

Campaign '97 - Full Local Election Coverage

# Parents Fight for Fair Education During Rally at Madison High; Sen. McGreevey Offers Views; Mr. Bagger Fills In for Gov. Whitman

By SUSAN M. DYCKMAN  
Specialty Writer for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Invited Governor Christine Todd Whitman and State Senator James E. McGreevey to speak at the Parents Rally for Fair Education Funding on October 13 at Madison High School.

The governor asked Republican Assemblyman Richard H. Bagger of Westfield, a prominent proponent of public education, to attend the rally in her place. His comments followed remarks from Senator McGreevey, who is also Mayor of Woodbridge Township. Both legisla-

tors fielded questions from the audience. "Lifetime learning is the cornerstone of my campaign," declared the Democratic challenger. "Our goal is to raise the floor, not lower the ceiling (on standards)."

He said, "It is incumbent upon the state to develop internal opportunities within the public education structure (for special education students)."

"It is no exaggeration that the Garden State Coalition has changed the course of the state's educational debate and school funding," began Assemblyman Bagger. "Education will continue to be a top issue in New Jersey, as it is the most important thing state government does."

While he acknowledged the GSCS's frustration in the absence of a "fix" in the area of educational spending, the assembly majority conference leader added that, "The Comprehensive Educational Improvement and Financing Act (CEIFA) represents the first time a governor and legislature tried to define and give substantive meaning to the constitutional right to free and consistent education."

The bill, mandated by the state Supreme Court and passed by the legislature in December, 1996, established core curriculum standards in seven key subject areas.

It called for testing in the fourth, eighth and eleventh grades to measure students' progress in achievement of those standards.

While CEIFA also stated that \$7,200 is a legitimate per pupil cost for implementing core standards; it allowed districts that were spending more than that to increase their 1997-1998 budgets by up to 3 percent.

In addressing concerns that high achieving districts would be "leveled down" by the new legislation, Assemblyman Bagger said he would work toward ensuring that high achieving districts can continue to excel.

On May 14, the state Supreme Court accepted the recommended core curriculum standards, but rejected the legislature's financing proposal. The court ordered the state to supply an additional \$500 million in funding to help ensure that standards could actually be implemented across the state.

"These funds must be used for specific purposes," explained Assembly Bagger, "lower class size; acceleration of programs such as all-day Kindergarten, technology and early intervention; facility improvement expenses; and a safe learning environment."

Among the assemblyman's priorities are continued focus on a funding formula; more complete funding for special

education; more fully-funded debt service aid; and state funding for school facilities.

He indicated that, if reelected, Governor Whitman would likely put a \$500 million bond issue on the fall, 1998 ballot to raise funds for facilities' improvements.

"We should move away from a strict financial approach to focus on what we want children to learn, and never stand in the way of those districts who are leading the way," Assemblyman Bagger said.

Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education Vice President Jessica L. Simpson's question to the governor's representative met with applause from the audience.

"I don't mean to embarrass you," she said, "but we came to hear the governor's views. How can you convince us that she has been a friend of public education? She seems to have a problem with public education."

"The governor does not have a problem with public education," replied Assemblyman Bagger. "She is driven by a desire to satisfy the Supreme Court (decision)."

Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education President Donald E. Sheldon asked if the funding deficiencies recognized in CEIFA, particularly those associated with special education, would be corrected before the April, 1998 school election.

Assembly Bagger said he expects changes in the CEIFA formula to be in place prior to next year's budget vote.

Assemblyman Bagger concluded his remarks by saying, "We need to define it (education) and provide it. We shouldn't pit one set of communities against another."

GSCS is a bi-partisan coalition composed of 125 suburban school districts across New Jersey, including Scotch Plains-Fanwood and Westfield. Together, the districts represent 270,000 school children.

The two-hour rally was attended by approximately 300 GSCS members and supporters from around the state. Superintendent of Schools Dr. Carol B. Choye joined Mrs. Simpson and Dr. Sheldon, as well as Scotch Plains-Fanwood board members Theresa A. Larkin and Morris H. Gillet. Several local parents also attended.

## Democrats Seek to Unseat Republicans In Races for State Senate and Assembly

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On the issue of property tax funding of public education in the state, Mr. Baron called for implementation of the Michigan Model to reduce the burden on property taxpayers. The Michigan program calls for more equitable education funding by revamping the state's entire tax system.

In his campaign, Mr. Baron also called for an amendment to the Family Leave Act of 1989 which would establish "a set of standards and safeguards to protect both businesses and employees."

He supports providing temporary disability for a family faced with a seriously ill relative, in addition to the 12 weeks of unpaid leave to attend to the needs of a seriously ill family member.

"The Governor and my opponents," said Mr. Baron, "have mortgaged the future of my kids for the next 30 years."

"Using bonds to finance a gap in the operating budget is both dangerous and unprecedented...The bonds will require every legislature for the next 30 years to make burdensome appropriations to pay for the interest and principal of these bonds," he continued.

Assemblyman Augustine, a former Mayor and Councilman in Scotch Plains and Union County Freeholder, and called "the busiest man in Trenton" by a staff member in Senator DiFrancesco's office, is a member of the Appropriations Committee and Vice Chairman of the State Government and Financial Institutions Committees.

A Scotch Plains resident and former marketing consultant with Subaru Distributors Corporation, he has served in the Assembly since 1992.

