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Commentary

The New School Voting Law Will Be a 'Game Changer'

Likely, public school districts will choose to move their School Elections to November per the option given with the new law effective this January. The Board of Educations (BOEs) must decide by Friday, February 17. Many have already declared to do so. We know of none that have declared not to do so. By moving to November, the BOEs are guaranteed their budgets with 2 percent escalation each year without requiring public approval. They can request more money, but voter approval would be required for the excess.

The escalation limit is riddled with loopholes so the taxpayer must not assume that their property taxes will only increase by 2 percent per year.

Some claim this move will save money by eliminating the April voting. Cranford BOE (25,000 population) estimates \$25K savings. Westfield BOE (30,000 population) estimates \$30K savings. If this were representative throughout N.J., the

savings would be about \$1 per person or \$8.8 million. County officials that administer elections feel their cost will rise in November because of the increased complexity.

About 20 percent of the population (8.8 million) attends public schools (1.8 million). N.J. Public schools cost about \$19,000 per year per student (NJDOE). The total cost per year is then about \$34 billion.

Perhaps the real cost savings will be to the teachers who may no longer have to pay \$700 per year dues to the teachers union (NJEA). All those ads the union runs each year about approving the budget to "Do It For The Children" no longer would be necessary.

This seemingly simple little law will be a real "game changer" - from the top of the system all the way down to local PTAs.

Does this mean that we will be better able to educate our children with a system that is affordable? We hope so.

More Letters to the Editor

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The Military Promotes Peace And Stability Without Combat

In recent news, President Barack Obama has announced that he is cutting the military by 100,000 troops from 560,000 to 460,000. I strongly oppose this cut as so many consequences stack against such an act. Is cutting back our military nothing more than a mass lay-off of government employees by the Obama administration? Each one of those troops includes senior officers to enlisted personnel who have been working for the military for their entire career.

The United States of America is the world's leading superpower. Cutting back our military is a sign of declining world power; same as the British did during the 1970s. Our military goes beyond just fighting wars. They promote peace and stability without actually encountering any combat. The world relies on the most efficient military in the world. The global community looks upon us for protection and peace; by shrinking the size of the proudest army on the globe you are creating more harm in foreign policy than aiding it. Over 200 years of perfection, efficiency, and honor are being destroyed in the faces of the men and women who have served in the name of freedom.

In fact, our military is more of a humanitarian army than a machine of war. Regretfully, hundreds of the humanitarian relief work which is conducted a year by soldiers of all branches are refused to be shown in the media. Did you know that over 100 relief missions were conducted in 30 countries last year? Who will step up to the same role millions of people worldwide desperately depend on? Will it be communist China? How will other nations respond to such a cutback in the most looked

upon and needed military?

Every, great empire in the history of the world has used military as its pillar for growth, stability, and prosperity. However, modern armies have changed incredibly since the time of the ancients, from technology, size and to morality but it's the same common soldier who serves and allows the state to flourish. I know that some countries have abused the military from every era, but those that haven't and stood for justice always prevailed triumphant.

The definition of an empire has evolved through time, and believe it or not the United States is a modern empire. The definition has changed but the basic necessities for the empire to grow and flourish have stayed the same. The pen is mightier than the sword but it is that pen that strikes the sword through the heart of his enemies in the name of the empire.

The eagle is bold, intelligent, and quick. We Americans are the eagles of the world. The red blood that we shed, for valor and hardiness, the blue sky we see and air we breathe, for perseverance, vigilance, and justice, the white lights that have shown us home, in the name of purity and innocence, and the indivisible eternal stars that shine above our sky represent the freedom, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, that so many people from every corner of the globe have given their lives for just a drop of it are the evergreen logs that fuel the heart of all Americans to do extraordinary work for those who dream of it. Those extraordinary men and women are the soldiers, sailors, and airmen that make up our armed forces.

Thomas Spera, 11th grade Scotch Plains-Fanwood HS

Scotch Plains Taxpayer Calls for Fair Share School Funding from State

The following letter was sent to our three elected officials from District 22 that provides them the opportunity to learn more about Senator Doherty's Fair School Funding initiative. In addition, it provides them a first hand view of the interest by the tax payers in their district who because of the unequal school funding, as dictated by the NJ Court System, lose thousands dollars a year of school aid.

