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**Paul Peyton** ASSIGNMENT EDITOR  
**Suzette F. Stalker** COMMUNITY  
**Michael Pollack** EDUCATION & ARTS

**Horace R. Corbin** PUBLISHER  
**David B. Corbin** ASSISTANT PUBLISHER & SPORTS  
**Karen M. Hinds** OFFICE MANAGER  
**Ben Corbin** SERVICES

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## Will State Budget Process Be a Slowdown, Letdown or Meltdown?

Two years ago, a state government shut down occurred during a stalemate between lawmakers, Democrat fighting and Republican opposition, over the then proposed \$27.9 billion budget. The seven-day shutdown resulted in "non-essential" government workers being sent home. Atlantic City casinos, the state's lottery system and motor vehicle services offices were closed. The battle pitted Assembly Democrats, led by Speaker Joe Roberts (D-Camden), against Governor Jon Corzine's plan to raise the sales tax by 17 percent — from 6 to 7 percent of sales. Eventually, the sales tax hike was approved and was hailed as fixing the state's problems.

Here it is 2008, and the state still faces dismal financial numbers. More desperate taxing schemes have been proposed such as taxing drinking water, mortgaging the tolls and expanding lotteries. None of the basic ills have been corrected involving corruption, over-spending and abuse. Yes, spending cuts are being proposed, but not against the abuse, but for important social programs such as aid to hospitals and municipalities.

The Governor has said New Jersey is doing better on additional revenue from income tax returns. Yet municipalities, hospitals, universities and state employee unions are angry over funding cuts. Hospitals are closing.

Lawmakers are faced with angry towns, which want municipal aid fully restored. Hospitals are battling for more aid for charitable care. Schools and universities want more money.

How did we get in this mess? How will we get out of this mess? When will the Legislature actually start taking real action? Will the Legislature melt down again this month with nothing substantially achieved?

Let's look at budget statements by our ex-Governors in previous years: Christine Todd Whitman said her Fiscal Year (FY) 2000 \$19.2 billion budget was "balanced, responsible and ambitious" and that her \$21.3 billion budget for FY 2001 was "balanced and responsible." And in the FY 2002 budget, she said, "This is a [\$23-billion] budget that will help us continue to make New Jersey a better place in which to live, work, and raise a family" once again calling it "balanced and responsible."

Yet, just one year later, Governor Jim McGreevey said his \$23.7-billion budget for FY 2003 was "intended to pull us out of a crisis and put our state on the right track" by closing a "\$5 billion shortfall."

In the FY 2006 budget detailed three years ago, Acting Governor Richard Codey said of the state's fiscal situation, "In this [\$28 billion] budget address, there's good news and there's bad news. The good news is we're not bankrupt. The bad news is, we're close."

Mr. Corzine described the state's finances in 2006

for the FY 2007 budget of \$33.5 billion as a "recurring structural budget crisis."

In terms of the FY 2009 budget still in the works, GOP leaders in New Jersey, including Senator Tom Kean, Jr. of Westfield, the senate minority leader for the Republicans, unveiled \$1.3 billion in state spending "savings" from Mr. Corzine's budget. Their "Common-Sense Plan for a More Affordable New Jersey" recommends changing tax rebates to direct credit on property tax bills or as income tax credits to save \$44 million, eliminating political appointees to save \$68.5 million, changing the state employee retirement age from 60 to 62 to save another \$85 million. They also want to cut three state holidays the federal workers do not get and to include a one-year cap on accrued vacation time.

However, they propose to restore \$375 million from proposed cuts in property tax rebate programs and \$150 million in municipal aid cuts.

In response, Senator Barbara Buono (LD-18, Edison), a Democrat, said the state must reduce spending \$1 billion from last year. She specifically wants to "impose accountability" over state contracts and wants to "rein in skyrocketing debt" by fixing the state's pension's system for future workers by "preserving pension" for long-time employees.

But, while the Senator says this, her party is supportive of issuing \$2.5 billion for more school construction projects despite the widely published scandals of the \$8 billion School Construction Corporation (SCC).

Senator Kip Bateman (LD-16, Somerville), a Republican, called the Governor's proposal "appalling."

It's hard to tell if all the factions are working together for the common good of the citizens. It's pretty obvious that the special interest groups and abusers are working hard for themselves. Each side of the aisle, GOP versus DEMs, are flooded with special interests such that it becomes difficult for the average Joe to tell the difference between a jackass and a pachyderm.

