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State Redistricting May Fool Us All

Mark Twain
April Fool!

"The first of April is the day we remember what we are the other 364 days of the year." — Mark Twain.

Tomorrow, Friday, April 1, most residents are careful about believing what they hear or see because of April Fools' Day. They don't want to get hooked by a prank.

We are careful today, as well – about believing things like how housepocus "bonding" is not really debt – "I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today." - J. Wellington Wimpy, *Popeye*, 1932. A lot of fools were involved in passing government budgets, giving lifetime benefits to themselves, their friends and their supporters — with no means of paying for it, except from you. Unabashedly, they all seek more from thee. They were not foolish enough to be vexed by the Constitution or to have their prattle relevant to themselves. The good of debate was discarded as inconvenient, or ducked entirely. The greasing of palms, pay-offs for votes, are "*à la carte*" and the burden on our generation – and those of future generations – is "*carte blanche*." This is not willynilly. This monkeyshine is notably more than an April Fools' Day shenanigan.

The April Fools' Day tradition is thought to have started in France around 1582. Prior to that, the New Year was celebrated for eight days, beginning on March 25 and ending on April 1. Charles IX changed the calendar then. The Gregorian calendar was introduced, and New Year's Day was moved to January 1. However, news back then traveled by foot, and many did not learn of the calendar change for several years. Others refused to accept the new calendar and continued to celebrate the New Year on April 1. The populace labeled these people as "fools" and subjected them to ridicule. They were made the butt of practical jokes.

This tradition of pranks on the first day of April spread to England and Scotland in the 18th century and was then introduced to the American colonies. For the most part, April Fools' Day is supposed to be a funfest, where some carry out their brand of humor at the expense of others. Pranks on April Fools' Day range from simply saying, "Your shoe's untied!" or perhaps setting a roommate's alarm clock back an hour. Whatever the gag, the trickster ends it by yelling to his victim, "April Fool!"

The local April Fools' Day prank this year may fall on Sunday, when the State Redistricting Map is revealed. It will be a 10-year commitment determining where you vote, for whom you vote – along with the likely outcome. The state politicians are anxiously awaiting the map to see if it's April Fools for them. Actually, it's quite exciting and we're looking forward to it.

In general and in theory, the state gerrymandering map will not impact municipal, county and school district voting alignments. Still, everything is intertwined and the first election subsequently occurs on April 27, for school boards and budgets. But don't be April Fooled – April 27 is a Wednesday; this is the first time we can recall in quite a spell when the voting was not on a Tuesday.

Were Samuel Langhorne Clemens alive today, would our naiveté lead him to shout: April Fool!?!

You Can't Beat City Hall? Show Up; Look 'em in the Eye'

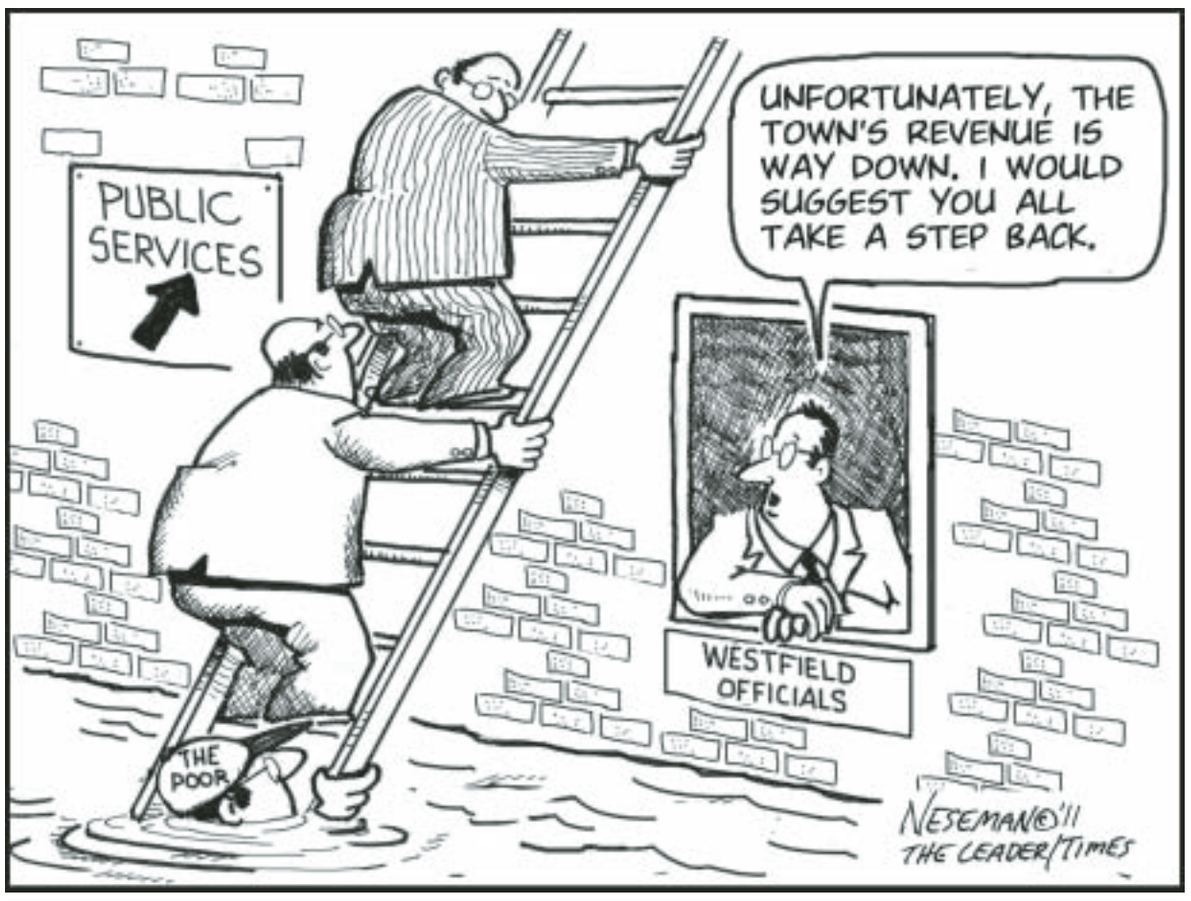
You can't beat City Hall. That is the old saying. But we would like to amend that by saying: You can beat City Hall if you go to meetings and voice your views to elected officials. With many of our readers complaining about county and school budget hikes projected for this year, we ask: Have you attended school board, county and municipal meetings and given your comments — both verbally and in writing?

