

GOP Governor Candidates Discuss State Overspending, Corruption

By **BETSEY BURGDOFF**
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — At a meeting organized by the Mountainside Republican Club, gubernatorial candidates Bret Schundler and Doug Forrester gathered last Wednesday night to meet residents and discuss their ideas to reform New Jersey. Tax reform and corruption were two key issues echoed by both candidates.

"You care enough about New Jersey to be active and I applaud that," Mr. Schundler told the crowd of mostly senior citizens. He continued by saying he feels that corruption and over spending are the key issues that have led the state to near bankruptcy.

Mr. Schundler cited property tax reform, as one issue he feels should be foremost on the state's agenda. "What we need to do as a party is fight to pass reforms now — before Election Day," he said.

His platform is geared towards taking the tax burden off the homeowner by limiting spending and imposing budget caps.

Senior citizens on fixed incomes have been feeling the squeeze and are being forced out of neighborhoods they raised their children in due to the rising costs of property taxes. "We understand you want more money coming back to your community," he said.

Mr. Schundler noted that there was a 20 percent increase in state spending last year. He asked those in attendance if there was anyone who had

noticed an increase of state services. "Come on, don't be bashful," he chided when no one motioned that they had.

According to his campaign literature, his permanent property tax reduction amendment would have limited the increase to 4 percent. It also would have forced the state to send a share of the savings to local public schools and municipal government to lower taxes.

Mr. Schundler suggested, "Demand that those that are asking for your vote do what you want first." He stated that campaign promises often fall short once candidates are elected and said residents should not take "no" for an answer. He said he feels candidates should "make the message simple and focused."

He warned voters not to be swayed by negative campaign ads that United States Senator and likely Democratic gubernatorial candidate Jon Corzine and his endless supply of funding will soon be running on local television stations. He joked that most people won't believe them anyway because they think, "all politicians are liars" but suggested that voters stay focused on the issues. "We are going to fight for your fair share of funding. The message is simple — stand up for Mountainside, don't take no for an answer," Mr. Schundler concluded.

"I want to share with you the excitement that is building," Mr.

Forrester began when the time came for him to address the audience. "I think New Jersey is a place we can be proud of if our government reflects who we are."

He stated that he feels there are three major issues that have spiraled out of control in New Jersey. They are: property taxes, state spending and corruption. He feels there is a correlation between high taxes and corruption.

"They didn't come together in some cosmic connection," he said referring to the fact that the higher the level of corruption, the higher the level of property taxes.

"New Jersey is bankrupt and corrupt and we are staggering under the crushing weight. It has reached emergency level," Mr. Forrester said. He explained that his "30 in 3 Guarantee" is a property tax relief plan that will be phased in over three years. A 10 percent cut will be seen the first year, 20 percent the second and a 30 percent reduction will be felt the third year of implementation. He claims this permanent plan is state Constitutionally guaranteed.

"We can do this. It is very specific and very simple," he said.

He introduced a feature of the plan that had not been introduced before stating, "We are linking the decision making process with the state government to the local government."

According to his plan, if state government puts a mandate on local government, then the state will have to "pony up 30 percent" in funding for programs it is requiring from local government. "It (tax reform plan) is simple, direct, efficient, substantial and it is Constitutionally guaranteed," Mr. Forrester said.

Mr. Forrester then turned his attention to what he called "wasteful spending." He noted the hockey arena being built in Newark as one example. He also stated that the state school construction authority has wasted millions by building schools for more than double what they should cost. He said New Jersey receives \$20 billion in state aid.

"The amount of money that is wasted is fundamentally enough to solve the tax problem," he said. "Corruption is an abandonment of public trust. It is a willingness to buy things that are unnecessary," Mr. Forrester commented. "The biggest problem in New Jersey is dishonesty."

"The State is bankrupt," Mr. Forrester concluded. "Jon Corzine is not going to change, but I will. I am running for governor so we can restore financial sanity."

PUBLIC NOTICE

TOWNSHIP OF SCOTCH PLAINS

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that at the regular meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Scotch Plains held on MAY 10, 2005 the 2005 LOCAL MUNICIPAL BUDGET OF THE TOWNSHIP OF SCOTCH PLAINS was duly passed on second and final reading.

Barbara Riepe
Township Clerk
1 T - 5/12/05, The Times Fee: \$10.71

Christopher's Law Gaining Support of Freeholder Bd.

By **PAUL J. PEYTON**
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

ELIZABETH — The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders will vote tonight, May 12, to endorse state legislation that would upgrade penalties for unlicensed drivers involved in fatal accidents to a third degree crime.

"Christopher's Law" is named after Christopher Williamson of Cranford, a 12-year-old killed when his bike was hit by a van on June 14, 2004 that was driven by an unlicensed driver. The accident occurred at the intersection of South Union and Lincoln Avenues. The boy was killed days before he was to have graduated from the Hillside Avenue Middle School.

The legislation, S-2144 and A-3556, has been sponsored by Senator Tom Kean, Jr. (R-21, Westfield), Senator Nicholas Scutari (D-22, Linden), Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (R-21, Westfield) and Assemblyman Eric Munoz (R-21, Summit).

Freeholder Bette Jane Kowalski of Cranford is sponsoring the freeholder resolution.

The state bills, currently assigned to the Senate Law, Public Safety and Veterans' affairs Committee and the Assembly Law and Public Safety Committee, would upgrade fatalities caused by an unlicensed driver to a third degree crime.

Such crimes are punishable by a jail sentence of three to five years and/or a \$15,000 fine. The proposed law would upgrade unlicensed drivers to the same penalties faced by drivers with a revoked license where driver recklessness caused a fatality.