Since 2006, several lawmakers have retired to escape subpoenas and others are in jail — or soon to be there. As each layer of the onion is peeled open, the abuse becomes even more apparent. The witch-hunt is now focusing on the contract abuses by superintendent of schools in Abbott districts. Will anything actually be done?

All the state's problems, your problems, our problems can't be solved in this one budget session. We're not sure the corner has been turned on the culture of corruption. We think and hope there is some progress, but...

There are just a couple of weeks for the state to put a budget together. Will this budget be a slowdown, letdown or meltdown?

## Letters to the Editor

### If Town is Losing Money on Parking Enforcement, Do Away with It

In response to all the letters regarding the parking situation in town, there is a very obvious solution — do away with metered parking in town. Why? I did not get my degree in economics, but it seems logical that any program that loses money should be done away with.

Imagine running a municipal service in the black. Right now, according to our municipal officials, we are losing money on parking enforcement to the tune of \$200,000. It seems as if there is something very wrong here. Shouldn't the town consider making parking free? Other than the commuter lots (which I will address later in this letter) and getting rid of the enforcement officials and machines, which contribute to our costs, why should we lose money? I really see no sense in running a negative to the tune of \$200,000 as one of our councilman has discussed.

If this were a private business venture that any of our elected officials were involved with, they would be looking to preserve their capital by cutting waste, which would save and possibly make money.

When it comes to politics, everyone should be able to voice their opinions

Brian Greenfield  
Westfield

### BOE Lack of Action on High School Student Parking is Frustrating

Superintendent Dolan and the Westfield B.O.E. is anything going to change by September 2008 with regards to the WHS student-parking situation? Another school year is coming to a close and nothing has been done. When will this situation be addressed?

Are you having discussions with the mayor and town council to address this issue? Ever since students were kicked out of the back parking lot of WHS, neighborhood streets have been left to become the parking lot for students. WHS staff took the former student spots and no new spots have been added. Please build some parking on WHS grounds to make up for the spaces lost due to the WHS building addition and for the additional staff that was hired.

How many students parked behind WHS before the addition was completed? This should give you an idea of how many spaces should be added.

Simply kicking the students out of the parking lot and pushing them into the street in order to solve the problem of providing parking for teachers and staff is shortsighted and inconsiderate. It shows a lack of concern for the residents around WHS, which never had a student-parking problem before, and also a lack of concern for the safety students.

The issue of open lunch for juniors and seniors should also be addressed. Is it wise to promote driving to school, so that students can have access to their cars during open lunch, when you are not even providing a safe place for them to park and be somewhat monitored? Litter from fast food establishments left behind on neighborhood streets is one big problem with the current open lunch policy.

When open lunch was first established, students were allowed to park behind WHS. Now they are not. Please create two rows of additional parking in the back lot of WHS as was proposed by the town council early last year. Also, 40 spaces could be added along Rahway Avenue, as was discussed by previous BOE members.

It is my understanding that the town council cannot act without the support and cooperation of the BOE. This has been a very frustrating issue for residents and town council members alike. Please address the WHS student parking this issue to your 2008-2009 school year goals, which are posted on the BOE website so that people know you are acknowledging the situation and working with the town council to solve it.

Mike Nemeth  
Westfield

### Public Urged to Attend Muhlenberg Hospital Hearing Set Today, June 5

The People's Organization for Progress urges the public to attend the hearing on Thursday, June 5 at 6 p.m. at Plainfield High School located at 950 Park Avenue in Plainfield, NJ to stop the closing of Muhlenberg Hospital.

The organization also will be holding a demonstration at the high school at 4:30 p.m. and seeks public support to demand that Muhlenberg remain open as a full

service hospital.

For more information, call People's Organization for Progress at (908) 731-1518 or (973) 801-0001. Email joan.hervy@plainfieldareaequality.com or call (908) 222-3330. See the website PlainfieldAreaEquality.com.

Joan Hervy  
Plainfield

### Leader/Times Should Publish Teacher/Superintendent Contracts

Very recently, *The Star Ledger* drew attention to one aspect of public school funding in New Jersey — payments to superintendents of schools. The latest flap is over severance pay for the superintendent of the Keansburg public schools in Monmouth County.

