

REVIEW ESSAY

TWENTIETH-CENTURY PENNSYLVANIA POLITICS

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*V*incent P. Carocci. *A Capitol Journey: Reflections on the Press, Politics, and the Making of Public Policy in Pennsylvania* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005. Pp. viii, 298, illustrations, index.).

Jack M. Treadway. *Elections in Pennsylvania: A Century of Partisan Conflict in the Keystone State* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005. Pp. x, 296, tables, figures, appendices, references, index.).

Vincent Carocci's memoir, *Capitol Journey*, covers the forty years he spent as a political journalist under various titles in Pennsylvania. He began, writing for United Press International, the Associated Press, and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, as a member of the capitol press corps in the 1960s. He next worked for thirteen years on the Democratic staff of the Pennsylvania Senate, then stepped up to the senior staff of Governor Robert P. Casey,

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and ultimately served as Casey's Press Secretary from 1989 to 1995. His last political post was Director of Government Affairs for Capital Blue Cross. It's fair to say that sometimes Carocci writes as a professional, seasoned reporter—one of the boys—and other times he writes as a Catholic Democrat and Casey loyalist. In either case, he plays his role effectively, and documents his activities extensively.

Carocci's "no apologies narrative" is divided into four parts—the first recounts his early years in Scranton and his newspaper career, the second comments on the operations of the Pennsylvania Senate and the characteristics of particular senators, the third evaluates the administrations and personalities of six governors, and the fourth describes his service with Casey.

There appear to be no dramatic or scandalous revelations in Carocci's account—unless politicians providing liquor for the newsroom Christmas party in the "old days" qualifies as a scandal—but capitol insiders may be chatting about some of his opinions. For example, he believes today's reporters are more probing than he and his co-workers were in the 1960s, but that improvement may lead them to take themselves and their position too seriously. The cause of that hubris, he offers, is television, which tends to manufacture confrontation and celebrity in the pursuit of entertainment. Instantaneous TV news may have its advantages, he agrees, but it lacks completion and balance. Furthermore, "I see more ideology in story lines," (p. 33) he remarks, which is a charge one might expect to hear from a Republican more often than a Democrat. Carocci appears like something of a cultural conservative in this section, or at least he sounds nostalgic.

His opinions on the Pennsylvania Senate and senators seem less critical. He considers Senator Marty Murray a paragon of the old school, a coal region Democrat in the tradition of Roosevelt and Truman. Senator Tom Lamb he likewise considers a skillful politician who worked for the public interest. Other senators who attracted his attention and earn pages are Franklin L. Kury, H. Craig Lewis, Joe Ammerman, Henry Messinger, Gene Scanlon, Ed Zemprelli, and Buddy Cianfrani. None of them comes in for a severe scolding, and in each case their political acumen is appreciated. Indeed, after reading his appreciation, one may be inclined to believe that Pennsylvanians are very well served by their legislature. Three separate chapters in this section are devoted to Carocci's observations on four legislative reorganizations in the 1970s and 80s, the legal "Transgressions" of Democratic senators (e.g., Frank Mazzei, William Duffield, and Tom Nolan), and the Philadelphia phenomenon of "The Vince"—Senator Vincent J. Fumo.

Carocci's notes on six governors are detailed and considerate. Again, he seems to appreciate moderation and statesmanship. David L. Lawrence (1959–1963) was “the last of the old-time pols” (p. 122), whose word was his bond. William Warren Scranton (1963–1967) the author regards as “one of the two best governors I observed” and was “a class act from start to finish” (p. 141). He calls Raymond Philip Shafer (1967–1971) “earnest but unspectacular” (p. 156), while Milton J. Shapp (1971–1979) was “well-intentioned” but “a poor judge of character.” When “outsider” Shapp's two terms were over, “[f]ew that I knew lamented his leaving” (pp. 184–85). Richard L. Thornburgh (1979–1987) was not one of Carocci's favorites: “He reminded me in many ways of Richard Nixon . . . calculating, combative, and cunning” (p. 186).

Robert P. Casey, Sr. (1987–1995) was the author's favorite governor, and his coverage of the Casey administration occupies nearly a third of the text. Here Carocci is at his best as an observer, partisan though he is. The high points of the story are the author's treatment of Casey's sustained pursuit of the state's highest office, Casey's effort to reform the Liquor Control System (Carocci was deeply involved in that process), the budget crisis of 1991, Casey's role at the Democratic National Convention of 1992, and, finally, of course, the governor's dual heart and lung transplant in 1993. Recalling events at the convention, where Casey was denied the chance to speak against the party's “abortion on demand” plank, Carocci's prose will be considered over the top: “This convention and this party were run by a bunch of brown-shirts who would have been right at home in Hitler's Germany” (p. 243). The statement serves the coincidental purpose, however, of revealing the strength of feeling some traditional Democrats have about the direction their party has taken since the 1960s.

