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— Established 1890 —

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The President's Visit — Inside the Walls

This week, there is a flurry of letters as one can note. They flooded in immediately upon completion of the President George W. Bush's visit to Westfield. Those opposed to the President's policies and those who were involved in protest demonstrations submitted several letters. We printed most.

From what we can tell, the protesters were responsible; certainly within their rights. Only nine were judged to have crossed the line by police — and arrested for misconduct.

Before and after the event, political and special interest groups e-mailed several letters in what seemed to be a coordinated effort.

In all likelihood, several letters expressing opposite views will be received next week.

One had to be there, in the Army with the President, to know what went on. It was electrifying. Of course, it was not possible for everyone to be there. Most definitely, attendees were thoroughly screened.

From inside the walls, it was captivating. We documented our immediate impression by producing a six-minute video and posting it on the Internet that day. You can see this at www.goleader.com/video. The transcript of the event is also posted there. Westfield TV-36 and Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School TV-34 will be airing videos of the President's program shortly. We invite you view these.

We videotaped about three hours including the event, interviews and happenings outside the walls to go with hundreds of photographs. These will be compiled to DVDs and turned over to the Westfield Historical Society for safeguarding. Copies will be given to our libraries for public access. Other copies will be offered to the public, and segments will be posted on our Internet site.

If you have digital photographs or videotape regarding the event and want it to be part of the archives, please contact us by e-mailing editor@goleader.com. Large files can be delivered to us by connecting to our ftp site (call for details).

For a week beforehand, it was an incredible process, seeing this being put together by the White House, local

officials, fire, police, county, swat teams, secret service, helicopter surveillance — we know not all of it. As others connected with the event, we were kept informed, but carefully and on a need-to-know basis only — fully understandable.

Only on the last day were approvals for attendance confirmed; this of course after complete background checks were made — requiring submissions of social security number, date of birth and other personal information.

Tickets, about 1,500 in all, were extremely difficult to obtain and they were allocated throughout the Seventh Congressional District (Rep. Mike Ferguson) and within the state. Within an hour on Tuesday beforehand, Congressman Ferguson's office was overwhelmed and could no longer accept phone call requests.

When notified of clearance for tickets, everyone needed to pick them up personally on Thursday with photo I.D. required. All were screened at the door on Friday, passed through metal detectors and many were personally frisked. The line to get in was an hour long and stretched from Railway Avenue, around the Armory and to the back entrance. No one seemed to mind the wait or the cold. All understood the precautions.

There were many men dressed in black — polite, but all business. It was not a time to mess around. As 9/11 has come upon us, no President of the United States can appear in public without concern of assassination — a sad commentary for the world?

The President's visit was not a Town Hall meeting as the press may have led those to believe. It was a presentation, carefully scripted and produced. It was very entertaining, upbeat and without partisan rhetoric. All in attendance realized that and accepted the basis.

When the President says we have a problem with Social Security coming down the road, that it needs to be fixed, this newspaper takes the message seriously. We believe others that heard the President do as well.

President Bush has accomplished at least one purpose — to start the public dialogue on the issue. We hope the public examines his postulates and not fall into partisan "lock step" — on either side.

One Who Was Arrested Provides Perspective

As one of the several citizens arrested after President Bush's visit to Westfield, I presume to offer a perspective on the day's happenings.

First, I can state that other than the rationale that led to my arrest and the particular officer who initiated it, the conduct of the county sheriff and the Westfield police throughout my period of custody was professional and courteous. Cuffs were adjusted for tightness; frisking, processing and questioning were all done with respect.

The officers displayed an "innocent until proven guilty" attitude that is both lawful and appropriate. However, it is still clear that our police officers need to receive training in the nature and responsibilities of crowd control.

It is grossly unfair to expect officers trained in crime prevention and response to also be able on "instinct" to properly protect/control lawful citizens exercising their right to peacefully assemble. As it may not be practical to train suburban officers for a once in a generation event, perhaps it makes sense to have this type of enforcement under the control of the county or state.

In witnessing numerous officers throughout the day's events, I can state confidently that most know well their dual responsibility to protect the town and its laws along with the public's right to protest. It is a difficult predicament for them, especially without guidance or proper supervision from their superiors.

We as a citizenry need to carefully examine our conduct in our democracy and to recognize that we have much work to do. This is true for the protesters, supporters, police and the President himself. We need to step back and examine our own behavior as critically as we examine each other's.

