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Paul Peyton ASSIGNMENT EDITOR
Suzette F. Stalker COMMUNITY
Betsy Burgdorf EDUCATION & ARTS

Horace R. Corbin PUBLISHER
David B. Corbin ASSISTANT PUBLISHER & SPORTS
Ben Corbin SERVICES

Jeff Gruman SALES MANAGER
Michael L. Bartiromo MARKETING PRODUCTION
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Letters to the Editor

Courts Would Never Tolerate So-Called Bridgegate 'Evidence'

In front of nearly every courthouse in the land is the Statue of Lady Justice who is blindfolded that she be impartial. She balances the Scales of Justice.

Inside every courtroom will be heard the witness on pain of perjury swear or affirm, "to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Every defendant is given ample opportunity to question the accuser. Only evidence in accordance with the rules of evidence is admissible. Through the voir dire an impartial jury is selected. The judge instructs the jury on the law. The jury decides the facts based upon the jury instructions. The judge determines if the verdict is supported by the law. And there is a right of appeal to an appellate court and, in some cases, even to the United States Supreme Court!

But the public and the mass media in their frenzied rush to judgment will have none of this! They find fault based upon rumor, hearsay, gossip, scuttlebutt, and innuendo. And are heavily influenced not only by their own predilections but by what they hear from sources that are often far from impartial! They accept as truth sources without proper attribution.

To illustrate, an editorial in *The New York Times* of January 9, 2013 screams the headline, "The Bully Was A Dupe!" Not a shred of admissible evidence that Governor Christie is a bully or was a dupe in what the press

calls "Bridgegate." In its next day's editorial entitled, "After Chris Christie's Performance," *The New York Times* asserted, "But he has set a tone that makes abusive actions acceptable... At this point, the governor has zero credibility." Again, not a shred of admissible evidence to support this statement.

Public reliance on publicity such as this makes it difficult to empanel an impartial jury and may ensure the ruin of reputations, careers, and even lives!

I may be a retired attorney-at-law in three states, but I do know a thing or two about the criminal justice system!

No judicial court in the land would tolerate for one second that which the public and the media now consider evidence about "Bridgegate!" Not accept the word of anybody who is not under oath or affirmation. Nor permit conviction without the person accused having had the opportunity to cross-examine the accuser under oath or affirmation.

What has been done to Governor Christie can be done to any of us!

Every person is entitled to his or her day in court! If we want to preserve our beloved country as a land of law then we had better know the difference between a court of law and a court of public opinion!

Stephen Schoeman
 Westfield

ABCD EFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ



Diction Deception

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. Capybara - A large, tailless, partially web-footed rodent of South America
2. Ticpolonga - An extremely venomous Indian snake
3. Runcation - A wedding
4. Gingili - Sesame seed or the oil from it

NULLIPARA

1. Useless; of little or no value
2. A woman who has not borne a child
3. A traitor; tunic
4. Apathetic; disinterested

CLACHAN

1. A hamlet in the Highlands of Scotland
2. Solidified; hardened
3. A state of insensibility; numbness
4. Hanging in clusters, such as with grapes

STREPITANT

1. Harsh; raspy
2. Oozing; seeping
3. Noisy, loud
4. Salty; saline

ERUCTION

1. Shameful; corrupt
2. The act of belching
3. Swelling or state of being swollen
4. The act of stretching and yawning

Citizens Must Gain Control of the Ballot Box From Political Parties

New Jersey is again in the national spotlight over a new scandal dubbed Bridgegate. Ten years ago the state was dealing with the sudden resignation of then Governor James McGreevey, who announced he was "a gay American" and was having an affair with another man while married to First Lady Dina Matos McGreevey.

Last Thursday, Governor Chris Christie had to apologize to New Jerseyans after news reports that his administration was responsible for four days of traffic snarls near the George Washington Bridge that brought Fort Lee to a standstill, delaying emergency vehicles and school buses filled with children. The closing of the two lanes are said to be political retaliation for Fort Lee Mayor Mark Sokolich refusing to endorse the governor in last's year's election. "Say it ain't so, Joe."

Political action and reaction to this scandal has been as expected - Democrats, on a witch hunt, say the Governor is "a bully" who has set a "vindictive culture" in his administration while Republicans say the Governor showed leadership in holding a two-hour press conference and for swiftly firing his deputy chief of staff, Bridget Anne Kelly, and pulling his nominee for state GOP chairman, Bill Stepien. Two other Port Authority of New York and New Jersey officials the Governor appointed quit over the scandal in December.

The Assembly Transportation Committee, a special state Senate committee, the U.S. Senate, U.S. Attorney's Office for New Jersey, the Port Authority inspector general, and Bergen County Prosecutor have all launched or are about to initiate investigations into Bridgegate, probes that are likely to take months to complete.

The Governor, in our opinion, needs to get everything out in the open on this issue ASAP. It's becoming a tidal wave that puts the state and the administration in gridlock the next three years. Is the Governor considering further administrative shakeups to ensure that something this dumb and vindictive never happens again? Can he (and the public) trust those in leadership positions in his administration to mind the fort while he is out of state during his term as head of the Republican Governors Association (RGA)?

