

The ADVOCATE

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Editorial

Jobs saved, but what's to come?

Kudos to the Stamford police union for coming around and working with the city to save the jobs of 20 officers who were slated to be laid off due to the budget crunch.

The cops had been the lone holdout among the city's labor unions. The others had averted layoffs by agreeing to renegotiate contracts to help close a budget gap that was created when the Board of Finance slashed the upcoming fiscal year's salary accounts. (The teachers have refused to renegotiate, too, but they're not considered a "city" union, per se, because they come under the Board of Education in the budget.)

It would have been a terrible outcome to lose the 20 officers, many of whom likely would have been snatched up by neighboring communities, taking with them the large investments of time and money Stamford has made to train them.

Police union president Sgt. Joseph Kennedy had strong words in announcing the agreement, which police and the city reached in last-minute negotiations.

"Stamford really needs to evaluate how they manage things, and I do blame the Board of Finance for this as my membership does," he said.

We'll take the second part of that first: Sgt. Kennedy is wrong

The Issue:
Having avoided police layoffs, city must now chart course for its future.

to blame the Board of Finance, which had to act in order to save residents from a property tax increase that was simply too high. The budget that Mayor Dannel Malloy presented to the board called for a tax hike of nearly 7 percent for the next fiscal year — at a time when many of the people who'd have to pay it are losing their jobs or taking big salary cuts. It could not stand.

Sgt. Kennedy is absolutely right, however, when he says Stamford has some re-evaluating to do. Stamford taxpayers have been hit hard in recent years, and they need a break. At the same time, this is a diverse, not-so-small city with lots of moving parts. Getting a handle on spending calls for difficult prioritizing and clear-eyed vision.

How fortunate that we have a mayor's race that should be kicking off in earnest ... oh, any moment now. And how fortunate that we have candidates with backgrounds that should enable them to offer specific ideas for finding economies without gutting necessary ser-

vices.

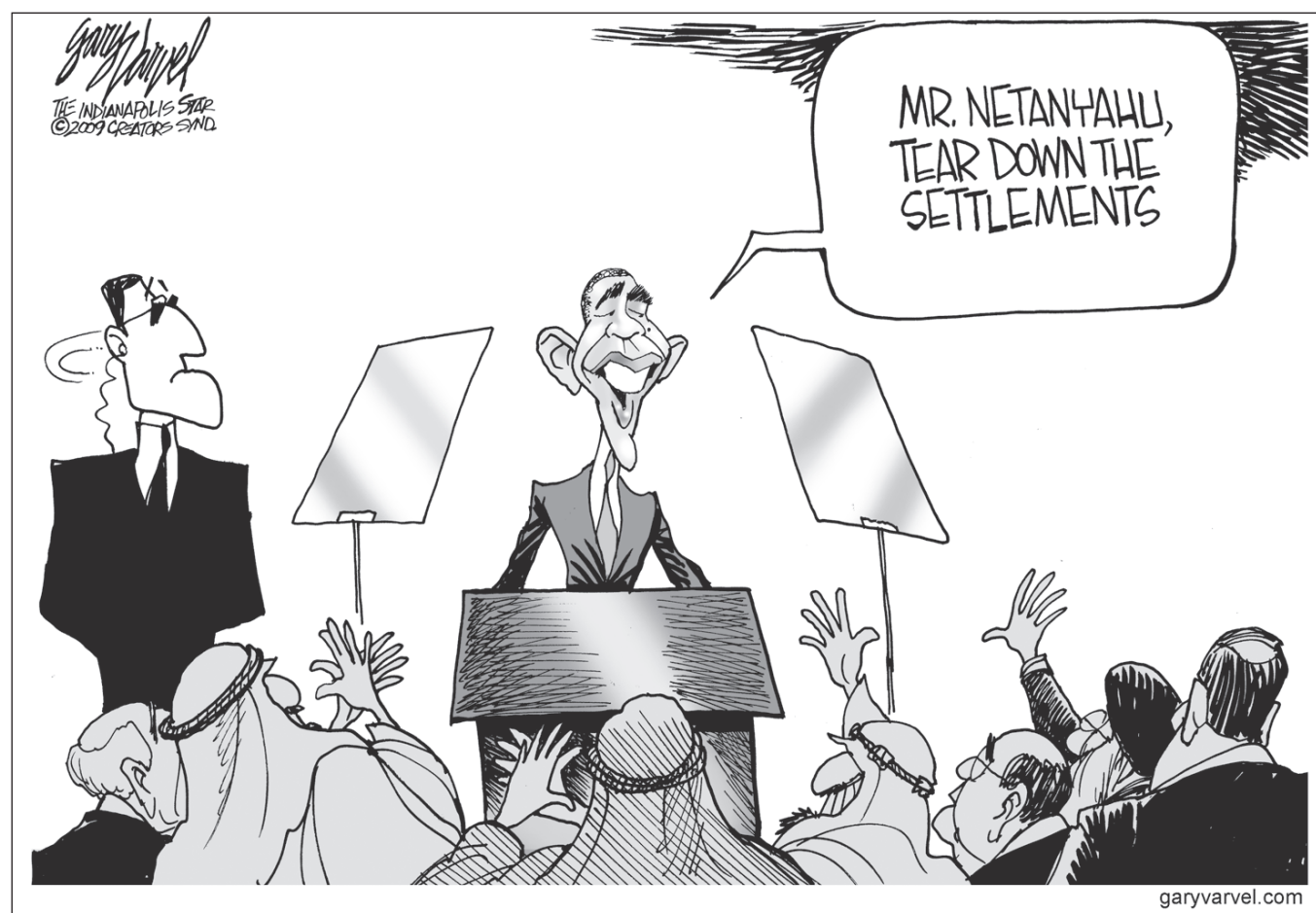
The Republican candidate, Michael Pavia, is a former Board of Representatives member and a developer with a background in urban planning. On the Democratic side, Board of Finance member and former chairman Timothy Abbazia is vying for his party's nomination against Board of Representatives President David Martin. They in particular should know the ins and outs of the city budget better than almost anyone else in Stamford.

