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## Garden Staters to Join the Early Primary Bandwagon

It's been more than 30 years since the New Jersey Presidential Primary mattered at all. In 1976, Jimmy Carter needed, and got, a late season win in New Jersey that pretty much secured him the Democratic nod, while on the GOP side, Ronald Reagan was battling President Gerald Ford for every delegate in their down-to-the-wire nomination fight.

Traditionally, New Jersey has been the last state along with Montana to hold its Primary Election to choose party candidates for President of the United States. Although New Jersey was known as an "ATM State" for fundraising, few candidates campaigned here because it didn't matter - everything was over before our residents went to the polls. The net effect for New Jersey was, out of 200 million eligible citizens, by the time of voting, the field is narrowed down to two candidates.

Also, many New Jerseyans do not vote in the primary election because almost half of registered voters are not affiliated with a political party. State residents can't vote unless they sign up in advance to be in the party. Many unaffiliated registered voters find this unacceptable.

In 2008, everything is changing with the dates for the Presidential Primaries. California has set the pace by moving their date to February 5. New Jersey has also joined that date. New York, Illinois and others are near to joining as well. In effect, we may end up with a national primary election day.

The California Primary Election last year was June 6. Anyone not registered with a political party in California, upon request they can vote a ballot of any political party (for the most part).

In New Jersey, just over 619,000 people voted in the June Presidential Primary in 2000. That means 10 percent of New Jersey's 6,245,000 voting-age population voted and 13 percent of New Jersey's 4,710,768 registered voters voted. Very dismal.

Things may be different for New Jersey in the 2008 Primary Election because of the early date. But, will the large portion of unaffiliated voters still not go to the polls because of the rules? Or will many voters choose to join a political party so they can vote for a party's choice to be the candidate for President of the United States?

In all likelihood, it will be an exciting time for our region with two very different, yet well known, candidates for President from across the Hudson currently frontrunners - Rudy Giuliani and Hillary Clinton. This is sure to generate considerable hoopla - and sparks.

February 2008 promises to be meaningful for Garden Staters.

Sometimes the primaries can be exciting; however, both party cores shun those who challenge candidates within their own party. In 2000, Maryanne Connelly ran in the primary against party choice Michael Lapolla and won. She did not receive the full party support for the General Election. Mike Ferguson defeated her.

Another example occurred when Bret Schundler ran against Bob Franks in the primary for governor in 2001. The surprised core Republicans had to rush up from Mr. Franks' camp in Princeton to congratulate Mr. Schundler in East Brunswick. The crowd booted them. Mr. Schundler receive little party support in the general election and lost against Jim McGreevey.

New Jersey has a way of making politics and elections exciting. The state is famous for its "bait and switch" candidates, regardless of what the Primary results were. When Bob Torricelli appeared to be a sure loser for Senate in 2002 and he

withdrew, Democrats dusted off Frank Lautenberg as his replacement past the statutory deadline. It was similar in 2001 when Donald DiFrancesco bowed out of the Primary for governor and a bill was passed to delay the primary a week.

In 2003, State Senator Joe Suliga of Linden, now deceased, looked like a sure loser due to an arrest scandal and he withdrew. Past the statutory deadline, Nick Scutari was asked to saddle up as the replacement. Mr. Scutari won in a well-fought race with Scotch Plains Mayor Martin Marks.

Primaries offer political parties a method to choose a candidate when party caucuses cannot achieve consensus. It can divide a party and consume campaign resources prior to going into the General Election. Those who typically vote in the primary are well informed when there is a contested primary. It may not be a matter of a blind party-line vote, but rather a matter of choosing the candidate with the best chance of winning in the November election.

However, for the average citizen, most simply wait until November. In effect, they can say "wake me up when you find the party rep and then I'll vote for that person." If nothing else, with the primaries over, the real campaign season begins.

Voters will be more than ready to cast their presidential ballots by November of 2008. Already campaigning seems to be firing on all cylinders. Presidential politics is the talk of talk radio, the nighttime cable news programs, Internet blogs and message boards, newspapers, magazines and even around the office water cooler.

It's a longer campaign trail than in the past - Bill Clinton announced his candidacy late in 1991, Ronald Reagan jumped into the race in late 1979 and John Kennedy began his presidential bid early in 1960. And probably correctly now, the absurd attention to the tiny state of New Hampshire and the small state of Iowa will fade from dominance with New Jersey now to have some say.

