



## Peyton's Peek at the Week In Politics

By Paul Peyton of The Leader/Times

### Judge Rebuffs Reform Dems' Bid for June Primary Run

The Star Ledger has reported that State Superior Court Judge Katherine Dupuis has ruled against a slate of potential Democratic Primary challengers to Democratic Union County Freeholder incumbents Bette Jane Kowalski and Dan Sullivan, running-mate Rayland Van Blake and Sheriff Ralph Froehlich. The judge ruled in favor of Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi, who said the freeholder challengers - running under the slogan "Reform Democrats of Union County" - did not have the sufficient number of signatures on their petitions and that the sheriff's candidate filed his petition late. Freeholder Adrian Mapp, who was bounced from the organization line, sought to run in the June Primary with Barbara Zamora of Elizabeth and Becky McHugh of Linden for freeholder. Charles E. Mitchell Sr. of Roselle, an Essex County sheriff's officer, sought to challenge Mr. Froehlich.

### Gloucester PD Chief, Wife Face Charges of Robbing MADD

A Gloucester County Police Chief Frank Winters and his wife, Bernice Winters, have been charged with stealing \$150,000 from Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), Attorney General Stuart Rabner said last week, according to an Associated Press report. Both Mr. Winters, a councilman in Newfield, and his wife each face one charge each of conspiracy and theft by deception.

### Bergen Legislators Receive Latest Subpoenas from Feds

State Senator Paul Sarlo and Assembly members Robert Gordon and Joan Voss, all Bergen County Democrats, are the latest legislators to receive subpoenas from the federal prosecutors as the probe, that began with allegations of now-indicted Senator Wayne Bryant receiving as no-show job at the University of Medicine and

Dentistry, widens. The subpoenas sought records relating to Hackensack University Medical Center since the start of 2004. Authorities have been examining the relationship between the hospital and Democratic Senator Joseph Coniglio. Prosecutors previously served subpoenas on all the leadership offices in the Legislature, the non-partisan Office of Legislative Services, the office of former Assembly Speaker and now-congressman Albio Sires (D-Hudson), Assemblyman Brian Stack (D-Hudson), Senator Nicholas Scutari (D-Union) and the governor's office.

### New Jersey Ranks Fourth In Nation In Debt

Moody's Investors Service's annual State Debt Medians report said New Jersey finished last year with the fourth-highest debt - \$33.7 billion - in the nation, behind only California, New York and Massachusetts, according to a Star Ledger report.

### Social Security Trustees Project Future Lack of Funds

The 2007 annual report of the Social Security Board of Trustees reveals the board's projections that payroll taxes would no longer raise enough money to pay full Social Security benefits starting in 2017 and that trust funds would be exhausted by 2041.

"Over the 75-year period, the trust funds would require additional revenue equivalent to \$4.7 trillion in today's dollars to pay all scheduled benefits. This unfunded obligation is about \$100 billion higher than the amount estimated last year," according to a press release from the board of trustees.

Christian Seniors Association (CSA) Executive Director James Lafferty said in another press release, "The moment of truth is approaching as some Washington insiders continue to pretend there is a genuine trust fund from which Social Security checks are withdrawn."



A GOOD DAY'S WORK...Union County Freeholder Chairman Bette Jane Kowalski, left, and Margaret Pipchick of Cranford remove trash and debris from the banks of the Rahway River in Cranford on April 21 during the Earth Day clean-up event sponsored by the Rahway River Association.

## Sen. Kean Asks Rutgers Not To Cut Six Athletic Teams

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

AREA - State Senator Tom Kean, Jr. of Westfield is pushing for Rutgers University to rescind its decision to cut six sports teams. Last summer's decision by the university board of governors was made in response to \$66 million in cuts by the state legislature.

Rutgers decided to eliminate men's swimming and diving, men's tennis, men's and women's fencing and heavy and lightweight crew.

The Board of Governors of Rutgers approved its FY 2006-2007 budget of \$1.63 billion on July 14, 2006, which included the elimination of the six teams effective this June, according to Mr. Kean's resolution introduced February 8.

"The decision makes no sense whatsoever," said Mr. Kean when reached by phone Monday. He said eliminating the sports programs would cause some of "the best student-athletes in the state" to leave New Jersey.

"Many of the competing schools (to Rutgers) have these types of programs," he added.

According to the resolution (no. 93), the cuts affect some 121 student-athletes, who would have to decide to "either forgo this aspect of their overall educational experience or transfer to other schools to continue participation in their sport of choice."

The state senator blamed higher-education funding cuts by the state over the past several years for Rutgers' decision, causing increases in tuition that make New Jersey's colleges and universities "less affordable."

