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As Property Taxes Soar, Who's Next to Pay Their Fair Share?

Just like the federal government, the State of New Jersey along with the counties, school systems, municipalities and authorities have proven that they will not control expenditures and ever-increasing taxes — it's not in their genes. Rather than solving the spending problems, many officials are calling for everyone to pay their "fair share." We think this is political expediency; do they really believe that everyone's not paying their fair share?

In New Jersey, property taxes are out of control (regardless of the attempt at a 2 percent cap). The seriousness of the problem forces a look at everything. As example, why aren't all property owners paying property taxes? Who will government be coming after next? Are they thinking that "non-profits" are getting a free ride?

Right or wrong, some of the largest properties in the state — not to mention Union County — do not pay property taxes because they are deemed non-profits. Colleges such as Kean University and Union County College and organizations like the YMCA, JCC and Children's Specialized Hospital do not pay property taxes.

We took a look at some assessed values of non-profit properties to "guesstimate" what they might be worth to the government coffers, if government forced everyone to pay their fair share. Assessed values in the area vary from town to town and are generally one-third to one-sixth of the market value.

The Westfield Area "Y's" main building at 220 Clark Street in Westfield, a 150-by-220-foot lot, is assessed at over \$2 million, although in today's market the property would likely net around \$8 million. Note that the average assessed value in Westfield is \$180,000. As of its 2009 annual report, the Westfield "Y" had facility assets of over \$12 million and a budget of \$9 million. Private homes near the Clark Street address in Westfield pay in the \$10,000 to \$13,000 range in property taxes. Does this mean the "fair share" taxing potential of the Y might be over \$100,000 per year?

In recent years, the "Y" has obtained lots at 111 and 115 Ferris Place for half million dollars from a homeowner and from the First United Methodist Church for \$400,000, respectively. The "Y's" most expensive purchase, at 422 East Broad Street, was bought for \$2 million in 2004 from the First Church of Christ, Scientist. The property is assessed at \$600,000.

The Scotch Plains "Y's" eight-acre lot at 1340 Martine Avenue is assessed at \$1.6 million for which

they pay no taxes although they pay \$17,000 for a property at 1380 Martine Avenue. We estimate that the eight-acre Martine Avenue property would be worth around \$6.5 million in today's market. What is their "fair share" taxing potential?

The JCC, located at 1391 Martine Avenue in Scotch Plains, also occupies nearly eight acres, which is assessed at \$2.1 million, but is likely worth \$8 million. The average assessed value in Scotch Plains is \$122,000. Nearby homeowners are paying in the range of \$15,000 and \$20,000 in taxes. What is the JCC "fair share" taxing potential?

One of the largest properties in Mountainside is that of Children's Specialized Hospital, located at 150 New Providence Road. The 11-acre property is assessed at \$10 million. Smaller lots on that block of New Providence Road pay between \$6,000 and \$8,000 in taxes. The average assessed value in Mountainside is \$184,000. Recent sales show the market value is roughly four times the assessed value, meaning CSH is worth around \$40 million. What is their "fair share" taxing potential?

Kean University has been expanding over the years into properties that were once tax-producing rateables for Union Township. The university obtained the 22-acre Liberty Hall Museum for over \$5 million five years ago; prior to that the Kean family owned the property. The university also acquired the former Pingry School campus, located behind Liberty Hall in Hillside, in 1997. The main Kean campus, located at 1000 Morris Avenue in Union Township, is spread across 117 acres and is assessed at \$49 million. Homes in the neighborhood are estimated to be worth five times the assessments making Kean campus worth around \$250 million. What is their "fair share" taxing potential?

The Union County College campus on Springfield Avenue in Cranford is on 22 acres of land assessed at nearly \$17 million. What is their "fair share" taxing potential?

Given the value of some of these properties, municipalities and school districts could garner millions in new rateables for their coffers if "non-profits" had to reach into the "profits" and pay property taxes.

We're not suggesting that property taxes be expanded, but we're pointing out that government's appetite is insatiable. If you're not paying your "fair share," you'd better jump in and help force a solution to government spending — otherwise you're likely next on the list.

