

RECOGNIZING THE PENN WYNNE-OVERBROOK HILLS FIRE COMPANY ON THEIR 75TH ANNIVERSARY

**HON. JIM GERLACH**

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, October 8, 2003*

Mr. GERLACH. Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize members of the Penn Wynne-Overbrook Hills Fire Company on the 75th Anniversary of their company's founding.

In the spring of 1928, the Penn Wynne-Overbrook Hills Civic Association purchased a single, used, chain-drive "Brockway" pumper truck, recruited a few eager volunteers and began operations out of a private garage that is now known as the Penn Wynne-Overbrook Hills Fire Company. In just a year, the newly formed fire company purchased a new "American LaFrance" pumper truck and installed a roof alert system signifying their newfound presence in the local community. In 1931, the Board of Directors of the Company purchased land just down the road from their temporary home and erected the fire house that remains on Rock Glen and Manoa Roads today. The new firehouse provided not only a home for their new truck, but also a meeting place and classroom for present and future generations of volunteers to train and serve.

As the community has grown and prospered over the years, so has the Fire Company, expanding to three garages for its two pumpers and one ladder truck. They have also added sleeping quarters so that there can be 24 hour coverage by paid firefighters, as well as making further renovations and improvements to the meeting rooms.

Over the past 75 years, Penn Wynne-Overbrook Volunteer Firefighters Brigade and Board of Directors have been examples of exemplary governance and planning, as they have served the community with dedication, devotion and sound business management. The Penn Wynne-Overbrook Hills Fire Company is consistently able to update and replace old or out-of-date equipment in order to maximize their ability to protect the health and property of those that they serve. In 2004, they anticipate the arrival of a new rescue truck and personnel carrier that is currently being designed.

The 45 volunteers of this fine company deserve all the support that we may offer. They serve selflessly and tirelessly in order to protect their fellow citizens and, in the times of uncertainty we face today, their heroics are immeasurable. They are citizens just like you and I—teachers, students, doctors, lawyers, electricians, engineers, police officers. The list goes on and on—all willing to make sacrifices to ensure public safety. Before a member of this Company even sets foot into their first fire, they must undergo 80 hours of training and, once completed, the education continues with advanced classes to learn vehicle rescue, firefighter rescue, pump operations and so on. As a service to the community, they put on demonstrations that educate us on how to stay safe in emergency situations. They are an irreplaceable and integral part of our community, whether it is raising money for a cause, adding to the joy of a local parade or hosting meetings and social functions. Clearly, the members of the Penn Wynne-Overbrook Hills

Fire Company have served proudly and I rise today to recognize their service over the past 75 years.

I ask my colleagues to join me today in recognizing the Penn Wynne-Overbrook Hills Fire Company on their 75th Anniversary and salute, admire and appreciate all the volunteers that have served this community for so many years.

IN DEFENSE OF HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS

**HON. BARNEY FRANK**

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, October 8, 2003*

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, from time to time Members use the vehicle of the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD to emphasize their positions on ideological or political issues of great importance. That is an entirely valid function for those of us who are supposed to be engaged in democratic debate. But I think it is also important from time to time to call attention to non-ideological, non-partisan matters which could improve that debate and the recent article by Michael Kinsley in the Washington Post entitled, "In Defense of Hypothetical Questions" is a superb example of this. Often when we are using the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD to call attention to an important statement we seek to summarize its message in prefatory remarks. In the case of Michael Kinsley's article—as is often the case with Mr. Kinsley—he does such a good job of making the case that my trying to do so here would be not only redundant, as these summaries are by definition, but a mistake because it would not do justice to his argument. Instead, in the interest of improving the quality of political debate in America, I ask that Michael Kinsley's defense of hypothetical questions be printed.

[From the Washington Post]

IN DEFENSE OF HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS

(By Michael Kinsley)

One of the absurd conventions of American politics is the notion that there is something suspect or illegitimate about a hypothetical question. By labeling a question as "hypothetical," politicians and government officials feel they are entitled to duck it without looking like they have something to hide. They even seem to want credit for maintaining high standards by keeping this virus from corrupting the political discussion.

"If I've learned one thing in my nine days in politics, it's you better be careful with hypothetical questions," declared Gen. Wesley Clark in a recent presidential candidates debate. He might have learned it on TV, where "Never answer a hypothetical question" is one of the rules a real life political strategist offered to real-life presidential candidate Howard Dean in HBO's fictional Washington drama, "K Street."

The question Clark was trying not to answer was "your vote, up or down, yes or no" on President Bush's request for \$87 billion to finance the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for another year. This question is only hypothetical in the sense that Clark doesn't literally get to vote on the matter. That kind of literalness could make almost any question hypothetical. The obvious purpose of the question was to elicit Clark's opinion on the \$87 billion. And surely it is not unreason-

able or "hypothetical" to expect candidates for president to express an opinion on whatever controversy surrounds the presidency at the moment.

Secretary of State Colin Powell was asked this week whether Americans would have supported the Iraq war if they'd known we weren't going to find those weapons of mass destruction the administration used to justify it. This really is a hypothetical question, as Powell labeled it in declining to answer, but it's a darned interesting one and one an honest leader in a democracy ought to be pondering about now, even if he doesn't care to share his thoughts.

Neither of these examples is the kind of hypothetical question that calls on the answerer to imagine a situation that is unlikely to occur and one there would have been no good reason to think about. What if a man from Mars were running in the California recall? What if President Bush were secretly writing a treatise on moral philosophy? And so on.

Avoiding questions (from reporters, from opponents, from citizens) is the basic activity of the American politician. Or, rather, avoiding the supply of answers. Skill and ingenuity in question-avoidance are a big factor in political success. Usually, avoiding the question involves pretending to answer it or at least supplying some words to fill the dead space after the question has been asked. But if you can squeeze a question into one of a few choice categories, the unwritten rules allow you to not answer at all. There's national security. ("I'm sorry, but revealing the size of my gun collection might imperil our war on terrorism.") There's privacy. ("I must protect my family from the pain of learning about my other family.") There's legal proceedings. ("That arson allegation has been referred to the Justice Department and I cannot comment further.") But only an allegedly hypothetical question may be dismissed because of its very nature, irrespective of subject matter.

This is silly. Hypothetical questions are at the heart of every election in a democracy. These are questions the voters must answer. Voters are expected to imagine each candidate holding the office he or she is seeking and to decide which one's performance would be most to their liking. Every promise made by a candidate imposes two hypothetical questions on the voter: If elected, will this person do as promised? And if this promise is kept, will I like the result? The voter cannot say, "I don't answer hypothetical questions." And voters cannot sensibly answer the hypothetical questions they've been assigned without learning the answers to some hypothetical questions from the candidates.

Hypothetical questions are essential to thinking through almost any social or political issue. In law school there called "hypos" and the process is called "salami slicing." Imagine this situation and tell me the result. Now change the situation slightly—does the result change? Now change it in a different way—same result, or different one? It's just like an eye exam, in which you peer through a series of alternative lenses until you zero in on the correct prescription.

Yet even lawyers turn against the cherished hypo when nominated for prestigious judgeships. Then they say self-righteously that they cannot answer hypothetical questions about how they might rule. Once they are safely on the bench, of course, they issue public opinions every day that are, among other things, statements about how they analyze the issue at hand and strong indications, if not more, of how they will rule in the future.

A refusal or inability to answer hypothetical questions is nothing to be proud of. In fact, it ought to be a disqualification for