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Comment/Opinion

GROSSMAN

Return of the rail crisis

by Howard J. Grossman
A frightening prospect exists that slowly but surely Northeastern Pennsylvania is sliding into another railroad crisis. Since 1973 the region has experienced major fluctuations in dealing with the preservation of a railroad system crucial to the successful economic development of Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Having initially won the battle to preserve a main line rail system as well as the many rail branch lines serving communities throughout the region, Northeastern Pennsylvania now must contend with Conrail, which was created as a result of several railroad acts enacted by Congress since 1973.

The importance of rail service to Northeastern Pennsylvania is still best typified by the fact that over 60 percent of all industrial development in the region is dependent in some part on continuation of rail service. The most recent example of the war to continue rail service at a level important to our economy is found in Monroe County with the commitment of the Monroe County Commissioners and others who fight to preserve the rail line which serves several industries in that county. In addition, the county is continuing to work towards restoration, on a demonstration basis, of rail passenger service.

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation recently issued an update of the State Railroad Plan which talks of continuation subsidies for rail branch lines as well as other aspects of railroad service. There is a need, however, to renew a State-Regional partnership which will combat current trends which seemingly may cause a deterioration of railroad service to an unacceptable level.

This has come about as a result of the monopoly which Conrail enjoys in this part of the nation as well as the deterioration of services which many shippers have identified as a result of Conrail's operations. With the possible deregulation of railroads similar to the recent deregulation of airlines, many rail shippers feel threatened by the possibility of rail service being discontinued and more rail lines abandoned.

The nation now has three recent rail legislative bills enacted in 1973, 1976, and 1978 which foster the image of extensive federal attention on railroad needs, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest. Certainly this is true, and such attention has been badly needed.

One of the problems, however, is the need to bring together the various federal grant and loan programs with state efforts to ensure a long term commitment to continuation of rail services to not only current levels, but to use such governmental programs to help expand a railroad network.

Organizations such as the Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania, chambers of commerce, local industrial development groups, the Railroad Task force for Northeast Region, and others must redouble their vigilance in coping with another rail crisis which threatens the economic vitality of Northeastern Pennsylvania as well as other sectors of the State and Nation.

The Railroad Task Force for Northeast Region is a combination of 22 counties, consisting of three of the Commonwealth's regional planning and development regions, united in the effort to promote an effective railroad system tied to economic development.

The Task Force is currently enlisting the support of local organizations and individuals in a financial campaign to help support its goals. Those who are interested should write the Task Force at Box 777, Avoca, Pa. 18641 and express support for this key program, designed to help vitalize rail service at a time when the unemployment rate in our region is reaching double digit proportions once again.

We need a renewed and active regional community united in its position to ensure that railroads remain with us now and in the long term.



"POOR GUY, HE WAS TRYING TO ASSEMBLE HIS SON'S NEW STAR WARS ELECTRON-NEURO-NEUTRALIZER."

BURNHAM

Checking for ripeness

by L. D. Burnham

I finally found why doctors thump chests during a checkup. They're checking for ripeness. That's right. Now I don't particularly like being treated like a watermelon, but I do want to live long enough to fit into the ROA (Ripe Old Age) category, and I guess that's the accepted method of checking for ripeness.

"Nope, you're not ripe yet. You go out and sit in the sun another 20 years."

Before long people are going to take much more time to ripen, and there are going to be some problems. Our whole perspective of life will have to shift when people start living to be 150 and 200 years old. What in the world will people do with all those years?

Longevity could change the standards of human development. Consider a bit of math. At present, when a person turns 16 years old he has lived approximately one-quarter of his life.

When the time comes when life expectancy reaches say, 160, a person would not have lived a quarter of his life till he reached 40. In perspective then, a 40-year-old would be a teen-ager.

Preposterous you say? Consider this: People living to be 160 years old certainly aren't going to retire at 65. Heavens no. They'll probably work at least until they're 100 or

140 or so. So how will anybody "young" get a job?

It's almost silly to think a person 21 could break into the job market. People just might have to wait till they reach 40 to start a career.

What will they do till then? Who knows. Go to school for 30 years, drive around, go to dances, hang out, have a few kids? Whatever.

Perhaps people won't have to be in such a hurry to grown up when longevity becomes a fact of life. Many people don't "grow up" till they reach 40 anyway. In the future, maybe they won't have to.