Letters to the Editor

Red Cross Ends Sr. Trans. Service; Town and Westfield UF Takeover

We wish to clarify a statement that was made in last week's newspaper (*The Westfield Leader*, July 5) regarding the senior transportation service, which the Westfield Recreation Department will be providing, with some funding from the Westfield United Fund. The Westfield/Mountainside chapter of the American Red Cross had been providing this service since 1998, when it was identified as a high priority need in a survey of our senior citizens.

The Red Cross received funding from both the Town of Westfield and the Westfield United Fund to provide this service. Several months ago, the Red Cross notified both parties that they would be discontinuing the transportation service as of June 30, 2012 in order to conform to National Red Cross policy, which requires all regional offices to focus their efforts on core mission (disaster preparedness)

programs and services.

At that point, we began discussions with the town administrator, Jim Gildea, because we felt a responsibility to our senior citizens, and we did not want to see this vital service discontinued. Mr. Gildea informed us that the Town of Westfield was willing to take over the program, which would be administered by the recreation department. Since the Westfield United Fund had already allocated the funds for its share of the program for the full year 2012, we agreed to transfer that money to the town to help pay for the program for the balance of this year.

Beginning in 2013, the program will be fully funded by the town. We hope this addresses any concerns your readers may have.

Linda Maggio
 Executive Director
 Westfield United Fund

Not One of My Neighbors Knew Of This Draconian Idea

As a former resident of Westfield, I applaud your strong editorial concerning the "Draconian" idea of buying foreclosed property for the purpose of affordable housing (*"Stunning How Brazen Government Can Become,"* June 21, 2012).

[I'm] Happy to see the Governor has vetoed this idea.

I talked to several of my neighbors about this and out of five, not one knew of this issue — Typical of Washington — oops sorry meant to say Trenton, trying to sneak bills like this through.

Francis X. Quinn
 Lavallette N.J.

Officer Should Have Issued Warning For 'Head-In' Parking in Westfield

Is the Town of Westfield so hard up for cash that its parking enforcement officer must lurk in the shadows waiting for victims? I was in the municipal parking lot behind Bovella's today (July 5) for less than 20 minutes. I dutifully paid at the "Paystation" because you dare not take a chance in this town. However, when I returned to my vehicle, there was a ticket waiting. The offense? — Not parked "head in." Yes, the rule is posted; however, it's a small sign that isn't near the space. Besides, who post rules for a parking lot?

Couldn't a warning have been issued? Couldn't the officer have accounted for the fact I had over 40 minutes of time left? Apparently not. Perhaps Westfield needs to handout tickets to offset the cost of the parking officer's salary and benefits. This along with the special vehicle purchased and its maintenance costs (e.g. insurance, gas, repairs, etc.) Wouldn't

it be easier to eliminate these expenses and have a parking-friendly town? I believe so and I know a few of the merchants that do too.

It's unfortunate that Westfield cares more about making money than it does its visitors. It seems to me that the town would want to attract people instead of giving them reasons to stay away. Some towns offer free parking. If it sounds like I'm a bit disgruntled, I am. I don't feel I deserved it. After all, I paid to park. Had I been a second-offender I would understand getting the ticket. I own a pickup truck and I back in most places just because it's easier. That being said, I will pay my revenue-making ticket because the fat cats need the money. I would like to thank the Town of Westfield for making me feel welcome.

Rich Zielinski
 South Plainfield

What Does Pelosi Call The 48 Percent Who Don't Pay Income Taxes?

With SCOTUS having transformed the PPACA individual mandate and penalties for so-called "free-riders" into a tax ("There are people who are free riders who now have a responsibility to have health insurance or pay a penalty." — Minority Leader Pelosi, June 28, 2012), those who are deemed irresponsible because they don't pay for health insurance can no longer avoid paying their "fair share" into the health system.

Isn't that line of thought just a bit presumptuous? What of the "free-riders" who have paid into the health system by paying as they go, conscientiously paying for services rendered? Will the amounts that they paid for their health care be credited

back to them when health taxes are assessed? Good luck with that.

And what of "free-riders" in other situations? Can they be bent to the will of the government under the banner of taxation? Those who don't purchase hybrid/electric automobiles? Those who don't use alternative energy? Those who don't buy enough veggies? Those who don't purchase contraceptives? Those who don't get an abortion?

