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COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

3

EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING

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Caucus Room, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Friday, 11/16/01
10:45 a.m.

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SCHEDULED MEETING WITH EDISON

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PRESENT: Councilwoman Donna Reed Miller,
Education Committee Chair
Councilman Darrell L. Clarke

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Pedro Ramos, President School Board
School Board Member Martin Bednarek
Reverend Ralph Blanks, School Board Member

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State Rep. Louise Williams Bishop
State Rep. John Myers

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Matt Quigley, Representing Councilman Goode

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2 is here. We do have State Representative Louise
3 Bishop here, who is co-chair of the Philadelphia
4 Delegation; Pedro Ramos, School Board President;
5 Councilman Darrell Clarke; Reverend Ralph Blanks;
6 Representative John Myers; Marty Bednarek; and we
7 have a representative from Councilman Wilson Goode's
8 office and I believe someone may be here from
9 Councilwoman Blondell Reynolds' office and from
10 Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell's office.
11 Councilwoman Blackwell could not be here today
12 because of a prior commitment; she's out doing a
13 tour with senior citizens in her district.

14 We're disappointed that Edison is not here
15 this morning. This is going to be ongoing, and they
16 can't expect to just come into Philadelphia and
17 answer some questions for an hour and a half and
18 that's the end of it. We have scheduled another
19 meeting with them on this Wednesday, the 21st of
20 November, at 2:00 p.m. in Council chambers. And I'm
21 going to pass the mike. I notice some of my
22 colleagues have some remarks, and this just doesn't
23 sit well with us. You know, we're not just
24 representatives of the people, but many of us are
25 also parents of public school children. This is

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2 such a critical issue we're faced with right now
3 here in Philadelphia, and this is going to be
4 ongoing, so they might as well get used to coming
5 back to Philadelphia and answering questions to us.

6 STATE REPRESENTATIVE BISHOP: Thank you
7 very much, Councilwoman Miller. I am Representative
8 Louise Williams Bishop, and I too am very
9 disappointed that Edison did not show up today,
10 especially since it was them who had wanted and
11 asked for a second time to come and appear before
12 City Council and others who were here in conjunction
13 with this meeting.

14 I think we get a good look at the kind of
15 company that we will be dealing with whenever they
16 don't show the responsibility to come before the
17 people and talk to the people, the representatives
18 and the Congress people as well as the Council
19 people, the Senate, the House of Representatives.
20 It shows their blatant disregard for what we need
21 and for what Philadelphia needs. They are not
22 interested, it appears, in our concern, and they're
23 not interested in being questioned by us because if
24 they were, the large entourage they had they could
25 have had at least one person here to respond to

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2 questions. And when they have invited the
3 Philadelphia press conveniently to New York City so
4 that they can brief the press, they could have very
5 well briefed the press right here in Council
6 chambers, or certainly we would have prepared
7 another place for them to brief the press if that
8 was really their intention.

9 So to me, it's blatant disregard for our
10 concerns, it's disregard for our children, and it
11 shows what kind of hands our schools fall should
12 they take over.

13 Thank you.

14 PRESIDENT RAMOS: Good morning.
15 Chairwoman Miller. First of all, I want to thank
16 the committee again for holding these hearings and
17 insisting upon a dialog and information.

18 As you know, the Board has also been
19 unsuccessful in getting details out of Edison or the
20 Governor on their report and the plan. I just want
21 to observe, I guess, as somebody who's been on the
22 Board now for almost six years -- two of them as
23 president and three as vice president -- that the
24 nine members of the Board of Education are all
25 volunteers, and most of us -- still most of us are

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2 not retired, and those that are retired are probably
3 even busier with other obligations. And despite the
4 fact that serving on the board is a voluntary
5 commitment, we understand, and have always
6 understood, that when City Council calls us, even
7 when it's inconvenient, even when we don't want to
8 be here -- although those are very few occasions --
9 we understand that part of the responsibility that
10 we undertook when we agreed to have the
11 responsibility for public schools was to be at the
12 call of those elected officials representing the
13 taxpayers of the City of Philadelphia. And we
14 recognize and respect that. And I think you would
15 agree, you know, that we have always been respectful
16 of that authority of Council and that prerogative of
17 elected officials.