Just listening to the numbers will be an adjustment. Consider listening to sports broadcasts. "Bruno was drafted when he was only 35, but he's matured in his fullback position."

"You know, Blanda's as good at 80 as he was at 40. Did you know his grandfather used to play football, Curt?"

A seasoned boxer at 60, a veteran of 583 pro fights... "Olds said it himself, 'I've only just turned 55 and I have a lot to learn about pitching.'"

Farfetched? Hardly. People won't be living to be 160 by magic. It'll be due to improved physical health, improved diet, the elimination of terminal diseases

and better control of the aging process. The 65-year-old of the future will not be the 65-year-old of today. (And I'm sure you know some pretty spry 65-year-olds anyway.)

Guinness will have to do a great deal of rewriting. So many records will be broken simply because people will have longer to break them. How many times could a guy like Mickey Rooney get married, for instance, if he could live to 160? Why he could probably marry every woman in the state of California. He'd probably try.

And think of it, 100 year anniversaries, 125 year anniversaries. So if the fiftieth is golden what will the 150th be called?

One thing is definite. We'll have to perfect birth control methods once and for all. When people start living 150 to 200 years we could get awfully crowded. Why, one good sized family reunion could fill the state of Rhode Island.

What would you do if you had all those years to live? No matter, regardless of how many years we get in life, we have to live them one at a time. Take some of those things you'd like to do if you could live to a really ripe old age and see how many you can crowd into 1980. Happy New Year.

Ayatollah who?

An open letter to the President

Since everyone seems at a loss regarding a potentially effective approach to the Iranian crisis, herewith is submitted our "Dallas Barbershop" plan as contrived and created in the revolving chair of one Jim Finn...

1. U.S. spokesmen should forcefully and broadly characterize the adventures of the Ayatollah Khomeini for what they appear to be: the presentments of an Islamic zealot heavily influenced by radical and leftist advisors. His backers may pay lip service to Islam but their sentiments are more likely Marxian and the Ayatollah is likely being "used."
2. The spokesmen should also note who stands to gain the most from trouble in Iran...a petroleum customer dependent upon the product of the nation but thousands of miles away...or a neighboring nation with a history of exported "revolution" and a record of dominating and attempting to dominate adjoining territories, completely disregarding moral restraints. Is it more likely that Iran is threatened by a God-fearing Western Hemisphere nation where Allah is respected or an owed atheistic country where the mosque is only tolerated as a fading symbol of past religiosity?
3. These points must be raised consistently and forcefully throughout the world. The whereabouts of the Shah is not a question to acknowledge until "civilized" international relationships have been returned to normal and hostages release. The questions Iranians should be forced to consider is "who stands to gain the most long term from Iranian unrest and instability?"
4. Instead of prompt legal deportation of anti-Shah and pro-Khomeini demonstrators from the United States, such individuals should be refused exit visas pending the normalization of relations "to protect them from the chaotic situation," and keep them available for possible future negotiations. The Iranians in the U.S. who are of most value in future negotiations may not be the pro-Shah refugees but those who identify with the Khomeini.
5. At the same time, every effort should be made to identify the radicals holding positions of authority in the present Iranian anarchy. Their contacts should be reviewed along with their backgrounds to develop the best book possible on how to influence them as individuals. It's clear that government authority in Iran is minimal and we must recognize that we are dealing with an assortment of individuals with varying vulnerabilities to reason and persuasion.
6. Avoid "saber rattling" in the public media but mount a series of formidable feints, "war games" or exercises in the vicinity of the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf, anyone of which might successfully screen military action would we sometime choose to initiate it. Keep Iranian forces preoccupied with continual alerts and alarms which distract the nation. This should serve to emphasize the disarray there.
7. Continue the freeze on Iranian transactions and sustain United Nations dialog when possible. The overall attitude of restraint is still beneficial.

And if the cross-cultural rift is resolved, we'll arrange for Jim Finn to provide a FREE trim for Ted Kennedy.

State News

BY AN overwhelming margin, the House approved a proposed amendment to the Pennsylvania constitution that would set spending limits for state and local governments and for school districts. The amendment, which must be approved again by the 1981-82 legislature and then by voters, would hold state spending hikes to 80 percent of the percentage increase in Pennsylvanians' personal income. Spending limits for each of the state's 3,100 local government units would be set by the General Assembly.

