



Peyton's Peek at the Week In Politics

By Paul Peyton of The Leader/Times

Gormley, Corodemus Not to Seek Re-Election

Veteran Republican Senator William Gormley has announced that he will not seek re-election after 30 years in the legislature. He joined the Senate in 1982, after serving as an Atlantic County freeholder and as an state assemblyman. In addition, GOP Assemblyman Steven Corodemus of Monmouth County has decided not to run again after serving eight two-year terms.

Legislators Propose I and R in New Jersey

Assemblymen Richard Merkt and Joseph Pennacchio, both Republicans, want to give New Jerseyans the power to decide how the state spends money through initiative and referendum.

Under the Initiative and Referendum (I and R) proposal, residents would be able to place questions on the election ballot if they obtain signatures from 25 percent of registered voters in 14 of the state's 21 counties. If passed by voters, a proposal would become law within 60 days. The Legislature would have the power to defeat the proposal if two-thirds of both houses of the Legislature - 120 members - voted to overturn voter approval of a measure.

Tax Bd. Expansion Cost \$1.2 Million

Legislation passed in 2005 to expand the 21 county tax boards in the state is drawing questions. The law authorized 42 new political patronage positions at \$1.2 million, according to a *Star-Ledger* report. The jobs pay between \$16,000 and \$22,000 annually. Each county's board can be between five and seven members.

Mayor McCarthy to Hold Saturday Hours

GARWOOD - Garwood Mayor Dennis McCarthy will hold his monthly Mayor's Saturday this Saturday, January 13, from 10 to 11 a.m., in the Municipal Building at 403 South Avenue.

Residents are invited to stop by to discuss any concerns they have, or just stop by and say hello and meet Mayor McCarthy. For more information, call (908) 789-0710.

based on population. Union County's board consists of five members. Boards are responsible for certifying tax assessments, as well as hearing tax appeals. James Cafiero, son of former GOP state Senator James Cafiero, was appointed in Cape May County, as was former Morris County Democrat Chairman Thomas Zelante in Morris and Fredric Weinstein, a former chairman of the Camden County Improvement Authority, in Camden.

Paperwork Lapse Costs DEP \$10 million

The Gannett State Bureau has reported that due to faulty paperwork, the state Department of Environmental Protection has failed to charge \$10 million to polluters responsible for environmental cleanups. The information was based on a state auditor's report, which also found that the DEP lost an unspecified amount of money because its automated billing system does not calculate interest charges on overdue accounts.

JC Dep. Mayor Resigns After Peddling Bus.

Jersey City Deputy Mayor Ador Equipado resigned last week, following calls from *The Jersey Journal* inquiring about his alleged demands for cash from a couple he married in October, and using the occasion to peddle his phone service business.

A city resident married at Jersey City Hall on October 6 told the newspaper that Mr. Equipado spent the first 10 minutes with her and her husband-to-be questioning them about their finances and what phone service they used. When they declined to change carriers, he charged them \$50 for officiating the service. The city does not charge a fee other than the \$28 for a marriage license.

Councilman Told to Account for Funds

A State Superior Court judge in Union County last week ordered sheriff's officers to bring Morristown Councilman Richard Tighe to his courtroom to explain where \$182,000 of an incapacitated woman's money went while he had power-of-attorney control over her finances. Mr. Tighe also was ordered to pay \$100 a day for every day he fails to provide that accounting. The woman, 96-year-old Lenore Johnson, lives in Summit.



LEADERS MEET...Westfield Rotary President Edred Shen welcomes district leaders to a club meeting held recently. Pictured, left to right, are: Deputy District Governor Byron Miller, Mr. Shen, Rotary District 7510 Governor Michael Hart and former Rotary International Director David Linett.

MVC Calls Estrada Report A 'Private Personnel Issue'

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

ELIZABETH - The New Jersey Ethics Commission has released its findings on Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC) report on whether Union County Freeholder Angel Estrada broke any rules when he assisted former State Attorney General Zulima Farber's boyfriend Hamlet Goore regain his driving privileges.

When contacted by *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*, MVC Director of Communications Mike Horan said MVC Executive Director Sharon Harrington received the ethics commission findings on December 4. He said Mr. Estrada and other MVC employees cited in Special Deputy Attorney General Richard Williams' report to Governor Jon Corzine were also notified of the findings.

"The issue was brought before the (ethics) commission. They reviewed it and contacted [MVC] and explained their findings," Mr. Horan said.

Upon an inquiry for a copy of the report he said, "[It] cannot be discussed publicly because it is a private personnel issue," Mr. Horan said. MVC ethics officer Steve Robertson made that decision. The ethics commission hearing was conducted on November 29 and the letter to Ms. Harrington, executive director of the MVC, was dated November 30, according to Mr. Horan.

The report mentioned Mr. Estrada for his call to the MVC's central office, where an employee in the Court Suspension Unit determined Mr. Goore's driver's license was suspended for an unpaid parking ticket which he had paid to the court, but no one had contacted the suspension unit to acti-

vate his driving privileges. The employee then restored his driver's license.

"The restoration of Mr. Goore's driving privileges, as well as the renewal of the registration of Goore's vehicle, both occurred before he ever arrived at the Elizabeth office of MVC," Mr. Williams said in his report.

"Mr. Estrada's handling of this matter before Hamlet Goore arrived at the MVC agency raises questions about the propriety of his practices and whether they were in compliance with MVC procedures," Mr. Williams reported, noting he had no jurisdiction on Mr. Estrada's involvement in the case.