On non-Presidential Election years, such as 2007, New Jersey will continue to hold its Primary Elections in mid June. When it comes to state and local offices such as the governor, the legislature, county and local positions, there's no reason to hold a primary earlier - and filling these offices this year, given all the state controversy and challenges, could be more meaningful for the citizens of New Jersey than who sits in the Oval Office in Washington.

### - Another View -

#### When is a Dollar a Dollar?

The state lottery lauds that Mr. and Mrs. Harold Messner of Cape May County won \$195 million in the Mega Millions Jackpot - but is that true? - not according to the lottery's own figures in a hyped-up press release.

From this Mega Millions jackpot roll, New Jersey sucked up \$4 million in commissions for the lottery retailers and more than \$31 million for the state coffers. The cash for the Messners after taxes amounts to about \$88 million.

Other states took their slices from the ticket pool too. Mega Millions member states include: New Jersey, California, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Texas, Virginia and Washington.

In our view, the lottery is legalized numbers racket, taxation of the poor, false advertising, unbridled government craving for your cash and a real bad bet.

## Letters to the Editor

### Teacher Objects to Editorial, Calls for Supervisor Contracts to be Revealed

After reading your editorial in the March 15 issue of *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*, I'm not quite certain where to begin. Our board of education is not in violation of any OPRA request as there is no contract to share. A consequence of years of vitriol between various boards and the SPFEA, the contract is still under study and legal review as to its language.

Nobody has seen it, and there is no final copy to share with the public or anyone else. I notice that *The Times* does not mention an OPRA request to share administrative and supervisory staff contracts with the public. Curious.

I notice that neither *The Times* nor Mrs. Buckridge mentions that faculty members who continue to carry traditional health insurance coverage pay an additional \$500 each for this option, above the cost of lesser plans. Nor is there any curiosity shown about the cost or level of insurance benefits for administrative and

supervisory personnel.

State legislative restrictions upon reserve funds maintained by our board and restrictive caps upon district spending, regardless of need, are equally important as any other factors in understanding our present budgetary dilemma. It is disingenuous of *The Times* not to mention these facts in its editorial.

The public demands restraint in spending which impacts our already high property taxes. These state caps are not going away any time soon. There is no reason to believe that we will not be facing the challenge of additional cuts for years to come. School spending has become a very complicated and emotional issue, and *The Times* does its readers a disservice when it fails to treat it as such.

David Multer, Teacher  
Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School  
Brick

### Mountainside Schools Disagrees with The Leader/Times News Article

Recently *The Westfield Leader* incorrectly reported the amount by which the Mountainside Board of Education proposes to increase its budget for FY 2007-2008. The Mountainside Board of Education FY 2007-2008 proposed increase in budget levy is only 3.7 percent, which supports a budget increase of \$598,807 from the current year.

The Mountainside Board of Education Finance Committee and the Administration worked to shape an educational plan which maintains all programs that serve our students, plan for the expiration of the dissolution funding, provides fiscal accountability and serves all children in its care while fighting to balance needs against taxes. The tentative budget approved for FY 2007-2008 by the Mountainside Board of Education accomplishes all of these objectives including a levy increase of only 3.7 percent.

On March 13, 2007 the Mountainside Board of Education approved a tentative budget for FY 2007-2008 with a proposed tax levy of \$11,694,735. This represents a 3.7 percent increase over the current year's tax levy of \$11,276,433. The FY 2007-2008 proposed levy supports a budget of \$14,565,75, which is \$598,807 more than the current FY 2006-2007 budget of \$13,966,844 approved by voters in April 2006.

The single driving factor behind this growth was the increase of \$793,508 in

tuition due to Berkeley Heights under the sending/receiving agreement. Without the Berkeley Heights' tuition increase the budget would actually have decreased by 1 percent from this year to next year.

The proposed FY 2007-2008 budget reduces reliance upon the dissolution funds by 28 percent or less \$510,804. The total reduction from two years ago is 37 percent or less \$675,496. In 2005 the current administration and board brought to the public's attention the issue of the prior administration using gradually dissipating dissolution funds for ongoing operations. At that time dissolution funds made up 13 percent of the district's revenues. Under the FY 2007-2008 budget dissolution funds comprise 8 percent of the district's budget.

Based upon 2007 property assessments and other relevant tax data, which the Mountainside Board of Education obtained from Mountainside Borough Tax Assessor's Office the proposed budget will amount to \$11.74 a month or \$141 annually for the average homeowner.

