

Weingarten, Morrissey Accuse Ferguson of Push Polling; Candidate's Aides Say Poll Was Legitimate Survey

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WARREN — Seventh Congressional Republican candidates Joel Weingarten and Patrick Morrissey last week took fellow Primary candidate Michael Ferguson to task for what they say have been push polls conducted to discredit their campaign efforts while bolstering Mr. Ferguson's effort.

The Ferguson campaign defended the poll, conducted by the national polling firm Diversified Research of New York, as not pushing voters towards voting for Mr. Ferguson but merely trying to gauge responses from likely Republican Primary voters.

Mr. Weingarten and Mr. Morrissey held the impromptu press conference in the lobby of the Warren Municipal Building on April 11. Mr. Ferguson, a new resident of the township, was not in attendance, but his campaign manager and a political consultant did attend.

Mr. Weingarten said it is "beyond the pale for someone to engage in unfair campaign practices which not only distort the truth but border on defamation."

"I am running a campaign, as is Pat (Morrissey), based on our records of achievement in public service," the Assemblyman continued.

"This (the poll) undermines the integrity of the (political) process," Mr. Weingarten stated.

The candidates were critical of Mr. Ferguson who introduced a "clean campaign pledge" at a candidates forum in Scotch Plains in February. The pledge called on the GOP candidates not to make personal attacks against a candidate or their family; not to use black and white grainy or distorted photos of an opponent; not to distort the truth regarding a candidate's background; not to use push polls; not to send out anonymous fliers; and not to make attacks through third parties.

"He himself has violated the very pledge which he has stated should be followed," Mr. Weingarten charged.

Dan Quinonez, Mr. Ferguson's Campaign Manager, said throughout the poll the Assemblyman was cited for raising taxes 13 times.

Mr. Weingarten, in reviewing his tax votes, stated he voted against one of them; two were tax cuts; three were tax neutral; one was a voter referendum; one was to give municipalities the right to set fees; another was to give the right for private sector financial institutions to set fees; three of the proposed tax hikes were actually to allow fees to be increased on discretionary services; and one was a tobacco tax to fund school construction.

He said he voted in favor of the tobacco tax "to see if we could retard children's use of tobacco and at the same time see that we didn't increase broad-based taxes on New Jersey residents."

"If that (the charge that was purely

a tax increase) is not defamation of record, I don't know what is," Mr. Weingarten explained.

Mr. Quinonez said his research indicates Mr. Weingarten voted to raise property taxes two times while on the Millburn Township Committee.

Tom Blakely, a campaign consultant for Mr. Ferguson, told reporters there is no way to "disprove" the push poll allegations. He called the press conference a "good (campaign) tactic" by Mr. Weingarten and Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Weingarten quickly responded, "not only are you distorting a record but smirking at a public official."

Assemblyman Weingarten said he intends to introduce legislation by early May that will call for an end to push polling in New Jersey. The legislation would also require that the name of the campaign be clearly noted at the beginning and end of the polling calls.

Mr. Blakely, who helped formulate some of the poll's questions, said legitimate polls do not reference who the poll is being conducted for in order not to influence the answers.

Assemblyman Weingarten said, based on his proposed legislation, any campaign poll that includes factually inaccurate information about another candidate would result in charges and fines by the campaign that conducted the poll.

Mr. Morrissey added that he thinks, "it is the height of hypocrisy for Mike Ferguson to be saying that he is going to conduct a clean campaign when one month later he turns around and does push polling."

The candidate has been critical of Mr. Ferguson's use of political consultant Arthur Finkelstein who Mr. Morrissey claimed is known for negative campaigning.

Mr. Blakely said Mr. Finkelstein is a "legitimate pollster" who has done work for former President Ronald Reagan, New York Governor George Pataki and former Senator Al D'Amato.

Mr. Quinonez said the Ferguson Campaign is the only Seventh District campaign not running negative attacks on opponents. He said Mr. Weingarten himself is running telephone polls.

Mr. Morrissey said he was the topic of pushing polling because he is "the only qualified conservative in this race and Mike is going to distort my record."

Mr. Morrissey said the poll falsely stated he was an attorney in Washington and was "somehow responsible for this whole health care mess when in fact I was one of the people at the point trying to fight Bill Clinton's liberal big government

agenda." Mr. Morrissey served as Counsel to the House Commerce Committee under GOP leadership the past five years.

He also said he is Pro-Life and Pro-Choice on the abortion issue as he said was indicated in the Ferguson campaign poll. Congressman Christopher Smith, a pro-life Congressman, recently sponsored a fundraiser for Mr. Ferguson.

"I think it is important that voters know that Mike Ferguson is spreading lies about his opponents," Mr. Morrissey stated. "I think Mike Ferguson better start to come clean with the voters and start to confess the dirty tactics that he is using."

He charged that Mr. Ferguson's campaign is going to perpetuate the Clinton era rather than end it.

Paul Danielczyk, President of the Woodbridge-based Conservative G.O.P., said he was a recipient of one of the calls about three weeks ago in the evening from the Ferguson camp.