When reached Monday Mr. Estrada said, "I will be making a future statement" but said he was not prepared to do at this time. He said he wanted to make sure residents understood nothing was done "improper" by his office.

Union County Republican Party Chairman Phil Morin said he would have no comment until the report's findings are made public.

The Leader/Times submitted an Open Records Act request for both the MVC report and Ethics Commission findings last Friday.

County Announces OPRA Forms

COUNTY - To obtain public information from Union County, the manager's office has announced that new forms are to be used to submit the request. The county notes that advisory opinion, "What Constitutes a Valid Open Public Records Request (OPRA)," issued by the New Jersey Government Records Council on February 17, 2006, requires that OPRA requests be submitted on the public agency's official OPRA request forms.

The county instructs the public that completed request forms and correspondence are to be sent to the dedicated e-mail account: opra@ucnj.org.

For additional information, contact Marlena Russo, Office of the County Manager, Union County Administration Bldg., 6th Fl., 10 Elizabethtown Plaza, Elizabeth, NJ 07207; call (908) 527-4178, fax (908) 558-0915 or e-mail opra@ucnj.org.

The forms and instructions can be downloaded at the county website on the following link: ucnj.org/opra.

Kowalski Unveils Helpline, Upgraded Dog Park at Echo

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

ELIZABETH - Freeholder Bette Jane Kowalski took the gavel Sunday afternoon as the new chairman of the nine-member Union County freeholder board. She is the seventh woman to hold the post in the 150-year history of the county, according to County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi.

Prior to giving her address on 2007 initiatives, Freeholders Al Mirabella of Fanwood, Chester Holmes of Rahway and Deborah Scanlon of Union were sworn into their fourth three-terms. Freeholder Angel Estrada was sworn in as the vice chairman of the board this year after chairing the fiscal affairs committee, which conducts county budget hearings, last year. Mr. Mirabella will chair the fiscal affairs panel this year.

Governor Jon Corzine headlined a guest list during Sunday's ceremony, which was conducted in the chambers of State Superior Court Assignment Judge Walter Barisonok at the Union County Courthouse. Other guests included State Assemblymen Gerry Green of Plainfield and Joe Cryan of Union, Elizabeth Mayor Chris Bollwage and new Scotch Plains Councilman Kevin Glover.

Ms. Kowalski, a Cranford resident serving her third year on the board, unveiled five initiatives highlighted by a \$912,000 upgrade to the Echo Lake Dog Park.

"The renovation will include new fencing, a gazebo, benches and additional recreation space for the pooches to be completed later this year. The plan includes 22 additional parking spaces and water fountains for the enjoyment and recreation of pets and their owners," she said in her address.

Her second initiative will be "to work to identify and build a consensus on creating increased shared services." The county received a state grant to be used for a consultant who will conduct "record management assessments, inventories and plans for 19 municipalities," the freeholder chairman said, noting that the consultant would also create a proposal for a countywide microfilming services bureau.

"The County of Union continues to support statewide property tax reform and the cost saving measures the State Legislature and Governor are pursuing as they pertain to shared services," Ms. Kowalski said.

Governor Corzine, who spoke briefly at the start of the meeting, said: "It is hard to imagine a compounding rate of property taxes is 7 percent a year...If it's a \$6,000 medium...you've got over a \$400 increase. It is a remarkable burden for our citizens to have. We have an obligation to deal with this."

Ms. Kowalski's other initiatives include the Union County Economic and Workforce Competitiveness Project at a cost of \$97,000, a Union County Arts and Economic Prosperity Initiative paid for through a \$60,000 state grant and the creation of a Youth Helpline to provide guidance and referrals for youth and teenagers. A toll-free confidential telephone number will be operational seven days a week from 9 a.m. to midnight. The Helpline will be staffed by professionals and trained volunteers, she said.

Through the Economic and Workforce Competitiveness initiative, the county will partner with Rutgers University, the workforce, education and business sectors to "develop a blueprint and plan for sustained economic growth," according to a county press release.

The Arts and Economic Prosperity initiative will utilize a \$60,000 grant "to market the county's historic sites, recreation areas and arts centers for tourism."

"A study conducted in 2001 noted that the arts generated more than \$2.5 million a year in spending in Union County, with more than 200,000 people attending events," Ms. Kowalski said.

The chairman said this year's Playground Initiative will provide matching dollars to towns to create and improve playgrounds and will be funded for up to \$600,000 from the county's Open Space trust fund. She also announced a pilot program to eliminate fees charged to schools visiting the Trailside Nature and Science Center. The county estimated the lost revenue at \$15,000.

During the business portion of the meeting, multiple local residents were appointed to advisory boards. The board named May Furstner and Terry Tainov of Westfield to the Advisory Council on Aging for terms through 2008. Matthew Sontz of Westfield was named to a three-year term on the construction board of appeals. Phyllis Brociner of Mountainside was appointed to the cultural and heritage advisory board for a three-year term, and Jane O'Hara of Westfield was named to a three-year term on the Commission of the Status of Women in Union County.

Paul Santos was named to the Motion Picture and Television Advisory Board for a three-year term and Pamela Boright and Mr. Glover of Scotch Plains were appointed to the Rumlens Specialized Hospital Advisory Board for three-year terms. Jerome Feder and Rosemary Millet were reappointed to the Union County Air Traffic Noise Advisory Board through 2008, and Reni Erdos of Scotch Plains was named to the Union County Utilities Authority for a term through the end of 2011.



Bette Jane Kowalski

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