

**The Westfield Leader** THE SCOTCH PLAINS-FANWOOD  
 — Established 1890 —  
 Legal Newspaper for the Town of Westfield,  
 Boroughs of Mountainside and Garwood  
 And the County of Union, N.J.  
 Members of:  
 New Jersey Press Association • National Newspaper Association • Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce  
 Scotch Plains Business & Professional Association • Fanwood Business & Professional Association

Periodicals - Postage Paid at Westfield, New Jersey P.O. Box 250 • 251 North Avenue, West  
 Westfield, N.J. 07091  
 Periodicals - Postage Paid at Scotch Plains, New Jersey P. O. Box 368  
 Scotch Plains, N.J. 07076

Tele: (908) 232-4407 • E-mail: editor@goleader.com • Web: www.goleader.com • Fax: (908) 232-0473  
 POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the offices of the newspapers at  
 P. O. Box 250, Westfield, New Jersey 07091

Published every Thursday by Watchung Communications, Inc.

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Subscription Price  
 One-year - \$28 • Two-year - \$52 • Three-year - \$76 • One-year college (September to May) - \$20

**2007 GOVERNMENT REFORM THOUGHTS PART 1**

Each week in 2007, the staff of the newspaper posted a government reform thought on [goleader.com](http://goleader.com). The following is part 1 of the list for the first half of 2007. Part 2 will be published next week. We will start a new list for 2008 and the public is invited to submit their thoughts to [editor@goleader.com](mailto:editor@goleader.com) throughout the year.

**January 11:** Now that our local governments have reorganized it is time to focus on spending. If our state will not do the job it is time for local governments to work together to achieve real shared services. We believe merging municipal courts (as discussed in Scotch Plains and Fanwood) is a start. Tax assessors and tax collectors could follow along with shared agreements on administrative school district expenses.

**January 18:** The New Jersey Legislature should adopt anti-Pork Barrel legislation. The U.S. Senate passed rules Tuesday, January 16, 2007 that will force disclosure of pet projects at least two days in advance by posting them on the Internet. It is designed to end the practice of slipping them into spending bills at the last minute. It doesn't prohibit "Pork Barrel" legislation, but is a good first step.

**January 25:** County Manager George Devanney has released his \$415-million executive budget, which calls for a tax levy of \$268 million, nearly \$40 million over last year's adopted spending plan by the freeholders. We question such a huge hit in taxes and encourage the freeholders' finance committee to hold budget meetings outside of their Elizabeth confines and allow for public comments.

**February 1:** In guise of reform, the New Jersey Legislature has just passed a property-tax bill approving a one-time rebate to occur in September. It borrows taxpayers' money to provide the voters with a payment just before Election Day. We believe incumbents are using public money to buy votes and that this should be challenged in court.

**February 8:** The Town of Westfield this week reached a settlement with police officer Greg Kasko. The town has refused to say how much money he will be paid. How can the town withhold telling taxpayers how much of their hard-earned money is going to settle a lawsuit? We believe legal agreements involving public entities must be fully disclosed and include public hearings.

**February 15:** Local governments, as part of settlement agreements of legal issues, have been approving early-retirement packages to employees. The taxpayer is not permitted to see how much money is given as payments, as well as the total cost of benefits packages to these workers. We believe such agreements should be fully disclosed as public documents prior to votes by elected officials.

**February 22:** Elected officials often run unopposed for re-election because of the political party establishment of the incumbent. We believe that some sort of threshold, perhaps a requirement that one-third of registered voters turn out for an election, be instituted or the election results would be deemed invalid.

**March 1:** We believe that information pertinent to a municipal budget should be made readily available. For example, in Scotch Plains a councilman has requested figures for the revenues of the new mini-golf course. We cannot understand why financial reports on this venture have not been compiled or why the request for these figures would meet opposition.

**March 8:** Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education officials this week are considering cutting the high school's ROTC, German classes and the freshman sports program to reduce the proposed tax-levy increase to 4 percent. Why not consider cutting school administrators? Sharing a vice principal or assistant superintendent with a surrounding district?

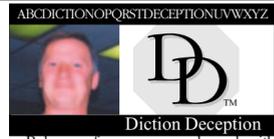
**March 15:** As property taxes continue to spiral out of control, maybe it's time to start reducing the salaries of administrators at the top.

**March 22:** In New Jersey, government health care and retirement benefits should be provided only to full-time employees. We call for an end to the pervasive abuse by part-time political appointees.

**March 29:** The ethics committees in the State of New Jersey are dysfunctional, and they refuse to act on matters of wrongdoing. To save money and to end the fakery that they do something, should they not be disbanded?