If the 17 percent of Americans who don't purchase health insurance are free-riders, what does Speaker Pelosi call the 48 percent who don't pay income taxes?

Mickey O'Brien
 Westfield

Seat Belt Law, ObamaCare, Taxes and Who's This for Says Cardiologist

In all of the uproar about the politics of the Affordable Care Act, we seem to have lost focus on who the law was written to protect.

As a cardiologist, each month several previously young and healthy individuals present to our emergency department with heart attacks as their initial sign of disease. Many of these people have avoided preventive care because they lack health insurance, and now may be crippled for life by damaged hearts.

For those unlucky individuals without insurance who come to a New Jersey hospital with an acute heart attack, there will always be premier health care from my colleagues and the hospital staff. However, as cardiologists, we must decide whether to place the state-of-the-art "drug-eluting" coronary artery stents (which require long-term treatment with more expensive medications), versus the older "bare metal stents" which are often less protective over time but don't require the same long term medications that uninsured patients often won't be able to afford.

This said, it's unfortunate the Supreme Court was forced to make its decision regarding the Affordable Care Act based on whether the federal government can impose what is essentially an economic mandate on

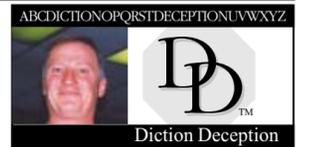
citizens. To lump together the issue of broccoli and health care reduces the argument to a grade school debate. This is not a mandate about eating certain foods, nor should it involve any particular social, political or business activity.

Does the Federal government actually have the ability to mandate expenditures for the good of individual citizens? One need only look back to the Federal Guidelines for Motor Vehicles, imposed in 1967, which mandated that automobile manufacturers install seat belts with the purpose of "preventing injury and death due to auto accidents." It's a reality that the Federal government had already governed using economic mandates to insure the health of individuals.

The dissenting justices did bring up the issue that not all young people will use health care, and I suppose they would make the same spurious argument that no one is forced to buy an automobile and pay the added expense of seat belts. But at some point, just about everyone travels in an automobile, and the added expense of seat belts is in some manner added into the cost passed along to drivers or passengers, whether they're in a taxi or a family vehicle.

And unlike seat belt laws, the ACA only imposes an economic sanction on individuals who chose not to have health insurance, unlike the penalties imposed (granted by the states, which regarding the ACA will also be legislating how to care for their uninsured) for not wearing seatbelts.

Austin Kutscher, M.D., Flemington Governor, New Jersey Chapter American College of Cardiology



ABDCITIONOPQRSTDECEPTIONUVWXYZ
 Diction Deception

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. Plaga — In zoology, a colored band or streak
2. Pandy — To punish by striking the hand with a cane
3. Geordie — A miner or a miner's safety lamp
4. Dacoit — A member of a gang of robbers in India or Burma

SENESENC

1. Oozing; seeping
2. Abundant; plentiful
3. Sagacious; intellectual
4. Growing old

SEPICOLOUS

1. Lighthearted; cheerful
2. Putrid; foul-smelling
3. Growing in hedges
4. Arranged in groups of seven

AMYGDALINE

1. Having an alkaline imbalance
2. Resembling almonds
3. Hanging in clusters, such as with grapes
4. Resembling a honeycomb

SITIOLOGY

1. The study of foods, nutrition, etc.
2. The study of eye diseases and care
3. The study of the anatomy of fishes
4. The study of microscopic organisms, especially bacteria

Letters to the Editor

Deerfield Thanked for Recognizing Daughter

We would like to publically thank the Deerfield School Librarian, Ms. Silagyi, for recognizing our daughter, Spencer Elizabeth, for being chosen by the New Jersey Association of School Librarians to represent Elementary Schools for her winning essay on "Why My School Library is Important to Me" (*Westfield Leader*, June 14, 2012).

Thank you, Ms. Silagyi, for inspiring our daughter and for your dedication to our children!

James and Tracey Murdoch
 Westfield

Commentary

Don't Leave Your Pet In a Parked Car

Whether you're parking in the shade, just running into the store, or leaving the windows cracked, it is still not OK to leave your pet in a parked car. The temperature inside a car can skyrocket after just a few minutes. Parking in the shade or leaving the windows cracked does very little to alleviate this pressure cooker.