Richard O'Malley  
Chief School Administrator  
Mountainside Public Schools

Editor's Note: In attempt to clarify this matter, the newspaper met with the administrator and requested the legal filings for current year and for proposed year, but the information has yet to be provided.

### To Turf or Not to Turf, Is that Really a Question?

That seems to be a question on some residents' minds these days as news of the upcoming \$2-million bond referendum, being placed on the April 17 ballot, and spreads like wildfire. I think it's great that the residents are at least aware of the bond.

My family has been in this community for five generations and as a 1978 graduate of SPFHHS, a current resident of Scotch Plains, and a mother of a student-athlete, I am in full support of the bond for the renovation of the athletic facilities at the high school.

The fields and track at our high school are in deplorable condition and have not had any substantial work done to them since before I left high school. Given the physical location of our football field and track facilities, they sit akin to the bottom of a bowl, where water collects and puddles until the sun dries it out because there is no existing drainage system.

Our school budget allocates monies to for the athletic program, so shouldn't there be monetary allocations periodically for the athletic facilities on which they are played? The current maintenance program of the fields at the high school has proven to be insufficient. Something must be done before the school district is faced with potential lawsuits and medical expenses, which over the long-term could prove to be very costly, not only from a financial standpoint, but a cost to our children as well, should they suffer injury because we neglected to do anything about them.

How many more children have to be injured before we say, "enough?" To continue to ignore these facilities would be paramount to child neglect and endangering the welfare of our children.

I invite any resident that questions the validity of whether "To Turf or Not to Turf" to visit these facilities, preferably after a few good substantial rains. Take a stroll onto our football field, but be sure to bring a walking stick to help keep your footing as you sink deeply into the mud, muck and mire. Bring your hip waders to

keep your feet and legs dry; then after you extract yourself from the football field, take a leisurely walk into the long jump pit - you may feel like you've just walked into a tar pit instead.

I urge serious caution to anyone venturing out onto the track; please sign a waiver before stepping onto the surface. What used to be called a track can probably now be found in pieces on the football field and maybe even around the bleachers because that surface is peeling, cracking, and seems to be self-destructing. Yes, I feel it is well worth the \$2 million or even more so our children can play games safely. If the sidewalks and yards at our homes were in the condition that our high school athletic facilities are in presently, we would spend the money to repair/renovate them without question to keep the desired "curb appeal" and avoid the possible fines that the township could impose for not making the repairs in a timely fashion as well as any potential lawsuit should someone get injured from the neglect.

Statistics show that children who are involved in sporting activities develop life-long skills including leadership and teamwork, helps to build their self-esteem as well as helping to keep them engaged in positive/structured activities. How could anyone not see value in that?

With regard to school budgets, let me say that communities that do not vote for the budget have done nothing more than put the budget in the hands of the respective mayor and town councils to decide what the budget will be. Make no mistake, there will always be an annual school budget; it just comes down to this: who do you want to determine what is needed in the school budget: the people who we elected to do that job, i.e., the local board of education or the mayor and town council, who were elected to run our municipal government?

Please vote Yes for the bond on April 17. Let's Turf it.

Natalie Taylor  
Scotch Plains

### Mr. Samuel Replies to Mr. Spera's Letter of Scotch Plains Politics

In a letter to the editor of last week's edition of *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*, former Mayor Gabe Spera suggested that I was disruptive in discussing the shortcomings of the present administration in Scotch Plains and it's handling of our tax money.

It is not surprising that Mr. Spera is happy with the financial practices of his cronies. I must say, however, that I am not, and the more the rest of our taxpayers know the more they will not be.

In April of 1998, the all Republican Scotch Plains Township Council, including our current mayor, voted unanimously to seize, by "eminent domain," ownership of the former Scotch Plains Zoo property, which is not far from Mr. Spera's house. It was said that the seizure was for a public park.

Then, the council passed a \$570,000-bond ordinance in order to pay what it considered "a fair-market price" to Sunrise Assisted Living, for the 5.87 acres at Raritan and Terrill Roads. An attorney for Sunrise, the owner at that time, said, however, that the purchase price Sunrise had paid was \$850,000, and that Sunrise had already spent at least \$60,000 addressing "environmental problems."

