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We Need Healthcare Reform That Gives Control Back to You

By David Larsen
Republican Candidate for Congress
There's no doubt about it - our country's healthcare system is in desperate need of reform. But how we go about those reforms makes all the difference. Each individual should be in control of their healthcare, not the government. Government mandating that all Americans buy health insurance is just another government takeover. We've seen how poorly the government runs large companies. Surely we don't want to let government bureaucrats make more decisions about our personal healthcare.

Forcing people to buy health insurance, either individually or through an employer mandate, could require nearly 100 million Americans to switch to a more expensive health plan. In addition, this would violate President Obama's pledge to allow people to keep their current health insurance. Rather than forcing people to buy health insurance, Congress should make it more affordable by creating inter-state commerce laws that allow people to choose their own plan from any state in the Union instead of just from the state they live in. Breaking up state monopolies on health insurance would increase competition among health plans and provide more options for individuals. It would also increase access to coverage for people currently uninsured, without imposing new taxes or government subsidies.

Also, there are weighty regulations on providers that increase healthcare costs because most providers need to obtain licenses from every state in which they practice. If one state recognized the licensing of physicians and clinicians from another state, this would benefit the consumer. Getting rid of licensing monopolies would provide a greater array of options to consumers by allowing greater competition among providers. Right now the consumers' options are limited because states can hold those options at bay with licensing regulations.

Another major change that would greatly help individuals and families is to allow portability in the purchase of healthcare. One of the problems with the current system is that if you lose your job, you lose your healthcare. With companies paying less and less of their employees' healthcare tab due to skyrocketing costs, we need to give control of healthcare back to employees and individuals. Congress can do

this by reforming the tax treatment of healthcare using large health savings accounts. These health savings accounts would reduce the number of uninsured Americans and free workers to buy health coverage from any source, not just the increasingly limited options that many employers are forced to offer these days. Putting people in charge of their own healthcare dollars would help eliminate wasteful spending as they see exactly what their money is paying for.

Healthcare is a personal issue to be decided between individuals and their doctors. We all know how inefficient and wasteful Washington can be, so let's not naively think "big government" can successfully administer healthcare, which is one-sixth of our economy. The current system needs reform, but it needs reform that gives more, not less control to you, the individual. This is another reason why I want to represent your concerns in Congress. I will make sure you gain control over issues important to you and your family. For more, go to davidlarsenforcongress.com.

Red Cross to Hold Fundraiser in Garwood

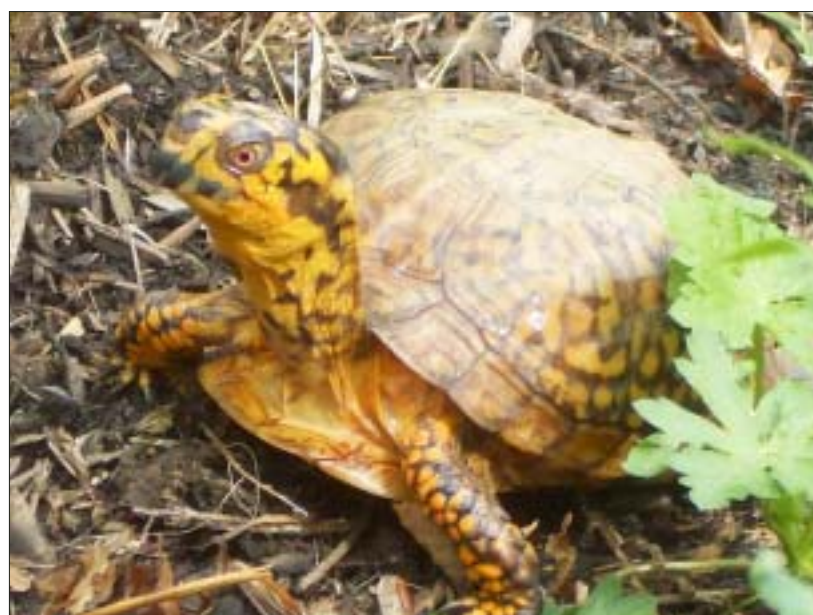
GARWOOD - In honor of the Tri-County Red Cross disaster relief efforts during Hurricane Katrina, the chapter is holding a "Fais do-do" Awards Fundraiser at the Westwood, 438 North Avenue, Garwood, on Saturday, May 8, from 7 to 11 p.m.

A Fais do-do is a Cajun party, and the term originated from New Orleans. Marshall's Dixieland Band will provide live music and guests will have the opportunity to meander through a French Quarter Silent Auction.

