

## Parent Asks for High Standards and Return to Common Decency In Schools

Some of you may be aware of a controversial book that has parents concerned in Westfield. This book, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie, can be found on our intermediate school library shelves and has become required reading for our freshmen high school students. I am writing today not to stir the pot or finger point, nor to request a banning of this book, rather I would like to address what I feel is an even greater concern that we are facing today as parents and educators.

Most people would agree that our country's film and music industry often, shall we say, "lacks etiquette." It is not surprising that young adult fiction has rapidly followed suit. What is surprising is that many of our schools have succumbed to the influence by throwing their high standards to the wind and adopting these unsuitable works into their curricula. While it is apparent that the naive and simple adolescent world of *Nancy Drew* and *The Hardy Boys* is virtually extinct, what has not been quite as evident is how far young adult fiction has descended from that world and has begun to infiltrate our schools. These days if a novel happens to slip under a parent's radar it could be a costly price for their child to pay, as the contents of many of these young adult novels deemed educational would distress any principled educator. It seems that the infliction of impropriety through the media has created an overall deadening of the senses and has given way to the adaptation of an "anything goes" philosophy in many of our schools.

This new philosophy embraces the idea that an entertaining story that ends with a good message cancels out the fact that the young reader will be dragged through continuous perversities to arrive at that message. Any savvy parent or teacher should be able to recognize the futility of this objective. After all, we are dealing with kids who are not yet mature and tend to focus on the gross expletives and emulate them in writing. What you put into a child's mind, he or she will gladly give back to you, as most children seek to please their parents and educators. This may seem like common sense but it is not a commonly shared philosophy in schools today.

On the contrary, schools are requiring that young children read these new age, graphic narratives filled with expletives. It is evident that they have not considered the potential devastation it will have over time on our children's overall quality of learning, that is, if it hasn't already. These books are replacing what could have been other great literary works of higher educational merit. Moreover, requiring children to read this style of writing within the walls of a school only validates the vulgarity they are constantly exposed to in the media, and gives credibility to the use of these expressions amongst their peers. This is precisely what parents are trying to counter on a daily basis, only to find that the schools are now working against them. Furthermore, a story with a positive ending does not necessarily make for effective educational material, especially when minors are the recipients. For example, simply because a porn star is reformed doesn't mean we should have children read the sordid details on his or her

way to purity. Simply because a prison mate has found religion doesn't mean we should subject a child to reading how he beat his wife senseless on his way to his conversion. And just because a Native-American took the initiative to leave a destitute reservation doesn't mean a child should read about how he "sticks his d\*\*k in trees" on the way out (p. 225 of Alexie's *Diary*). Adults who used to be responsible for the protection of a child's exposure to indecency and vulgarity have become muddled by the age of insolence, and sadly, have become victims of it themselves. We have all become desensitized to some degree, but many have become so without even knowing it in view of the fact that they can't see "dirt" even when they are shown.

Technology and the media's lack of decorum may be largely to blame, but the time has come for parents and teachers to take a step back and seriously consider how far we've drifted and the direction we want for our schools. We are all trying to mold competent children of character and conscience, however no one feels more strongly about this than parents, and it behooves teachers to heed their advice, in more ways than one.

Anna Githens  
Westfield

## Bramnick Says Trenton Should Focus on Jobs

TRENTON — Assembly GOP Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21, Westfield) said yesterday that New Jersey taxpayers want the Legislature focused on creating jobs and lowering taxes. Mr. Bramnick was joined by other Assembly Republicans as he discussed New Jersey's priorities at a press conference before the Assembly's first voting session on Thursday, February 16. He challenged Democrats to join Republicans on making these items Trenton's top priorities. "Over the last two years, taxpayers benefited most when the Legislature worked with Gov. Christie to control spending and create jobs," he said. "The Legislature needs to address these important issues now, not wait until the next election."

He said N.J. added 62,000 private-sector jobs over the past two years and the bipartisan property tax cap yielded the lowest increase in two decades. "Listening to ideas, learning what works and then taking action has proven to be successful. Improving our economy and putting money back into taxpayers' pockets should be our highest priorities," he said.

## Letters to the Editor

### Infrastructure Technocrats Must Take Back Industry From Pol. Operatives

As money and power are increasingly concentrated in Washington, the line of supplicants stretches all the way to Monticello. That has created a "barbarians at the gate" mentality among the congressional conservatives and budget experts who guard the treasury. Infrastructure advocates claim great benefits from public investment. But so do many others.

