



CROSSING THE LINE...A demonstrator went too far in protesting, as judged by police during President Bush's visit to Westfield last Friday.

Anthony DiBattista for The Westfield Leader

Protestors Blast President On Social Security Plan

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

chanted "Bush must go."

In addressing the crowd, Congressman Pallone stated, "The bottom line is that this is a bad bill."

He said that under Bush's new system, bad investments could hurt Social Security recipients who are not knowledgeable investors.

"The only guys that think that way are the Wall Street guys, Bush's buddies," he said.

Union County Labor Council President Ed Zarnock was particularly impassioned, refusing to use a microphone during his raucous speech. He ended with some advice for the President, shouting, "Keep your damn hands out of it, and get the hell out of Jersey."

NAACP Vice President James Harris and N.O.W. (National Organization of Women) President Suzannah Porter were among those who addressed the crowd. Their unified message was that the President was not welcome here in New Jersey, and should stop lying to the American people. "Back to the Ranch" the crowd yelled coarsely throughout the demonstrations.

NJCA Political Director Staci Berge said she is confident that the nation's Social Security will remain solvent until 2042 because there is a "surplus built in. We have 40 years to figure out how to fix this," she said.

When asked whether she would feel more secure with a proactive President that would seek out measures to protect the nation's Social Security, Ms. Berger responded, "Not if that's the kind of leader George Bush is going to be."

Ms. Berger also feels the Town Hall meetings are simply campaign meetings and referred to them as a "scam" and "fake."

With regard to the protestors, much of their distrust is still rooted in the weapons of mass destruction controversy from the Iraq war. While most of the protesting centered around accusations of lies and deception toward the Bush Administration, it was lacking in suggestive alternative plans to help the ailing Social Security system.

As the demonstration came to an end at approximately 9:45 a.m., the anti-Bush crowd marched down towards the Armory waving placards that read "Hands off My Social Security" and shouting to passersby. When they were stopped on Rahway Avenue by police barricades and a Union County S.W.A.T. team, many demonstrators broke off down First Street to head off police in an attempt to get near the rear of the Armory.

Police at the intersection of Edgar Street and Lynwood Place then blocked the crowd with barricades to prevent them from getting near the Armory. After a great deal of commotion, three policemen took control and arrested a young girl as the crowd shouted, "Let her go."

The chanting developed into shouting matches between President Bush supporters and opponents with one side yelling, "Save Social Security" and the other side countering, "That's what he's trying to do."

Not everyone in the crowd was upset about the President's proposal.

"I'm really excited that he's here to convey to the people of Westfield what his plan to privatize Social Security is all about," said Marcus Swillingsley, 18, of Westfield.

Many President Bush supporters came with American flags and signs that read, "We love President Bush." Others were saying that the protestors' criticism stems from blind hatred toward the Bush Administration.

The following adult citizens were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct and released pending court appearances: Emily Colvin, 18, of Westfield; Jonathan Spitz, 41, of Westfield; Gabrielle Hanlon, 21, of New Brunswick; and Thomas Silva, 40, of Paterson. In addition four 16-year-olds from Westfield, two boys and two girls, were arrested along with a 15-year-old boy from Rahway.

The police released the five juveniles to their parents or guardians. The arrests occurred on Rahway Avenue, Coddling Place, and Lynwood Lane.

Mr. Spitz, who did not resist arrest, told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that the arrests occurred after the President's motorcade exited the Armory. Although the police treated him well including loosening the hand cuffs, he believed they were "over zealous" and that his arrest was to "silly."

"I really feel it (the day's event) could have been handled much, much better by the President, the protestors and the police," Mr. Spitz said, adding that he felt protestors should have been allowed to demonstrate on the Westfield High School field.

"I think that was what everyone was looking for," he said, to be viewed by the President and his motorcade. Mr. Spitz, who said he was on the sidewalk when he was arrested, believes charges will be dropped upon his appearance in Municipal Court on Wednesday, March 23.

President Bush Holds Town Hall-Style Forum On Social Security Reform at Westfield Armory

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

their working career would save \$250,000 by the time they retire. In addition, that amount would continue to earn interest over the years.

"It's been proven that when you hold money over a period of time in safe, conservative investments, it gets a better rate of return than the money you get in the Social Security system," the President said. He emphasized that his plan would include guidelines and rules, due to the fact it would be considered a retirement account.

He said under the current system the government promises a "stipend" but not an asset that is owned by the individual.

The President said his plan would be phased in slowly "so that we can better afford the transition cost to go from one system to another. But I'll tell you this: If we don't act, we're looking at about an \$11 trillion hole for the American taxpayers that are coming up."

One of the panelists, John Bly of Suffolk County, Long Island, said he was more concerned about his children and grandchildren's Social Security benefits.

"Private accounts are going to pay more," he said.

His daughter, Lisa Engler of Westfield, said the prospect of Social Security going bankrupt is, "very frightening" to her. The mother of five children with her husband, Bill, she said, "there is no getting around"

that the system will be in the red in the near future.