A HOUSE committee approved a measure that would remove an estimated 80,000 persons from the state's welfare rolls, at a savings of up to \$90 million annually. If the legislation is ultimately signed into law, physically and mentally handicapped welfare recipients would continue to collect their assistance checks. However, healthy persons of working age who are classified as employable would be limited to a single, 30-day cash grant in any one-year period.

A BILL to give the state's elderly \$15 to \$95 a year in "inflation dividends" passed the Senate and was sent to Gov. Dick Thornburgh for his signature. Persons who already qualify for property tax and rent rebates will be eligible for the dividend program, which is to be funded by an excess \$28 million in state lottery receipts. The first dividend payments will be made in January.

KATHY Gross of Cambridge Springs, Pa., one of the first three hostages released by Iran, received a legislative citation from the House and later joined Gov. Thornburgh in a minute of silent prayer for the other Americans still held captive at the U.S. embassy in Tehran. Thornburgh said that the hostages were the "victims of a political vendetta, one that corrupts the very meaning of religious faith and brotherhood."

How PennDOT

Now that the first major snowstorm has given Northeastern Pennsylvania motorists things to come, Sen. Frank O'Connell needs to have phone numbers of PennDOT during the snow season.

"There have been several small changes in PennDOT personnel since last year, due to the change of administrations," O'Connell added. "So I am providing a list of all offices for future reference, when needed."

- PennDOT District offices in O'Connell's Senatorial District include:
- District 4-0: Tom Collins, O'Neil Highway, Dunmore, Pa. 18512 (717) 961-4061.
 - District 4-1: Robert T. Doble, P.O. Box 30, Towanda, Pa. 18848 (717) 265-2181.
 - District 4-3: David Skrocki, P.O. Box 311, Wilkes-Barre, Pa. 18703. (717) 826-2386. (Luzerne)
 - District 4-4: William A. Bosler, R.R. 2 Box 8, Milford, Pa. 18337. (717) 296-6961 (Pike)
 - District 4-5: Joseph D. Jagger, P.O. Box 188, Montrose, Pa. 18801. (717) 278-1171. (Susquehanna)
 - District 4-6: Thomas J. Farley, P.O. Box 671, Honesdale, Pa. 18431 (717) 253-3130 (Wayne)
 - District 4-7: Michael A. McLellan, P.O. Box 89, Tunkhannock, Pa. 18657 (717) 836-3141. (Wyoming)
 - District 5-0: Victor A. Cesare, P.O. Box 1379, 1713-41 Lehigh St., Allentown, Pa. 18105 (215) 821-6633.
 - District 5-4: Edward F. Niedzwiecki, R.D. 7, Box 7460, Stroudsburg, Pa. 18360 (717) 424-3024 (Monroe)

He said that Districts 4-0 and 5-0 are regional offices in charge of engineering and maintenance, and the other Districts are county districts for maintenance.

"I hope this list will be useful," O'Connell said.

low income families has been extended indefinitely," O'Connell said.

Government officials estimate that 170,000 households are eligible, including welfare and Supplemental Security Income recipients, and households with income levels below: \$4,250 for one-person households, \$5,625 for a household of two people, \$7,000 for a family of three, \$8,375 for a family of four, and \$1,375 additional income for each person over four.

"The amount of money available to each household will depend on the number of applicants and the type of fuel used to heat the dwelling," O'Connell said. "Households heated with oil could potentially receive up to \$350, with other fuels limited to lower maximum levels."

Applications are available at all county Board of Assistance offices.

"Even though this program is being operated out of the welfare office, it is not welfare," O'Connell added. "The only reason the Board of Assistance offices are being used is to cut down administrative costs, so that more money goes where it belongs--to the people."

FARM SHOW AGAIN!-This year's Farm Show will be January 6-11 in the Farm Show complex in Harrisburg. With the opening of the River Relief Route several years ago, access to the Farm Show is easiest from exit 23 of I-81.

Sunday, this year, will be Family Farm Day, and is open to the general public, unlike other years. The governor will be unveiling a new logo for agricultural promotion.

AG CO-OP BILL SIGNED--A bill to change auditing procedures for certain farm cooperatives has been signed into law by the governor. O'Connell was sponsor of the measure (SB 756).