We know school board candidates have been attending BOE meetings, but have others who either support or oppose the school tax levy given their views in person? We know that county meetings have few members of the public in attendance. Showing up in public forces your elected officials to listen. If it is the few same people every week, officials ignore the comments.

Citizens need to be in the know and act to prevent abuses. How much has your tax bill risen? Who's getting your money? How much has been borrowed? What is the size of pensions and healthcare promises? Know the names of your elected officials and make sure they know you.

We encourage groups, such as the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Tea Party and Democrats for Change, as well school board members, mayors, council members and residents to attend county and state meetings. Form a car pool and go. Look 'em in the eye.'

As election season kicks off with the School election on Wednesday, April 27 followed by the Primary Election on Tuesday, June 7, get to know all the candidates and their views. Will they represent the public's interests or special interests? Push the green button for the right candidate.



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Letters to the Editor

Regular DEMS Have No More Legitimacy Than DEMS for Change

You identified the Regular Democratic Organization of Union County as the Union County Democratic Committee, which serves to lend a false illusion of legitimacy to the gang of crooked politicians led by state Sen. Raymond Lesniak, the self described power broker whose greed typifies what's wrong with New Jersey's boss-dominated electoral system.

The regular political organization has no more legitimacy than Democrats for Change, and in the June Primary Election, voters will decide who gets the nomination to square off against the Republicans.

It's bad enough that we have institutionalized corruption in New Jersey with rigged ballots designed to discourage anyone from giving the voters honest choices in primary elections, but a system of free and open democracy relies on an informed citizenry and an accurate Fourth Estate.

The press release issued by Nick Fixer states in the first line that the political insiders will be running on the regular organization ticket. These candidates were selected by a shadow panel behind closed doors. Anyone who wants to run in the Democrats for Change column has an opportunity to visit our website at www.democratsforchange.net and sign up under the "recruiting" tab.

We encourage Democrats to come forward and be a part of our effort to eliminate corruption that is supported by the political insiders who currently run the county, which is to say Sen. Ray Lesniak and his minions. The fact is you cannot be a part of the regular political organization unless you endorse both the thievery and corruption plus the right wing agenda that is crushing the middle class working families of this state, because that is the Lesniak legacy.

While Lesniak's law firm collects $3.5 million in taxpayer money each year as a result of no-bid contracts, he is advancing a Republican legislative agenda that includes privatizing public education, abolishing New Jersey's affordable housing program and allowing corporations to jack up phone rates for the poor and elderly. Lesniak has profited by a direct assault on the environment with such debacles as Xanadu and Encap, which cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.

Lesniak's gang of crooked politicians, the regular political organization, does not care about rank-and-file Democrats. They have repeatedly demonstrated contempt for the people in the most obnoxious ways, besides just stealing and lying.