As we look to champion democracy

throughout the world, we must remember not to take our own for granted. Both Democrat and Republican leadership have fostered an "us versus them" mentality, creating an environment in which to prove a point one must destroy his opponent.

This atmosphere is not new (check the library archives for newspaper coverage of the Jefferson versus Adams election) but has been finely tuned by our current political players. It is not trite or hypocritical to talk about our varying roles as citizens. We constantly must consider our acts in terms of their personal and civic implications.

It is perfectly consistent to peacefully wave message of protest as the President passes while the same time sharing in my child's excitement over seeing President Bush's hand wave from his limousine as it sped past Edison School. Just as my youngest daughter was thrilled to have President Bush's picture and signature come in the mail after she sent him a letter upon his first inauguration.

Even as one who voted for Mondale, I admit that when I by chance saw Ronald Reagan's motorcade travel down Second Avenue in New York, I had goose-bumps at seeing his familiar face in the window. We are complex beings and should not let ourselves be narrowly defined by one issue or party.

This current Social Security debate hopefully can serve to illustrate the point that folks do not necessarily consider themselves simply Republican or Democrat, but rather chose to consider issues individually. We can say, for example: yes, I voted for President Bush but do not support the war, or I voted against him but support his policy on Social Security.

We must regain our ability to give ground, to concede mistakes without concern of showing weakness. Disagreement is not disloyalty. We speak often of rights

but rarely of responsibility. The Constitution enshrines our rights, but it is through our actions that we acknowledge our responsibilities.

Specifically, the police need to make a best faith effort to provide protesters as much access as possible to redress their grievances in front of elected officials. The protesters too need to recognize that the right to protest against the government does not preclude civility toward fellow citizens who disagree, such as those attending the event at the armory.

These citizens, too have the right to meet and support the President's policies. The police have a crucial responsibility. They need to ensure the public's right to meaningful protest, showing respect for process despite any possible antipathy to a particular cause. To expect them to accomplish this without training or proper leadership is unfair to the officers, dangerous to the citizenry and hazardous to democracy.