Superintendents have fixed-term contracts, and are not tenured. It would be a valuable public service for *The Westfield Leader* to do a piece on the financial aspects of the employment contracts of the superintendents of schools, and other top administrators, in Mountainside, Westfield, Scotch Plains, Cranford and Garwood.

To the extent that there has been recent turnover in a position — such as with the superintendent in Westfield — informing the public of any severance and sick/personal day reimbursement paid to outgoing administrators would also be of interest.

The NJ Commissioner of Education [Lucille Davy] has urged executive county superintendents to gather information on the employment contracts of superintendents in their counties, and has encouraged the public to review them. "Transparency" and "accountability" are the

bywords. As part of a transparency in government effort, last year the Legislature enacted a law that requires school districts to post key contract provisions for their superintendents, assistant superintendents and business administrators on their websites, and make the contracts available for public review.

I, for one, support these measures because they help taxpayers evaluate how their dollars are spent.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Teresa Moore  
Westfield

*Editor's Note: As urged by Mrs. Moore in her letter above and as urged by NIDOE Commissioner Lucille Davy (see letter below), we have submitted an Open Public Records Act (OPRA) request to Union County Superintendent of Schools Carmen Centuolo for email copies of all the county school district administrative contracts. As these were due to the county superintendent yesterday (Wednesday), we see no reason for a delay in our receiving the contracts such as to enable the start of our review, with perhaps a first in a series of articles next week.*

### Ed. Commissioner Requires County Supers to Review District Contracts

TRENTON — New Jersey Commissioner of Education Lucille Davy last Friday asked the 21 county superintendents to review the existing contracts of all district superintendents within their jurisdictions, particularly any provisions relating to excessive severance payments.

"Our priorities in doing this work are transparency and accountability," Ms. Davy said.

"We understand that being a district superintendent is not an easy job. The time demands are extensive and the various skills needed to perform the job well are complex. However, resources should be focused on classroom instruction and not on subsidizing golden parachutes for public employees," she said.

The contracts will be reviewed against a consistent set of criteria, which were to be provided to the county offices this week, and the results of the reviews will be reported directly to the Commissioner. Assistant Commissioner for Field Services William King e-mailed the county superintendents requesting that they ask all district superintendents to forward their contracts to their county offices by next Wednesday, June 4.

Commissioner Davy said she expected the focus of the review to be special severance packages and bonuses provided on retirement and termination. She said that payment for unused sick and vacation days for retiring superintendents was permissible under the law, but noted that excessive examples of these types of payments should be brought to her attention. Contracts for school employees, in-

cluding superintendents and other administrators, are negotiated by local school boards in each district. State law requires that key provisions in all contracts for superintendents, assistant superintendents and business administrators be posted on the district's website if one exists, and made available for public review.

"Although the Department is undertaking this review, community members and taxpayers are encouraged to examine these contracts as well," Commissioner Davy said.

While the Department has no legal authority to order modifications to existing contracts, the data that is gathered will be used to ensure that new regulations adequately delineate acceptable standards for all contracts now being reviewed under the CORE Reform Act, N.J.S.A. 18A:7-8.

**Deadlines**  
 General News - Friday 4pm  
 Weekend Sports - Monday 12pm  
 Classifieds - Tuesday 12pm  
 Ad Reservation - Friday 4pm  
 Ad Submittal - Monday 12pm

**To Reach Us**  
 E-Mail - editor@goleader.com  
 Phone - (908) 232-4407

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 www.goleader.com/help

ABCDICHIKNOPIQSTDECEPTIONLUVWXYZ

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. Zokor — A burrowing rodent that looks like a mole rat
2. Culpon — A shred or splinter
3. Teff — A grain plant of Abyssinia from which flour is made
4. Sarcoid — Like or consisting of flesh

**TERGIVERSATE**

1. To give a wavy form, margin, or surface
2. To desert a cause
3. To please, charm or delight
4. To flatten or squash

**SAPIENT**

1. Restless; nervous
2. Wise; knowing
3. Dewy; moist
4. Not subject to corruption

**TEREBINTH**

1. A translucent quartz of leek-green color
2. A medieval catapult for hurling stones
3. A small European tree of the sumac family. Turpentine tree.
4. A German helmet with a sharp metal spike

**DEBULLITION**

1. Boiling over
2. A persistent ringing sound in the inner ear
3. The shattering effect of a sudden burst of energy, as in an explosion
4. A pulling or plucking off

## Letters to the Editor

### Remembering a Marine, Brad Shuder

I wrote the following to the Marine's mom and dad, sending the photo from *The Westfield Leader* (Marine killed in Iraq, May 29, page 3). I am filled with respect and glad I wrote to them, so sad with her "what ifs," a lifetime lost in a country so far away.