When Atlantic City citizens and labor unions wanted to stop a $350-million casino tax break for Morgan Stanley, Lesniak took away their right to vote. Two other regular organization politicians from Union County wrote a law so that citizens in New Brunswick who wanted to reform the corruption-plagued City Hall would be deprived of their right to vote. If you give your vote to the regular political organization candidates, they might just take it away from you! That is not representative of Democratic Party values and ideals.

Of course nobody is less of a Democrat than Ass. Joe Cryan, who cast the deciding vote to approve Republican Gov. Chris Christie's budget last year. Only because of Cryan's vote was education aid slashed, property tax rebates eliminated and hundreds of teachers, police and firefighters added to unemployment lines while 16,000 millionaires in the state enjoyed a billion dollars in new tax breaks.

The regular political organization has far less legitimacy than Democrats for Change, because those insiders spent a considerable part of the last 30 years filling their own pockets instead of fighting back to stop the Republican war on America's middle class. The regular political organization is the crooked political gang that helped make things the way they are and Democrats for Change are those of us who plan to fight back.

James Devine
Rahway

County Should Be Split In Two With Eastern and Western Halfs

Once again the County Board of Chosen Freeholders has decided to raise our property taxes, this time by 6 percent. This at a time of high unemployment, high anxiety and cost cutting by businesses, families and anyone else not on an unlimited budget.

The freeholders recently approved lifetime medical coverage for 600 or 700 employees. The employees had not requested the benefit. The freeholders chose to award the benefit out of the goodness of their hearts – and our pockets. The freeholders did not even know how many people were going to be covered by this gift – or even how much of our money this was going to cost! They went ahead and awarded lifetime medical benefits anyway.

The entire State Legislature is up for re-election in November. I suggest that all readers of this newspaper demand that any candidate from any local state legislative district seeking our support pledge to introduce – as their first act in the Assembly or the Senate – a bill to divide Union County in two; an eastern half and a western half. If they won't agree, we should not vote for them. Counties in New Jersey have been divided many times in the past, and for many different reasons. All it takes is an act of the State Legislature. It would be a big help for this effort if the State Legislature turned Republican next November. Anyone tired of the way we in this area of the county are treated by the freeholders should do all that they can to support a Republican takeover of the Legislature in November.

The county government ignores our complaints (I've seen the freeholders laughing at suggestions that they be elected by district voting) so maybe it is time to start pressuring Trenton to do something to break the stranglehold that the Democrat machine has over us at the county level.

Rich Fortunato
Scotch Plains

Defeat of WF Budget Will Result In Degradation of Our School System

In comparison to other local towns, Westfield houses have maintained their value. This depends on many factors, but the excellent school system is one of the most important drivers of Westfield's house prices.

Many, if not most people, move here because of our superior schools. Last year Westfield had the highest average SAT score of any Union County school district. This was achieved with one of the lowest costs per pupil – $1,824 less than the state average.

As a Westfield homeowner, I am concerned that recent draconian funding cuts will adversely affect our district's excellent school performance. Cuts will likely damage the quality of education in Westfield because the school system has been so cost effective. Further cuts will inevitably mean an additional loss of programs and teachers. Degradation of our school system will inevitably bite us all in the rear with lower property values as people choose other towns to live.

To homeowners without children in the school system, I urge you to support the school budget. The talking heads bashing New Jersey schools would have you ignore the positive effect of our school system on property values. If everyone supports the modest Westfield school budget, we can hope to maintain our excellent school system and our home values.

Thank you for your consideration.

David Rogers
Westfield

Congressman Lance, Please Consider Doctornaut Act to Find Therapies

Editor's Note: The following letter was sent to Rep. Leonard Lance and copied to this newspaper.

Has Congress ever asked the general question, "Why with our breathtaking medical technology there are so few major medical therapies or cures for patients?" Also, has Congress ever asked, "Are there other ways to reduce health care costs besides reducing health care services and streamlining logistical efficiencies?" I think not.

FIM, the Foundation for Innovation in Medicine, believes it has a single, simple common answer to both questions. It's the Doctornaut Act. On FIM's website homepage, www.fimdefelice.org, the following is a brief rationale of this proposed Act:

"The FIM Initiatives: Cure Care, Health Care Costs Reduction And The Doctornaut Act for inexplicable reasons, we have a cultural blind spot regarding the critical importance of clinical research or studies and its essential role in accelerating the discovery of new medical breakthrough therapies as well as helping reduce health care costs.

