state Supreme Court Chief Justice Ralph Cappy stepped into the political hot seat this week to discuss pay raises.

Cappy's — whose salary went from \$154,448 to \$176,800 and who lobbied for the pay raise — told the Associated Press that opposition to the change was "kneejerk" and in need of a more reasoned response.

Public officials need salaries adequate enough to attract and retain "highly qualified, truly dedicated public servants who make our democracy work," he said in letters to the editor sent to newspapers across Pennsylvania.

The governor and lawmakers took "the high road on a difficult issue" and had "foresight and fortitude to withstand the pressure ...," he said.

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