**April 5:** We believe that when government salary contracts (i.e. the teachers' contract in Scotch Plains-Fanwood) are signed, the final version of the contract must be produced with no modifications. Union members should not receive retroactive increases and pay hikes until the contract is finalized. The current system through which staff receive their increases offers no incentives to release the final contract to the public.

**April 12:** It's been suggested that New Jersey Legislators' voting power in the Legislature be weighted based on how many votes each received in getting elected; or alternately, based on voter turnout. The reasoning is that the seats are all arranged as safe seats and the power bosses snuff out competition while discouraging voting. As example, in District 20 in 2003 without competition Senator Ray Lesniak (D) received 12,361 votes with a dismal turnout. In District 21 in 2003, Senator Tom Kean, Jr. (R) with



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.**
- Eustomatous - Having a well-developed mouth
  - Smaragdine - Pertaining to the emerald
  - Fluctuosous - Resembling the sound of waves
  - Petard - A kind of firecracker

- KILLIGREW**
- Cornish crow with red feet and beak
  - A small bell similar to a sleighbell
  - A traitor; turcoat
  - A lake dwelling built on an artificial island

- TUMBEKI**
- A gipsy
  - A species of green tea from China
  - A small globular vessel of polished brass
  - A kind of Persian tobacco

- DEINOUS**
- Balanced; stable
  - Sharpness; eagerness
  - Arrogant; haughty
  - Uselessness; of little or no value

- STRABISMUS**
- Cross-eyed
  - Formed like a fan
  - A tendency or leaning
  - A scar or ulcer underneath the skin of sheep

**I Will Raise a Glass in Coach K's Honor**

Regarding Bruce Johnson's article, I don't know if he remembers me or not - but I was a member of the 1970 WHS football team. Like the rest of my team mates, I was saddened to hear of the passing of Coach K.

I was unable to get up for the service. I live in Florida but my parents, who still live in Westfield, sent me *The Westfield Leader* and I thoroughly enjoyed your tribute to Coach K in the "Devil's Den" article. It brought me back and it was great to read about my teammates, Monninger, Zitch, Harvey, Napier, etc. - all the guys.

It was a great group. It is interesting that the passing of Coach K has actually increased the communication amongst the group. I've opened communication with Bill Napier who I haven't talked to in over 30 years and speak with Tupper Hillard regularly. I am hopeful I can reach out to the rest of the guys and reconnect. Leave it to Coach K to keep us close even after his passing.

I thought you did a great job capturing the magic that was Westfield football back in the 60s and 70s. While we played on those teams, I remember seeing you at practices and the games so you knew first-hand what it was like to be a part of the WHS football program under Coach K. Thanks for reporting it as you did and to the memories. Your article will go with the rest of the articles I still have from our undefeated 1970 season.

Thanks again Bruce. Have a great holiday. I will raise a glass in Coach K's honor over the holidays.

Mike Dorne  
 Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida

**Shouldn't Car Owners Have Repair Choice?**

We have owned and operated an automotive repair shop in Berlin, New Jersey for many years, providing affordable and competitive service to our customers, many of which have been with us for a long time. Unfortunately, our ability to repair vehicles and our customers' ability to obtain affordable and convenient service are being seriously challenged.

Today's highly sophisticated vehicles contain computers and other advanced technology that monitors or controls virtually every vehicle function. Servicing these vehicles requires that shops like ours have full access to the same information and tools that the car companies make available to their franchised dealer network.

However, in many cases the vehicle manufacturers lock us out of key information or repair capabilities that we need to complete a repair. While we try at all costs to avoid losing a customer, often the inability to provide the repair forces us to send our customer to the dealer with the strong possibility that they will not be back.

Car companies tell us that it is in their best interest to make information and tools available to our industry, but the truth is that they and their franchised dealers are making more money servicing vehicles than they are selling new cars. Therefore, despite their lip service, they have little incentive to work with the independent service industry to ensure that we can compete on a level playing field with their dealers.

That's why the future health of our company and others like ours is dependant upon the immediate passage by Congress of the Motor Vehicles Owners' Right to Repair Act. This legislation requires that car manufacturers make available to independent service shops the same information and tools that they provide to their dealerships. After all, shouldn't the car owner make the choice of where they have their vehicle is repaired and not the car company?

We urge everyone in New Jersey who owns a car to contact their elected officials in support of Right to Repair legislation. Go to [www.righttorepair.org](http://www.righttorepair.org) for additional information and whom to send a letter in support of this legislation.

Jim Robey and Chad Barber  
 Robey's Automotive, Berlin

**Holiday Schedule Announcement**

Next week's newspaper will be completed Monday, December 31 and mailed Thursday, January 3.

Our office is open next week (closed January 1). Press day will be Monday, December 31.

