

POLITIFAX™

A Weekly Electronic Newsletter on Politics in **NEW JERSEY**

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Who's Hot

Jon Corzine

So, who was that masked rider? The one using the teleprompter? There are people who think style doesn't count, and, to judge from his earlier insistence on reading speeches with his head down, the Governor was one of them. Whoever nagged him to switch to appropriate technology is to be commended for making it possible to listen to the Budget Address and concentrate on the content without the horrific distraction of counting how many words were enunciated before each page got turned.

Quote of the Week

The rumors that a legislator has been wearing a wire, first reported on Monday in inthelobby.net, led one legislative wag to suggest to fellow caucus members that: ***"To make things more lively, we could pat each other down."*** From what we hear, though, nobody thought the line was particularly funny, and, instead of the anticipated laughter, a deadly silence fell over the group.

Budget Blues

AN ELECTION YEAR BUDGET. Of course it's an election year budget. It's an election year. The proposed spending blueprint may not solve very many problems, but Democrats can say that there are increases in local aid; all the opposition can say is it's not enough. The Democrats can also say that, even though there's a seven percent increase in spending, there are no tax increases -- for the first time since 1991. And, finally, Democrats can argue that those who say it's hypocritical to ask municipalities to accept a four percent cap while increasing state spending by seven percent are confusing tangerines with nectarines; the four-percent cap is on tax increases, and, as we said, there are none in this budget. This may be sophistry, but it is, as everybody agrees, an election year budget.

UNION GIVEBACKS. Tonight we're dining on gourmet crow. We admit we never thought the Governor would get anything approximating the concessions five of the seven state employee CWA locals accepted: a 1.5 percent levy toward health care premiums and an increase in the retirement age from 55 to 60 for new hires in exchange for a 13.6 percent salary increase over four years. And we were as sure as we are that baseball is the greatest spectator sport that he wouldn't get it in time for his budget message -- not to mention a budget message moved up several days. (Our only consolation is that just about everybody agreed with us.) Cynics point out, however, that the two dissenting locals represent 40 percent of the workers. The truly cynical note that Carla Katz heads the one of the dissenting locals, the largest of the seven. The Governor needed concessions to prevent suggestions that he caved in to his former girlfriend's demands. Katz needed to oppose whatever concessions emerged to maintain credibility with her rank and file. Our regular interlocutors are split over whether their reactions were scripted, but almost everybody agrees that the winking and nodding has been broad enough to be seen in the last row of the balcony.

MONETIZING. And that, according to the Governor, was the easy part. We're still agnostic -- fiscally and politically -- on monetization. But Transportation Chairman John Wisniewski isn't; nor is Lou Manzo, who has introduced legislation to prevent the sale of the Turnpike; nor, from what we can tell, are most civilians. This could be a hard sell. But the Governor is asking only that we not reject what isn't yet on the table. And he did get those union concessions. So, let's see what he comes up with.

Around the State

Gloucester

FOOD FIGHT. The fact that the Republicans have been losing local offices not only through elections but also through defections has not passed unnoticed by the party faithful. Accordingly, GOP Vice Chairman Carmen DiNovi decided to run against Chairwoman Loran Oglesby. For her part, Oglesby told Gloucester County *Times* political columnist Pete McCarthy that she'll be running on her record and that, if she had had a more active Vice Chair, a lot of the lost elections and defections might not've happened.

Hudson

FOOD FOR THOUGHT. The thing you have to understand about Hudson politics is that it's a lot like *Seinfeld*. It's about nothing. Don't misunderstand us: There's a lot at stake for the players. But it's all inside baseball. It's nonpartisan and nonideological. When each war ends, one side or the other wins, but nothing really changes. That said, the war is still pretty fierce on the inside. Everybody seems to want peace -- but on his own terms. Bernie Kenny and Brian Stack want the same Senate seat. Nick Sacco wants to retain his king-of-the-hill position in North Hudson. Joe Doria wants a peaceful settlement, without which Sandra Cunningham becomes a much more formidable foe. Tom DeGise wants to get reelected without a primary. And Jerry Healy has his eye on succeeding Kenny as County Democratic Chairman. Of course, Healy is also worried about his reelection as Jersey City Mayor in 2009. In fact, to a great extent a lot of this is about the Jersey City mayoralty, which is the big plum not only for the players themselves but also for what one of our wags calls "the investors." With that great prize in mind,