The event will honor local Red Cross donors, volunteers and supporters. This year's honorees are Assemblyman Joseph Cryan (LD-20, Union), Disaster Action Team Leader Terri Esposito, Freeholder Al Mirabella, and Steven Brower of the Kean University Design Studio.

All funds raised from the fundraiser will benefit the Tri-County Red Cross, which covers 22 communities in Union, Somerset and Middlesex counties.

For more information, visit tricountyredcross.org/gala or contact Corinna Krauskopf at (908) 756-6414, extension no. 20, or krauskopf@usa.redcross.org.



WILD PHOTOS... The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders is looking for amateur photographers, ages six to adult, to take part in the Wildlife Photography Contest as part of Trailside Nature and Science Center's 20th annual Wildlife Sunday event. The deadline is April 9. Prizes will be awarded.

New Birth Certificate Needed for New Jerseyans Born in Puerto Rico

STATE - Beginning July 1, New Jersey residents born in Puerto Rico will have to obtain a new certified copy of their birth certificate under a new law passed by the government of Puerto Rico.

The new law was based on collaboration with the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to address the fraudulent use of Puerto Rico-issued birth certificates to unlawfully obtain U.S. passports, Social Security benefits and other federal services.

New Jersey residents born in Puerto Rico need to contact the Office of Vital Statistics in Puerto Rico to obtain a new, certified copy of their birth certificate. Individuals should contact the government of Puerto Rico at salud.gov.pr or call (787) 767-9120. For additional information, individuals can also contact prfaa.com/birthcertificates for information on how to obtain a copy of their certified birth certificate.

Joseph Komosinski, state registrar of Vital Records, stressed that only those individuals who need to obtain a certified copy of their birth certificate for immediate official business such as obtaining a passport need to request a new birth certificate right away. "People who want to obtain a copy for their records are encouraged to apply at a later date," he said.

The law that passed in Puerto Rico in December will invalidate all exist-

ing certified copies of birth certificates issued in Puerto Rico.

Budget Hearings

ELIZABETH - The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders Fiscal Affairs Committee will hold meetings today, March 18, from 4 to 7 p.m., Wednesday, March 24, from 5 to 7 p.m. and Thursday, March 25, from 4 to 7 p.m. to review the proposed \$469-million executive budget and accompanying \$276 million tax levy.

Agenda and regular meetings will be held following the budget meetings.

Flooded Basements, Roads Reported From Storm

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

AREA - This weekend's storm, which dumped over five inches of rain in Union County, kept local emergency crews busy pumping basements and removing tree limbs from roadways and homes.

Westfield Fire Chief Dan Kelly said compared to storm damage around the state Westfield was not hit that hard. "I think we came through it pretty well," Chief Kelly said.

He said sporadic power outages were reported town-wide, impacting about a dozen homes. Firefighters pumped out 126 basements of private homes between Saturday and Monday mornings.

Downed trees damaged a home in the 800-block of Shadowlawn Drive and two homes in the 800 block of North Avenue, West. He said the Westfield Municipal Building experienced basement flooding, while flooding also occurred at the North and Central Avenue firehouses in the radio communications area and living quarters, respectively.

St. Helen's Roman Catholic Church experienced flooding, as did parts of Lamberts Mill Road near Scotch Plains' Shackamaxon Golf and Country Club, which was also flooded, as were sections of Boynton Avenue and Vernon Place, Chief Kelly said.

Mountainside Fire Chief Neil Williams said his department responded to over 50 calls for flooded basements. The department also assisted with a downed tree in the 1100 block of Puddingstone Road. The tree, he

said, "wiped out the entire block" by taking down power lines. Some 50 to 60 homes lost power due to this one tree alone, he said.

"So, we were pretty busy," Chief Williams said.

The department also was called for mutual aid into Roselle to assist at its headquarters while Roselle's firefighters were fighting "a huge structure fire."

Scotch Plains Fire Chief Jonathan Ellis said firefighters pumped out 84 flooded basements ranging from six inches of water to levels up to the first floor. In addition, three homes in town were hit by lightning, damaging electrical systems during a hail storm that passed through the area on Sunday.

"Probably the worst [flooding] was on Farley Avenue," Chief Ellis said.

Scotch Plains Detective Lieutenant Brian Donnelly said the township did not experience any major power outages, although half a dozen roads were closed due to flooding and downed trees during the height of the storm.

"We did alright," he said, although neighboring Edison had extensive flooding and reported a storm-related death on Raritan Road.

Lieutenant Donnelly said Route 22 at Glenside Road was closed overnight from Saturday into Sunday due to flooding, causing police to divert traffic onto local roads. West Broad Street and Mountain Avenue were also closed at times during the storm, which began Friday night and continued into Sunday.

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