"Rose, thank you. I wrote within my heart thinking too of my life from my 20s to today. It's the thought and memory of your son that was reminding me more deeply of my life and values, as shared actually age 69.

I have many memories of Camp Pendleton, his affiliation with First Marines, for I was in that regiment at a gentler period of time — Another week of ribbons yesterday. Your son filled my heart, the reading of your special service. My son just turned 40 in April, a daughter 42 in California, San Jose. My words will not fill your void. You must remember the life and memories you gave your son Brad — your son and a brother to his sister. His sister has a rich history to make life truly special. Thank you for your note and sharing."

George Rodgers  
Westfield

From Rose Shuder: Dear Mr. Rodgers. Thank you for the material you mailed to us and for especially remembering our son this Memorial Day. It was heart-warming to know that he was honored for his service in such a special way. It is hard to believe that we lost Brad four years ago. It seems like yesterday.

We are at the point of wondering — how would he look, would he have made the military his career as he was planning, would he be married, would he have children?

We thank you for your service to this country and for continuing to remember those that served and those that have made the ultimate sacrifice.

Glenn and Rose Shuder  
Parents of Lcpl Brad Shuder, KIA  
Iraq 4/12/2004

### Same Parking Problem, Different Generation

Our parking needs have not changed much in the past 40 years.

But the Grant School Talent Show, of fond memory, and parent of the Washington School Show, had a solution we always loved:

If you want a parking space in downtown Westfield, buy a parked car. Also, most families had only one car, so the wife drove her husband to the station in the morning and picked him up there when his train came in at night. Enjoy a little laugh.

Ken MacRitchie and family  
Westfield

### How Far Would You Go To Stop A War?

On Wednesday, June 18 at 7 p.m., the Westfield Memorial Library presents some answers to that question with the showing of "The Camden 28," a documentary film about protests during the Vietnam War in Camden, NJ.

In the summer of 1971, protests against the Vietnam War were spreading across America. A group of 28 Camden activists, mostly conscientious objectors from the Catholic left, plan to break into a local draft board office and destroy records. But little do they know that a mole has infiltrated their operation, and within hours of beginning their mission, they are rounded up and arrested by the FBI, under the personal authority of J. Edgar Hoover.

Running 83 minutes, the film includes interviews and archival footage. This event is a collaboration with P.O.V., PBS's award-winning nonfiction film series.

For more information, see

www.pbs.org/pov. The film is free and open to Westfield Library and MURAL cardholders. Please register at the desk or call (908) 789.4090 ext. 4140.

Founded in 1879, the Westfield Memorial Library strives to provide the Westfield community an environment that promotes a love of reading and ensures free access to ideas and information.



**Your State Legislators**

---LD-21---  
 Sen. Thomas Kean, Jr. (R)  
 203 Elm Street  
 Westfield, NJ 07090  
 (908)-232-3673  
 Asm. Jon Bramnick (R)  
 251 North Ave. West  
 Westfield, NJ 07090  
 (908)-232-2073  
 Asm. Eric Munoz (R)  
 57 Union Place, Suite 310  
 Summit, NJ 07901  
 (908)-918-0414

---LD-22---  
 Sen. Nicholas Scutari (D)  
 1514 E. Saint Georges Ave.  
 Linden, NJ 07036  
 (908)-587-0404  
 Asw. Linda Stender (D)  
 1801 East Second St.  
 Scotch Plains, NJ 07076  
 (908)-668-1900  
 Asm. Jerry Green (D)  
 17 Watchung Ave.  
 Plainfield, NJ 07060  
 (908)-561-5757

LD-21 includes Westfield, Mountainside, Garwood, Summit and Cranford.  
 LD-22 includes Scotch Plains, Fanwood, Plainfield, Clark and Linden.

**E-mails**  
 senkean@njleg.org  
 senscutari@njleg.org  
 asmbarnick@njleg.org  
 asmunoz@njleg.org  
 aswstender@njleg.org  
 asmgreen@njleg.org