Carocci concludes that someone “more detached than myself” must “render a more objective judgment” on Casey's legacy. He believes that the governor's main strength was “integrity,” although, to his credit, he includes the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* opinion that such a trait might also be understood as a “prickly uncompromising style” (p. 291). Whatever a more detached judge decides, he will need to rely on this distinctive, detailed and devoted account.

If Carocci's memoir will be appreciated by political junkies, Prof. Jack M. Treadway's scholarship, *Elections in Pennsylvania*, will be admired by political scientists. One counts 178 tables and 25 maps summarizing more than 13,000 general elections and more than 6,000 primaries from 1900 to 1998, with all the data accompanied by a very orderly analysis. Treadway's purpose

throughout is to provide historical perspective on Pennsylvania elections in order that we can generalize about both long-term trends and recent patterns. His over-all conclusion is that landing among us today, "a time traveler from 1900 would not find himself or herself in a totally alien political universe" (p. 206). Spoken like a historian, we might generalize.

It is a tribute to the book's organization that a reviewer can readily locate and stipulate its findings, but interested readers should not let the abstract that follows keep them from examining the fact-filled text in its entirety.

The Electors: Since 1900, voter turnout has declined from about 80 percent to about 50 percent in presidential elections. Ironically, the decline was most dramatic after the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 made it easier to register, demonstrating that just because voters register does not mean they will vote. Further, split-ticket voting has increased significantly since the 1960s. Split results were "virtually unknown" (p. 49) between 1900 and 1948. Voter independence that appeared in the 1990s was a return to behavior that occurred in the 1920s.

Legislative Elections: In the Pennsylvania General Assembly, incumbents have increasingly sought reelection since 1900. The reelection rate (96%) is high now but it was the same in the 1920s and has rarely dropped below 80 percent. The proportion of safe seats today is not dramatically different from what it was in the past. Treadway concludes that "there simply is not much competition in Pennsylvania legislative elections at present" (p. 78). In the U.S. House of Representatives, the situation is similar: Pennsylvania incumbents have always had high reelection rates, and the proportion of safe districts was also reasonably high in the past.

Legislative Careerism: More Pennsylvanians in the General Assembly and the U.S. House are serving multiple terms; i.e., there is more careerism now. In the past, politicians were more likely to have had party experience before election. The direct primary and political consultants have made candidates less dependent upon party organizations and party experience before they run for office. In addition, the percentage of candidates running unopposed has increased greatly since the 1980s.

Statewide Elections: In elections for governor, president, U.S. senator, and statewide offices, Tioga, Bradford, Lancaster, Snyder, and Union counties, basically rural areas, were among the most Republican. Greene, Fayette, Washington, Lackawanna, Westmoreland, Cambria, Beaver, and Philadelphia counties were among the least Republican; these are urban counties in the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia metropolitan areas. Winners of gubernatorial,

senatorial, and statewide elections have been disproportionately from the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh areas.

Primary Elections: This analysis supports V.O. Key's conclusion that there is less competition in primary elections when an incumbent is running. There is much competition in Democratic primaries in the safest Democratic urban districts, while Republicans have their highest primary competition in their safest rural districts and in marginal districts near urban areas.

Patterns of Partisanship: After the partisan realignment of the 1890s, Pennsylvania became a Republican, one-party state. After realignment in the 1932 election, party strengths were reversed—Democrat power shifted from rural Pennsylvania to urban, immigrant, and African American voters, which were formerly Republican strongholds. Thereafter, the most Democratic counties were in the southwestern corner of the state, and the most Republican counties were northern and central. Geography aside, the author concludes that “[d]espite the dramatic political transformations that occurred in Pennsylvania during the twentieth century, the state has always retained a Republican bias” (p. 199).

This simplified summary of Treadway's book cannot convey the density of the material or what must have been the author's highly vigorous effort in compiling and assessing it. Let it be said there is also potential in the data for more inferential statistical analysis on top of the descriptions he provides. His results were never destined to take the form of literary art, but they will be a numerical treasury for Pennsylvania democracy.

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