We doubt that Westfield's Rich Bagger, who was the Governor's first chief of staff, would ever have let such a distasteful, vile political act, such as may have happened in Bridgegate, ever get past first base.

Maybe ex-United States Senator and former Attorney General Jeff Chiesa is still available.

In the meantime, both political parties need to work together to ensure work continues in Trenton during these investigations. We are encouraged, however, by a press release from Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield), which said, "Following Governor Chris Christie's marathon Bridgegate news conference, leaders from both sides of the aisle agreed they need to continue to work together in a bipartisan fashion - along with the governor - to keep the state moving."

In the news release, Assembly Speaker-elect Vinnie Prieto (D-32, Secaucus) said the number one goal for lawmakers "is to work to do the best job for the residents of the State of New Jersey... He [Chris Christie] is the Governor and we are the Legislature, so government can't stop."

We are encouraged by the unanimous vote by the Assembly Transportation Committee - which has eight Democrats and four Republicans - finding ex-Port Authority of New York and New Jersey official David Wildstein in contempt for refusing to answer the committee's questions.

We expect more heads to roll and changes in the Governor's top staff as well as in the Port Authority administration in the coming weeks. The big thing is, will Governor Christie truly ever be able to trust his staff again? They have let him down, not to mention the people of New Jersey.

Whether you like the Governor or not, the President or not - whether you are a Democrat, Republican or just a plain Joe - it's evident to us that the smell of political parties and their operatives is too pungent, too pervasive - the stink must be purged from our nation.

How do we do this? Special interests have duped the people. The citizens must wrestle back control of the ballot box.

Pandora's Box: Politics Today

Politics Today: "Pandora opened it, and all evil contained therein escaped and spread over the earth. She hastened to close the container, but the whole contents had escaped, except for one thing that lay at the bottom - the Spirit of Hope." wikipedia.

Westfield Board of Health Reports 2013 Annual Town Statistics

The Westfield Board of Health met on January 6 for its annual reorganization meeting. Four new members were appointed by the mayor with approval of Town Council: Sherl Brand, Tricia Lerner, Dr. Maria LoGrippo and Joshua Suri. The board reelected me as president and Thomas O'Neill as vice-president.

In 2013, Westfield residents had 264 newborn babies. There were 67 marriages and five civil unions among residents. Another 72 marriages occurred in town among non-residents. One hundred ninety-six residents died, and 70 other persons died in town.

During the year, 29 residents reportedly were bitten or scratched by animals. Animal protection services were provided to one animal, which had been mistreated and to 55 surrendered, stray or wild animals.

Influenza activity is now increasing in Union County. Forty residents were vaccinated in December and it is not too late to get your flu vaccine. You can still protect yourself, your family and your friends by being vaccinated against the flu. Also, state law requires that children under 60 months of age who attend licensed child care or preschool must be vaccinated each year.

The Westfield Regional Health

Department offers many types of flu vaccine. For all types, there is a \$15 cash fee for each person who does not have Medicare B or one of the following insurances: Aetna, CIGNA, Humana, Medicaid and United Healthcare. To schedule yours, please contact Laura Scanlon, the public health nursing supervisor, at (908) 789-4070, extension 4074 or lscanlon@westfieldnj.gov.

The health department is sponsoring health screenings with Overlook Medical Center in the municipal building. A Cholesterol screening will be on Thursday, January 23, from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. for a \$10 charge. For more information and to register, please contact the Overlook Community Health Department at 1-800-247-9580.

Information about all of the department's activities is available on its website www.westfieldnj.gov/health. The complete minutes of the January 6 meeting will be posted after review and approval at our Monday, February 3 meeting, which starts at 5:30 p.m. in the municipal building. At that meeting, we will discuss our goals for 2014. As always, the public is invited to attend.

Lawrence D. Budnick, MD
 President, Westfield Board of Health

2014 Federal Tax Changes Impact Region's Commuters

Transit riders received a not-so-welcome gift on January 1 when the maximum pre-tax contribution for transit dropped from \$245 a month to \$130 a month, resulting in a de facto tax increase not only for 700,000 transit users in the tri-state region, but for commuters across the nation. The monthly cost of a transit pass exceeds \$130 for riders on at least 24 transit systems, impacting commuting in 20 states and the District of Columbia.

As Congress reconvenes in Washington for its first days of work in 2014, restoring parity to the commuter tax benefit for transit riders must be at the top of its to-do list. With an appropriations bill a top priority for Congress, there is an opportunity to restore the parity in the bill, and make the benefit permanent in the next few weeks.

Veronica Vanterpool, www.tstc.org
 Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Collaborative Approach Necessary for Improving New Jersey Schools

Regarding Governor Chris Christie's call for extending school days and years: The American Federation of Teachers New Jersey (AFTNJ) is concerned that Governor Chris Christie calls for extending school days and years without mandating a collaborative planning process that has helped make these programs successful in districts in New Jersey and elsewhere. The planning process for any new program should be inclusive and solicit meaningful input from local teachers participating on behalf of their unions, parents and community members.