18 So I think one thing -- and I believe that
19 City Council and other elected officials that have
20 been involved in these hearings have shown
21 extraordinary courtesy towards the representatives
22 of the Edison company, and I know firsthand that the
23 chairwoman has gone out of her way. I was actually
24 pretty jealous at how accommodating you were being
25 to them compared to my volunteer board members in

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2 the past, but I want to recognize that I know that
3 you tried to be extra fair and extra courteous, and
4 I'm really surprised that the Edison Company would
5 consider entertaining media in New York a priority
6 over responding to elected officials, particularly
7 not just a question of board members here, but
8 questions of elected officials when they're -- when
9 they're advocating spending, you know, taking
10 responsibility for over \$10 billion over the next
11 five years, being entrusted with \$10 billion. And
12 that's nothing compared to what else they're being
13 entrusted to, and that's the future of our children,
14 yours and mine, and the children and many other
15 people around the State who are in Philadelphia
16 public schools.

17 So I think that, you know, one thing that
18 seems evident about this company that I hope that
19 they learn is you can't run the school system from
20 New York. You've got to be here on the ground.
21 And, you know, if they can't bring themselves to the
22 table, even in these preliminary questions and
23 discussions, I don't know how they think they could
24 possibly imagine that they could survive in this
25 city as a part of a hostile takeover.

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2 So I'm just really baffled that Edison has
3 not taken the call to be here more seriously.

4 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thanks.

5 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: I --

6 PRESIDENT RAMOS: I want to also make the
7 point that I just want to underscore again: For a
8 company that says it has the capacity to run a
9 system of over 200,000 children, to not have a
10 person to spare is also remarkable.

11 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Good morning, Madam
12 Chair.

13 Madam Chair, I too would like to also
14 thank you for calling for these hearings and
15 conducting these hearings. They have been
16 informative in that it informed us that we are
17 continuing to seek information from that entity who
18 has been requested to possibly take charge of the
19 school system. As a result of their unwillingness
20 in my mind to share adequate appropriate information
21 to we, as members of Council and members of the
22 board and ultimately members of the public, it is
23 increasingly leading me to be very concerned that
24 we're definitely not going in the right direction.

25 I can recall in my short tenure here as a

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2 Councilperson having a traffic engineer from the
3 Streets Department and grilling that individual for
4 more than an hour and a half about a stop sign. And
5 to think that somehow something as important as the
6 children of the City of Philadelphia and the school
7 system, with hundreds of millions of dollars, that
8 somehow that entity thinks that they can give us
9 less time than Charlie Trainer from the Streets
10 Department about a stop sign is, frankly speaking,
11 pretty amazing to me.

12 So I think that whatever happens, people
13 need to understand, you know, we're simply not going
14 to stand by idly and allow individuals to come in
15 based on some contract, based on some deals that was
16 made, and to take charge of our school system and
17 not be in a position adequately inform the public as
18 to what their plan is and answer the questions not
19 only of this body but answer the questions from the
20 public. 'Cause ultimately, we are all responsible
21 to them, and I think that people need to understand
22 both from the State, both from this particular
23 organization, that, you know, it's going to be a
24 long road if they continue to act in this manner.

25 But again, Madam Chair, I just want to

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2 thank you for doing what you're doing and keeping
3 our nose to the grindstone, and I will continue to
4 be supportive of you.

5 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you.

6 Marty?

7 MR. BEDNAREK: Thank you, Madam Chair.

8 Who do these people think they are? I mean, here
9 they are in New York today. You can't run a
10 district using fax machines, e-mails, telephone
11 calls, and ask for meetings and not show up.

12 You know, I resent it personally and I
13 feel bad for this committee that they're not here
14 today, and I think it's a disgrace that they showed
15 this disrespect to this committee and to the
16 citizens of Philadelphia.

