



Mount Airy Independent

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Northwest's 'Gateway' To Be Restored

By **PATRICK COBBS**
Staff Writer

Imagine a cruise along the Wissahickon Creek back when Lincoln Drive was still new and the Pennsylvania and Reading rail lines had given the Northwest a boom period. Picture that cruise in a new automobile in about 1910 when 60 miles per hour was considered world-class racing speed.

Even at a much less reckless rate you would need something to announce you had arrived in the new, extraordinary residential community once you emerged from the park. Something like the Park Gates

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President Barack Obama spoke to a packed house at Arcadia University on Monday about what he saw as the vital necessity of reforming the American health care system – this year. For more on the President's speech and visit, the first to the area since he campaigned here in October, 2008, see story below.

President Makes Pitch for Health Reform 'This Year'

By **PATRICK COBBS**
Staff Writer

President Barak Obama returned to the area Monday for the first time since his 2008 campaign rally in Vernon Park. Speaking only three miles off of Germantown Avenue on the campus of Arcadia University in Glenside, he visited in an attempt to return the steam of victory to the health care debate, which has stalled inside the Beltway.

"The insurance companies continue to ration health care based on who's sick and who's healthy; on who can pay and who can't pay,"

he said. The indoor gym was packed with supporters who cheered at every punch line – including when, early in the speech, he removed his navy blazer and rolled up his shirt cuffs.

"We can't have a system that works better for the insurance companies than it does for the American people," he went on. "We need to give families and businesses more control over their own health insurance. And that's why we need to pass health care reform - not next year, not five years from now, not 10 years from now, but now."

He called the national health care market too concentrated and he blamed insurance companies for profit calculations that pay little

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President Obama Makes Passionate Plea for Health Reform

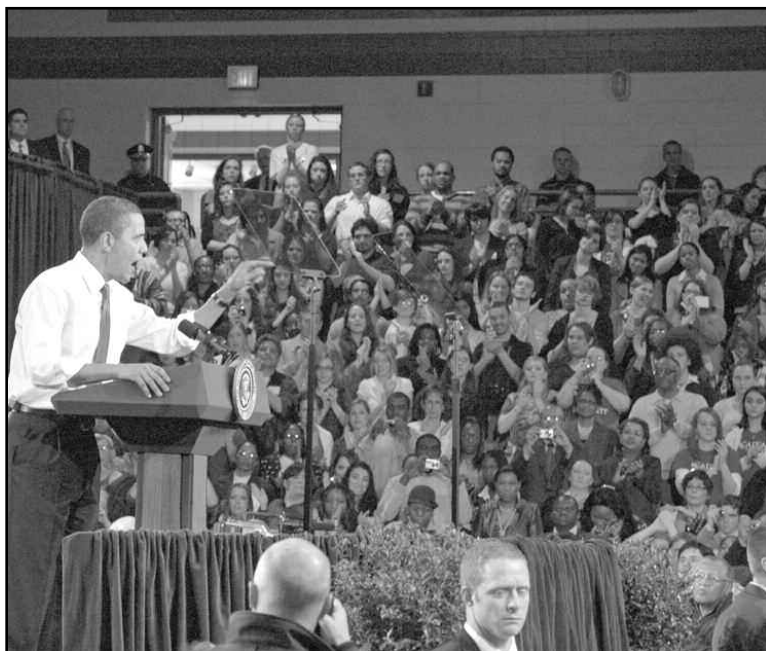
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heed to people's health needs, and that instead attempt to drain money from the middle class. And he admonished Republicans for distracting the argument with cost concerns and other politicians for being too involved with the Washington "echo chamber" to do what's right.

"How much higher do premiums have to rise until we do something about it?" he asked. "How many more Americans have to lose their health insurance?"

And so, "this year," the President promised, America would have new health care rules that do three main things. One, "end the worst practices of insurance companies" by opening health care to 31 million uninsured Americans with preexisting conditions, and imposing bans on health care companies that want to deny coverage to children with preexisting conditions. There would also be bans on dropping coverage of people when they get sick, he said, bans on arbitrary, massive premium hikes and the creation of a new independent appeals process for people who feel their claims were unfairly denied.

The second change the President promised for this year had to do with the so-called government-run question. He proposes opening up the federally overseen but private-



Above left: President Barak Obama spoke to an enthusiastic crowd about his health care reform proposal at Arcadia University March 8. Above right: a crowd of equally impassioned detractors protested at the main gates of the campus. Mike Farrell of Doylestown displays his message of "Freedom Not Force" as a fellow protestor packs up and goes home from the picketing. Farrell feared the country would not be able to afford a healthcare overhaul and he objected to the mandated coverage in Obama's plan.

ly run plans that are available to members of the government to a wider pool of Americans. This proposal mirrors the Senate approved version of the health care bill. The pool of new clients would give bargaining power to individuals and small businesses, he said. And on top of that, he promised a federal tax credit to help make insurance more affordable.

