



TALKING POLITICS...Assemblywoman Nancy Muñoz (R-21st, Summit), center, and Republican Freeholder candidates Peter Lijoi of Summit, left, and Patricia Quattrocchi of Clark, right, attended the Union County Republican event September 26 at Echo Lake Country Club in Westfield.



CAMPAIGN SEASON...Keynote speaker Carlos Rendo, mayor of Woodcliff Lake and Republican candidate for lieutenant governor, left, poses with New Jersey District 22 Assembly candidates Rich Fortunado of Scotch Plains, right, and John Quattrocchi of Clark, center, at the Union County Republican Committee event at Echo Lake Country Club in Westfield on September 26.



RAISING MONEY...Assembly Republican Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield), right, held a fundraiser Thursday night for Assembly District 2 candidates at his house in Westfield. Pictured, from left to right, are: Patricia Brentano Bramnick, Rich Brockway, Mary Liebau, Tola Murphy Baran and Mr. Bramnick.

Assembly DEM Candidates Talk About Taxes, Housing

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — The Democratic candidates for State Assembly in the 21st Legislative District criticized Christie Administration policies they say have led to higher property taxes in New Jersey and also resulted in court involvement in affordable-housing policies. The two candidates will face incumbents Jon Bramnick and Nancy Muñoz in the November election.

Democrats Lacey Rzeszowski and Bruce Bergen spoke with *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* about a variety of issues, with the bulk of the conversation focusing on property taxes. Speaking about school funding, Ms. Rzeszowski, a Summit resident making her first foray into electoral politics, addressed the disparity in education quality between suburban towns and inner cities, lamenting “how much your zip code depended on the kind of education that you could receive.” She said increased funding from the state was needed so that “every student has the opportunity for a top-quality education.”

Mr. Bergen, presently the chairman of the Union County Freeholder Board, said that “fairness” or “equity” was important so that “every student in New Jersey has the opportunity to get a first-class education.” He said the present school funding formula is “underfunded” so that it is “doing what it’s supposed to do.” Cautioning that he was not proposing taking money from one district to fund another, he said he wanted to “make sure that everybody has the funding that they need.”

Addressing property taxes in general, Mr. Bergen said that during the Christie Administration, state funding to local and county governments as well as boards of education has declined — and shifted the burden for funding to property taxes. He described the property tax burden on residents as “overwhelming” and called on the state “to start funding what they used to fund” in order to reduce pressure on local and county governments and boards of education.

Mr. Bergen, who has run for Assembly several times in previous elections, said the state’s 2-percent salary arbitration cap being considered for extension is “an artificial way” to hold down property taxes. If state finances were healthy, he said, Trenton authorities could fund the services they mandate and would not need the cap. He added that “salaries should be able to be negotiated and be at a fair level without bankrupting municipalities.” Ms. Rzeszowski concurred, saying that, “When you want to have the best police officers, then you need to have a market salary rate for them.”

Speaking about the state-mandated, 2-percent cap on property-tax increases, Mr. Bergen pointed out that when the state government mandates expenses and then does not provide the funding, then the Union County government, for instance, has to find the funding, and the sole source is property taxes. Ms.

Rzeszowski said that consolidation and coordination of services is another way to cut costs, lamenting the amount of duplicative services as well as what she has witnessed as a lack of coordination between agencies, citing instances where a street is torn up for repaving, only to be torn up again the following year for gas companies work and then torn up again for a new curbing project.

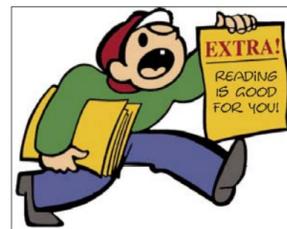
Mr. Bergen called on the state to encourage more sharing of services, pointing to the Union County emergency dispatch service that a number of towns in Union County have joined. He said the service was “cheaper than [towns] doing it on their own.”

On the topic of high-density housing, something that is being debated in Cranford, for one, where a 905-unit development is under consideration, Mr. Bergen criticized the governor for allowing the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) to wither and, thus, leading to the courts to step in and dictate affordable-housing policies to municipalities. Mr. Bergen said that when the governor and his supporters say the Legislature, not the courts, should be addressing housing, “they’re right. But they had that opportunity” and their actions “forced the courts to get involved.” Ms. Rzeszowski was similarly critical, saying that, “All of a sudden, there’s a lot of interest from the representatives of this district, and they should have been interested all along.”

Mr. Bergen said that “there can be and should be growth, but it has to be reasonable.” Ms. Rzeszowski said high levels of college loan debt are making it difficult for millennials to live in the state and buy houses. Mr. Bergen said the issue goes back to the state’s fiscal health, noting that the state’s bond rating has been downgraded 15 times during the Christie Administration while Union County recently saw its rating upgraded to AAA, the highest rating.

Speaking about the proposed Gateway Tunnel under the Hudson River, both candidates were supportive, with Ms. Rzeszowski calling it “absolutely essential” and saying the lack of additional train track capacity is “a roadblock” to new business growth in the region. She pointed out that 10 percent of national GDP “comes through this corridor.” For his part, Mr. Bergen said the new tunnel was “critical to the economic health of Union County, New Jersey and the Eastern seaboard.”

The video can be viewed at goleader.com/services/video/2017/.



SEEKING OFFICE...State Assembly District 21 candidates Bruce Bergen and Lacey Rzeszowski sat down with editor Paul Peyton to discuss state issues ahead of the November election. Mr. Bergen is currently Union County Freeholder chairman.

Lance Issues Statement on Tax Reform Outline

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congressman Leonard Lance (R-7th) released the following statement after the Republican tax reform retreat and the announcement of a tax reform framework:

“There is a lot I agree with in the tax reform outline announced today (September 27th). Lower individual rates on middle-class families and a competitive corporate rate will unleash tremendous economic growth and job creation. These reforms will have a positive effect on take-home pay in every state and should enjoy large bipartisan support. I hope these items are included in the final package.”

“When our leadership opened the floor for comments I was the first to make the case to my colleagues for maintaining the state and local tax deduction that is so critically important for New Jersey. New Jersey taxpayers support federal initiatives more than any other state. The elimination of this deduction would further increase the disparity in New Jersey’s support for the federal government versus the return in federal tax funds.”

“I will continue to speak out on this issue and work hard to include the state and local tax deduction among those itemized deductions that need to be preserved. There are many hearings and debate still to come.”



MEETING COMMUTERS...Westfield mayoral candidate Shelley Brindle meets with commuter Sam, a project manager for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, an MIT graduate, 40-year Westfield resident, and 9/11 survivor. The Brindle campaign was at the Westfield Train Station where they gave out 200 cups of coffee courtesy of Ahrrre’s Coffee Roastery.

Here’s why Jon Bramnick receives overwhelming support

- ☑ “Bramnick Has Guts” – The Record
- ☑ “Bramnick May Be What State Needs” – Daily Record
- ☑ Endorsed by Professional Firefighters Association of New Jersey
- ☑ Endorsed by the Fraternal Order of Police
- ☑ Ended the death tax in New Jersey
- ☑ Led fight to reduce income tax burden on retirees
- ☑ Stands against high density housing imposed on us from Trenton
- ☑ Highest honor in arts education by NJ’s arts community
- ☑ The voice against new taxes
- ☑ Called a Guardian of Small Business by the National Federation of Independent Business



JON
BRAMNICK
★ FOR STATE ASSEMBLY ★

VOTE NOVEMBER 7TH | [f](#) | [t](#)