17 Is this what we're going to have to get
18 used to? Is this what we're going to have to get
19 used to? I think the citizens better wake up and
20 see what's happening here. And we got to get our
21 heads from out of the sand and get out into the
22 streets and let these people how we feel.

23 And I just want to express that e-mails do
24 not work. I heard them talking about e-mails at the
25 last hearing. To contact people, you got to press

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2 the flesh. These are our kids very importantly, and
3 I'm very disappointed they're not here today.

4 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you.

5 Rick Myers?

6 STATE REPRESENTATIVE MYERS: Good morning,

7 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Good morning.

8 STATE REPRESENTATIVE MYERS: You know
9 better than to put a microphone in front of a
10 politician.

11 (Laughter.)

12 STATE REPRESENTATIVE MYERS: One thing
13 that comes to mind is I think it's wonderful and
14 great that you're not going to let up and continue
15 to put the pressure on. Somebody has to lead this
16 charge and somebody has to lead this charge in a
17 serious matter, and their feet have to be held to
18 the fire. They have to be held accountable, they
19 have to be asked to be here every day, every day.
20 When they don't show up, we need to expose them for
21 the disrespect and disregard for the citizens of
22 Philadelphia.

23 I was thinking about colonial Pennsylvania
24 and the British and how the British were running the
25 colonial government from outside of the

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2 Commonwealth, and this is sort of a microcosm or a
3 megalocosm of history kind of repeating itself
4 again.

5 Clearly in my mind, on a national level, a
6 war has been declared with regards to who's going to
7 take responsibility and figure out public school
8 systems. The colonialists -- I was thinking
9 capitalists. The colonialists have once again in
10 American history have decided that they want to, in
11 fact, take charge of the government.

12 A very interesting point in my view is
13 that Edison is in this town today. Somebody from
14 Edison is in this town today because they're meeting
15 with community groups and stuff. They're meeting
16 with elements in the community that they are going
17 to use as their commandos to wage a street war.
18 This is going to, you know, develop into a street
19 war.

20 And I think that the other salient point
21 is that that (inaudible) is the governor. If the
22 Governor told Edison to be here, they would be here

23 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: That's right.

24 STATE REPRESENTATIVE MYERS: It's not
25 just, Well, we're not going to meet with City

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2 Council. They're getting marching instructions from
3 somewhere. I think we need to put fire under the
4 people handing out marching instructions.

5 Also, we got to expose them too. If you
6 work for me to, you go where I tell you to go when I
7 tell you to go. \$2.7 million to write a report so
8 that I can offer -- what was it, \$37,000 a page?
9 After spending \$37,000 a page, then I can offer you
10 a plan?

11 So I think that one of the issues that
12 needs to be addressed, in addition to putting the
13 focus on Edison, I think we need to rally behind the
14 Councilwoman, the Mayor, and the School Board, and
15 we need to have Governor Schweiker call Edison in
16 the room and chastise them on our behalf.

17 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you. That's
18 great.

19 I think that we do need to bring Governor
20 Schweiker in this. Governor Schweiker's here in
21 Philadelphia today too. I know two groups in
22 particular that he's meeting with today, and it may
23 be other groups too, but I do know of two groups
24 that he'll be meeting with out in the neighborhoods
25 in Philadelphia.

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2 And, you know, one of the questions that I
3 have is, there are many Councilmembers and many
4 School District members and many State reps that
5 have not -- or were not able to ask Edison
6 questions. We have to get 'em back here.

7 Governor Schweiker, I agree,
8 Representative Meyers, we need to call him. We need
9 to say, Governor Schweiker, we want you to be
10 accountable to us and deal with this whole issue of
11 this Edison problem and the fact that they need to
12 come back and get back here to Philadelphia. The
13 accountability is the issue, and that's one of the
14 questions that keeps coming up, keeps coming up with
15 privatization -- where is accountability and who are
16 they accountable to? Are they accountable to our
17 children, are they accountable to parents, are they
18 going to be accountable to us, or are they just
19 accountable to stockholders? Or how do they
20 prioritize who they're going to be accountable to?
21 And I know that's one of my questions I've been
22 asking all along.