Under current law, unlicensed drivers face a fine of between \$200 and \$500, imprisonment of up to 60 days and a disqualification from obtaining a license for not less than 180 days.

The driver of the vehicle involved in Christopher's death was 40 years old but never had a driver's license.

The board will also act tonight to hire an investigator to follow-up on auto accident fatalities that occur in the county.

First Assistant Prosecutor Albert Cernadas, Jr. told the board that there are 200 persons a year killed on Union County highways as a result of traffic accidents.

PUBLIC NOTICE

TOWNSHIP OF SCOTCH PLAINS

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that at a regular meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Scotch Plains, held on Tuesday, May 10, 2005 the following ordinance entitled:

AN ORDINANCE SUPPLEMENTING AND AMENDING CHAPTER XXIII, ZONING, OF THE REVISED GENERAL ORDINANCES OF THE TOWNSHIP OF SCOTCH PLAINS, 1978, RE-ZONING LOT 58.02 IN BLOCK 1001, KNOWN AS 1821 FRONT STREET, FROM THE "B-1 ZONE" TO THE "B-2 ZONE".

was adopted on second and final reading.

TOWNSHIP OF SCOTCH PLAINS

Barbara Riepe
Township Clerk
1 T - 5/12/05, The Times Fee: \$20.91

The county prosecutor's office is responsible for heading investigations involving all fatalities resulting from traffic accidents, Mr. Cernadas said.

He said between eight and 15 such cases are prosecuted by the county annually. Most of the accidents occur on highways such as Route 78 and the Garden State Parkway, the assistant prosecutor added.

The freeholders are expected to approve a resolution tonight to accept funding in the amount of \$81,174 from the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety to fund a county investigator position to oversee the investigation of traffic fatalities in the county. The cost of the position does require county funding.

The board will also vote tonight to increase funding by \$10,000 to \$45,000 in litigation entitled *Todaro v. County of Union*.

Maria Todaro of Westfield was reportedly awarded \$378,000 in January by a jury. Ms. Todaro sued the county in 2002, claiming she was unfairly discriminated against for the position of superintendent of the county division of weights and measures. The division is responsible for checking supermarket scales, gasoline pumps, store scanners, etc., for accuracy.

Ms. Todaro, a registered Republican, currently serves as assistant superintendent of weights and measures.

She alleged in her suit that the county hired Michael Florio of Union, the son of former Democratic Mayor Joseph Florio, due to his political ties. Union County government has been under Democratic majority since 1997.

Frank Capese of Cranford, a

Westfield attorney representing the county in the matter, declined to comment on the case.

County spokesman John Salerno said "the case is still ongoing" and, thus, the county could not comment until the matter is concluded. He said the increase in funding to the law firm of Garrubbo & Capece of Westfield is to pay bills for legal services rendered in the case.

However, Ms. Todaro's attorney, David F. Corrigan of Keyport, said the matter has been settled although he said the terms of the agreement are confidential.

"I am pleased that this matter has been resolved," said Mr. Corrigan. He would not issue further comments on the case.

The board will also vote to approve temporary street closings in Berkeley Heights on Saturday, July 16, for the Mt. Carmel Society's annual festival and fireworks display; in Springfield for the annual Memorial Day Parade on Monday, May 30, and for a street fair in Fanwood on Sunday, June 26.

The board will also vote to issue contracts to two local companies from the county. Fert L-Soil Turf Supply, Inc. of Scotch Plains is set to receive a 12-month, \$47,173 contract to supply ground maintenance chemicals for the county's golf and horticulture operations.

Weldon Materials, Inc. of Westfield will be on the agenda for a 12-month contract of \$358,667 to supply and deliver various items of bituminous concrete, additives and membrane materials for the Division of Public Works.

Governor Codey Signs Pedestrian Safety Bill

AREA — Acting Governor Codey signed Assembly Bill 2605 into law on May 4. This bill increases penalties for failing to yield at crosswalks by \$50; and dedicates the extra money to the Department of Law and Public Safety's pedestrian safety program.

Assemblywoman Linda Stender (D-22, Fanwood) and Assemblyman Bramnick, original sponsors of the bill, called this a victory for pedestrians across the state. Assemblyman Bramnick worked in partnership with Democrats to get this bi-partisan piece of legislation passed.

Assemblyman Bramnick said the origin of this legislation stemmed from two tragic deaths that occurred in his hometown of Westfield in the span of just one week.

New Jersey is second in the nation for pedestrian related fatalities, with about one-fifth of fatal vehicle accidents killing pedestrians. Union County, which is part of Assemblyman Bramnick's district, had the highest death rate from pedestrian accidents in the state.

The increase in the fee will be used to finance special projects aimed at increasing pedestrian safety. The projects include more shoulder room on busy roads, sidewalks on both sides of streets in rural areas and

changes to slow traffic in cities and suburbs. The non-partisan arm of the legislature, the Office of Legislative Services, has determined that this increased fee will raise an average of \$44,000 per year for pedestrian safety.

This is one of two pedestrian safety related bills Assemblyman Bramnick has sponsored. The other bill is A-619, which would require motorists to stop for pedestrians in, or waiting to enter crosswalks.

Under current law, motorists must only yield to pedestrians already crossing the street. This bill overwhelmingly passed the General Assembly by a vote of 75-2-0 and is currently in the Senate Transportation Committee awaiting review.

Assemblyman Bramnick and Assembly Speaker Albio Sires (D-33, West New York) addressed the ABC Program at Kean University.

The concept of the ABC program, created by Assemblyman Bramnick, teaches interpersonal skills to high school students on a college campus. The program arose out of the civility resolution that the Assemblyman introduced in the State Assembly.

The program has reached more than 500 students to date, according to Assemblyman Bramnick's office.

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