

Sestak stresses accountability

Series note: This is the second installment in a three-part series on candidates in Pennsylvania's midterm elections.

By Katrina Wehr
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Joe Sestak served 31 years in the U.S. Navy before he returned to serve the citizens of Pennsylvania. Now, the three-star admiral is taking those lessons to Washington as Pennsylvania's Democratic candidate for the United States Senate.

Sestak graduated from the United States Naval Academy, Class of 1974, with a degree in American political systems. His father — also an alumnus of the academy — inspired his initial interest in politics, he said, but it wasn't until after his daughter Alex underwent brain cancer treatment that he knew he wanted to enter public service.

Their daughter's diagnosis was



something Sestak's wife, Susan Clark-Sestak, spoke of when she visited campus in September. At four years old, their daughter was given only three to nine months to live. Alex underwent surgeries, chemotherapy and radiation treatments.

Her husband's health care from the Navy covered all of it, Clark-Sestak said, and he wanted to make sure other families had that kind of security, too.

"I went down to Congress because I felt it was very important that people had the same health care opportunity that I did with the Navy," Sestak said.

Today, Sestak spends his spare time cherishing every moment he has with his daughter — from camping and seeing movies to riding in wooden go-karts, he said.

And when it comes to his job, he

said he takes a practical approach. Previously Pennsylvania's seventh congressional district representative, Sestak said investing in a skilled workforce by putting money into education and health care will drive the nation forward. He said he is willing to lose his job to do what is necessary for working families in Pennsylvania.

But it was during that time in the Navy that Sestak gained insight into what people really need from those who represent them.

"In the Navy you learn that you're not just responsible, but accountable for what occurs," he said.

To demonstrate the level of accountability he's talking about, Sestak talked about the procedures men and women who serve in the Navy follow when planes are preparing for takeoff.

The plane is attached to a catapult that launches it into the air, he said. But if for some reason the pilots are called off, a specific chain of events takes place. The



Senate hopeful Joe Sestak gives June Nevin, of Lock Haven, a kiss on the cheek during a parade at the Grange Fair in Centre Hall on Sept. 2.

pilots do not turn off the engines of the plane until they are given a special signal that means they have been disconnected from the catapult.

Once someone on the deck has unhooked the plane, that person stands in front of it and gives the signal to let the pilots know they can turn off the engines.

But that person doesn't just walk away, Sestak said. That person stands in front of the plane

until those pilots are safely on the deck, because if he or she made a mistake and those pilots go flying, the person responsible for unhooking them is going down, too.

"It's like that person is saying, 'Trust me, I am responsible. I am accountable,'" Sestak said.

"Imagine a Senate where senators feel that accountable."

To e-mail reporter: kmw5340@psu.edu

Senate candidate Toomey motivated by experience

By Katrina Wehr
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

As a small business owner frustrated by taxes on Pennsylvania's small businesses, Pat Toomey entered politics when he decided he had enough.

But his interest in politics really began when Toomey was in college and Ronald Reagan was president of the United States.

"Ronald Reagan's optimism in America and his belief in American exceptionalism have greatly inspired me," Toomey said.

In the 1990s, Toomey volunteered his time helping out with a congressional race in Lehigh Valley, and eventually became the representative to the U.S. Congress in the 15th district, in which Lehigh Valley is located.

Toomey served in that position for three terms, a limit he imposed on himself, said former Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge, who endorsed Toomey in State College in September. That self-imposed term limit, and Toomey's follow-through with it, were qualities Ridge said he admired in the Republican Senate candidate.

Before becoming the 15th congressional district representative, Toomey

also served on the Allentown Government Committee from 1994 to 1996.

Toomey said his motivation comes from the people he represents. Campaigning across the state and listening to the concerns of the residents of Pennsylvania keeps him focused on his work, he said.

"Meeting people all across Pennsylvania who work hard to make a better life for themselves and their children is a great motivator," Toomey said.

And when he's not on the campaign trail, Toomey likes to play soccer and baseball with his children and read with them. Landscaping is also a hobby he enjoys.

Through the 2010 general election season, Toomey has received numerous endorsements from a variety of political figures. In addition to Ridge, former Harrisburg mayor Stephen Reed and former Navy Secretary John Lehman have announced their support for Toomey.

When Ridge announced his endorsement for Toomey, Ridge emphasized that Toomey's background in small business ownership would be a refreshing change for Pennsylvania, and Toomey said he

intends to put that experience to good use.

"That's the perspective I'm going to bring," he said. "That of a small business owner looking to create jobs."

Toomey said he thinks college students are concerned about the high unemployment rate they face upon graduation and entrance into the job market.

In Pennsylvania, the unemployment rate is currently 9.3 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the national unemployment rate is even higher, at 9.6 percent.

"We have to create jobs so that our college graduates can find the opportunities they deserve when they enter the work force," Toomey said.

As he reflects on the prosperity he experienced during the Reagan administration, Toomey is optimistic he can bring that success to the current generation of young people.

"I want to make sure that my children and all future generations will have the same opportunities for success and happiness that I was fortunate to enjoy," Toomey said.

To e-mail reporter: kmw5340@psu.edu



U.S. Senate candidate Pat Toomey speaks on Oct. 12.

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