Representatives of any group that currently provides wraparound services such as health care, tutoring or counseling for students and their families should be included to insure continuity of these valuable programs.

Successful implementation of an extended school day or school year must start with an in-district evaluation of what is already working or lacking within that district's existing programs including current extended day, after school and summer school programs. How can we expect a different result if a district simply extends a

The expiration of parity for the transit commuter benefit means fewer dollars in transit riders' pockets - and fewer dollars in the farebox too. When riders no longer have the option to use pre-tax dollars for transit passes, transit systems may face decreased ridership, which often leads to fare hikes and service cuts.

Just as the transit commuter benefit was slashed, the benefit for parking increased by \$5 to \$250 per month, which amounts to a federally-endorsed transportation policy that incentivizes driving, leading to more cars on the region's already congested and deteriorating roads. Restoring and enacting permanent parity for transit riders, and making that parity retroactive to January 1, establishes a balanced and progressive fiscal policy.

Veronica Vanterpool, www.tstc.org
 Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Vol. Fire Depts. Exempt From ObamaCare

REGION - Towns will not have to provide health insurance for volunteer firefighters, a reprieve from Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act/Obamacare rules. Volunteer emergency workers will be made exempt from a requirement that employers with more than 50 workers provide health coverage to those putting in at least 30 hours a week per the new healthcare law, according to media reports.

Volunteers account for 69 percent of firefighters in the U.S., according to the National Volunteer Fire Council. The National Association of Counties has said requiring municipalities to provide health care to volunteers may have forced some fire departments in rural areas to close.

Megan's Law Bill
Approved by Assembly

TRENTON - Legislation sponsored by Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield) that strengthens certain provisions of "Megan's Law," which requires the registration of sex offenders and notification to the community of their whereabouts, was unanimously approved by the General Assembly on Monday.

The bill, S-2636/A-3886, would upgrade the penalty for a sexual assault committed against a person who is physically or intellectually incapacitated to aggravated sexual assault, increasing the charge from a third degree crime to one of the second degree. It also requires the offender to register under Megan's Law.

"Sexual predators will now pay a more severe penalty for committing this heinous act," Asm. Bramnick said. "We must always protect our most vulnerable citizens. Those who violate Megan's Law will pay a steep price to keep them from harming anyone else."

Mr. Bramnick's bill also increases the penalty when a sex offender fails to notify law enforcement of a change in address or they have access to the Internet from a fourth degree crime to a third degree offense.

Additionally, the bill also imposes a requirement on the State Parole Board to improve the board's supervision and monitoring of sex offenders. A monthly penalty of \$30 would be imposed on every person convicted of a sex offense to fund these initiatives. Monies deposited into the "Sex Offender Fund" are to be used for operational expenses incurred by the board in this effort.

HEY KIDS, LONGER SCHOOL COMING?

Giving low-income children a safe and stimulating place to spend their afternoons helps makes the school a more integral part of the community and strengthens students' connection to the school and teachers.

Ironically, the Governor yesterday (Monday) vetoed bipartisan bills; one to study implementation of universal full-day kindergarten and another to study college affordability. New Jersey needs collaborative plans to improve education from pre-kindergarten through higher education based on proven research and the leadership of experienced educators, not political gimmicks.

Donna M. Chiera
 AFTNJ President

THE NEW CHRISTIE MINSTREL



NESEMAN @14
 THE LEADER/TIMES

State LD-21 Sen. Thomas Kean, Jr. (R) 425 North Ave. E. Westfield, N.J. 07090 (908) 232-3673 Asm. Jon Bramnick (R) 251 North Ave. West Westfield, N.J. 07090 (908) 232-2073 Asm. Nancy Munoz (R) 57 Union Place, Suite 310 Summit, N.J. 07901 (908) 918-0414	State LD-22 Sen. Nicholas Scutari (D) 1514 E. Saint Georges Ave. Linden, N.J. 07036 (908) 587-0404 Asm. Linda Stender (D) 1801 East Second St. Scotch Plains, N.J. 07076 (908) 668-1900 Asm. Jerry Green (D) 17 Watchung Ave. Plainfield, N.J. 07060 (908) 561-5757	7th Congressional District Representative Leonard Lance (R) 425 North Avenue E., Westfield, NJ 07090 (908) 518-7733 [Westfield, Mountainside, Garwood, Summit and Cranford are in the 7th Congressional District] 12th Congressional District Rep. Rush Holt (D) 50 Washington Rd., West Windsor, N.J. 08550 (609) 750-9365 [Fanwood, Plainfield and most of Scotch Plains are in the 12th Congressional District]
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senkean@njleg.org, senscutari@njleg.org
 asmbarnick@njleg.org, asmunoz@njleg.org
 aswstender@njleg.org, asmgreen@njleg.org



CHARLIE
 August 10, 1957 - 1981