Pete Ruane, a veteran of the infrastructure funding wars, calls Washington a "fact-free zone." The firewall that for 56 years has protected the federal highway trust fund from being used for deficit reduction is in grave danger of being breached. "We're going to be fighting for every penny from this point on," he says.

If not direct federal investment then what about tax credits and other leveraging tools? Advocates for these programs have been pulling their hair out for years over how tax credits are scored for infrastructure programs. There is no acknowledgment of the federal revenue upside created by public investment in mobility, safe water, etc. That's not going to change easily because those rules are embedded in the federal budget bureaucracy.

Because so much is political, the members of the elite infrastructure technocracy in the U.S. too often are forced to bow to the politicians who dispense the subsidies. Compliance with unending regulations is seen as a cost of doing business, but taxpayers, not contractors, pay the full price.

U.S. construction companies are carrying a much heavier regulatory burden under the Obama Administration than ever before. The EPA is an untethered driver of regulations. Owners, public and private, are as likely to find themselves in court as under construction.

Enforcement actions under the various federal set-aside programs are up by 10 times in the past three years. Dept. of Labor audits are up by 25 times. "There is a huge new regulatory component to our work and more political impact," says Bruce Grewcock, CEO of Kiewit Corp., whose managers generate 50 mil-

lion man hours of craft labor a year. "The Obama Administration is listening to a different audience," he says.

Powerful advocates for smaller government charge that the federal public works budget is so skewed toward political ends and insiders that any increase in public investment from taxes or user fees should be opposed as wasteful. They have a large and growing audience of believers because they are partly correct.

Consider this from the director of a major U.S. infrastructure investment fund: "Every big transportation project in America is political now. It has very little to do with delivering infrastructure projects when there's big money involved."

He continues: "Lobbyists have found out that the money is at the project level, not in Washington. They add a political tone to everything, and they've convinced local governments that they need political influence to get anything done." As a result, he says, too little gets built because too few decisions are made on the merits of a project.

We are at a crossroads. No amount of "needs" surveys will spur voters or politicians to support a major commitment to meet future demands for transportation, water, public buildings and other critical infrastructure services. That will come when the public and private planners, designers, builders and operators of these facilities convince a skeptical public that they are getting the services they pay for at a fair price and without political favoritism. To do that, the infrastructure technocrats must take back their industry from the political operatives who promise subsidy but deliver mainly invoices.

William Reinhardt  
Westfield

## WF Health Dept. Reports on 2011 Activities, 2012 Coming Events

The Westfield Board of Health met on February 6. New goals for 2012 included the following: to incorporate the Township of Cranford into the Westfield Regional Health Department, to agree on a new contract mechanism with the participating municipalities, to significantly cut the costs for animal control, to update the health department website and to support efforts for statewide community water fluoridation.

The health department activities in 2011 were reviewed and included the following for Westfield residents: It provided 336 residents with influenza vaccinations, 87 childhood vaccinations and 151 vaccinations for meningitis, pneumonia, Tdap (tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis) and human papilloma virus. It also provided 38 children with evaluations, 31 with examinations, and 63 residents with health screenings. Seventy-two persons with communicable diseases were evaluated and provided services and nine residents required home visits.

In addition, all restaurants, retail food establishments and public pools in town were inspected at least once and most were inspected two or more times during the year. A few food establishments were closed due to fires. One was closed due to an unsatisfactory sanitary rating and when it reopened was given a four-day suspension, which was held in abey-

ance. A town-wide community blood drive on Thursday, March 8, from 2:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in the Municipal Building Community Room is being sponsored by the Health Department and Overlook Medical Center to help supply the blood bank at Overlook. Residents can call (908) 522-2985 to schedule an appointment.

In addition, the Health Department is sponsoring free health screenings with Overlook in the Municipal Building. A respiratory disease screening will be on Thursday, March 15, from 10 a.m. to noon and colorectal education will be on Thursday, April 12, from 10 a.m. to noon. For more information about these programs and to register, please call the Overlook Medical Center Community Health Department at 1-800-247-9580.

The board also heard a resident request that it consider restrictions on cigarette smoking in selected public places, which will be further discussed at our next meeting. Information about all of the department's activities is available on its website [www.westfieldnj.gov/health](http://www.westfieldnj.gov/health). The complete minutes of the February 6 meeting will be posted after review and approval at our March 5 meeting, which starts at 5:30 p.m. in the Municipal Building.

Dr. Lawrence Budnick  
President, Westfield Bd. of Health

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