



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BROWNSVILLE BOROUGH WELCOMES U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY

Uniontown, PA – U.S. Sen. Bob Casey (D-Pa.) returned to Fayette County last week for a special visit with Brownsville Borough community leaders.

A joint effort by Brownsville Borough Council, the Fayette Chamber of Commerce and its affiliate, the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce, Casey's visit consisted of a "Walk and Talk" tour along the Monongahela River and Historic National Road, with stops at local businesses, historic sites and ongoing project areas.

Sen Casey said Brownsville is a "prime example of an historic community that is working together to recover from decades of struggle and rebuild even stronger than before."

"Local leaders in government and the private sector have worked together to put American Rescue Plan and IIJA (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) dollars to good use," Casey said. "I am grateful for the community of advocates working to preserve America's history and revitalize Brownsville and Fayette County. I look forward to supporting their work moving forward."

Fayette Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Muriel Nuttall said the tour was designed to showcase "what a small community can achieve when residents are passionate and have support from local, state and federal officials."

"It's important for our elected officials at all levels to fully understand how important it is for our small, rural communities to be able to grow and thrive," Nuttall said. "This was an opportunity for us to have that conversation with Senator Casey directly and show him exactly where he could support the community even more, with proper use of federal funds."

Nuttall said Brownsville is "unique," in that the work being done throughout is "community-driven."

"This is a community that is so passionate about their history, but also incredibly passionate about their future and making Brownsville a place for their younger population to live, work and raise their families," she said.

For several years now, Brownsville Borough has been experiencing a renaissance, with community officials, nonprofits, private investors, volunteers, the local school district and many others working together to implement changes that have made positive economic and visual impacts.

More than a dozen new businesses opened downtown during the COVID-19 pandemic, while many other Pennsylvania communities were faltering. Sen. Casey visited two of those local businesses, The Sandwich Shop and Deli, owned by Sabina Walters and Brownsville Borough Councilman Mike Walters, and Pickers Pub and Grub, owned by Jaymee Lutz.

"It was extremely exciting to have Senator Casey come to our small community and have him look at the things we're doing on our own. Hopefully, he'll be able to help us continue to rebuild this town," Mike Walters said. "What the senator's presence in our community says to me and everyone else is 'believability.' Several years ago, there was no believability. Nobody believed you could put a business in Brownsville and it would actually sustain. My message to the senator was that, by giving us his time, he is showing new investors they can believe in Brownsville again."

Walters said the many community groups and businesses continue "physically working, rather than just talking about it," to make a difference.

"We can't convince people Brownsville is coming back; we have to show them. The only way people will believe things are happening is if they see it themselves, and Senator Casey's presence really helps that," he said.

Casey's tour included stops at the Snowden Park Arch, Cast Iron Amphitheater, Veterans' Memorial Wall, and Cast Iron Bridge. Accompanied by his Southwest Regional Representative Robbie Matesic, the senator heard from Veterans Wall Partnership representative and community volunteer Denny Falsetto, as well as PennDOT Assistant District Executive Rachel Duda, P.E.; state Rep. Pam Snyder (50th District); and Fayette County Commissioner Scott Dunn along the way.

"It meant so much to the community to see the revitalization of Brownsville," Rep. Snyder said. "I know Senator Casey will work with the community to secure additional, much-needed funding."

Dunn said federal leaders have put funding programs together for infrastructure, broadband and a myriad of other issues - all of which are important to Fayette County.

"To have our senator come see firsthand the impact these dollars can have is extremely beneficial to both Brownsville and the county. My focus has been on unlocking these monies for the needs of our rural county," Dunn said. "Many times, the big metro areas get these dollars. It's harder for smaller counties and municipalities to navigate the red tape and bureaucracy. My message to Senator Casey was that streamlining the grant application process would help greatly, and I stressed the positive impact of these federal programs on rural areas."

Brownsville Perennial Project founder Joe Barantovich echoed Dunn's statements, noting small communities' difficulty competing for federal funds with larger cities, such as Pittsburgh or Philadelphia.

"At this point, almost everything we've gotten has been local or state money, and without that assistance, we wouldn't have been able to accomplish everything we have thus far. Having Senator Casey in town however, we can start talking about federal money, and that puts you in a whole different league of how much you can ask for and what you can accomplish on a much larger scale," Barantovich said. "Right now, that gulf between us and federal money is too big to overcome on our own. We just don't have the resources or the manpower to go after the big, federal grants and bridge that gulf ourselves."

Barantovich said the new connection to Casey's team will allow Brownsville citizens to continue "helping themselves."

"There are a lot of organizations and individuals contributing to the effort to turn Brownsville around. We don't need him to come in and save us, but we need him to help us get to the point where funding will allow us to save ourselves," he said. "On a lot of these projects, like Union Station, if he can get us to that point, we can take it from there."

National Road Heritage Corridor Director Sarah Collier shared Brownsville's significance in the nation's western frontier development and ongoing preservation initiatives; and Brownsville Area School District Superintendent Dr. Keith Hartbauer and Students in Action member Anna Clistler discussed students' key roles in the revitalization efforts.

Casey also heard from Brownsville Mayor Ross Swords; Brownsville Area Revitalization Corporation founder and former Mayor Norma Ryan; and NAACP Fayette County Chapter President Terry Vassar. He was introduced to the Fayette Living Well Coalition's ongoing Blue Zones Project by Chestnut Ridge Counseling Services Executive Director and coalition Chairman Mike Quinn; and learned about the Hope Park Gathering Place, Brownsville Public Library, Charles Street Community Bridge Replacement Project and more.

Brownsville Borough Council President Tracy Zivkovich discussed the municipality's use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for public safety; its comprehensive plan for future development; and vision for the future.

"We primarily wanted the senator to witness the progress we've made in a small community through partnerships and everyone working very hard. We're on the move and ready to go, so we wanted to show him some of our accomplishments and talk to him about the federal funding that may be available to take us toward the next step in achieving our goals."

Zivkovich said the borough has a lot of "shovel-ready projects" and "the capacity to keep going," but needs assistance at the federal level.

"I think today was very exciting, because we brought a group of people together that told Senator Casey a beautiful story about our community. We gave him a chance to interact with small-town America and, in turn, he linked us to his policy team that will point us in the right direction toward completing the projects we've identified as our priorities," she said. "Our first step is meeting with the senator and his staff to start those applications for funding, so we can keep moving Brownsville forward."

To learn more about U.S. Sen. Bob Casey, visit www.casey.senate.gov. To learn more about Brownsville Borough, visit www.brownvilleborough.com.

For more information about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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