

Branstetter, Jennifer

From: Tomalis, Ronald
Sent: Thursday, July 12, 2012 6:59 PM
To: Branstetter, Jennifer
Subject: Fw: Angry Gov ensures questions about his Sandusky decisions will persist

----- Original Message -----

From: Eller, Timothy (PDE)
Sent: Thursday, July 12, 2012 05:44 PM
To: Tomalis, Ronald
Cc: Bolden, Elizabeth; Hickernell, Jessica; Kelley, Janet; Koser, Erica; Gouker, Jordan
Subject: Angry Gov ensures questions about his Sandusky decisions will persist

Angry Gov ensures questions about his Sandusky decisions will persist

Pete DeCoursey
Capitolwire
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Gov. Tom Corbett was angry and offended today when a reporter asked him – as questions mount about Penn State's handling of the Jerry Sandusky child abuse case – if he wished he had done anything differently.

Corbett not only got podium-pounding mad, an extreme rarity for him in public, or private, he said the media and public had no right or reason to ask that question. Which of course, probably will mean 200 new Monday morning quarterbacks will press him about it in the future.

Angela Coulombis of the Philadelphia Inquirer, an unflappable, insistent and well-mannered reporter, noted that Corbett was refusing to answer anything about the critical report on former Penn State official. Even so, she noted that former FBI director Louis Freeh's report scorched PSU former football coach Joe Paterno and former university president Graham Spanier for their decisions. With that being the case, did Corbett believe he, as the attorney general who started and staffed the case, should have done anything differently? Or acted sooner or "alerted the public somehow?"

An angry Corbett turned on her and angrily retorted: "Why are you all obsessed with that?"

Coulombis responded: "It is a really important question, governor."

"It has been answered," Corbett spat out, taking this question, as he sometimes does, very personally. "It has been answered over," he smacked the podium with a resounding thump! "And over," Thump! "And over!" Thump!

Corbett said Sandusky was convicted on "45 of 48 counts," convictions that will lead to life imprisonment. "We do not hold up investigations for anything."

Then he paused, and red-faced, scolded Coulombis: "You are disparaging the reputations of the men and women in that office who have worked very hard to get the result that justice was served and a monster was taken off the street.

"They are not going to hold it up for anything. It takes a long time to develop these cases. They have the experience. I have the experience. I've handled cases like this."

Another pause, but more to collect and focus his anger than to dispel it, he said calmly, with less edge but more finality in his voice: "To continue to ask that question is, in my opinion, out of line. These men and women did their job and I have done my job. The men and women on the jury did their job. And that's the story. Next question."

First, obviously Corbett is sensitive to this criticism, and frustrated that even an overwhelming conviction of Sandusky has not made it go away.

Unlike former Gov. Tom Ridge, the closest thing we have had in a prior governor to Corbett, he also lets how personally he takes questions show in public.

Also, like most of us, Corbett is so used to the rules of his profession that he does not see how to most of us they seem ridiculous. After he knew he was developing a case, and believed Sandusky to be a monster, for most of us, not leaking out that news to safeguard Second Mile and other kids from him seems awful.

But divulging his investigation would have broken his oath of office as attorney general and as an attorney and tossed his legal ethics in the ashbin.

Since most of us know more about the law from TV shows than from real cases, we kinda expect the hero lawyer to get around the bad regulations that seem technical to us and do the melodramatically right thing.

Corbett believes – and we are probably better off when our attorneys general believe this – you can't do that, legally or morally or ethically.

He believes prosecutors have to do this kind of case the way the regulations lay it down. A fair question would then be why did he tolerate leaks to the newspapers about the Bonusgate case from investigators and others, but keep this one bottled up until The Patriot-News broke the story.

And why, when the newspaper did that, did he not let a few folks know there was something to that? Again, he thinks it was wrong, and apparently the Bonusgate leakers were bottled up or not working on the Sandusky case.

The governor also took great pains to outline why he believes the Sandusky investigation and prosecution took as long as it did: to get the right result.

Of course, other factors contributed. For one thing, a major break in the case comes in mid-to-late 2010, as has been widely reported.

For another, he and the other veterans of child sex abuse prosecutions in his office believe, he said, that bringing just one case before the "mountain of evidence" was assembled against Sandusky "would not have been successful."

He said he wished more people had been in the courtroom when Sandusky was convicted, "to see how that mounting evidence ... became overwhelming beyond a reasonable doubt."

He even named the actual investigators he added to the team, an unusual public outing of his top cops, while answering another question about why he assigned more investigators to probe legislative corruption than this child sex abuse case.

That by the way, is a charge I don't understand. Sandusky is a case that involved one monster and a handful of folks who should have acted sooner to expose him, and far too many tragically-ignored victims.

Bonusgate required staff to sift through hundreds of people to figure which were witnesses and which were the 26, including six lawmakers and two former House Speakers, who would end up pleading guilty or being convicted by a jury.

Obviously the Sandusky case is more important to get him off the street, but probably requires less manpower than convicting 26 people of many different crimes.

In some ways, the governor spent the whole press conference answering Couloumbis' question, and as is his way, trying to atone for yelling at her.

A few minutes after scorching her verbally and telling her she had no right to ask that question, he selected her from about a dozen reporters, some of who had asked no questions yet.

He said, as his initially grumpy tone turned more genial: "I don't know why I'm giving you a second question when I'm mad at you..." as he, Couloumbis and the reporters all broke up in laughter.

Corbett is a nice guy, and understands that is a central part of his appeal, and he genuinely doesn't like the kind of public anger former Govs. Ed Rendell and, less often, Dick Thornburgh showed in public. And Corbett gets mad in public or private, far less than any two-term governor, except for maybe Ridge.

So the governor called on Couloumbis two more times. And probably would have done so again if she and the rest of us had not run out of questions after 35 minutes.

He even dealt with the Freeh report's damning of Paterno for allegedly helping to cover up the Sandusky allegations that came to him and Spanier and others. And remember, much of the stuff in the Freeh report is stuff Corbett or his team saw when they were over running the attorney general's office. Most of it is new to us, but not to him.

First, he said only: "I don't think I need to say anything to people about Joe Paterno. That's not my job."

Well, as governor of the state of Pennsylvania, it is his job, to say whether this stuff should alter our perception of Paterno. Some celebrities, like Bill Cosby or Kobe Bryant, to name a pair of famous Philadelphia natives, survive such accusations with good reputations. Some, like Michael Jackson, do not.

But it turned out Corbett was just standing at the edge of the pool before he jumped.

He said that Paterno said he wished he had done more and Corbett had the same wish.

Then he parted ways from Freeh, pushing Paterno toward the Cosby image category, saying: "Do I think Joe Paterno was a good man? Yes."

Obviously, by spending this much time on it, and taking far more questions than anyone expected him to take, Corbett is still trying to put this behind him.

But it wasn't going to end today, no matter how he handled it. And by showing anger and outrage bordering on defensiveness, he gave his enemies a new promising angle to pester him with.

He may think any issue over the time it took to convict Sandusky should be over. He may wish it was. It isn't. And it probably won't be until he leaves the governorship, be that in 30 months or 78.