

TESTIMONY GIVEN BY

— JOHN A. SKIAVO —  
PRESIDENT

WESTMORELAND COUNTY  
TWP. SUPERVISORS ASSOCIATION

AGAINST

HOUSE BILL 527

MAY 20, 1981

MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND GUESTS:

I am John Skiavo, member of the Board of Supervisors of Hempfield Township in Westmoreland County and President of the Westmoreland County Township Supervisors Association. I am here to speak in opposition to House Bill 527.

House Bill 527 dramatically displays the reasons why the Townships in Westmoreland County strongly oppose the Road Turn back proposal. We have been apprehensive of Penn DOT's statements that road turnbacks would be voluntary on the part of the local municipality. This proposed bill creates an arbitration board which means that Townships like ours in Westmoreland County can be forced to take state roads whether we want them or not. This is very disturbing to us.

Secondly, House Bill 527 makes no mention that maintenance work, paving, drainage, etc. would have to be completed by the State prior to the transfer taking place. While our County Association opposes the road turnback proposal, we recognize that some municipalities across the state may wish to participate in the road turn back proposal. However, any legislation dealing with this issue must first deal with requirements for the State to upgrade these roads as required by the participating municipality. Without this necessary requirement local governments will be faced with extreme financial hardships.

Another objectionable section of House Bill 527 is the composition of the proposed Highway Transfer Board. Almost 95% of the class six roads proposed to be turned back will go to Townships of the Second Class. However, this bill proposes to give Townships of the Second Class only one appointment

out of an eight member board. This proposal is not only unfair but ignores the reality of the situation. We strongly endorse the proposal of the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors to create two Highway Transfer Boards, one for the Townships of the Second Class and one for all other municipality types involved. We believe this to be fair.

Another issue concerning the road turn back proposal neglected by House Bill 527 concerns the acceptance of bridges located on these class six roads. In the past, Penn DOT and others have proposed transferring ownership of these bridges sometime after the road transfer has taken place. The problem with this proposal is who is going to maintain these bridges during the interim. We believe that it's foolish to think that Penn DOT will maintain bridges located on roads taken over by local municipalities while it's having difficulties maintaining its bridges on major highways. In short, when a local government gets a road it gets any bridges located on that road whether they have formally accepted them or not. We believe, therefore, that roads and bridges must be handled together.

The Townships of the Second Class of Westmoreland County have opposed the road turn back proposal because such a proposal would cause local governments financial hardships. With all the rhetoric coming out of Penn DOT of the problems of rising costs, we seem to forget that rising material and labor costs are also a severe problem for local governments. Our asphaltic material costs, for example, have risen over 40% alone in the past two years. In addition, my municipality of Hempfield Township would face a \$70,000 to \$80,000 increase in snow removal costs just for the first year if it accepted the 24 miles of roads being proposed to be turned back. This cost includes the purchase of a truck will all necessary equipment, additional personnel and added materials costs. In addition, Hempfield Township currently spends an average of \$7,000 per mile for all its road maintenance. Consider what the addition of 24 miles of additional roads

and 12 bridges will mean to our budget in the long run. The added costs will be considerable and far in excess of what House Bill 527 proposes to give.

We, in Westmoreland County, have also been disturbed by the fact that Penn DOT in its eagerness to solve its problems have not been completely factual with the general public. At no time in all the discussion has anyone from Penn DOT, in particular, and the Thornburgh Administration, in general, stated that the road turn back proposal will mean a property tax increase for local governments. The statistics already mentioned speak for themselves. And these statistics do not take into account that the local governments may have upgrading to do on these roads if proposals like House Bill 527 is passed.

Many local governments also feel as though they are unintentionally being coerced into accepting these class six roads because with little or no maintenance being performed on them the people who use or live along these roads see no other alternative than for local governments to take them. This pressure mounts everyday with many local officials believing this to be a part of Penn DOT strategy.

In short, we in Westmoreland County believe that the road turn back proposal is mainly Penn DOT shipping out its problems to local governments. Local governments did not create their problems so, therefore, should not be forced to become part of a solution, particularly when the solution will create hardships for the local government.

The current trend of passing greater and more responsibilities must stop because conspicuously absent from State proposals are the financial means with which to handle these increased responsibilities. As a result, the local property tax, the most inequitable tax we have in this state, is being raised and will continue to rise like never before.

We strongly urge your rejection of House Bill 527.

Thank you for allowing me to testify.