In particular, the Court's rulings have taken tax dollars out of the majority of NJ towns and provided it unevenly to 31 districts that were formally known as Abbott Districts. This resulted in property taxes in most towns in NJ to increase at an astronomical rate. Any taxpayer residents that are bothered by this unfairness may like to know that some of us are trying to get our elected officials to address the situation. The meeting indicated below is open to all, so those that would like to learn more about Senator Doherty's Bill may attend, and see which one(s) of these elected officials are in attendance. Perhaps they would like to hear your opinion that night. Anyone that would like to learn more about the Bill in advance or can not attend the meeting can go to the Web site: fairschoolfunding.com/ and should they like to take action there is an online petition to sign.

Albert Muller
Scotch Plains



HELPING HABITAT... Congregation Beth Israel volunteers, pictured standing on the porch of the six-condo building where they assisted Habitat for Humanity, pictured from left to right, are: Michael Margolin, Bill Sherman, Jay Goldring, Sarah Siegel, Jodie Garfinkel, Lise Krieger, Pamela Brownstein, Dave Labush, Marc Tropper and Michael Gershman.

CBI Volunteers Lend Hand To Habitat For Humanity

SCOTCH PLAINS - Volunteers from Congregation Beth Israel assisted Morris Habitat for Humanity in building a condominium unit in Summit on January 22. The synagogue's Social Action Committee organized its second community outreach project with Habitat for Humanity.

"We had such a positive experience working with Habitat for Humanity about a year ago that we wanted to volunteer again," said Pamela Brownstein, who coordinated the project for Congregation Beth Israel's Social Action Committee.

"Last time, we worked mostly outdoors on a single-family home built by Habitat in Plainfield. This time around, it was winter, so we worked indoors; our jobs were different, but equally rewarding," she said.

The 10 Congregation Beth Israel volunteers were assigned a range of responsibilities, including painting walls, ceilings and trim; installing floor tiles in a bathroom, laundry area and utility closet; hanging doors; installing closet shelves and door knobs, and caulking.

The unit is one of six being built at 39 Morris Avenue in Summit, in a building offering two- and three-bedroom condominiums. It is expected to be finished within a few months. Construction began in the fall of 2010.

Prospective homeowners are required to put 300 hours of "sweat equity" into construction of the units. Habitat gives the owners - low-income, working families - a 30-year mortgage at no interest and with minimum down payment. Habitat's mission is to provide safe, decent, affordable housing for such families.

Congregation Beth Israel's Social Action Committee sponsors a wide range of activities throughout the year to help people in need in Scotch Plains and surrounding communities. Additional outreach efforts include activities such as delivering food for home-bound elderly through Mobile Meals; running an annual coat drive for Jersey Cares and making sandwiches once a month for Plainfield's Second Street Youth Center.

Congregation Beth Israel is located at 18 Shalom Way in Scotch Plains. For information, call (908) 889-1830.



RUGGED...Over 300 Boy Scouts from 41 patrols compete in the 57th Annual Klondike Derby held this past weekend in the Watchung Reservation.

Bramnick Announces GOP Committee Assignments

TRENTON - Assembly Republican Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21, Westfield) has announced the assignments of Republican members to the General Assembly standing reference committees for the current 215th legislative session. The list is as follows:

Budget: Asm. Declan O'Scanlon (R-13, Red Bank), Asm. Anthony Bucco (R-25, Randolph), Asm. Gary Chiusano (R-24, Sparta), and Asm. Jay Webber (R-26, Whippany).

Consumer Affairs: Chris Brown (R-2, Atlantic) and Asm. Alison McHose (R-24, Flanders).

Financial Institutions and Insurance: Ciattarelli (R-16, Somerville) and Asm. Sean Kean (R-30, Wall Twp.).

Health and Senior Services: Asm. Mary Pat Angelini (R-11, Wall Twp.), Asm. Amy Handlin (R-13, Bedford), Asm. Nancy Munoz (R-21, Summit) and Erik Peterson (R-23, Clinton).

Higher Education: Asm. John DiMaio (R-23, Hackettstown) and Asm. DiAnne Gove (R-9, Forked River).

Regulatory Oversight and Gaming: Asm. John Amodeo (R-2, Northfield) and Ronald Dancer (R-12, Jackson).

