

OPINION

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ASBURY PARK PRESS
A Gannett Newspaper



Winner,
1998 Pulitzer Prize

Vol. 130, No. 176

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Established 1879 as
The Shore Press
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EDITORIAL

Bid Rig: Here we go again

The arrests Thursday of 44 public officials and religious leaders in New Jersey in an ongoing corruption sting tells citizens everything they need to know about politics in this state: greed is rampant, money trumps ethics and too many public officials are still willing to sell their souls for the almighty buck.

It also confirms, as we have long maintained, that the ethics reforms approved by the Democratic-controlled Legislature over the past few years to address the state's culture of corruption were grossly inadequate.

Among the 29 officials charged with public corruption, mostly for bribe-taking, were two assemblymen, a former assemblyman and the mayors of Hoboken, Secaucus and Ridgefield. Federal prosecutors said the arrests were part of the Operation Bid Rig investigation, which brought down more than 20 Monmouth County officials in 2005. Four people from the Shore area were charged Thursday, including Assemblyman Daniel Van Pelt, R-Ocean, and Lakewood building inspector Jeffrey Williamson, a former Democratic Assembly candidate.

A second track of the investigation resulted in 14 arrests in an international money-laundering scheme. Among those charged were Eliahu Ben Haim of Long Branch, principal rabbi of Congregation Ohel Yaacob in Deal, and Edmund Nahum, of Deal, the principal rabbi of Deal Synagogue.

At a press conference Thursday, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph Marra Jr. spoke of his disgust at "the pervasive nature of corruption in the state." He called corruption "a way of life" for public officials, who "existed in an ethics-free zone." He noted that "giant loopholes" remain in campaign donation rules that contribute to the problem — rules Gov. Jon Corzine, Senate President Richard Codey and the Democratic leadership have refused to tighten.



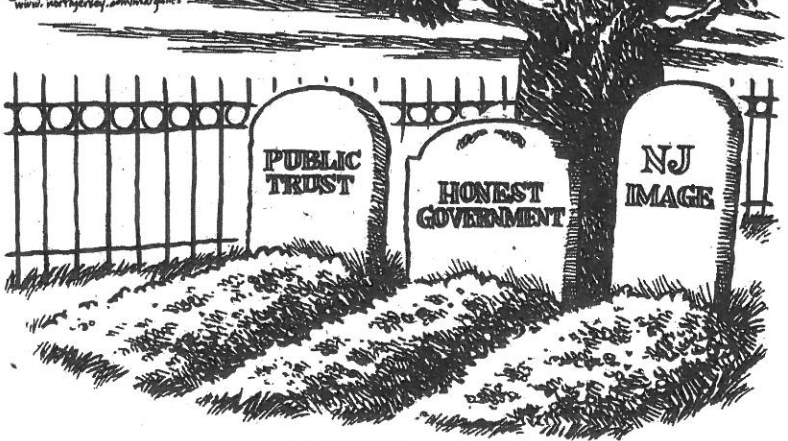
Van Pelt



Williamson

Van Pelt, former mayor of Ocean Township (Waretown), was charged with taking \$10,000 from a cooperating witness to help smoothe the permit process for a multi-use development. Williamson was charged with taking \$15,000 in bribes to overlook code problems in buildings owned by the same witness, who though not identified by name is apparently Solomon Dwek. His well-publicized 2006 arrest on bank fraud charges would have been a warning bell with

MARQUIES
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MEMORIAL
The Garden State

YOUR VIEWS

Current health plans should be continued

We have a good health care system that is generally responsive to needs. My experience has been that most people are generally satisfied with their medical care and coverage. Yes, sometimes we hear of someone who is requesting a service that is not approved by the insurance company, but that is the exception. And yes, we all would like to pay less for our insurance. However, most people consider their health care good and dependable.

Some politicians want to make health care universal. Our Constitution does not provide for universal health care. However, if we feel it is our moral obligation to provide health care insurance to everyone, let's not destroy the current system to accommodate the uninsured. This additional plan should not be constructed so it encourages employers to discontinue their current plans. If anything, those employers should be rewarded for providing the coverage they do.

Tom Mitchell
HOLMDEL

Nothing backhanded about Fort Hancock

I am writing to set the record straight concerning the June 30 op-ed "Park service continues its smoke-and-mirrors game."

All the steps we have taken to save Fort Hancock have been done in full consultation with government attorneys, contract specialists and business management professionals. Two federal courts and



Tribune Media Services/MICHAEL OSBURN

Save your pennies, buy a political office

Are millionaires who run for a political office a threat to our democracy? Some of these well-heeled individuals change political affiliation at will, such as Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York City. Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani was barred from running for a third term due to term limits, but wait. Bloomberg is running for a third term. What happened? The New York City Council abolished term limits for him. And no one can compete with Bloomberg's money.

In New Jersey, we have a millionaire who wanted to be a U.S. senator. An unknown, Jon Corzine first became a senator, then decided he wanted to be governor. So what happened? Senate President Richard Codey, who was acting governor, stepped aside.

In spite of his dismal record, Corzine has unlimited financial resources to be able to convince enough voters to re-elect him.

To young people aspiring for political office, I say, save your pennies. Someday you may be able to

We've seen this before, in one of the most disgraceful episodes in American history, and one that was also foisted by Democrats during World War II: The forced internment of 120,000 Japanese-Americans into camps with barbed wire and machine gun towers.

Obamists would give two unelected government officials power to legally declare someone a "domestic terrorist" and send them to a government-run camp. Obamists were hysterical about this kind of action during the Bush administration, even though none of it occurred. Obama and his supporters are destroying our First Amendment freedoms.

Garrett Stasse
OCEAN TOWNSHIP

NJ Transit fizzled at Kaboom! fireworks

A big "thumb's up" to Red Bank and a huge "thumb's down" to NJ Transit for the Kaboom! fireworks event.

On the Web sites of app.com and NJ Transit, spectators were urged to take the train. The NJ Transit Web site said six additional trains would be added to the North Jersey Coast Line to accommodate customers traveling to Red Bank. Sounds good.

Not only was the train from Aberdeen a half hour late, it was an old-style, single-level model that was packed in an unsafe manner due to two hours' worth of passengers waiting. Conductors were unable to collect fares, cheating the people who had the foresight to buy tickets in advance out of their money.

The ride home was worse.