Sunrise had offered to donate two acres of the zoo site to the township, restore the site's historic "Frazee House" for an estimated \$200,000, and create a new petting zoo if allowed to develop the property. The then Republican Mayor Joan Papen said the portion Sunrise wanted to give the town was not good enough for the town's purposes.

In March of 1999, Marty Marks presented a nine-point "Recreation Plan for the 21st Century" that envisioned, among other things, development of the former zoo property.

Today, almost nine years later, the property, last I looked, lies fallow and overgrown, the community is being solicited to contribute to restore the site's historic "Frazee House" and the town collects no taxes for that property. Of course that was almost a decade ago, today we have the benefit of a new mini-golf course. Perhaps a new council could find out what happened in between.

All be quite, it disturbs Mr. Spera's friends.

Dick Samuel  
Scotch Plains

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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. Orgulous - Proud; haughty
2. Rhipadate - Formed like a fan
3. Roboration - A strengthening
4. Sevum - Fat, as used in the preparation of ointments

**POLTROON**

1. A Russian silver half ruble
2. A busybody
3. Cowardly; contemptible
4. A person who speaks with several languages

**TELESTIC**

1. Artistically suited for show or display
2. A mind reader; telepath
3. Discharging electrical impulses, such as with an electric eel
4. Pertaining to the final end or purpose

**GLUTTON**

1. In botany, having a sticky, moist surface
2. The act of swallowing
3. The act or result of excessive overeating
4. A surplus in supplies, materials, etc.

**MACTATION**

1. The killing of anything offered as a sacrifice
2. The process of chewing and swallowing
3. Characterized by long, sharp teeth
4. Marked with or constituting spots or stains

### A Day to Remember, Thank You

On February 25, the Westfield High School Girls Swim Team brought home the New Jersey Public A State Championship trophy, after an outstanding meet with West Windsor-Plainsboro South. Upon arrival to Westfield, the bus was met by both the fire department and the police department and escorted around town to celebrate our victory.

The final destination for the bus was the high school, where the team was greeted by Mayor Andrew Skibitsky, Councilman Sal Caruana, Anne Riegel, president of the board of education and many other enthusiastic townspeople. We would like to thank everyone whose efforts were involved in this special day, for it was one that will never be forgotten.

The WHS Girls Swim Team

### Jumping the Gun on Westfield Snow Days

I feel obliged to point out how fortunate our school board was this past Friday. Two weeks ago, on a Sunday night (I got my call at 9 p.m.), they deemed it necessary to close school for the next day, despite the fact that not a flake of snow had fallen. In the end, we got less than two inches of snow, and I could see most of my lawn.

Jumping the gun like this causes an unnecessary burden on working parents who cannot cancel work over a dusting of snow. Getting back to last week, let's ask, "What if that storm had come on Thursday?" The answer, an extra day of school this spring because someone used our last snow day for no reason at all two weeks earlier.

In the future, the parents of Westfield would all appreciate it if these days could be used judiciously, even if that means we occasionally get a middle of the night wake-up call with your eventual decision.

Steve Diamond  
Westfield

### Samuel: Strong Tactics But is Thin-Skinned

I was amused by the letter from Dick Samuel in last week's *Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* paper asking Republicans to reject the practice of character assassination. During the recent local campaign in Scotch Plains, Mr. Samuel ran a campaign that was almost entirely a character assassination of me.

He attacked me, even though I was not a candidate for office, and now you would think he was elected to the council by his actions and behavior. His actions would not be questioned if he would let those who were elected do their jobs.

I am surprised that someone who used such strong tactics a few months ago has developed such a thin skin now. Those who throw stones should not live in glass houses.

Bill McClintock  
Scotch Plains

### Elec. Laws; Feels Good, Accomplishes Nothing

Our lawmakers in Trenton passed another "Clean Election" pilot program to make it look like they are actually doing something. Three election districts will participate in a voluntary program designed to look like they are limiting special-interest funding and influence.

Asking incumbent elected officials to police themselves is like asking a child to eliminate birthday or Christmas presents. Using the same principle, we can have other pilot programs in the same districts. Voluntary enforcement of speeding laws and voluntary drunk-driving restrictions would have the same chance of reducing speeding and drunk driving as having the legislature volunteering not to accept special interest campaign money.

This is nothing but another "feel good" law that will accomplish nothing.

Thomas Lienhard  
Westfield

### Quote of the Week

Source unknown: "99 percent of the lawyers give the rest of them a bad name."