23 Some of us have met with Edison prior to
24 last Thursday when they were here in September and
25 in August, and accountability, the issue of

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2 accountability keeps coming up. And public
3 education allows for public debate about education,
4 and we need to have it. I don't care who's running
5 our schools. Edison needs to get used to it.

6 We're certainly not the first city that
7 they've tried to come into or tried to come into
8 and, I know that they have -- must have had other
9 hearings across the country. People have not just
10 sat back and just opened their arms and said, Come
11 on in, you know, we're waiting for you. And the
12 same thing is not going to happen here in
13 Philadelphia.

14 I just want to thank everybody for their
15 interests. We're sticking together on this issue as
16 unified people, and I've enjoyed having more of a
17 dialogue with many people from the State level and
18 also from the School District level. And, of
19 course, City Councilmembers, we always talk, but
20 this has really made all of us talk more on a
21 regular basis, 'cause sometimes we may not talk for
22 a whole month, but this is really good, and we're
23 going to call on the Mayor and we may invite Edison
24 back on Monday and take it up on State
25 representative Meyers' suggestion that we need to

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2 invite them back every day. And we may just perhaps
3 invite them back on Monday, but they definitely are
4 scheduled to come back on Wednesday.

5 And I want to thank everyone for coming
6 here this morning. We don't want to prolong things,
7 but we thought it was important, you know, to talk
8 about what's going on, and I just want to continue
9 to thank people for their support and for their
10 efforts to fight privatizing Philadelphia's public
11 schools. Thank you.

12 REVEREND BLANKS: If I may. I would be
13 remiss if I would not take advantage of the
14 opportunity to express my gratitude and appreciation
15 with you and other members of Council as well as
16 members of the State legislators and Black Caucus as
17 well as our president, Pedro Ramos, for his
18 leadership in this matter.

19 And I think beyond that, I concur with all
20 of the sentiments that have been expressed here this
21 morning and just feel further that this is the
22 biggest farce that has been presented in this new
23 millennium. If we allow this to happen without
24 these kind of hearings and requests for information
25 and understanding, then we are copartners to the

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2 biggest farce in the new millennium.

3 Thank you.

4 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you.

5 MR. BURWELL: My name is Sam Burwell from
6 the Philadelphia Home and School Council. I chair
7 public relations and special education.

8 I have one concern that I would like to
9 address the body here because you can help the
10 Philadelphia Home and School Council and our
11 parents. We've taken on the goals of trying to
12 educate our parents, but we don't seem to be getting
13 any support from other organizations that are here
14 that can really back the parents.

15 If there's any way that the School
16 District -- and I know you have limitations. I
17 wonder if there's any way that individuals here can
18 support the Philadelphia Home and School Council and
19 give us some guidelines and ammunition that we can
20 educate the parents with because they really do not
21 know what the Edison Corporation is all about. They
22 don't have the information. We have some but it's
23 limited. We'd like to try to educate these parents,
24 and maybe we can rally them. That's number one

25 Number two, we also have a special needs

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2 radio talk show which we deal with special needs on
3 the radio. This program is live on the Internet. I
4 am willing to take this special needs program and
5 concentrate on the Edison Corporation from now until
6 we have some support. If this is live on the
7 Internet, it sends a message to the Governor if
8 he'll tune in on the Internet to hear what
9 Philadelphia's going to say. In order to do this,
10 we need support, we need you to appear on the show.
11 We also need parents that are educated that can make
12 statements that the Governor needs to hear and that
13 Edison Corporation needs to hear.

14 We can rally the parents but we need you
15 to support us and give us some guidance and real
16 help.

17 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Just for clarity,
18 when you said you need us to support you, who do you
19 mean? I know you did mention the School District
20 but what other --

21 MR. BURWELL: I believe, Councilwoman
22 Miller, you chair the Education Committee,
23 Councilwoman Miller?

24 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Yes.