Mr. Augustine said he is seeking reelection to continue "the incredible experience" he has enjoyed in his role as Assemblyman, "to be a tremendous force for good...and to have a positive influence on people's future and quality of life, and in making New Jersey a better place to live."

He said, "Two years ago, I was elected on a platform that called for cutting red tape. Since then, we've cut taxes 14 times and kept the annual rate of budget growth to 1.8 percent. The 1998 budget sets a record for the lowest growth rate over the last 50 years."

"The Mandate Relief Acts of 1995 and 1996 cut red tape and eliminated bureaucratic layers in over 20 areas of municipal and county governments," the Assemblyman said.

Among the priorities Mr. Augustine listed for the next two years are "smaller government; lower taxes; property tax reform that doesn't sneak new taxes onto residents; a no-nonsense criminal justice system that locks up violent criminals and throws away the key, and environmental protection that works without forcing businesses out of New Jersey."

Cranford resident Mr. Albert is an attorney and a former Mayor of his hometown. In his campaign to unseat the Republicans, the Democratic contender said he has "focused on property tax relief and the impact of state policies on property taxpayers."

Referring to state revenues, Mr. Albert said, "The state skimmed \$200 million off the top from gross receipts."

He indicated that those moneys should be destined for property tax relief at the community level.

The Conservative candidates for assembly seats include Mountaintop resident Douglas Lawless and Scotch Plains resident Norman Ross.

Mr. Lawless, employed as an environmentalist, favors a constitutional amendment to limit the annual growth of property taxes to either 3 percent or set them at the rate of inflation. He favors deregulation of the auto insurance laws.

He also favors the preservation of the Watchung Reservation and funding for open space preservation.

**Governor's Race**  
Governor Christine Todd Whitman, whose campaign has emphasized that she achieved what she promised to do four years ago, has actively wooed Union County voters in her crusade for reelection by visiting the area once every 10 days since June.

The Governor joined 40,000 people in Westfield for the town's annual September Fes/Fall street fair. Her visit, which had been scheduled to last 45 minutes, was extended to two and a half hours, as Mrs. Whitman greeted constituents and enjoyed the festive atmosphere which encompassed the downtown, according to Susan Jester, Executive Director of Union County for the Republican State Committee.

Governor Whitman also met with Scotch Plains' municipal officials, local merchants and the general public during a "business walk" through the township several weeks ago.

The Governor stands on her record of cutting taxes by \$4.4 billion and creating more than 216,000 new jobs since she first took office.

In a letter to the voters published by *The Star Ledger*, Governor Whitman said, "New Jersey now has rigorous standards in place so that progress in education will be measured by how much students learn, not by how much gets spent on educational bureaucracy."

"I've already imposed a freeze on insurance rates and I've repealed the surcharges and automatic rate increases that were the law in New Jersey for far too long. I presented a real reform plan that...will bring auto insurance rates down by as much as 25 percent, guaranteed," she added.

"Union County is not solidly Republican or Democrat. It can go either way and has over the last four elections," Ms. Jester concluded.

"The county offers such a diverse mix of people, it is a picture image of what New Jersey is all about. The Governor enjoys and wants the support of voters in Union County, and she thinks she's going to get it," she noted.

During his campaign locally and around the state, Senator James E. McGreevey, who also serves as Woodbridge Mayor, has reiterated his intent to revise and raise the education standards established by the Whitman Administration, and to establish a "Lifetime Learning" program.

He has promised to reduce auto insurance rates by 10 percent and address the fraud within that industry by establishing a fraud prosecutor and public advocate.

Mr. McGreevey also seeks to control the growing burden of property taxes by diminishing New Jersey's dependence on those taxes to fund education.

In his *Star Ledger* letter to the voters, the Democratic contender maintained that his experience in elected office, coupled with his work as an Assistant Prosecutor in Middlesex County, Executive Director of the New Jersey State Parole Board and Merck attorney, have prepared him to govern a government which is "professional, cost-effective and ethical as well as compassionate and responsive to the needs of the state's citizens."

Requests to the Senator's campaign office for information regarding his campaign activity at the local level were not answered in time for publication.

If elected, Libertarian Party candidate Murray Sabrin has said he plans to reduce auto insurance by at least 50 percent by deregulating the industry; reduce the state budget by implementing a line-item veto; end affirmative action programs that favor group membership over individual achievement; suspend implementation of the new auto emissions test; raise the speed limit to 65 miles per hour; and ban late-term partial birth abortions, according to his "To Do" list published in the *Star Ledger*.

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On November 4, Vote  
**Ken Rotter**  
for Town Council

Paid for by Ken Rotter for Town Council, David Haas, Treasurer, 137 Greene Place, Westfield, NJ 07090

### The Committee for Fanwood '97

## Re-Elect Bill Populus & Elect Pat Plante

# Fanwood Borough Council

*We are proud to support Bill and Pat for Fanwood Council*

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Katherine Mitchell	Karen Schurtz	Richard Stender
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Linda Caminiti	Cristy Tighe	Tracy Fletcher
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## Vote Democratic November 4

# Re-Elect Bill Populus / Elect Pat Plante

Paid for by the Comitee to Elect Populus and Plante, Carol Cassidy Treasurer, PO Box 163, Fanwood, NJ 07023