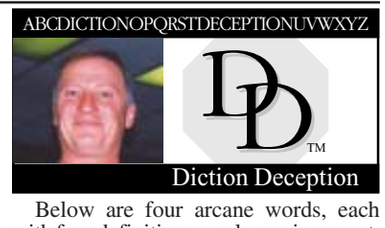
"We seem to have forgotten that penicillin and insulin are only discovered in clinical studies. Block that step and the medical discovery rate goes down. It is generally recognized that there are formidable barriers to conducting clinical studies dramatically raising the cost and risks but, strangely enough, there are few voices making the connection between such barriers and the disappointing track record of the discovery of new medical therapies despite our enormous scientific, technological capacity. Has anyone wondered why we can go to the moon, but cannot cure the common cold? What also is not appreciated is that high cost and risky barriers to clinical research encourage companies to develop high cost medical – health products. It naturally follows that if the barriers to clinical research are substantially reduced, then low cost products also will be clinically tested and developed competing with high cost ones. This will result in significant health care cost reduction.

"Now here's where the Doctornaut Act comes in: For historical reasons our country is extremely suspicious and apprehensive about clinical studies. Any attempts to reduce the barriers to clinical research and make it much easier for patients to volunteer to test potential new medical breakthroughs simply will not succeed. But if we do this with physician volunteers or Doctornauts then we believe that this would not only be an acceptable solution, but a highly welcomed one. Who can argue against physicians willing to take greater risks to help their patients?"

And what is highly encouraging is that it is a very simple and easily understood Act, which could be enacted expeditiously and the accrued medical benefits realized within the very near future. I know of no other plan that has the potential to achieve this goal.

Congressman Lance, you are an ardent advocate in the quest to find new therapies for the approximately 7,000 rare or orphan diseases which currently lack effective treatments. The Doctornaut Act will not only accelerate the discovery of therapies for orphan diseases, but also all others. Now that you are a member of the influential House Energy and Commerce Committee as well as the Subcommittee on Health, I urge to take up this matter with your colleagues.

Dr. Stephen DeFelice
Chairman, FIM
Westfield



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. Theriomorphic – Said of gods having the form of an animal
2. Argali – A species of very large wild sheep
3. Ryot – A tenant farmer of India
4. Dianoetic – Capable of thought through logic, rather than intuitive reasoning

CYGNET

1. A young swan
2. A cluster of flowers in which each main and secondary stem bears a single flower
3. In architecture, a molding of a cornice, the profile of which is partly concave and partly convex
4. In biology, a cell without a nucleus

THROE

1. Skylight that admits or deflects light
2. A manrope beside a ladder
3. A sort of coarse canvas
4. To put in agony

TIMARAU

1. A courlan, a bird found in the West Indies and Florida
2. A small stocky Philippine buffalo
3. A small flying squirrel, native to Northern Europe
4. A shoemaker

HUGUENOT

1. Of the sea or ocean
2. An ancient Greek sailor in the military
3. A French Protestant of the 16th and 17th centuries
4. A sharp spear used in harpooning sea turtles

More letters; pages 5 and 20

Letters to the Editor

A Question to Ponder

Who's In Charge? The Governor or Everyone Else? — Legislature, Judges, BOE, County, Authorities, Unions?

DEMS Ticket Is Out Of Touch With Reality

The Union County Democrats are just offering the residents of Union County more of the same: candidates who have spent their lives as public employees who are out of touch with the financial realities of hard-working taxpayers struggling to stay in their homes. No wonder why the all-Democratic freeholder board has proposed a budget with a 6 percent tax increase.

Phil Morin
Chairman, Republican Committee of Union County

Editor's Note: The letter is in response to the proposed county Democrats candidate slate for their convention.

Planned Parenthood Should Not Be Funded

If Congress is serious about cutting spending, it should start with ending taxpayer funding for Planned Parenthood. Planned Parenthood is the nation's largest abortion provider receiving over $300 million in taxpayer funding in 2010.

As the government increases its funding year after year to Planned Parenthood, the number of abortions they perform increases. Many non-abortion agencies are available to provide healthcare for low-income women. I do not want my tax dollars going to Planned Parenthood – life is precious!

Barbara Bottini
Westfield

Jackson Fund Thanks Junior Woman's Club For Generous Support

We give our heartfelt thanks to the Junior Woman's Club of Westfield for their incredible generosity and hard work. The Club hosted their annual fund-raising gala at the Grand Summit Hotel on March 12, with proceeds going to The Paul Jackson Fund. The Club members worked incredibly hard to orchestrate such a successful event. We are deeply grateful for their generosity.

The Paul Jackson Fund is a Westfield-based charity that provides grants to families who are facing financial crisis because of a catastrophic illness or disability. Now in its 20th year, The Fund was started for Paul Jackson (WHS '79) who became paralyzed as a result of a surgery to remove a spinal cord tumor. The Fund was started to help Paul pay for an uncovered outpatient rehab program. When Paul's health stabilized, he then began helping others in need. Paul passed away in February 2009.

His wish was for the work of The Fund to continue. The Junior Woman's Club of Westfield has helped The Paul Jackson Fund continue it's mission of helping those most in need.

Mary Jackson
The Paul Jackson Fund
Westfield

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