And the third change President Obama promised for this year was to include most of the Senate-approved cost containment strategies for private health plans.

The President's speech was interrupted only once by a pair of men near the back of the crowd who tried to press him on some plan details not contained in the speech. Jack O'Brian, a father of ten from Coatesville, was one of



them.

"We have an abortion crisis in this country, of 1.5 million abortions per year," he explained after the speech. "Don't ask us to pay for that."

The Obama plan keeps the Senate stance on abortion, which pro-life groups oppose, according to previously published Associated Press reports. No health plan is required to cover abortion under

the Senate approach, and those that do would have to collect private payments for premiums associated with abortion and keep federal money in a separate account, according to the Associated Press.

O'Brian, along with many others who gathered near the Arcadia main gates to protest the President's speech, was also convinced that the country could not afford the plan.

Though the President said his plan was "paid for" he did acknowledge that it had about a \$100 billion per year price tag. But he thought most of that could come from the increased efficiencies associated with the reforms — like new fees on healthcare companies. He also said he would be asking wealthy Americans to pay "their fair share of Medicare." This would be an increased Medicare payroll tax for those making more than \$200,000 per year or married couples earning over \$250,000, according to the Associated Press.

Mike Farrell of Doylestown was among the more than a hundred protestors outside the university gates. He carried a sign that read "Freedom, not force."

"I think everyone should have the freedom to have healthcare," he said. "But not to force your version of it on everyone in this coun-

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Old Gates to Newly Announce: 'You're in the Northwest'

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and Pergolas at Lincoln Drive and Johnson Street, situated in between the enormous home of John Dexter McIlhenny (now hidden behind Lingelbach Elementary School) and the stately Thomas Mansion.

"You had the immediate sense that you'd come to a very, very important community," explained Patrick Moran of these stone gates, which are still standing.

Moran is the president of the board of directors of the Germantown Historical Society and he is heading up the effort to restore the Park Gates to what they were really meant to be — an announcement not only that motorists are entering beautiful Fairmount Park, but coming the other way, that they are about to experience the grandeur of the Northwest.

Moran sees the Park Gate restoration project doing two things at once. First, since Fairmount Park and West Mt. Airy Neighbors have been so supportive of the effort since the Historical Society began considering it about a year ago, he hopes it will be an opportunity for the



Above: Patrick Moran (center), president of the Board of Directors of the Germantown Historical Society, and other volunteers giving the gates an initial clean-up in October, 2009.

community to show its pride.

And second, he imagines it marking a change of mission for the Historical Society to one that takes a more active role in preserving the historic elements of Germantown and Mt. Airy. The board of directors has decided to return to a more active preservation focus after nearly 20 years, he said.

"Because our community has so much that's important," he said. "It really needs people to be aware of its fragility. So we agreed that

this was something that we needed to resume."

The idea for the project came when Moran was browsing through Liz Jarvis' book *Mt. Airy* by Jarvis Press. He noticed a picture of the gates from about 1911, with the McIlhenny Mansion in the background.

"In the foreground of the photo is an image of the gates and there were the pergolas. And when I was looking at them I had this kind of ah-ha moment what the structures' purpose was," he said.



Above: the gates in their heyday about a century ago. Photo courtesy of Germantown Historical Society, A.C. Chadwick, Wissahickon Collection.

The point of announcing the park and the residential community alike seemed to be a perfect fit with the Germantown Historical Society's newly activist position. It became the ideal starter project.

Restoring the Park Gates will involve cleaning up the landscaping around the remaining two stone piers and making sure they are architecturally sound, then installing a new lattice atop the piers. The new design is by Peter Di Carlo of Di Carlo Architecture, and local craftsman Daniel Husted will build the lattice from black locust harvested from fallen trees in the park. In addition the area around the piers will be re-planted and re-landscaped using all native species.

Moran expects the project to get

moving fairly quickly once the warm weather arrives. He estimated the final cost at between \$15-\$20 thousand. To date the project has raised almost \$11,000 toward the cause and Moran hopes to be holding community fundraisers soon not just to raise the remainder of the funds, but to get as many people involved with the project as possible. That's community pride again.

"For a real small amount of money people can actually contribute to something that will have a long life in terms of beatification of the neighborhood," he said.

Contact West Mt. Airy Neighbors at 215-438-6022 or the Germantown Historical Society at 215-844-0514 to learn more about the Park Gate Project.