25 MR. BURWELL: Well, we definitely could

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2 use your input and guidance, you know, on the facts
3 and the figures. You probably know what parents
4 need to know in order to move them in some
5 direction. Even the potential schools that have
6 been targeted, we don't know which schools have
7 actually been targeted. If we can figure out which
8 schools have been targeted, we can try to get these
9 parents and let them know what's going to happen per
10 se when the Edison Corporation is going to take
11 over. But we also need to know what we're going to
12 lose when it comes to special ed. I've been
13 talking to special ed. parents who are in an uproar
14 because they feel they're going to lose special ed.
15 if the schools becomes privatized. Where does the
16 State come in?

17 PRESIDENT RAMOS: One suggestion as far as
18 the radio show goes, Alexis is coordinating and
19 we're getting a lot of requests for radio and all of
20 that, so that's the route to go there.

21 But specifically to how do parents learn
22 about it, we're working on some things in
23 communications in the District which would be
24 helpful. I think too that the people that are on
25 this committee should get some questions from you

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2 directly from parents, because we may all have a
3 particular perspective. I'm a parent and I will ask
4 questions from my own perspective as well as from
5 the perspective of the Board but. It would be
6 helpful for you and I think we would welcome, you
7 know, those direct questions that you're getting
8 from parents. It should start with what questions
9 do parents have and let's get folks in here. Maybe
10 we can get them to show up and answer questions that
11 parents have directly. I think if we even had a
12 list in here, the committee would welcome going down
13 the list and reading the questions from parents and
14 having the representatives from Edison answer them
15 on the record.

16 I don't know if that works for the
17 chairwoman.

18 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: It works for us. We
19 would love to have that kind of list from you. I
20 think what we could do probably is meet, you know,
21 as a small group to figure out some strategies and
22 how we can work, best work with each other on what
23 we're trying to do.

24 MR. BURWELL: We're just as concerned and
25 we want to fight, but we can't fight a battle

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2 without the right ammunition.

3 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: We have to be
4 together.

5 PRESIDENT RAMOS: But part of what's
6 missing here is information, which is what this
7 committee and the Board is trying to get, and not a
8 lot of it is coming. I think we still have
9 responsibility to ask the questions, and I would ask
10 you to, through the Home and School Council and the
11 vehicles that you have available like the radio show
12 and the Internet and your other communication
13 vehicles, to collect what questions parents have
14 about this so that we can put them directly to
15 Edison on the record and try to get answers to the
16 questions because that, you know, is a part of
17 what's missing, information. We're having an
18 important debate because information's being
19 monopolized the way the proposal itself monopolizes
20 the management of the schools.

21 MR. BURWELL: When would you like to have
22 them?

23 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: The questions?

24 MR. BURWELL: Yes. Give us a date and
25 we'll have them for you.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Let's have them by
3 at least Tuesday.

4 MR. BURWELL: It will be done.

5 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Very good. Plus
6 it's important to -- you know people assume that we
7 have all of this information. As Pedro said, we
8 don't have lots of information but we would welcome
9 additional questions and will continue to seek
10 information.

11 We want to end this session now. If
12 people want to talk, we can talk after this is over.
13 I'm very conscious of people's time and other
14 schedules.

15 I want to thank everyone for coming, and
16 don't forget that we do have a scheduled hearing.
17 We have a meeting scheduled, a hearing scheduled for
18 Wednesday, at 2:00 p.m. in Room 400 across the hall.
19 And Edison said they'll also be there. Hopefully,
20 we'll see them on Wednesday.

21 Thank you for coming.

22 (Meeting ends at 11 a.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing
proceedings of the Council of the City of
Philadelphia's meeting of the Council Committee on
Education of Friday, 11/16/01, 2001, are contained
fully and accurately in the stenographic notes taken
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_____,
Josephine Cardillo
Registered Professional Reporter
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