

David Thornburgh

Samantha Matthews 26 March 2019

Speaking with the Committee of Seventy's President and CEO David Thornburgh, I got a real sense of his passion for Philadelphia city government. Indeed, politics are deeply rooted in Mr. Thornburgh's life and family. He is the son of former Pennsylvania Governor and U.S. Attorney General Dick Thornburgh. After graduating from Haverford College with a B.A. in Political Science, he received a Master's in Public Policy from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Mr. Thornburgh joined the Committee of Seventy (Seventy) as President and CEO in 2014. Prior to joining the Committee of Seventy, he held a variety of politically-focused positions in Philadelphia. Most recently, he served as Executive Director of the University of Pennsylvania's Fels Institute of Government. At Fels, Mr. Thornburgh launched the Executive MPA program and quadrupled alumni giving.

When Mr. Thornburgh came to the Committee of Seventy, Philadelphia city government was relatively stable and committed to ethics and integrity. However, he believes that as politics change, you must adapt, and new responses and priorities are needed. The 2016 Presidential election led to a restored interest in the Committee of Seventy's mission and a renewed purpose

of fighting for democracy and civil rights.

Established in 1905, the Committee of Seventy has an extensive and influential history in Philadelphia, where it continues to be dedicated to fair elections and good governance. At the turn of the twentieth century, Philadelphia was arguably the worst-governed city in America. Elections were far from fair. After a 1904 town hall meeting that aimed to improve Philadelphia's political climate, the Committee of Seventy was formed. That meeting brought together many prominent Philadelphia reformers, including Fels, Strawbridge, and Calvert, who were all members of Seventy's first board.

In order to solidify a robust and efficient organization, the founders of the Committee of Seventy created a clear mission statement. According to Mr. Thornburgh, Seventy's mission has fundamentally stayed the same for 115 years and he referred to it as, "in a way a rock."

While its mission has remained relatively stable, Seventy's goals and priorities have evolved with the changing political landscape. According to Mr. Thornburgh, Seventy has a history of stepping up when the city "loses its bearings." He believes that it is crucial to read the changes in the world around you and to understand how those changes affect the nature of your organization.

"Strategy is a Crossroad of Opportunity and Capacity."

Accordingly, when Thornburgh took over Seventy, he modified the organization's strategy. Seventy now fights to defend campaign finance laws, has made lobbying and campaign spending public information, and has established an independent City Board of Ethics. Seventy also provides unbiased, nonpartisan information to voters, a crucial task in today's political climate. Some of Seventy's recent accomplishments include prohibiting cash gifts for elected officials and city employees, banning excessive pensions for elected officials, and leading a successful court case to limit campaign contributions, thereby reducing corruption in the City.

Mr. Thornburgh has received numerous awards for his leadership, including an Eisenhower Fellowship in 2000 and being named one of the "40 Business Leaders Under 40" by Philadelphia Business Journal in 1992. He has also been recognized as a highly trusted and respected civic "connector" by LEADERSHIP Philadelphia.

Mr. Thornburgh believes that Seventy has "recommitted his interest in innovation." Moving forward, he hopes to extend Seventy's impact to Harrisburg and the greater region. Seventy and David Thornburgh are well positioned to respond to the needs of the current political landscape and ensure fair elections and good governance in Philadelphia and beyond.