To Reach Us  
 E-Mail - editor@goleader.com

**To the Good Hearts of Many, Happy New Year Everyone**

It can be annoying how quickly time goes by. In just a few days, we will need to retrain ourselves to write 2008 on our checks. There will be a myriad of things to be renewed, updated or filed. Then, one will need to focus on that new business plan, organizational changes, goals, resolutions, challenges and 'un-think-of' things.

Hopefully, everyone had a great 2007; and reflecting at this moment, one can recall the good memories and shrug away the bad ones.

As everyone musters the energy and attitude to

start anew - anticipating what 2008 might have in store - the only thing one can be sure of is that it will be as dynamic, fickle, fun and challenging as years before. Whatever matters that may be, or events that unfold, we have confidence in the humor, good sense, strength and the right stuff of our readers.

We look forward to sharing 2008 with you. Thank you for sharing with us the previous year.

It is because of family, fine friends, community and the good hearts of many that we know 2008 will be the best year yet. Happy New Year.

**Sen. Kean, It's totally Unfair that Westfield is Penalized for It's Hard Work, Success and Safe Neighborhoods**

The following letter was sent to State Legislative District 21 lawmakers. Their response is below.

It's totally unfair that the townspeople of Westfield should be penalized for "having wealth." Not all of us do. By no means am I poverty stricken, but I work really hard for my money, and I don't like being told I have to give it away.

I'm a secretary and my husband owns a small printing company in Cranford. We pay over \$30,000 a year in property taxes between the two properties. I'd love to know where the advisors from the department of education came up with the ridiculous data stating Westfield's income levels have increased over the last seven years by 62 percent. That works out to approximately a 9 percent average increase per year. Just for the record, my income increased over the past seven years at an average of 3.5 percent per year. I have many friends who would've been extremely happy with even a 5 percent yearly increase.

We've known for a long while that our taxes go out of Westfield into a "pool" for poorer districts. I used to think it was a good and fair solution. After seeing the Governor's formula, I'm not so sure anymore.

What makes the Governor's formula fair? Most towns surrounding Westfield will receive a 10 to 20 percent increase in state aid while Westfield only gets a 2 percent increase. Do we really have it that much better than Cranford, Mountainside or Millburn?

This can bring down the quality of education in Westfield. In the past, the Governor's plan gave these poorer districts so much money that they didn't know what to do with it. One good example is the Elizabeth school district. They built soundproof rooms so their music students could hear themselves and even record themselves. They built those rooms because the district had an excess of funds they had to spend so the state would continue to give them more funds.

The Westfield Fine Arts Department has to ask parents for donations to supplement the needs of our music students. We certainly don't have soundproof music rooms.

Like my father, I was born and raised in Westfield. We both attended Westfield schools. People used to move to Westfield so their children could go to our schools. People move here now too because it's also a safe place to raise a family.

People are moving out of the districts the Governor is funding, because of how unsafe they are. Elizabeth, Plainfield and Newark are the cities with the highest funding, but they're also the towns with the highest crime rates. Innocent people are shot in the street, mugged, robbed and beaten - it happens in their schools as well. Just because folks want to live in a safe town away from shooting and crime, and are willing and able to pay a premium for the price of their house, is no reason to penalize them.

It angers me to think that this is happening to Westfield.

I need all of you, including the Governor, to know that his plan is wrong. I want him and you to know that you're not listening to your constituents. What can be done about this taxation travesty? Please rethink this. Fix the situation before it gets to the point where it can no longer be fixed.

Trish Cheek  
 Westfield

Reply from Senator Tom Kean  
 Thank you for your recent inquiry regarding Governor Corzine's new school funding formula and its impact on the Westfield School District. Please know that we share your sentiments and are equally concerned about this all-important issue. Be assured, we intend to fight against this proposal in hopes of ensuring adequate funding for our schools.

As you may be aware, the Governor released a conceptual outline of a new school funding formula along with information regarding how much each school district would receive under the new proposal. However, detailed legislation has not been introduced. Therefore, we are basing our analysis on the information provided thus far.

The Governor's proposal first establishes a base adequacy amount for elementary, middle and high school; i.e. how much it should cost to educate a

student at each of those levels. That amount was determined by panels made of education professionals; taking into account salaries, benefits, supplies, etc. The adequacy amounts further were refined by other national experts. Extra weight is given for students who are deemed "at-risk" (students whose family incomes are 185 percent of poverty) and limited English proficient (LEP) students. Therefore, districts with higher concentrations of at-risk or LEP students are eligible for a greater amount of funding.

Second, for the first time since the 2001-2002 school year, the formula will make adjustments for enrollment. Districts that have seen a significant increase in enrollment will be eligible for additional aid to assist them in dealing with the demands that come with an increased student population.

After determining how much a district would be eligible for under these basic assumptions, a wealth-equalization component of the formula is applied. This component looks at a district's wealth as determined by the property value of the residences in the district and the income of the residents of the district. Similar to the old school formula, if a district is deemed "too wealthy" it is ineligible for the basic education aid.

