

GOP Prepares for Primary, Fall Elections at Fundraiser

By PAUL PEYTON
Specially Written for The Leader and The Times

MOUNTAINSIDE—Union County Republicans kicked off this year's selection cycle last Thursday night with party leaders calling this year's Lincoln Day fundraising reception one of the best-attended events in years.

The big attraction this year was the attendance of GOP candidates seeking the party's gubernatorial nomination in the June Primary. Among those candidates attending were 2002 U.S. Senate nominee Doug Forrester, Morris County freeholder John Murphy, Washington Township Councilman (Bergen County) Robert Schroeder, State Assemblyman Paul DiGaetano (R-36), and former Bergen County freeholder Todd Caligre.

Bret Schundler, the 2001 GOP gubernatorial nominee, and Bogota (Bergen County) Mayor Steve Longan were not in attendance.

With a switch of venue from The Westwood in Garwood to L'Affaire on Route 22 in Mountainside this year for the annual fundraiser, County Chairman Phil Morin of Cranford said the turnout of over 200 persons was the best attendance in several years for the event.

"Certainly this is the largest Lincoln Day event we have had in years," Mr. Morin said.

Congressman Mike Ferguson of Warren (R-7) added that the new members of the party at Thursday's reception "are as sign of growth and vitality of our party."

Senator Tom Kean, Jr. of Westfield (R-21) made a comparison between New Jersey politics and the free elections, which just occurred in Iraq.

"To think while the vote was going on in Iraq and people who have never been given the right to vote in their entire lives were dipping their fingers into the ink wells, Democratic Primary voters in this state were being deprived of their rights to choose their candidates," said Senator Kean, a reference to Acting Governor Richard Codey's decision not to run for Governor due to U.S. Senator Jon Corzine's huge financial edge in the race.

Senator Kean said the Democratic majority in the State Legislature has "mortgaged our future again and again."

The Senator noted that Abraham Lincoln and George W. Bush have one similar comparison — they both lost New Jersey twice in the general election.

As for the Governor's race, Mr. DiGaetano, an Assemblyman from the 36th District in Bergen County, noted that he is not able to self-fund his campaign.



GOVERNOR CONTENDERS...Mary Ogden of Summit poses with GOP contenders for governor at the Union County Republican Committee's annual Lincoln Day Reception held February 10 at L'Affaire in Mountainside. Pictured above, from left to right, are: Doug Forrester, Paul DiGaetano, Mrs. Ogden, Todd Caligre and John Murphy.

Noting that he has applied for matching state campaign funds he said, "We will have enough money to fund the campaign all the way through to June. We will have a very efficient and targeted campaign."

Mr. DiGaetano has been in the legislature for 16 years and served six years as majority leader and two years as minority leader in the General Assembly.

"My campaign has demonstrated that not only do I have a working knowledge of state government and a good handle on the issues, but also I am the best contrast to Jon Corzine. I am a blue-collar working class boots guy. I am regularly in work boots and jeans, flannel or wool shirt. That's what we need to contrast the guy. To be real New Jerseyans," he told *The Leader and The Times*. The candidate owns a construction and development company.

Mr. Forrester, the GOP's 2002 U.S. Senate nominee, stated he believes he is positioned well to win the gubernatorial nomination this fall. He vowed that if he wins the primary, the party will be united for the general election campaign in the fall, which he said was not the case in the 2001 governor's race.

When asked what he needs to defeat Mr. Corzine, Mr. Forrester jokingly says, "All I need to beat Jon Corzine is to have Jon Corzine stick with it until Election Day."

In 2002 incumbent U.S. Senator Robert Torricelli pulled out of the race (due to a probe into his 1996 fundraising efforts) a month before the election against Mr. Forrester. Frank Lautenberg, a retired Senator at the time, who went on to win that November, replaced him.

Mr. Forrester said the fact that he is self-funding his campaign should not

be a campaign issue in the primary. He said the fact that the issue has been brought by some of his opponents "is a real distraction" away from the real issues in the race. He said he does not believe taxpayers should fund primary candidates, which happens when candidates apply for state matching campaign funds.

"It is very important that we have the right resources to get our message out and I can guarantee we will have enough resources to get our message out," Mr. Forrester said, noting that Democrats will have a "well oiled machine" that will outspend Republicans in the fall.

"New Jersey is in crisis. New Jersey needs a businessman who is outside of Trenton to come in and clean house," Mr. Forrester said.

He pointed to his experience as the former mayor of West Windsor in South Jersey, as the director of state pension funds in the administration of former Governor Thomas H. Kean, and the fact that he built his own business, Benecard Services, a pharmaceutical benefits management company.

Mr. Forrester said honesty in government has become a major campaign issue in the state. "He (Mr. Corzine) has been their (the Democrats) funding source and they have led us to the verge of bankruptcy."

Also noting the spending practices of the Democratic majority in the State Legislature, Assemblyman Eric Munoz (R-21) said the governor's race "is ours to win."

Assemblyman Munoz of Summit and his running-mate, Assemblyman Jon Bramnick who served as auctioneer at Thursday's event, are both seeking reelection this year.

