

Philadelphia **FORWARD**

Truth or **CONSEQUENCES**

In a city that continues to lose so many residents and jobs and where the effects of years of decline can be seen in every neighborhood, the truth hurts. The consequences of decades of population loss and employer flight hurt even more. But, if we can face up to the truth and avoid the consequences, we can still move Philadelphia forward.

While other cities continue to grow and the Greater Philadelphia region as a whole continues to grow, the City of Philadelphia is still losing population and lagging in economic growth — a combination that threatens the city's very sustainability. Philadelphia has endured the loss of more than 250,000 jobs and more than 500,000 neighbors in recent decades. Neighborhoods across the city bear scars of abandonment and decay.

The cost of living and working in Philadelphia is high compared with competitor cities and surrounding jurisdictions and many firms and families find that the benefits offered by being in Philadelphia cannot compensate for those high costs. The efforts of city government and the community have failed to reverse the decline.

The Truth Hurts

The truth is that high and unfair taxes chase jobs and neighbors from Philadelphia, hurt small and growing businesses, and place the city at a competitive disadvantage in attracting and retaining firms and families.

The truth is that many of the rules that govern the way the city works were designed for the world of the 1950s and often hamper efforts to address the problems and challenges of the 21st century in the most responsive, efficient, and effective manner.

The truth is that the corrosive role of money in the political process compromises the integrity of our governmental operations, causes wasteful spending of public money, and erodes confidence in the city's political system.

The truth is that the political involvement of special interests makes government work well for their narrow concerns, but not for the needs of the more than 1.4 million Philadelphians living in neighborhood Philadelphia.

The truth is that the city budget is used to document our government's good intentions, reward political friends, and punish political foes — not to help address the needs of the citizenry, focus government on high performance, and improve the lives of Philadelphians.

Simply put, unless we reduce the cost of living and doing business in Philadelphia **AND** improve the quality of life and the quality of the marketplace, Philadelphia will continue to decline. That is the sad truth. The truth hurts.

As a consequence, Philadelphia too often finds itself mired in a vicious spiral. The needs of a population growing older, poorer, and fewer expand. Without growth, Philadelphia lacks the resources to meet the basic needs of its citizenry, let alone invest in the city's future or make the improvements necessary to build a truly world-class city.

The city is too often viewed as "corrupt and contented" and dominated by a political system where money buys influence and more. Powerful special interests block initiatives to reduce costs, inhibit efforts to improve governmental services, and claim a disproportionate share of scarce resources in wasteful spending while other programs face the threat of cuts each year.

In an effort to continue treading water as a city, we impose high taxes on residents and employers that chase some away, which forces us to impose even higher costs on those of us who remain. As a result, Philadelphia is a city diminished. Philadelphia is not the city we know it should be.

The Truth Will Set You Free

Truly the truth can set us free because if we can confront the truth and avoid its consequences we can make Philadelphia a city that grows jobs and attracts residents.

- Tax reform can make our taxes more fair and less burdensome. We must enact the unimplemented recommendations of the Tax Reform Commission to help Philadelphia attract and retain firms and families.
- Ethics reform, including changes in contracting and campaign finance, can reduce the influence of money in the political process. We must further reduce the ability of public officials to reward donors with public largesse and create real consequences for breach of the public's trust to restore public confidence in our government.
- Changes in our budgeting process and governance reforms can focus government on efficiently and effectively responding to the priorities and needs of the citizenry. We must clearly connect the costs of government expenditures with the results that spending creates and establish transparency in our budgeting so that officials and the public can better make judgments about the relative costs and value of spending our scarce resources.

Some may damn our city, with the epithet "the city of permanent potential." But, *Philadelphia Forward* believes that Philadelphia has a bright future and that a growing Philadelphia can be a city of boundless opportunity for its people. We believe that more information, more discussion, and more engagement in public debate will result in measures that benefit the general interest, not just the special interests.

If we speak the truth, and create different consequences, we can transmit this city not only not less but greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us. If we confront the truth, we can move Philadelphia forward.