



Protesters clad in "Handmaid's Tale" outfits and carrying handmade signs gather on Broad Street.
HEATHER KHALIFA / Staff Photographer

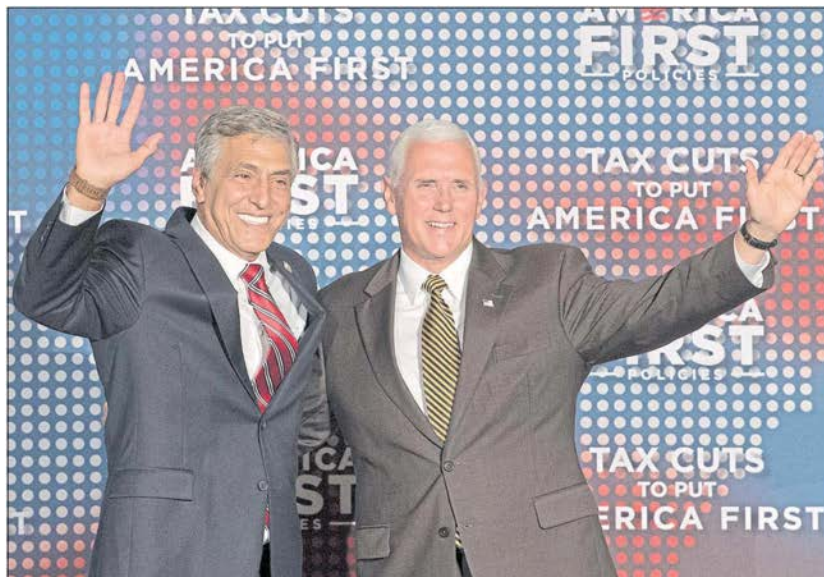
SEEING RED

A 'HANDMAID' PROTEST GREET'S PENCE

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JOSE. F. MORENO / Staff Photographer



Republican U.S. Senate candidate Lou Barletta (left) with Vice President Mike Pence during a political stop at the Sheraton Hotel in Philly. JOSE F. MORENO / Staff Photographer

Banner day for Pence

Philly visit draws supporters, lots of protesters

By Chris Brennan
STAFF WRITER

VICE PRESIDENT Pence came to Philadelphia on Monday to tout President Trump's economic agenda, raise cash for Rep. Lou Barletta's bid for the Senate, and tell voters they need Republicans in Congress to "finish what we've started."

His visit, which included speeches at a Center City hotel and a Barletta fundraiser at the Union League, snarled downtown traffic and drew protesters into the early evening.

At his first stop, a free event hosted by America First Policies,

a nonprofit set up by former Trump campaign staff to support the president's agenda, Pence told the crowd that the administration has kept its promises. He cited tariffs imposed to help American steel companies, the weakening of the individual mandate that was a core of the Affordable Care Act, and the tax cut package Trump signed into law in December.

Pence noted that the legislation resulted in 73,000 Pennsylvanians receiving pay raises. That's about 1.3 percent of the state's work force, per U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"Under our administration, Philadelphia's unemployment

rate has fallen to the lowest level ever reported," the vice president told more than 200 gathered in the ballroom. "The American dream is working again for every American." Philadelphia's unemployment rate was 5 percent as of May; the last time it was that low was in December 2000, according to Federal Reserve statistics.

His speech was a locally tailored version of a speech he has been delivering for months — from Cleveland in March to Milwaukee in April to Phoenix in May to Columbus in June to St. Louis last Thursday — as both parties prepare for midterm elections expected to have profound political implications. Though the event was open to the public, it



Protesters Mary Tierney (left) and Liz McHale don their "Handmaid's Tale" outfits to greet Vice President Mike Pence near City Hall. DAVID MAIALETTI / Staff Photographer



A protester has a message for the veep at Broad and Sansom Street, near the Union League. JESSICA GRIFFIN / Staff Photographer.

drew a largely partisan crowd: Cheers went up when Pence cited Trump's morning tweets warning Iran.