Healy has taken to rejecting any legislative candidate who might challenge him in 2009. Lou Manzo and Harvey Smith -- two of those whose names have been put forth as Doria runningmates -- have already run against Healy once, and neither is about to say he won't do it again. Then, there's the impending West New York donnybrook, where the May municipal election promises to be the initial fissure in the crack of doom. When last we looked, Albio Sires and Sal Vega -- now catch this, the Congressman/ former Mayor/ former Assemblyman and the present Mayor/ Assemblyman, respectively -- were fighting about who'd be the top guy in town. They actually met to discuss their differences (which were never very apparent while they served on the town Commission together for 11 years) and agreed on only one thing -- that they should meet again. Well, of course, they haven't, so this particular sore has been festering untended. We'll know more about whether the county war is on when we get to the March 15 filing deadline for the West New York Commission election. If there's a contest there -- pitting Vega with Sacco as an ally against Sires with Stack as an ally -- it'll be "Katie, bar the door" for the county-wide situation. And even those who didn't like Bob Menendez all that much are wondering who can replace him as the adult supervisor.

Monmouth

FEEDING THE BEAST. Republican Freeholder Anna Little flat out refused to sign the contract proposed by Chairman Adam Puharic and is now mulling either a switch to the Democrats or a run as an Independent. The contract required every candidate to pay \$1,000 for a background check and to agree not to primary the winner of a convention. Little says Puharic tried to intimidate her at a meeting earlier this month, and the two haven't spoken since. Curiously, Puharic dropped the contract after Little announced she wouldn't seek renomination as a Republican. Puharic told the *Asbury Park Press* that the contract wasn't the reason Little dropped out of the party, "but the truth is she hasn't been part of the party. She would not work with the party." The last accusation was a reference to her refusal to accept a contribution that had passed through a state fundraising vehicle.

Union

FEEDING FRENZY. The Attorney General's subpoena for information about a disputed ward Council

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race in Roselle goes back to a heated primary last year between Rosemarie Bullock, supported by Neil Cohen (who doubles as municipal Chairman), and incumbent Christine Dansereau, backed by Mayor Garrett Smith (who doubles as Cohen's least favorite person). Dansereau won on the machines by 17 votes, but Bullock took 54 of the 62 absentee ballots to pull ahead by 31 votes. Dansereau lost in court, but an appellate panel, citing a "potential for fraud," invalidated 31 absentees cast for Bullock and sent the case back to the trial judge. The crux of the matter appears to be that many if not all of the absentee ballots were handled by former Cohen aide Jamal Holley. Now that the AG has the case, nobody's willing to discuss it.

The Legislative Election Watch

DISTRICT 2. Frank Blee's decision not to run for another term in the Assembly with Sonny McCollough at the top of the legislative ticket leaves the Republicans with two Assembly slots to fill. Galloway Township Councilman Al DeSimone and former Atlantic Freeholder John Risley have already announced, but there are others in the wings considering the race. (Brigantine Mayor Philip Guenther, on the other hand, announced he won't be running.) There are about half a dozen interpretations of what happened last week when McCollough beat out Blee for the right to fill the last year of Bill Gormley's Senate term. Suffice it to say, though, that McCollough hasn't been a big Gormley fan; nor has his most visible backer, Frank LoBion-

do. But McCollough campaigned on a promise to end what he perceived as Gormley's high-handed ways. Well, no sooner did McCollough have the Senate seat (and presumably the nomination for a full term) in hand than he waved the unanimity rule of the United Republican Club of Egg Harbor City in the air and expelled the one member who supported Blee.

DISTRICT 11. Former Assemblyman John Villapiano says he's running for the Democratic Senate nomination to run against Sean Kean. His spot on the ticket isn't a sure thing, however, because there may be others interested in the seat.

