



Peyton's Peek at the Week In Politics

By Paul Peyton of The Leader/Times

Brick Mayor Resigns Amid Corruption Probe

Brick Mayor Joseph Scarpelli resigned last Wednesday following a federal corruption probe spanning two-and-a-half years. The FBI investigation has centered on the role the town's former public works director has had in the purchase of trucks and truck parts.

Corzine Launches First Statewide Blood Drive

Governor Jon Corzine called on New Jersey's top employers last week to join the state government in an ongoing effort to increase blood donations and avert future shortages. According to a New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services press release, the effort, known as the "Save 3 Lives... All in a Day's Work" campaign is the first unified effort between the state and its blood centers to reach employees of state government and major corporations through the workplace.

In 2005, the state used 74,000 more units of blood than it collected. Currently, 2.5 percent of the state's residents give blood on a regular basis compared to the national average of 5 percent, department officials said.

Tpke. Authority Head Under Investigation

Joseph Simunovich, chairman of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, is the subject of a state Ethics Commission complaint. He reportedly has acknowledged taking three flights to and from Florida on a private jet owned by Joseph Sanzari. Mr. Sanzari is involved in a joint venture that received \$52 million in Turnpike contracts. Mr. Simunovich was finance chairman for Sen. Robert Menendez's campaign but resigned after news of the investigation broke.

Senate OK's Commuter Van Safety Measures

The State Senate on Monday passed portions of a legislative package that would increase the safety and security of commuter van services used by day-labor employees. The package of bills was crafted following news reports last year that uncovered concerns regarding the safety of the van fleets that shuttle low-income day laborers to and from work. According to a press release from Assembly Democrats, 97 percent of the 209 commuter vans pulled

over for roadside safety spot checks were either in violation of state registration and licensing regulations or deemed to be so unsafe as to be unsafe to drive. Some 12,000 workers are transported daily on commuter vans.

A-1321/2980/2981 would increase fines for transporting passengers for hire, create additional fines for transporting passengers for hire without a required certificate of public convenience and necessity and dedicate those additional fines to an "Omni-bus Safety Enforcement Fund" to be created in the Department of the Treasury and to be used exclusively by the state Motor Vehicle Commission to administer and enforce the provisions of this legislation. Assemblywoman Linda Stender is one of the sponsors.

Booker Fined for '02 Campaign Reporting

Newark Mayor Cory Booker has been fined \$78,500 by the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC) for failing to properly report donations during his unsuccessful 2002 campaign for mayor, according to a *Star-Ledger* report. It is the second largest fine for a single candidate in ELEC history. Mayor Booker and his treasurer Elnardo J. Webster, 2nd admitted filing occupation and employer information for 56 contributions totaling \$58,450 anywhere from 1,486 to 2,124 days late. The paper reported that Mr. Booker paid the commission \$7,850 in August and must pay six additional payments of \$11,775 each by November 1, 2007. Mr. Booker and then-Mayor Sharpe James raised a combined \$5.4 million in the 2002 campaign, making it the most expensive municipal election in the state at the time.

FBI Arrests Developers As Probe Continues

FBI agents arrested two Monmouth County developers and their business partner last week as part of a continuing investigation of political corruption in Marlboro. Arrested were brothers Bernard and Steven Meiterman, who own Meiterman Holdings of Freehold, a builder of housing developments in Marlboro, and their business partner, Eddie Kay, according to an *Asbury Park Press* report. Sources told the newspaper that the Meitermans and Kay were indicted on charges of bribery, extortion and mail fraud.

Officers Indicted In Alleged Insurance Fraud Conspiracy

TRENTON - Two police officers from Plainfield and Roselle have been indicted on charges of conspiracy, official misconduct and theft for allegedly filing false accident reports to further an insurance fraud scheme involving an auto body shop in Roselle. Attorney General Stuart Rabner and Division of Criminal Justice Director Gregory Paw announced December 7.

According to Insurance Fraud Prosecutor Greta Gooden Brown, a state grand jury indicted Plainfield Police Detective Samad Abdel, 42, of Roselle, and Roselle Police Officer John Smith, 37, of Columbus. The officers were charged in a superseding indictment including seven other defendants who were indicted on August 9. The indictment was handed up to Superior Court Judge Linda Feinberg in Mercer County.

Authorities said Det. Abdel was charged with second-degree conspiracy, two counts of second-degree official misconduct, third-degree attempted theft by deception and third-degree theft by deception. Officer Smith was charged with second-degree conspiracy, two counts of second-degree official misconduct and two counts of third-degree theft by deception. The indictment alleges that both police officers filed two false police reports each regarding automobile accidents that they knew were staged or fictitious so that fraudulent insurance claims could be submitted, authorities said.

"The indictment alleges that these two police officers abused the trust and authority of their positions by writing

false accident reports to substantiate phony insurance claims," Mr. Rabner said. "We have zero tolerance for police officers who break the laws they are sworn to uphold."

The new indictment includes the following charges against these additional defendants, which match the charges contained in the Aug. 9 indictment:

Marco Rebelo, 33, of Avenel, the owner and operator of Creative Auto Body at 409 East 1st Avenue in Roselle, has been charged with conspiracy, theft by deception and misconduct by a corporate official, all in the second-degree and third-degree tampering with public records or information.