And as he has done elsewhere, Pence served up the same names and topics for the audiences to boo — such as House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Obamacare, and Democratic opposition to Trump's tax cuts.

"Let me say it from the heart, any leader who says \$1,000 in the pocket of American workers are 'crumbs' is out of touch with the

American Public and should never lead the Congress again," he said, citing Pelosi's criticism that the tax-cut raises were little more than crumbs.

Pence also knocked Barletta's opponent, Sen. Bob Casey, a Scranton Democrat seeking a third term, who opposed the Trump tax cuts.

"He was supposed to be a moderate; he votes more like Bernie Sanders than Pennsylvania,"

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Pence said, as the crowd chanted "Vote him out!"

Casey, speaking to reporters in Harrisburg hours before Pence arrived in Philadelphia, criticized the tax reform bill, rattling off statistics that he says prove that the largest tax breaks will come to those who need it the least, rather than to middle-class families.

"We missed an opportunity that only comes around every 30 years," he said.

The crowd at Pence's gathering had a different take.

"The president and vice president have restored our standing in the world and made us proud to be as exceptional as we are," said Jonathan Verlin, a resident of Philadelphia's Art Museum neighborhood, who had Pence autograph a red USA hat he brought to the event. He called Pence's speech "truly awe-inspiring."

Bill Kiss of Doylestown brought his own hat — this one a "Make America Great Again" hat he bought at Trump Tower in May 2016. "We need to have more people who want to push the agenda forward instead of burying it and trying to destroy the best two men we've had in the White House in a long, long time," Kiss said.

His appearance as the headliner at the private campaign fundraiser later at the Union League drew less enthusiastic support. Nearly 200, some in costumes from the dystopian Hulu drama *The Handmaid's Tale*, crowded near police barricades to protest the vice president and the administration in general.

"The Trump-Pence regime must go," the women, donning scarlet dresses and white bonnets, chanted several times in unison.

Among them was Patty Murphy, a Chestnut Hill tavern owner. "This is a bad group of men and women running our country," she said. "I'm turning 69 soon, and I never thought we would go back."

Pence's visit could be a much-needed boost for Barletta, a Hazleton Republican who has



Protesters gather outside the Union League in Center City, where Vice President Mike Pence attended a fundraiser for GOP Senate candidate Lou Barletta: Some dressed in "Handmaid's Tale" garb (above) while others carried messages for the political bigwigs. PHOTOS: HEATHER KHALIFA / Staff Photographer



lagged behind Casey in campaign cash.

Casey's most recent campaign finance reports show he raised \$2.2 million in the second quarter of 2018, and had \$9.8 million on hand for the fall contest. Barletta raised \$1.3 million in the same period, with \$1.6 million in the bank.

"I don't need to raise as much money as Sen. Casey," Barletta said Monday in Philadelphia before the vice president arrived. "The person who raises the most money doesn't always win. It's the person with the best ideas and who the people of Pennsylvania want to represent them."

Barletta said it was Trump, in a June 2017 phone call, who first urged him to run for the Senate. Trump has committed to campaign for him, said Barletta, who was cochairman of Trump's campaign in Pennsylvania in 2016. That could set up a unique political tension between a president who cherishes campaign rallies and his political team, who might worry about Trump so publicly supporting a candidate who falls short.

America First Policies, which also makes independent expenditures in races, reported spending just short of \$2 million on two races in 2017, one win and one loss. The group supported Luther Strange, who lost a Republican primary in Alabama for the U.S. Senate to former Judge Roy Jones, who then lost the special election to Democrat Doug Jones. And the group opposed Democrat Jon Ossoff, who lost a special election for the U.S. House to Republican Karen Handel in Georgia.

Asked if he feels his political fortunes are linked to Trump's, Barletta said he was looking forward to talking about tax cuts. "That's what matters most to people," he said. "Not so much the president but that his policies are working."

— Staff writer Claudia Irizarry-Apon-te and Liz Navratil of the Harrisburg Bureau contributed to this article.

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