On a warm, sunny day try turning your car off, cracking your windows and sitting there. It will only be a few short minutes before it becomes unbearable. Imagine how your helpless pet will feel. On an 85-degree day, for example, the temperature inside a car with the windows cracked can reach 102 degrees within only 10 minutes. After 30 minutes, the temperature will reach 120 degrees. At 110 degrees, pets are in danger of heatstroke. On hot and humid days, the temperature in a car parked in direct sunlight can quickly become lethal.

Ambient temperature doesn't matter — it's whether it's sunny out. Eighty percent of the temperature rise occurs within the first half-hour. Even on a relatively cool day, the temperature inside a parked car can quickly spike to life-threatening levels if the sun is out. Precautions such as cracking a window or running the air conditioner prior to parking the car were found to be inadequate.

If more people knew the danger of leaving their pets in their parked car, they probably wouldn't do it. Pets are very susceptible to overheating, as they are much less efficient at cooling themselves than people are. The solution is simple — leave your pets at home if the place you are going does not allow pets.

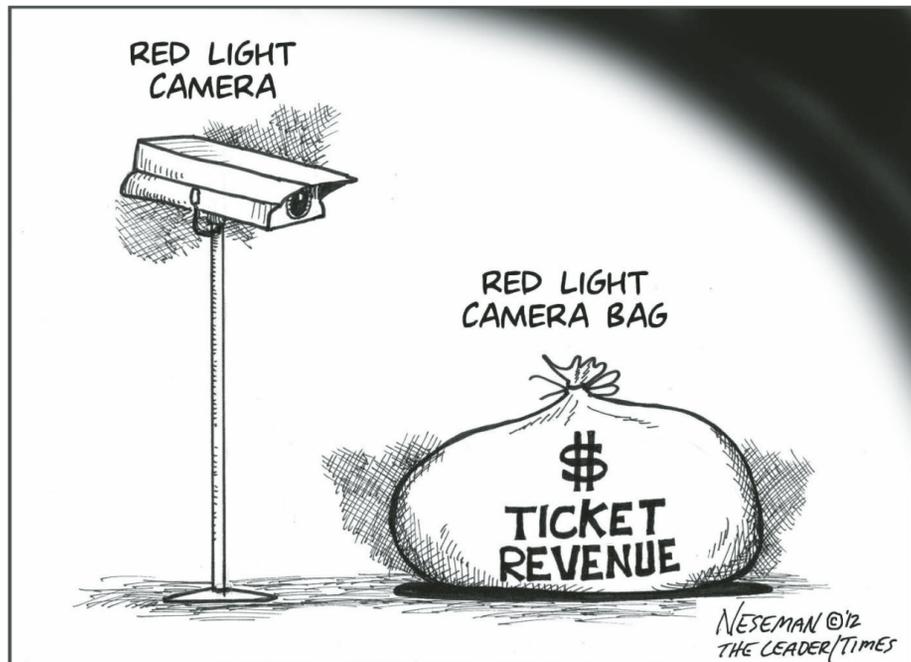
Dogs are designed to conserve heat. Their sweat glands, which exist on their nose and the pads of their feet, are inadequate for cooling during hot days. Panting and drinking water helps cool them, but if they only have hot air to breathe, dogs can suffer brain and organ damage after just 15 minutes. Short-nosed breeds, young pets, seniors or pets with weight, respiratory, cardiovascular or other health problems are especially susceptible to heat-related stress. Signs of heat stress include: heavy panting, glazed eyes, a rapid pulse, unsteadiness, a staggering gait, vomiting or a deep red or purple tongue.

If a pet becomes overheated, immediately lowering their body temperature is a must. Move the pet into the shade and apply cool (not cold) water all over their body to gradually lower their temperature. Apply ice packs or cool towels to the pet's head, neck and chest only. Allow the pet to drink small amounts of cool water or lick ice cubes. Then take the pet to the nearest vet.

Law enforcement officers are authorized to remove any animal left in an unattended vehicle that is exhibiting signs of heat stress.

Kim Salerno
 TRIPSwithPETS.com

Newspeak of "1984," Oceania is testing drones and banning 16 oz. sodas



Your State Legislators		
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