

By WF-BOE Candidate Beth Cassie Redistricting; Community Engagement

Families choose Westfield for many reasons, one of which is the fine reputation of the schools. The success of the school district is not due to the success of one school over another. It is due to the fact that the district as a whole is committed to excellence and creating success for all students.

Westfield citizens get engaged and involved in important decisions for our community. I have never seen us to be afraid to educate ourselves on the issues, enter into a debate and make difficult choices. Addressing our intermediate school enrollment is one of these important community decisions.

Enrollment projections indicate that growth at Roosevelt Intermediate School will far outpace growth at Edison Intermediate School beginning in the fall of 2007. Today the difference in enrollment between the two schools is less than fifty students. That difference is projected to grow to over 150 more students at Roosevelt than at Edison by the year 2009. This would be a 20 percent increase over today's enrollment at RIS — a problem given our existing facilities and the way we currently deliver intermediate school instruction.

As I mentioned in my article last week, a Citizens' Advisory Committee was formed to look at enrollment issues at both the elementary and intermediate school levels. More than sixty people applied for the sixteen slots. This committee of 16 citizens and 4 board members analyzed, discussed and debated the intermediate school situation at eight meetings held over the past two and a half months. After pouring over data, meeting with the intermediate school principals and other staff members and touring the facilities, the committee came to an understanding of the challenges those enrollment projections pose given our current intermediate

school program and facilities. The committee also gained an understanding as to what is important for middle school students with regard to class size and teacher/student assignment (teaming).

The committee was charged to address what changes need to be made in either the assignment of students or the availability of space to continue to provide a quality educational program. The "assignment of students" or redistricting is understandably a very hot issue for the community.

When the committee was established it was intended to wrap up in February with the goal of reporting out during March. The complexity of the issues (both intermediate and elementary) and the amount of debate between committee members lengthened the process.

As I announced at the March 21st Board of Education meeting, a subcommittee of the Citizens' Advisory Committee is currently in the process of writing up our findings. The full committee is scheduled to meet on April 5 to review a first draft of the report.

The dedication of the committee members to this very hard issue is admirable. Let's allow the committee to complete their work and hear their recommendations. The final report will be presented to the public and the board as soon as it is completed. Once that report is public, there will be plenty of opportunities for board members and the community to ask questions, express their opinions, deliberate on the recommendations and make a well-informed determination of their own positions.

In a perfect world there would be a solution that taxpayers, parents and students would unanimously embrace. Realistically, I hope that our community can come together in support of a recommendation that is well thought out and provides a workable solution for 2007.

More Candidates' Letters

By Freeholder Candidate Patricia Quattrocchi Residents to be Hit By Tax Whammy

Once in a while a film or stage production is referred to as the "sleeper" of the year. A sleeper by the way is said to be an unexpected achiever of success. Jon Corzine's budget address, which he delivered this week, could also be referred to as a sleeper, however in this case the word "sleeper" has a totally different meaning.

I am reminded of when I would vacuum the house when a cranky baby was in residence knowing that the hum of the machinery would lull my little one into a deep sleep; and to tell the truth, while listening to the governor droning on for what seemed to be an eternity, I actually did fall to sleep.

The hype that surrounded the release of the proposed budget went on for days prior with little tidbits of information occasionally coming at us through the press, TV and radio. Rumbblings of an increase in the sales tax, taxes on liquor and cigarettes, a water tax and a tax on services such as health club massages and your local carpet cleaning service were all possible along with a decrease in aid to municipalities and education. Tighten our belts, brace ourselves because this is going to hurt; all of it delivered in rapid fire monotone seemingly intended to allow the Governor to get in there, get it out there, get it over with and then make a rapid retreat for the exit door before the good residents of the state have the opportunity to organize a junta.

Corzine's plan containing increased spending of nearly \$3 billion closely mirrors that of our local Union County Board of Freeholders, who have been whining about not being able to control real estate taxes but all the while they continue to unabashedly build, buy and borrow. This gang of nine will soon be approving a budget of \$413 million for Union County, an increase of more than \$10 million over last year, giving them the dubious distinction of being capable of

spending \$1.11 million a day, a figure that most of us can't even conceptualize.

Like Jon Corzine, they really haven't announced any major changes in their everyday spending habits and also like Corzine they are talking about a layoff of lower level employees, who are the hard working backbone of the county government.

The State budget plan, which includes the sales tax increases is expected to cost New Jersey families in the neighborhood of \$2000 to \$3000 more a year with \$400 to \$500 in sales taxes alone. Here, in Union County, the cost will be compounded by the proposed increase in the county tax levies, an ever increasing county Open Space tax based on ever increasing Union County property values, and an increase in municipal property taxes as towns scramble to make up for the freezes on school and municipal aid.