DISTRICT 12. With Jenn Beck running for the Senate, Little Silver Councilman Declan O'Scanlon wants to succeed to Beck's Assembly seat.

DISTRICT 29. Freddy Caraballo had a fundraiser last week, and more than a hundred people showed up. Among them were a dozen or so Trenton lobbyists but not a single Newark or Essex figure of note. Among Caraballo's colleagues only Nellie Pou and Joe Roberts put in an appearance. The Speaker earned points in some quarters for showing up even though Caraballo has fallen from favor among the powers that be in his home county. One can understand the instinct, though, Caraballo is still a member of Roberts's caucus and was a supporter of Roberts's ascendancy to the Speaker's chair.

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News Roundup

Tidbits

Most Cynical Reaction of the Week: One veteran observer of the Legislature predicted that Dick Codey's proposed reform to create transparency in legislators' budget requests will create a new form of wheeling -- with Bergen legislators asking for changes and additions Camden guys want and vice versa.

Best Party of the Week: Democrats 2000 will hold a happy hour honoring Essex County Clerk Chris Durkin at Pal's Cabin tomorrow night. A \$40 ticket will get you an open bar, free appetizers, and a chance to harass Joe DiVincenzo, John McKeon, and Linda Cavanaugh from 6 to 7.

Best Legislative Initiative of the Week: A resolution sponsored by Joe Doria and Nia Gill in the Senate and Bonnie Watson and Mike Panter in the Assembly urges insurers of the World Trade Center to settle up on all claims as quickly as possible and suggests that the baking and Insurance Commissioner take whatever action it can to make sure that happens. The initiative passed both houses without a dissenting vote.

Presidential Stuff of the Week: John Edwards raked in about \$100,000 at a fundraiser in Colts Neck organized by Mike Panter. Reed Gusciora is starting a movement to draft Al Gore (as if an Academy Award and a Noble Peace Prize nomination weren't enough stimulation for one year.) But perhaps most important was that the Assembly passed a Joe Roberts-sponsored bill putting us in the general scramble to move primaries to February 5. Jon Corzine, Dick Codey, and Joe Cryan all agree, so we don't see how this won't happen.

Thought for the Week: With all the attention legislators have been getting lately for dual job holding and pension padding, maybe it's time to consider something we've discussed before: a full time Legislature whose members would earn a decent, Cabinet-like salary but would be precluded from outside employment. Michael Shapiro recently posted a piece on the subject on the Hall Institute's website. It's worth a look.

Addendum of the Week: We failed to include Kip Bateman in our list of those seeking elective positions once held by a close relative. Ray Bateman sat in the State Senate from 1968 to 1978.

Winners and Losers

Winner: Jon Corzine

We don't know why he'd want more work, but the Coalition of Northeastern Governors named our guy its Chairman for 2007.

Winner: Zulima Farber

The former Attorney General joined Issues Management, the lobbying arm of Lowenstein Sandler, where she worked before she became AG.

Winner: Ralph Izzo

PSE&G's president was elected Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of the company effective April 1.

Winner: John McCormac

The Woodbridge Mayor must've enjoyed Amisha Padnani's profile of him in Sunday's *Star-Ledger*. You can't buy publicity like that -- and as far as we can tell every word of it's true.

Winner: Josh Hodes

The son of political guru Harold Hodes and a former Associate Director of Athletic Development at the Rutgers University Foundation joined Public Strategies Impact, his father's firm last month. One of our wags was in complete awe of the move. "As if the genetic makeup weren't enough to master the trade. Now, he'll get to learn all of his father's tricks firsthand."

Winner: Eric Shuffler

For a guy with no official position on either side of the Hudson River he certainly did all right in the speechwriting department, having had a hand in both the Governor's State of the State and Budget addresses and in New York City Council President Christine Quinn's State of the City speech.

Winner: Carolyn Salazar

The New Jersey Press Association named *The Record* reporter its Journalist of the Year for breaking the story about former Attorney General Zulima Farber and the traffic stop that got out of hand.