"All this while, state spending has increased over \$10 billion the last few years," said Mr. Kean, noting that spending has increased 50 percent over the past six years.

## County Taxes Up \$12.7 Mil.; 19 of 21 Towns to See Hikes

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

ELIZABETH - The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders on Thursday introduced a \$414.3-million budget that calls for \$239.4 million to be raised in new taxes - a \$12.7-million hike over last year. County purpose taxes, which will increase in 19 of the county's 21 municipalities, are up 5.7 percent over last year.

The board's finance committee lowered the tax levy by \$300,000 from the \$13 million increase proposed in the executive budget County Manager George Devaney presented in January.

The budget represents a \$2.7-million decrease from the \$417-million end-of-year budget numbers for 2006 but a \$14.2-million increase over the \$400-million budget that was introduced last spring.

Under the budget, county taxes are projected to rise on average by \$131 to \$2,306 for the average homeowner in Westfield, \$102 to \$1,685 in Scotch Plains, \$73 to \$1,418 in Fanwood and \$64 to \$2,102 in Mountainside. County purpose taxes will drop \$50 to \$1,119 in Garwood, Summit faces the biggest hike, up \$191 to \$3,128, followed by Hillside, up \$103 to \$933.

Locally, average assessed property values are \$181,500 in Westfield, \$121,000 in Scotch Plains, \$85,000 in Fanwood, \$100,000 in Garwood and \$160,600 in Mountainside.

This year's tax levy accounts for 58 percent of the overall revenues. In 2000, taxes represented 49 percent of the total county revenue. The tax levy has risen \$89.2 million since 1998 but \$65.6 million in the past five years, according to the county. The overall budget has risen \$104 million since 2000.

In a press release issued by Sebastian D'Elia, the county's communications director in the Public Information office, the finance committee, under the chairmanship of Freeholder Al Mirabella, reduced the county's proposed capital budget by \$17.6 million for a new capital spending plan of \$37.6 million, \$29.2-million of which would be issued through authorizing new debt. The county's six-year projected capital program, through 2012, is \$132.6 million, according to a copy of the 2007 county budget obtained by The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times.

County officials said capital program reductions from the executive budget saved \$900,000 in the county budget. Mr. D'Elia told reporters \$7 million was reduced by capital requests from the parks and recreation and Runnells Specialized Hospital, with another \$10 million from public works.

Officials said the county saved \$650,000 from the early retirement program in which 140 employees participated, and gained another \$500,000 by deferring payments for years of service benefits to retirees. They realized another \$100,000 in leaf composting revenues from towns, a revenue item that came out of budget committee hearings, and another \$500,000 through increased revenues on investments due to higher interest rates.

Although no freeholders made comments at Thursday's meeting, in the press release County Manager George Devaney cited rising mandated costs such as pensions, health insurance and increased public safety costs following 9/11 as reasons for the tax hike.

"These are items over which county government exercises little or no control. In fact, \$94 million, of which \$239 million to be raised by [the levy] in the 2007 budget, stems from mandated costs - nearly 40 percent," Mr. Devaney told freeholders in his budget message, printed in the budget document.

Also cited for the tax increase was the \$3.5-million deficit at Runnells, blamed on "unforeseen market circumstances" and delays in the reimbursement of federal funds for Runnells' Cornerstone Psychiatric program.

The freeholders will hold a public hearing on the spending plan on Thursday, May 24, at 7 p.m., after which board members will vote to adopt the budget.

	County Tax Increase Or Decrease	2007 County Taxes
Berkeley Heights	\$36	\$1,883
Clark	\$114	\$1,391
Cranford	\$77	\$1,459
Elizabeth	\$105	\$1,032
Fanwood	\$73	\$1,418
Garwood	-\$50	\$1,119
Hillside	\$103	\$933
Kenilworth	\$62	\$1,215
Linden	\$74	\$974
Mountainside	\$64	\$2,102
New Providence	\$73	\$1,751
Plainfield	\$93	\$948
Rahway	\$72	\$961
Roselle	\$58	\$858
Roselle Park	\$77	\$1,006
Scotch Plains	\$102	\$1,685
Springfield	\$29	\$1,374
Summit	\$191	\$3,128
Union	\$6	\$1,033
Westfield	\$131	\$2,306
Winfield	-\$6	\$62

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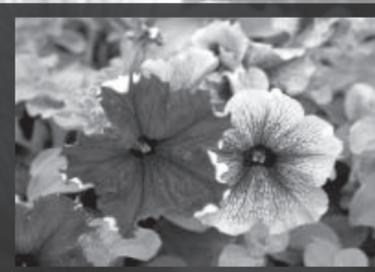
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