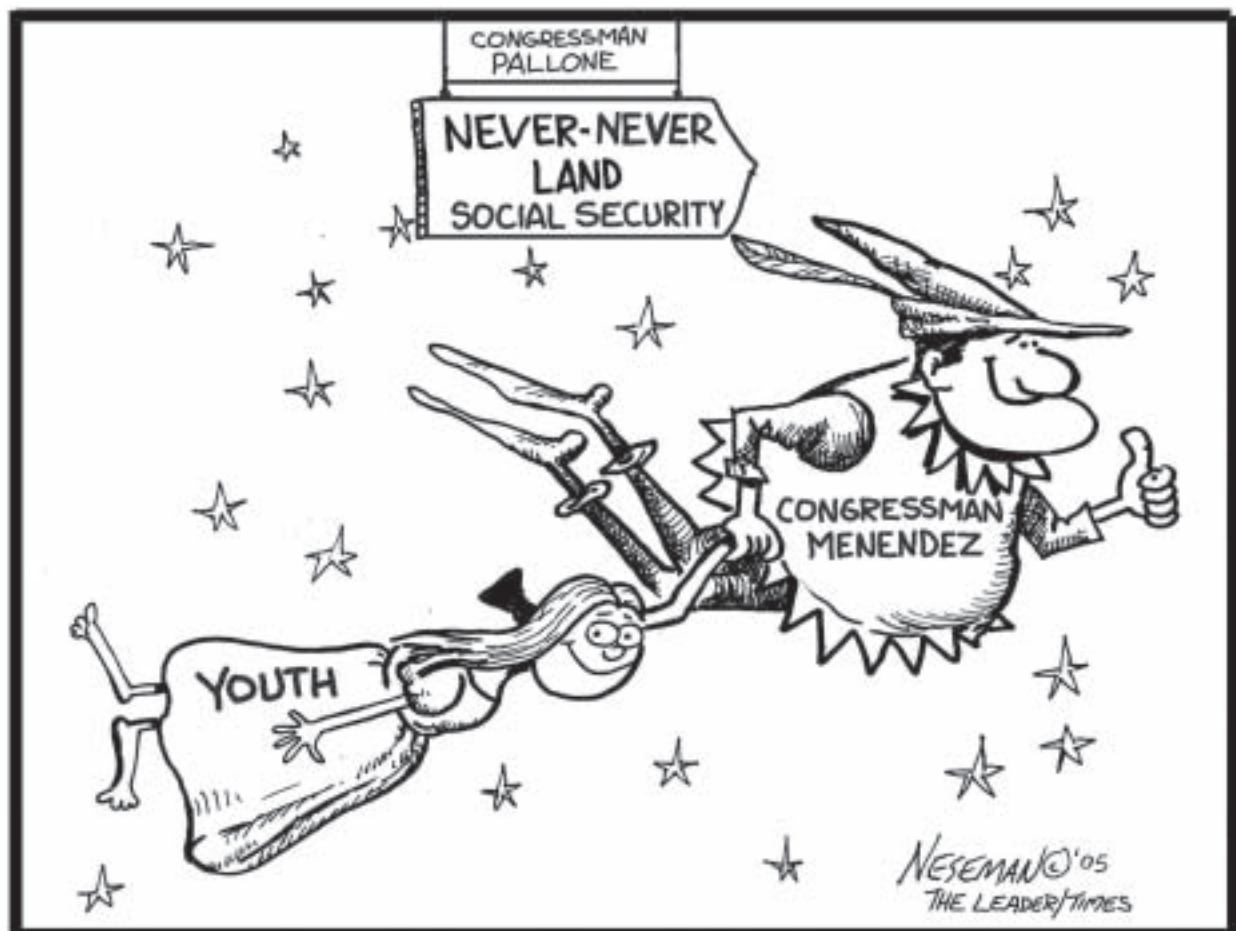
Jonathan Spitz
Westfield

President's Visit Gave Town National Headlines

What an honor to have President Bush and Congressman Ferguson visit our town and to have the headline "Westfield, New Jersey" appear in the major newspapers around the country as the reporters wrote about the President's town hall meeting.

The historic stop in Westfield certainly accomplished the goal of raising awareness of the Social Security debate and most likely has brought the issue to the thoughtful attention of many who might not otherwise given the subject more than a passing thought. The process works.

Julie Diddell
Westfield



22nd District News

NJ's Election System Is House of Lords Where Incumbents, Rich Get Elected

Senator Nicholas Scutari, Linden

At the end of the movie *The Candidate* Robert Redford poses the question, "what do we do now?" It's the very question we may be asking in terms of the candidates and officials we chose as the state tries again to engage in election reform.

There is the obvious goal of eliminating the excessive influence of money in our system. The current wave of harsh editorials and the voter cynicism are symptoms showing change is needed. We should make certain the change we make is an improvement.

That's not an idle thought. The reformers need remember the current system with pay to play and only the very rich running for office were all the result of past efforts at reform. In the name of reform we have a system in which the average citizen can no longer really dream of running for higher office. We are sadly very close to a House of Lords set up where only incumbents and the very rich run the system.

The question remains if not by the current system, then how will elections be financed. The cost of elections, mostly for advertisements, consultants, and direct mail are the culprits. I have yet to see a candidate who enjoys the prospect of raising money.

With surprisingly little fanfare, the New Jersey Fair and Clean Elections Pilot project has been moving forward since last June. Relying upon small contributions, the goal is to keep the

cost of elections in two targeted Assembly districts, "realistic and reasonable."

The New Jersey Citizens Clean Election Commission will administer the financing and assess the results. The assessment is especially important to me. Our courts have virtually permitted rich candidates to spend their money as they see fit for their own election. If we chose to limit the impact of the political parties, we need to determine the alternative.

The point being that dissatisfaction with a current system of excessive monied interests is fairly obvious. The dissatisfaction with the system and the seemingly easy position of just saying you're against the current system is just not good enough. We must be sure that the alternative is better and workable.

I sought a position on the Clean Elections Commission because I saw it as a practical way to develop a solution beyond just tearing down the old system. In the past, that approach has given us the current problems and no real answer to the question where to go from here. It's the need to answer that question which may determine that where we go is actually an improvement.

Senator Scutari was appointed to serve as a member of the New Jersey Citizens Clean Elections Commission.

Letters to the Editor

Protestors' Free Expression Was Depleted After March to Armory

Last Friday morning a spirited group of several hundred liberally minded citizens held a rally in Westfield's Lord and Taylor employee parking lot to hear politicians and civic activists speak about what President George W. Bush's minions are trying to accomplish in their bid to bankrupt America and disrupt our Social Security.