Brian Dougherty, 23, a sales manager with the Hilton Short Hills said people his age have been ignored by news networks and talk shows on the issue of Social Security.

"But we have something to say, and we're concerned about the issue," Mr. Dougherty told the President.

President Bush called Social Security a "generational issue" which needs to be "modernized and reformed so you'll have the safety net when you retire."

At the conclusion of the event Rep. Steve Rothman of Bergen County said the President's proposal would add \$2 trillion of new federal debt. He said if Social Security is left alone "the system will pay 83 cents on the dollar" in 2042 rather than going broke as the President stated. He said any plan must be bi-partisan in nature if a compromise between Republicans and Democrats is to be reached.

"The President's plan is so destructive to what so many people find dear," Rep. Rothman told reporters. He said the plan would result in a 40 percent cut in Social Security benefits and elimination of guaranteed benefits the system currently pays out.

As an alternative the Congressman favors a universal 401k plan as well as a Thrift savings plan similar to what employees receive.

He called President Bush's plan

"radical" and one that was not embraced by Presidents Ronald Reagan or George H. W. Bush.

"I think that's (President Bush's) plan the wrong idea and will destroy Social Security," Rep. Rothman said.

Congressman Ferguson said, "If we do nothing the system will go broke." He said Congress needs to "take a reasonable and rational" and bipartisan approach to the future of Social Security.

To the Democrats who have come out against the President's plan Mr.

Ferguson commented, "Those are people that are thinking about the next election rather than the next generation."

"I am trying to stay focused on the next generation and stay off of politics," President Bush said.

Although Mr. Ferguson has not officially endorsed the President's plan, he said people should be allowed to have "more control over their own resources."

Rep. Ferguson said the President was "welcomed very warmly by Westfield and the whole area."

Westfield High Students React to President's Visit

By MICHELLE KUPPERSMITH

Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — President George W. Bush's visit to Westfield this past Friday was met with fanfare as well as dissent. For many students at Westfield High School (WHS), the honor of having Bush in town outweighed the security measures that caused logistical difficulties that inconvenienced many.

Senior Brian Oxman said, "It was a special day that deserved extra precautions, and I think the small sacrifices we had to make were worth the opportunity to have the President come to Westfield."

WHS entered into a lockdown before President Bush arrived around 10:40 a.m., and open lunch, when students can leave school property, was suspended for all juniors

and seniors.

Although students were not allowed to view the President's arrival and departure from outside the school, those with a free period were allowed to congregate in the cafeteria, which provides a view of Rahway Avenue. Some students were not happy with the handling of the situation.

Senior Sarah Klass said, "I felt like I was assumed to be a threat, even though I was just going about my school day."

Prior to President Bush's visit, WHS Principal Dr. Robert Petix told the students that snipers would not be positioned on top of the school, as some rumors suggested, although snipers were perched on the roof of the Westfield National Guard Armory, facing the school, on Friday.

Police vehicles were stationed in the school parking lot and police officers blocked the entrances to the teacher parking lot on both Rahway Avenue and Trinity Place. Protesters visible from the school congregated on side streets off of Rahway, as well as on Trinity.

Nick Brownstone, a junior, said that, "having the President in town was surely a unique experience. Seeing the motorcade pass by school was a moment that I will never forget. I felt that the security was effective and the restriction on open lunch was the right decision to make. Overall, the school handled the situation astutely."

Other students were more upset with President Bush's reason for coming to Westfield than with his actual visit.

Freshman Charlie Tripp said, "As much as I thought it was thrilling to have the President in town, I do not like him as a leader, and I think that his Social Security plan will be ineffective. Also, his audience was composed of mainly Republican faithful, resulting in no opposition. I don't see what the point in that was."

Police Chief Comments On Actions of Protesters

By PAUL J. PEYTON

Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Police Chief Bernard Tracy said Tuesday night that problems regarding organized protests against President George W. Bush last Friday resulted when organizers from New Jersey Citizen Action (NJCA) and Americans United to Protect Social Security (AUPSS) decided to move from the location designated for protests, Mindowaskin Park, to the Lord & Taylor and Westfield "Y" parking lots.

"We got many complaints from the YMCA that they took over the parking. In fact they were parking in the front, they parked in the crosswalk," he said.

Chief Tracy added that parents bringing their children to daycare were forced to walk in the road to access the "Y." He said the fact that all the lots in the vicinity were full with illegal parking "created just chaos over at the YMCA."

He said demonstrators gathered in one of the lots and "took over sidewalks," where they passed out literature.

"And quite frankly, their behavior was despicable," said Chief Tracy. He stated that police had asked organizers what their plans were to demonstrate and asked them to clean up when they left.

"Police were called everything from fascists to Nazis to pigs," the chief said.

"I think the police officers in general handled everything profession-

ally," Chief Tracy said.

After speeches were given, demonstrators, he said, decided to march in the street through the South Avenue traffic circle and on to the Armory.

He said police had decided in advance that arrests would be made for assault or an act of violence, or if protesters crossed the perimeter (police barricades).

"Fundamentally, that's what happened," he said, noting the arrests of five juveniles and four adults on disorderly person's offenses.