Telecommunications and Utilities: Gregory McGuckin (R-10, Brick).

Appropriations: Asm. John DiMaio (R-23, Hackettstown), Asm. Caroline Casagrande (R-11, Freehold) and Alison McHose (R-24, Flanders).

Commerce and Economic Development: Asm. Anthony Bucco (R-25, Randolph) and Asm. Nancy Munoz (R-21, Summit).

Housing and Local Government: Asm. Michael Carroll (R-25, Morris Plains).

Law and Public Safety: Asm. Sean Kean (R-30, Wall Twp.), Asm. Gre-

gory McGuckin (R-10, Brick), Asm. Erik Peterson (R-23, Clifton) and Asm. David Ribble (R-30, Wall Twp.).

Regulated Professions: Asm. Jack Ciattarelli (R-16, Somerville), Asm. Amy Handlin (R-13, Belford) and Asm. Brian Rumpf (R-9, Forked River).

Tourism and Arts: Asm. Christopher Brown (R-2, Northfield) and Asm. DiAnne Gove (R-9, Forked River).

Judiciary: Asm. Michael Patrick Carroll (R-25, Morris Plains) and Asm. Holly Schepisi (R-39, Westwood).

Labor: Asm. Ronald Dancer (R-12, Jackson), Asm. Robert Schroeder (R-39, Woodcliff Lake) and Asm. Jay Webber (R-26, Whippany).

Military and Veterans' Affairs: Asm. Christopher Brown (R-8, Medford) and DiAnne Gove (R-9, Forked River).

Transportation, Public Works and Independent Authorities: Asm. John Amodeo (R-2, Northfield), Asm. Scott Rudder (R-8, Medford), Asm. Brian Rumpf (R-9, Forked River) and Asm. David Wolfe (R-10, Brick).

Agriculture and Natural Resources: Ronald Dancer (R-12, Jackson) and Asm. Robert Clifton (R-12, Millstone).

Education: Asm. David Wolfe (R-10, Brick) and Asm. Scott Rumana (R-40, Wayne).

Environment and Solid Waste: Asm. Scott Rudder (R-8, Medford) and Asm. Holly Schepisi (R-39, Westwood).

Homeland Security and State Preparedness: Asm. David Russo (R-40, Midland Park) and Asm. Robert Schroeder (R-39, Woodcliff Lake).

Human Services: Asm. Mary Pat Angelini (R-11, Wall Twp.).

State Government: Asm. Christopher Brown, (R-8, Medford).

Alexis Marta to Take Plunge For Special Olympics N.J.

SCOTCH PLAINS - Twelve-year-old Alexis Marta, a resident of Scotch Plains, will take her first mid-winter plunge into the frigid waters of the Atlantic Ocean on Saturday, February 25, by participating in the 2012 Polar Plunge for Special Olympics New Jersey.

This fund-raising event, which was created 19 years ago, has grown to be the premier winter event in the state, with participants from as far as Alaska joining the fun. All proceeds support Special Olympics New Jersey (SONJ), a non-profit organization that provides free year-round sports training and athletic competition in 24 Olympic-style events for more than 22,000 individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Alexis has committed herself to making a splash and has set a personal fund-raising goal of \$2,000. She is determined to reach this goal and has been busy making phone calls, writing letters and visiting

friends requesting their support.

Anyone wishing to help in this effort is invited to visit NJPolarPlunge.org, click on Sponsor Plunger and follow directions to plunger page.



Alexis Marta

Horticulturist to Give Talk On Gardens Consortium

SCOTCH PLAINS - The Scotch Plains Public Library will host a program on the Garden State Gardens Consortium on Thursday, February 23, at 7 p.m. Most of the 20 public gardens in the Consortium are within easy driving distance of the local community.

Horticulturist Chantal Ludder of the Greater Newark Conservancy, a non-profit organization devoted to education, community greening and environmental stewardship, will be the guest speaker.

Ms. Ludder will showcase some of the green spaces New Jersey has to offer. Through pictures and detailed information, participants will have an opportunity to take a "tour" of the better - and lesser - known gardens throughout the state.

The mission of the Garden State Gardens Consortium is to increase

First Aid Squad Posts Spaghetti Fundraiser

GARWOOD - The Garwood First Aid Squad will hold its Second Annual Spaghetti Dinner fundraiser on Saturday, February 11, from 4 to 8 p.m. at the Garwood Knights of Columbus hall, located at 37 South Avenue.