"The questions were to tear down the person they were talking about and build up Mike Ferguson," Mr. Danielczyk said, also referring to the charge that Mr. Morrissey was a Washington attorney. He said candidate Tom Kean Jr., a resident of Westfield, was accused of never buying a house in the district. Mr. Kean and his wife actually purchased a home on Harrison Avenue in Westfield in December.

"Polls are a part of political life, but when you start distorting within your own party — your opponents' records — I think that's improper," he said.

Mr. Danielczyk said his goal is to keep the Seventh District in Republican hands, given the fact the Democrats need only to gain five seats to take the majority of the House of

Representatives for the first time in six years.

He said the poll "went from laughable to sad." The Conservative G.O.P. has yet to endorse a candidate in the Seventh District but may do so at its next meeting this week. He said the group was not likely to endorse Mr. Kean or Mr. Ferguson.

Mr. Blakely, consultant to the Ferguson campaign, said a poll was conducted which he described as a "legitimate survey" of 60 questions among 300 voters. He said by comparison a push poll generally consists of three to five questions "after a negative message is delivered" and involves calling thousands of voters.

"I want to emphasize that that was not the case here," he told reporters.

Mr. Blakely said the poll did accuse Mr. Weingarten of raising taxes on parking and property taxes and increasing debt service on the budget all while he was an elected member of the Millburn Township Committee.

"We stand by every single question that was put forth in this poll," he added.

He said that pollsters tested both positive and negative data on all candidates including Mr. Ferguson. Mr. Blakely added that one of Mr. Ferguson's direct mail pieces mention his opponents. He stated, however, that Mr. Weingarten has sent out literature that included what he described as a distorted photograph of Mr. Kean.

A Weingarten Campaign aide said the picture was reproduced from a Christmas card Mr. Kean had mailed out. The literature was written to show Mr. Weingarten's record as an elected official versus Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Kean who have never held elective office.

Walsh, Gardner Bow Out of District 7 Race

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Failing to gain the momentum and support in her run for Congress, Green Brook Mayor Patricia Walsh and former Woodbridge City Council President and Fire Chief Ken Gardner last week announced they were withdrawing from the Seventh District Republican primary race, reducing the candidate field to five.

Ms. Walsh had placed health care reform and preserving Social Security as the centerpiece of her campaign to succeed Bob Franks in the House of Representatives. Ms. Walsh is a registered nurse, serving Somerset, Middlesex and Union Counties.

"A good leader and smart politician knows when its time to look at the issues and refocus," said Mayor Walsh. "This decision was a difficult one to make, but it is the right one for me at this point in the process." Mayor Walsh said in a statement released by her campaign last week.

"We ran a positive campaign based on the ideas of leaner government, tax cuts for working families, educational reform and a health care system that works for the patient. I am proud of that message and of the work we accomplished during this campaign," she stated.

She had also raised issues such as why it has taken the federal government 25 years to begin the Green Brook flood control project and why New Jersey sends the most

money to Washington yet is near the bottom of funding it receives in return.

When contacted by *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*, Ms. Walsh said she intends to endorse a candidate at some point. "But no one person at this time." Mr. Gardner, however, has endorsed Assemblyman Joel Weingarten of Millburn (R-21st).

Ms. Walsh said she will back a candidate who focuses on leaner government, tax cuts and working families, issues she addressed in her campaign.

Mr. Gardner stated that his bid for Congress relied heavily on winning the line in Middlesex County, his home county. He said changes must be made in that county's convention process including the use of voting machines as opposed to paper ballots along to guarantee ballot and credential integrity.

"I want to help improve our process. That will attract voters in the fall," Mr. Gardner stated.

Ms. Walsh's exit from the race leaves Assemblyman Weingarten, Michael Ferguson of Warren, and Tom Kean Jr. and Patrick Morrissey, both of Westfield, and newcomer Roderick M. McNealy of Somerset County as the remaining candidates in the race. Mr. McNealy just filed his petitions in Trenton last week.

Eric Urbano of Scotch Plains dropped out of the Congressional race earlier to run for Union County Clerk.

Westfield Jaycees Plan Annual Raffle Dinner-Dance

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Jaycees will host their annual Raffle Dinner-Dance on Saturday, April 29, from 8 p.m. to midnight at Temple Emanu-El, located at 756 East Broad Street.

Proceeds from the event will benefit various community programs, including the Jaycees' College Scholarship Fund.

For the third consecutive year, the dinner will be catered by J&M of Mountainside and will feature the Motown band "Smooth." Raffle tickets cost \$160 and admit two to the dinner-dance, but attending the event is not necessary to win.

A limit of 400 tickets will be sold and they will be picked in a reverse raffle manner, with the final ticket representing the winner of the grand prize: a 2000 BMW Z-3 Roadster.

Numerous other prizes will be dispersed throughout the evening, including many donated by local businesses and merchants.

Tickets may be purchased in downtown Westfield on East Broad Street, where the BMW Z-3 will be on display on Saturday mornings from about 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Tickets may also be purchased by calling the Westfield hotline at (908) 232-5123 or by contacting the Westfield Jaycees at P.O. Box 517, Westfield, 07091.

Further information about the Westfield Jaycees may also be obtained at www.westfieldnj.com/jaycees.

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