After examining the data provided by the department of education, it appears that the formula is a departure from the old system in that Abbott districts (low-wealth districts) are receiving minimal aid increases. This is due to the fact that over the years, Abbott districts have received a significant infusion of state funding that arguably has brought them to adequate spending levels. Middle-income districts are now benefitting under the new formula and are receiving a much needed aid increase. However, if a district is

spending over adequacy, any aid increase is capped at 10 percent. A district that is spending below adequacy is capped at 20 percent.

Unfortunately, districts like Westfield that are deemed "wealthy" are not significant beneficiaries under the new formula. According to data supplied by the department of education, Westfield's income levels have increased over the last seven years by 62 percent. That fact combined with high property values in Westfield make it ineligible for basic education support under the formula. Therefore, Westfield will receive only a 2 percent aid increase over the amount they received last year. Governor Corzine has indicated his intent to have that basic increase in place for at least three years. We are deeply concerned, as to what happens to communities like Westfield, after the three-year commitment is over.

We are cognizant of the serious impact this proposal has on the residents of Westfield and plan to work with our Republican and Democrat colleagues and the Governor on aspects of the formula, such as special-education funding, which may help districts like Westfield deal with their ever-increasing costs. The administration has proposed that a portion of the special-education funding be wealth-equalized as well. Again, this negatively impacts districts like Westfield. Additional funding in this area could mitigate the impact of the base aid calculations.

We will keep you apprised as there are further developments regarding this proposal. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have other concerns.

Sen. Tom Kean,  
 Asm. Eric Munoz,  
 Asm. Jon Bramnick

**Westfield Call To Action: School Funding Proposal**

I would like to bring to the attention of every Westfield resident a pending proposal in Trenton that would have an impact on local taxes and education. While the funding proposal is meant to bring tax relief for New Jersey residents, this will not be the case in Westfield. We were very disappointed to learn that, while many comparable districts are due to receive increases of 10 and 20 percent from the state, the Westfield School District is only slated for a 2 percent increase. (For a partial list of districts see [www.westfieldnj12.org/message](http://www.westfieldnj12.org/message).)

I have reached out to state officials to try to determine why Westfield will be receiving one of the lower per pupil state aid rates in the state. I have been told it is because we are wealthy. I am glad that the taxpayers in Millburn, Saddle River and Ridgewood will be receiving a 10 percent increase in state aid and that the taxpayers in Bernards Township and Kinnelon will be receiving a 20 percent increase. I am curious as to how it was determined that Westfield is wealthy, while these others towns are not.

We are being told that one of the determining factors in the formula is a district's enrollment growth over the last seven years. If the enrollment showed significant increase, the district would be eligible for more aid. Westfield's public school enrollment has grown 15 percent during that time period, while the state average is 4 percent, yet Westfield taxpayers are not being given tax relief.

Since we have been deemed to be a wealthy district, we will see a decrease in the state aid for special education. For many years, the State of New Jersey followed the philosophy that funding for special education should be allocated for the needs of individual disabled students, no matter where they live. The state's proposal changes this, and taxpayers in towns such as Westfield that fall on the wrong side of a formula will bear the burden. Exactly how this will translate is not yet clear. When we have sufficient and clear answers, hopefully by January 4, we will post the information on our website: [www.westfieldnj12.org](http://www.westfieldnj12.org). We urge Westfield residents to refer to our website on January 4 for updated information, since a vote on the funding proposal in Trenton could be scheduled on January 7.

I know this is a very busy time of year

and writing to your state officials and representatives will take more of your limited time. Some say that is exactly why the school-funding proposal is being rushed through now. Having served in the Westfield Public Schools for 11 years, I have witnessed the determination and action of community members when concern for equitable treatment, education and the future fiscal environment of Westfield is at stake. Please express your concerns and address your questions to your state leaders:

Governor Jon Corzine, [www.state.nj.us/governor](http://www.state.nj.us/governor) (this opens to the governor's website that provides an e-mail form), (609) 292-6000; Senator Richard Codey, [senecodey@njleg.org](mailto:senecodey@njleg.org), (973) 731-6670; Education Commissioner Lucille Lucille, [davy.doc@state.nj.us](mailto:davy.doc@state.nj.us), (609) 292-0193; Senator Tom Kean, Jr., [senkean@njleg.org](mailto:senkean@njleg.org), (908) 232-3673; Assemblyman Jon Bramnick, [asmbrannick@njleg.org](mailto:asmbrannick@njleg.org), (908) 232-3673; Assemblyman Eric Munoz, [asmunoz@njleg.org](mailto:asmunoz@njleg.org), (908) 918-0414.

Margaret Dolan, Ed.D. Superintendent of Westfield Schools



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