The cost for the meal, featuring spaghetti, meatballs and more, will be \$10. Tickets will be \$8 for senior citizens, \$5 for children and free for youngsters age 5 and younger.

The Garwood First Aid Squad is a non-profit volunteer organization and relies on donations to continue to provide free emergency medical services to anyone who needs it. In 2011, the squad responded to more than 420 calls in Garwood and surrounding communities. For more information, call (908) 789-0300.

Melissa Johnson to Discuss 'Descendant Tracing' Feb. 9

WESTFIELD - Melissa Johnson will be the speaker for the Genealogical Society of the West Fields on Thursday, February 9. She will discuss "Descendant Tracing" in her presentation at 1 p.m. at the Westfield Memorial Library, located at 550 East Broad Street.

Although still in her 20s, Ms. Johnson is an experienced genealogist, having begun her heritage research at 9 years old at the side of her grandfather. She has traced her family tree to uncover living relatives on the far branches of her family, who make for new sources of information that will help her reach farther back in time to add to her family picture.

Her presentation will be part of the society's continuing season of basic research and ethnic concentration.

In January, Robert Stein of the Morris Area Genealogy Society gave a program aimed at ferreting out the details of German family roots with a presentation on overcoming the language barrier connected with German ancestors. Not only is the lan-

Caregivers Group To Meet on Monday

WESTFIELD - A support group for those caring for elderly or chronically ill loved ones meets on the first non-holiday Monday of each month at 8 p.m. in the parish center of St. Helen's Roman Catholic Church on Lamberts Mill Road in Westfield.

These are information and sharing sessions. The next meeting will take place on February 6. For more information, call Marilyn Ryan at (908) 232-1214.

public awareness and appreciation for New Jersey's public gardens by promoting their horticultural, educational, historic and artistic value and to facilitate the collaboration of allied professionals in order to promote public garden visitation, stewardship and support.

All interested members of the public are invited to attend this free program. Pre-registration is not required. In the event of inclement weather, check the library's website, scotlib.org. The Scotch Plains Public Library is located at 1927 Bartle Avenue, one block from Park Avenue, in the center of the township.

Holy Name Society To Hold Breakfast

SCOTCH PLAINS - The Holy Name Society of St. Bartholomew the Apostle Roman Catholic Church will have its Annual Pancake Breakfast on Sunday, February 12, in the St. Bartholomew's cafeteria after the 7:30 a.m., 9 a.m., 10:30 a.m. and noon Masses.

Everyone is welcome to join the St. Bartholomew the Apostle congregation and enjoy pancakes and sausages prepared by "Marco" of the Highlander Restaurant.

Admission for adults and children age 13 and older will be \$7. For children ages 4 to 12, the price will be \$5. Children age 3 and under may attend for free. The maximum cost per family will be \$18.

All teachers and staff of St. Bartholomew Academy and the Religious Education Program (CCD) are invited as guests of the Holy Name Society. St. Bartholomew the Apostle Church is located at 2032 Westfield Avenue in Scotch Plains.

guage different but historic events can make pinpointing the village of origin of an ancestor a challenge.

Mr. Stein offered some key geographical facts that can point to the village of one's ancestors. "The really proper term for this ethnic research is Germanic, since the modern country that we think of as Germany is less than 150 years old," he said.

"We are doing our best to offer new ideas for discovering information as well as basic knowledge so that we have something to offer our older, more experienced members and people who are just spreading their genealogical wings," said Nancy Humphrey, the current Genealogical Society president. "It's a process, but it is endlessly fascinating!"

The public is invited to attend Genealogical Society programs. For more information, contact Ms. Humphrey at nlhumphrey315@hotmail.com.

Gallery Presents Miguelez Exhibit

AREA - "Happiness is a Warm Pun," a solo exhibit of abstract oil and acrylic landscapes distorted through a prism of music, by Roselle Park resident José Miguelez, will be on display at the Casano Community Center Gallery (CCC) through Friday, February 17.

The Gallery is located at 314 Chestnut Street in Roselle Park. The CCC hours are Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Friday until 5 p.m.

To view more of his paintings, visit madspa.com. Mr. Miguelez may be contacted at xe@madspa.com.