Proctor Says Bush Tax Cuts Have Reduced Block Grants

By DAVID GIALANELLA
Specially Written for The Leader and The Times

ELLZABETH — Union County Freeholder Chairman Rick Proctor last week spoke with an air of caution, mentioning that the Bush Administration's tax cuts have brought about a 50 percent reduction in federal community block grants for Union County, from \$6 million to \$3 million.

Freeholder Proctor claimed that the cuts "will hit senior programs particularly hard."

At the meeting's outset, special recognition was given to members of the County Youth Service Bureau for their participation in a youth outreach program aimed at exposing "at-risk" youth to incarcerated youth.

Participants from the Prosecutor's Office, Linden High School and others were honored. Board Member Angel Estrada emphasized the importance of such programs, given "the magnitude of the problem we face in our society today."

Vice-Chairman Alexander Mirabella said he recently visited students in Lisa Szustwal's class at St. Bartholomew's School in Scotch Plains. Mr. Mirabella recognized their completion of a special environment

tal studies unit dealing with trees.

The board approved a resolution to extend the contract with Children's Museum of Central New Jersey in Westfield for 18 months. The museum is still several years away from becoming a reality in the county.

The board appointed Westfielder James Aiello to the Union County Solid Waste Advisory Board. Also, Scotch Plains residents Dennis Hardie and Ira Bernstein were appointed to the Union County Air Traffic Noise Advisory Board.

A contract with T&M Associates of Middletown was approved. The firm will help design a new traffic signal to be installed at the intersection of North Avenue and Crossway Place in Westfield.

The board also approved an engineering service contract with PMK Group of Cranford for groundwater and storm sewer monitoring at the Veneri Complex at 300 North Avenue in Westfield.

Nancy A. Piwowar of Plainfield thanked the Board for its proclamation of Sunday, March 6, as National Lymphedema Awareness Day. Ms. Piwowar noted that Union County has been the first New Jersey county to do so.

Morin Blasts County's Pay Raise For Gov.'s Brother

CRANFORD — Union County Republican Chairman Phil Morin called upon Union County Freeholder Chairman Rick Proctor to explain the basis for the decision by the all-Democrat Union County Freeholder Board to boost the salary of Robert Codey, the brother of Acting Governor Richard Codey, despite no authority or precedent for such a maneuver.

According to Mr. Morin, Robert Codey, an attorney with the State Attorney General's Office, received a \$46,731 salary increase after a unanimous vote by the freeholder board in late September of 2004. The increase gives him a \$12,000 pension boost.

"It is time that the Freeholder Chairman explained his vote on this 'golden parachute' at taxpayer expense instead of hiding behind his PR department," Mr. Morin said. "With the all-Democrat freeholder board looking at an \$18 million tax increase in 2005, the public deserves an explanation from Mr. Proctor, not another press

release from his million-dollar spin doctors."

"Ironically, Robert Codey was specially assigned to Union County by the Attorney General to help find 'organized crime' in Union County," Mr. Morin said. "I've got a tip for him - the Democrats are well-organized in Union County and what the all-Democrat freeholder board is doing to taxpayers is a crime."

State Sets \$1.3 Million To County For Projects

TRENTON — Acting Governor Richard Codey signed legislation last month dedicating loans and grants for open space and park projects in Union County. This includes \$1.3 million for projects and \$1.2 million for planning incentive awards.

In total, 12 state bills dedicated \$353 million in loans and grants toward preserving open space and protecting natural resources in New Jersey.

The funding will go to Linden with \$250,000, to Elizabeth with \$67,000 and to Union County Meisel Avenue Park for \$1,100,000.

The county is redeveloping Meisel Park in Springfield to include a six-lane all weather track, a football/soccer field, softball and baseball fields, a fitness trail, and restroom renovation to the existing fieldhouse.

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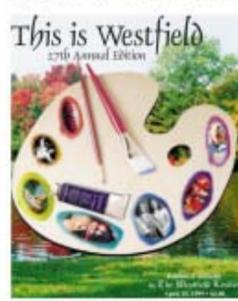
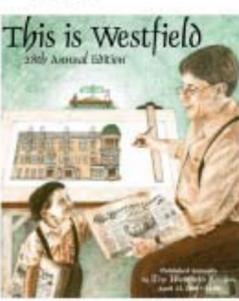
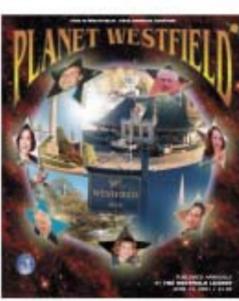
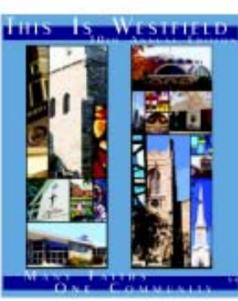
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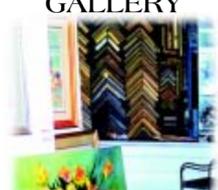
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