Eli Vasquez, 34, currently incarcerated at Bayside State Prison, has been charged with second-degree conspiracy and four counts of third-degree theft and attempted theft by deception.

Danny DaCosta, 26, of Elizabeth, has been charged with second-degree conspiracy and two counts of third-degree theft by deception, while Rogério Neves, 37, of Elizabeth, was charged with second-degree conspiracy and third-degree attempted theft by deception.

Rui Correia, 27, of Elizabeth, has been charged with second-degree conspiracy and third-degree attempted theft by deception. Charles Smith, 36, of Willingboro, has been charged with third-degree theft by deception, and Marquita Best, 32, of Linden, has been charged with third-degree theft by deception.

According to authorities, second-degree crimes carry a sentence of up to 10 years in prison and a criminal fine of \$150,000, while third-degree crimes carry a sentence of up to five years in prison and a criminal fine of \$15,000. In addition, the defendants may face civil insurance fraud fines.

"Staged car accidents are a particularly egregious form of insurance fraud because of the potential they present for injury or even death," said Insurance Fraud Prosecutor Brown. "[Last week's] indictment demonstrates our resolve to vigorously investigate and prosecute this type of crime."

The indictment alleges that the defendants reported seven staged or fictitious car accidents between March 2001 and March 2003 and filed more than \$117,800 in fraudulent automobile insurance property damage claims based on those phony accidents. The defendants allegedly provided false information for police accident reports from the Roselle and Plainfield Police Departments, which were used to substantiate the auto accident insurance claims.

The insurance companies paid \$94,200. The case was assigned to Union County, where the defendants will be ordered to appear in court at a later date to answer the charges.



United States Senate News My Comments On Iraq Study Group Report

Senator Robert Menendez

WASHINGTON - U.S. Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) last week released a statement on the recommendations for the war in Iraq as outlined in the Iraq Study Group report.

"For the past several years, the American people have cried out for a dramatic change in our nation's Iraq policy. And as one who voted against the war in Iraq, I, too, have called for a new, smart foreign policy that brings change to the Middle East and brings American troops home. Last month's elections and today's recommendations from the Iraq Study Group make it clear that change is indeed in the air.

It is critical to note how far the discussion on the Iraq War has shifted in such a short period of time. It was only several months ago that those of us who called for a gradual redeployment of U.S. troops were criticized for not fully understanding the global challenges Americans face in the War on Terror. Yet today we hear from a bipartisan commission of distinguished Americans that, barring drastic unforeseen circumstances, American troops can indeed be out of Iraq by the first quarter of 2008 - a goal not too far from the one I've advocated for several months.

I appreciate the group's general call for US troops to be out of Iraq by the beginning of 2008 and I also believe wholeheartedly that without a firm deadline America will still fall short of our foreign policy goals. I agree with the group in their call for the U.S. to engage in substantive and vigorous diplomacy to solve the Iraq conflict. I have long called for a regional conference to engage Iraq's neighbors and a renewed effort to engage our allies in Europe and around the globe.

Leaders of the Iraq Study Group said today that implementing their recommendations will require an extraordinary amount of political will from both the Congress and President Bush. They further make it clear that the previous 'stay the course' method is no longer viable. Both points are critical. Only sincere bipartisanship in both the legislative and executive branches of government can bring about true change in America's Iraq policy.

As an incoming member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I look forward to further discussions on these pressing matters. And I thank the members of the Iraq Study Group for their service to America on such a critical issue."

Freeholders to Authorize Contract for '07 Concerts

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

ELIZABETH - The Union County Freeholder Board is expected to issue new contracts tonight to Hoboken-based This Is It Productions to promote and produce three music concert events next year.

County manager George Devanney said resolutions would be on the board's regular agenda to hire the company to run MusicFest, the Rhythm and Blues Concert and the Kids Kingdom Jubilee.

The board also is expected to take action to approve a five-year contract to 4Connections, LLC, of Elizabeth to install and maintain a fiber-optic telecommunications network connected between various municipal and county buildings. The cost of installation of the network is \$194,000, with the maintenance contract costing \$263,457, for a total contract of \$457,457. Elizabeth will be required to reimburse the county \$361,493.

The board approved a \$500,000 contract with 4Connections in May to install a nine-mile high-speed fiber-optic network for a communications system connecting county buildings and the three Union County Col-

lege campuses.

The network stretches from the county administration building in Elizabeth to Runnells Specialized Hospital and includes the Ralph G. Froehlich Public Safety Building in Westfield, the department of engineering and public works in Scotch Plains, the Park Madison Building in Plainfield and the UCC campuses in Cranford, Elizabeth and Plainfield.

A resolution on tonight's agenda would authorize a \$775,724 contract with Condata, Inc. of Sewell for "integrated human resource and outsourced payroll system" services. Finance Director Larry Caroselli told the board that the company already provides payroll services for the county but now has the ability to provide human resources services.

The board will hold a public hearing prior to voting to adopt an ordinance to increase salaries of the county's nine department directors. The increases range from 2.75 to 4.88 percent.

The board's remaining meetings are scheduled for tonight, for a regular meeting, and Thursday, December 21, for agenda and regular meetings. Meetings begin at 7 p.m.

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