County residents can expect to be hit by a triple whammy to their wallets.

Like Trenton, Union County has been spending more than they take in tax revenues, grant monies seem to have started to dwindle and the county surplus once used to supplement the annual spending plan is fast becoming a fond memory. Eventually fancy financial footwork comes home to roost and it appears that this is what has finally happened on all fronts.

The freeholders are now beating the bushes to find the funds to support the fragile infrastructure they created and as with the state, this house of cards is beginning to tumble down.

Well, with that said, let's all hope that county government sees the light and starts to seriously cut the fat from the budget and that Gov. Jon Corzine's proposed budget does indeed turn out to be a "sleeper" living up to the true meaning of the word.

I'm a candidate for Union County Freeholder. Give me your vote in November and I'll represent you responsibly in government.

By SPF-BOE Candidate George Gowen One Less Bullet, One More Book

'One Less Bullet, One More Book'. By this simple phrase, I propose an idea that, if enacted, could answer the public school funding issue for the foreseeable future.

'One Less Bullet, One More Book', and if that sounds like 'beating swords into plowshares,' I admit to similar sentiment.

As a candidate for the Board of Education in the Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District, I've studied the debates, the frustrations of inequitable funding and the back-and-forth accusations that surround the paramount question: "How do we pay for public education?"

At its inception, public education was, generally speaking, made mandatory by state law and paid for locally through taxes on property. It is apparent that the process is tapped-out.

So localities look to their state legislature.

From our state legislature we receive no additional funding, but mandates and directives that specify achievement levels and score values that must be met at the risk of state interventions as a consequence for failure. The state response to requests for funding is simple — there is no money.

Hence, the repetition of the cycle: local burdens seek state relief, state denies, forces local burden, local burden seeks relief... and on and on, year after year.

So I ask, "Where is the money?"

We are taxed, and in some cases, up to 50 percent of income is carted away to pay for "the common good" by way of federal taxes.

In 1957, our nation went into shock as our self image and perceived stature in the world were crushed; Sputnik was in orbit and we were at risk. As a response, The National Defense Education Act of 1958, while in part 'knee-jerk' politics, went a considerable length in creating and funding public education projects of meaningful and far-reaching effect.

In 2001, our nation reeled once again as our imagined distance from a world of terrorism shrank to zero.

Since that moment, military defense spending has soared. The immediacy of purported need, and the enormity of perceived threat have combined to impoverish nearly every social program including future funding for public education.

While the poignantly titled set of objectives "No Child Left Behind" engenders images of wide-eyed waifs standing in tearful abandonment as the proverbial

'train-of-progress' threatens to depart without them, the simple fact is that the act consists of directives, not funding and that unless our federal government (the elected group that has taken the big tax bite from all of us) stops the reckless spending disguised as defense, there will not be a country nor a population to defend.

Without a huge federally funded investment now in public education, the world will first, begin to out-perform the U.S. in sciences, mathematics and the roots of philosophical thinking derived from English and history, and then go on to surpass us to the point where we won't be a nation capable of creating and mounting a defense.

Moreover, what if right now there is a child ready to enter a U.S. school who could, upon entering adulthood, move the world to peace? What will become of their incredible potential gift if we allow panic-driven waste to squander their rightful legacy?

It is a fact that currently there is a new National Defense Education Act in the works. Unfortunately, it falls short with respect to the needs of public education K through 12. It aims most heavily at the university level and specifically the research and "think tank" membership of the Association of American Universities.

It is my goal to speak out and work this program on behalf of our students. To seek an ever-increasing exchange of percentages spent: "One Less Bullet, One More Book".

In this way we can ensure that there is always an "America the Beautiful" that begins with the education of our children.

PUBLIC NOTICE

TOWN OF WESTFIELD PLANNING BOARD

Notice is hereby given that the Westfield Planning Board at its special meeting on Wednesday, March 22, 2006 memorialized the following Board action taken on the same day (March 22, 2006):

Settlement of litigation by and among Newport Realty, L.L.C., Planning Board of the Town of Westfield, Town of Westfield, and Ward & O'Donnell Property Development Co., Inc., that the form, terms and provisions of the Settlement Agreement and General Release be and is in all respects approved.

Kenneth B. Marsh
Secretary
1 T - 3/30/06, The Leader Fee: \$16.32

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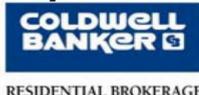
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