When the speeches ended the assemblage turned south and began a procession toward the Westfield Armory to explain to the servile Republican masses assembled inside the error of their ways, and if President Bush heard a stray voice of dissent, all the better. Marching orderly across North and South Avenues, the throng of chanting citizens was a colorful and magnetic sight, but as it covered a few more blocks a roadblock with strong police presence brought them to a halt.

Undeterred, some marchers swung right and moved one block over, left at the next corner, and on toward the Armory. Here the police were jostled a little, as the crowd inadvertently pushed someone into an officer, and in spite of her friends and supporters boisterous objections, they arrested and quickly drove the perpetrator off in a police van.

With that approach to the Armory and it's sought after inhabitants firmly blocked, the protestors pivoted and marched left and right. The well-prepared security forces stopped the dozens who went left. Another 30 or 40, who had again moved around in a successful right flanking effort, made it to the fence surrounding the Armory.

Here the teamwork of Westfield, several surrounding communities police, Union County Sheriff, officers, SWAT officers, and what looked like federal agents in neatly pressed suits and well polished shoes, pinned the boisterous rabble in place. However, the people were now within easy shouting range of their quarry, and when President Bush's long motorcade began its parade out of the grounds the decibel level tripled, as years of repressed indignation and outrage surged from the mouths of 50 marchers in a desperate cry to be heard.

Security concern was clearly manifest, as "town hall meeting" attendees were

Ralph Jones
Hackensack

Protestors Dissipated After Realizing They Were Not Prepared to Fight

On March 4 at 9 a.m., on this, the anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address, 500 people massed at the intersection of Clark Street and Ferris Place to hear Congressman Robert Menendez and Frank Pallone speak out against President Bush's plan to privatize Social Security.

The street protest, organized by New Jersey Citizen Action, was peopled by two distinct groups: Those who opposed the President's plan for Social Security and those who simply opposed the President.

At 9:45 a.m., the crowd began to march, double file, toward the Armory in a line that spanned the entire distance, only to be stopped two blocks away by police barricades and S.W.A.T. teams in full riot gear.

I looked at the senior citizens around me and said to myself, "This is America? This is democracy? Why does the President not want to hear what these people have to say?"

The organizers led chants with their bullhorns, but the crowd was not satisfied. A group broke off and began to walk, ten abreast, down First Street and then left on to Lynwood Place and then down to Edgar Street in a maneuver designed to flank the police and get near the rear of the Armory.

Scrambling, the cops rushed patrol cars to block the protesters at Edgar and Lynwood. Never good at following the herd, I could not find the voice to chant with the others, "Say no to privatization!" but suddenly found myself yelling "Let us through!"

The cops were agitated as they darted here and there to prevent citizens from crossing an imaginary line they had drawn on the township street. I looked a police officer directly in the eye and screamed, "You call this Democracy?" and he looked right back at me and shouted, "Take one more step and you will be the first to be arrested."

now passing by and through the rowdy crowd. Insults were hurled; a snowball flew through the air, and suddenly, a team of Union County SWAT members appeared and formed a solid line between the two ideological parties.

A young woman was dragged from the surging crowd, slammed up against a patrol car and put under arrest, followed quickly by another, as a young man yelled "leave her alone, get your bleeping hands off her," yet another angry young man kicked at the snow, and a couple of clumps lobbed up onto a policeman.

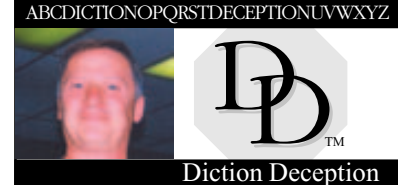
A blind rage shot across the offended officer's face and he took out after the culprit, who appeared to be running for his life. Quickly overtaken by the pursuing officer, the young man swung around to surrender and was buried in an avalanche of burly men in blue and black. Within seconds two more were on his back, with another's knee squarely on the squirming man's face, effectively pinning him to the snow covered ground.

A phalanx of SWAT officers immediately reformed between the arrest and the jostling crowd. These rapidly developing actions took the stand-off to a dangerous new level, and everybody knew it. We all took a deep breath and thought "oh my god, what next" but police numbers suddenly multiplied many fold and each resolutely escorted a marcher up the street and away from the Armory.