Chief Tracy said he has received only one complaint of police abuse from one of the arrests. He said the incident is being investigated, noting that the police department is trying to obtain videotapes from the Union County Sheriff's Department of the incident.

"But I believe it will show that the (officer) acted professionally and used great constraint" and that the arrest was made properly and "no excessive force" was used, he said.

Town Administrator Jim Gildea said he felt that the town's police and fire departments "did a wonderful job" during the event. He noted that the assistance Westfield received from neighboring communities was "unprecedented," noting that other towns handled four fire calls while Westfield firefighters were involved in the Presidential visit.

"I think it was a very positive day," said Mr. Gildea. "For the things that could have happened, it was very smooth."

Resident Laura Nolan, who lives near the Armory, told the council that she wanted her three young children to witness a "once in a lifetime opportunity" to see a Presidential motorcade at Lynwood Place and Coddling Road.

She said protestors, who had been under control, began "sneaking through yards on Edgar Road in order to gain access to the area." She witnessed some protestors spitting at police, yet, she said, police remained calm.

"Soon the crowd got out of hand and my children began to cry," she said. "Thankfully, the police were able to gain control of the situation and calm the crowd."

"I never imagined that such a great thing that happened to this town could have turned into such a mess," Ms. Nolan said. She thanked the police for their efforts.

Resident Cory Mermer said he didn't see actions by police that he would view as "out of line."

On another matter, Mr. Gildea announced that the town has again received a homeland security grant for \$140,000. The grant will reduce the tax rate increase from 6.1 cents to 5.4 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation and cut the increase per homeowner from \$118 to \$105 a year for a taxpayer owning a home assessed at \$180,000, the average assessment in town. Last year's municipal tax increase averaged \$199 per household.

A public hearing on the \$32.3 million budget and the \$17.6 million tax levy will be held at 8 p.m. on Tuesday, March 29, at the Municipal Building on East Broad Street.

See Exclusive Video on President Bush's Visit: www.goleader.com

Meetings Scheduled On Traffic Hot Spots

WESTFIELD — The town's Citizens Traffic Advisory Committee and the Town Council's Public Safety, Transportation & Parking Committee have scheduled two outreach meetings regarding a safety improvement plan for eight designated traffic hot spots in town.

On Monday, March 21, Woodland Avenue, the McKinley Elementary School area, and the Central Avenue and Clover Street intersection and Ayliffe Avenue will be discussed.

On Wednesday, March 23, comments will be heard on Tuttle Parkway and North Avenue, the Franklin Elementary School area, and the Lawrence and East Dudley Avenue and Walnut Street intersections.

Both meetings will be held at 7 p.m. in the Community Room of the Municipal Building.



GOOD MORNING...Lisa Grawehrs' Pre-Kindergarten Four class from the Mountainside campus of Holy Trinity Interparochial School rolled out of bed and strolled into school, still wearing their pajamas. As part of the day's lesson, they learned how to make their own breakfast of hot pancakes, maple syrup and milk. The first batch was made by Mrs. Grawehr, and her students, Deirdre, Ryan, Michael, Josephine and Maggie.

WESTFIELD POLICE BLOTTER

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 27

John Zaccaro and Joseph Wisniewski, both 19 and from Westfield, were arrested following a motor vehicle stop at South Avenue and Crossway Place. Each was charged with possession of less than 50 grams of suspected marijuana. Both were released on their own recognizance.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28

Markus Lostan, 22, of Cranford was arrested at South Avenue and Watterson Street and charged with driving while intoxicated. He was released to a responsible adult.

THURSDAY, MARCH 3

A Walnut Street resident reported that an unknown person stole his briefcase, containing a laptop computer, digital camera and Palm Pilot, from in front of his home. The victim had left the briefcase beside his parked car.

FRIDAY, MARCH 4

Three Westfield teenagers, two females and one male, were arrested after a motor vehicle stop at South Chestnut Street and Benson Place. All were charged with possession of less than 50 grams of suspected marijuana, possession of suspected marijuana with intent to distribute, and possession of suspected marijuana with intent to distribute within 500 feet of a public park. The eldest of the suspects was re-

leased on her own recognizance with a summons, while the younger two were released to the custody of their parents.

A Walnut Street resident reported her apartment was burglarized. Police reveal that force was used on the front door and two rooms had been ransacked. However, it was unknown what, if anything, was missing.

SUNDAY, MARCH 6

Walter Bilotta, 57, of Woodbridge was arrested at South and Central Avenues following a motor vehicle accident and charged with driving while intoxicated. There were no injuries. Bilotta was held until he was sober.

Marquis Relf, 20, of Plainfield and a female juvenile from Westfield were arrested following a motor vehicle stop at Boulevard and Caufield Place.

Both were charged with possession of less than 50 grams of suspected marijuana with intent to distribute, possession of suspected marijuana with intent to distribute within 1,000 feet of a school, and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Relf also was charged with unlawful possession of a weapon, identified by police as a four-inch Buck knife, was held pending the setting of bail. He additionally was wanted on an outstanding \$1,000 contempt of court warrant from Westfield.