"Just keep moving" they said, firmly guiding elbows in the desired direction; "you can say anything you want, sir, but just keep moving." There were no options.

Our rights of free assembly and freedom of expression were depleted, and within minutes it was all over. The unruly were moved off, the President's apostles were protected from anything unscribed, and everybody enjoyed a good laugh at the foolish rabble, except for those under the jack boot of Union County's finest and, I suspect, the police officers themselves.

They earned their pay, and although today was no Chicago 1968, just maybe the world was watching. This is what democracy looks like.



Below are four arcane words, each with four definitions — only one is correct. The others are made up. Are you sharp enough to discern this deception of diction?

If you can guess one correctly — good guess. If you get two — well-read individual. If you get three — word expert. If you get all four — You must have a lot of free time!

All words and correct definitions come from the board game *Diction Deception*.

Answers to last week's arcane words.

1. Tamaoír — The three-toed antaeater
2. Winnock — A window
3. Wether — A castrated ram
4. Talion — Punishment that exacts a penalty just like the crime

PUCERON

1. Covered with a hairy substance or wool
2. A gum resin which oozes from the Indian hemp
3. Second-class; something of lesser value
4. Plant louse

JUGAL

1. Snarly; tangled
2. Idle babble or chat
3. The cheekbone
4. Boisterous; noisy

PUERILISM

1. Childishness
2. An irritation; annoyance
3. Acting indiscreetly; carelessly
4. Very small amount; a pinch

JORUM

1. Discontent
2. A large bowl or vessel for drinking
3. Soreness in the eyes
4. A boat hoist used for raising and lowering smaller boats

Letters to the Editor

More Letters Pages 5, 8 & 16

Storm Drains in Town Are A Potential Hazard

I would like to advise the Westfield Public Works Department that there is a potential hazard with certain types of storm drains. On February 25, my grandson and I had the experience of slipping on ice and partially sliding into the drain.

I am a medium build person and my grandson is almost as large as I am. My concern lies in the consequence that may have occurred if my 3-year-old (very small built) grandson would have stepped in the same spot under the same conditions. This particular drain is at Westfield High School. I understand that this is a population of typically medium build persons. However, people do come with small children.

I was informed that my concern defied the 15 years of experience of one public servant. Nevertheless, and at the risk of being "pooh poohed" again, I think as a service department, you can keep the community safer if you are aware of such issues. As I close, please get this information clear, I am not saying that the storm drain is defective. I am simply saying that under certain conditions of weather and lighting, that rather large objects can slide into some existing openings.

Peggy Lore
Westfield

President Had Hold On Audience During Social Security Discussion

My wife Gaile and I were both impressed with the format for President Bush's event at the Westfield Armory last week. His presentation and his hold on the audience were all considerably improved over the earlier years in his Presidency. The event was very well managed considering the short time organizers had to put it together.

The event reminded me much of the mid-70s when Westfield really had a football team, and we three times went to Meadowlands for state playoffs — you got there and everybody you knew, even those you have not seen for 5, 10, 15 years, were there to greet, chat, and just assure that they were still with us. Here of course virtually all I assume were red Rs, but I also saw friends and colleagues from other towns as well.

The first half of the President's presentation was really fine, patriotic, tributes to those to whom tributes are needed as well as being humorous and funny at the same time. Like many I have some doubts and questions about the Social Security plans, but when the President wants my attention to present something the least I, as a citizen, can do is listen even if I do not agree.

Bud Boothe
Westfield

Minors Were Brutalized By Police During Protest

Editor's Note: The letter writer is a junior at Morristown-Beard School.

I had the unfortunate and disturbing experience of witnessing acts of police brutality against minors right here in Westfield on Friday, March 4. As a politically involved 16 year old, I looked forward to the opportunity to exercise my first amendment rights by participating in Friday's organized demonstration against President Bush's plan to privatize Social Security.

I was shocked when I observed police from Westfield, surrounding towns, and Union County antagonize, and ultimately brutalize and arrest, two kids. The violence they used was abhorrent and unacceptable to any civilized person.

I never thought I would experience something so repulsive and disturbing right here in my "perfect" little town. Unfortunately Abu Ghaib appears to be alive and well in Westfield. Something must be done to hold those involved accountable for their despicable actions.

Hannah Gannett Vickers
Westfield

Lewis Seagull
Westfield