There's little-to-no learning curve with these guys. At least, there shouldn't be. Given the times, there's no reason why this should be a typical race marked by vague promises. We should demand from the candidates not just platitudes, but their concrete plans for the city.

If they feel it's time to seek greater concessions from town unions, tell us how it would be done. There are many big-ticket capital items on, or potentially on, the horizon — Mill River Park renovation/downtown trolley/waste-to-energy plant. Can we move forward as planned? Should we?

That's a mere scratching of the surface. But it's a way of saying that if these guys want votes, they are going to have to deliver goods up front.

Gary Varvel's View



Saving GM just part of economic recovery

When General Dwight D. Eisenhower was president of the United States, Charles E. Wilson was appointed secretary of defense. He left his position as head of General Motors to accept the honor, and a short time following his appointment, he made a statement that anyone of my generation will find difficult to forget. The gist of it was: "What's good for General Motors is good for the country."

To be fair to Wilson, he was misquoted somewhat, but he was severely criticized at the time for what he said.

Last week, we taxpayers became owners of General Motors to save the company from extinction. In other words, the White House stepped in and rescued General Motors from financial disaster, and made it possible for it to stay in business — proving, in a way, the statement of Charles E. Wilson, 10 those many years ago, that it is good to have General Motors around.

Admittedly, it would be disastrous to allow the icon of auto-



Don Russell

mobile manufacturing to the world to go belly up. Where would we be without our Buicks or Chevrolets? We are going to give up the thoughts of buying a new Pontiac. GM will drop that brand among others. One might wish to possess a new Pontiac to put up on blocks to preserve it for posterity.

At any rate, GM is getting a new start courtesy of the taxpayers of this great country. So, severely criticized though he was at the time, Charles Wilson's wisdom came true on Monday, June 1. As taxpayers, our best hope is that what is good for General Motors will be good for us.

We know about Chrysler, and now GM, but what about

Ford? Apparently, the company that created the assembly line has decided to do it on its own. Ford asks for nothing except for people to buy its cars. After all, the company started the car business by Henry Ford's creation of the Model T. And, the company will chug along with no help from us taxpayers.

So what does this all mean? Not only for the automobile industry but for the local storekeepers and other businesses that are feeling the recession? Is anyone coming to their rescue? Or do they just sit and wait, struggling to stay in business?

The so-called stimulus bill is supposed to help by creating jobs for those who have been thrown out of work. We can only hope that it works, and that the actions of the Barack Obama administration will mirror the New Deal fostered by the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration that helped pull the country from the jaws of the Great Depression.

Back then, the country started to move in the proper finan-

cial direction by the creation of government programs that provided employment to those willing to work.

Before the Great Depression, banks all over the country started to fail. There was a rush on the banks. People wanted their money that they had deposited. The government intervention of the New Deal and the creation of regulatory agencies stabilized the banking and financial institutions.

Through all of the bank problems, there was a run on the stock market, and the institution that had created millionaires in a few days created paupers. The talk was that some men were flying out of the windows of the big buildings on Wall Street (though that didn't actually happen nearly as often as is believed). The country was in financial chaos.

But Franklin Roosevelt guided the country out of the financial mess it was in at the time.

Don Russell is a columnist for The Advocate. His e-mail address is HuyWrtr@aol.com.

Letters from readers

Himes should pay fair rent for office space

To the editor:

How generous it was for city administrators to give U.S. Rep. Jim Himes a discount of over \$12,000 on the first year of rent for offices on the Stamford Government Center's 10th floor. Ben Barnes stated in the March 16 Board of Reps Legislative and Rules Committee meeting that it is the administration's position that it is valuable to the city to retain the representative as a tenant, and that after speaking with other members of the administration, he decided to offer the lease to Mr. Himes at cost.

However, there was slim chance that Mr. Himes would vacate if he were charged rent at anything near the rate of the previous tenant, Congressman Chris Shays. The Advocate reported that Mr. Himes' staff had moved in on Inauguration Day, that his business cards already bore the Government Center address, and that his spokeswoman said he was intent on keeping an office in Stamford and, "The congressman will continue to seek cost-savings opportunities to ensure taxpayer dollars are used in the most efficient way possible." She was oblivious to the irony of that statement on several levels.

Part of the lease document is the U.S. Congress' District Office Lease Attachment. Item 21 states, "This lease is entered into at fair market value as the result of a bona fide, arms-length marketplace transaction."

Perhaps before he personally signs this lease as he is required to do, Mr. Himes — the recipient of \$1.4 million to cover his expenses — might take his cue from state Sen. Scott Frantz, who quietly declined any salary for his own public service. Perhaps Mr. Himes might rise toward that noble ideal and place before his own relatively slight expense those local constituents who elected him and who are now expected to bear — in a trying economic environment — the burden of his discount.

Perhaps the city's administration might occasionally make as its priorities the financial health of the city and the residents whom it serves, and at least have the appearance of propriety, instead of its personal joy in partisan camaraderie.

Claudia Puff
Stamford

Sacrificing trees

To the editor:

I'm so sad to see over 20 trees on Center Street scheduled to be cut down in order to have new sidewalks. The tranquil, bucolic tree-lined street will in a few weeks look bare and sterile.

Why? I'd rather walk over a bumpy sidewalk than have a bare-looking street. Also, these trees absorb carbon dioxide and give off needed oxygen.

I think the city should use the funds for keeping police and teachers on the payroll.

Sal Buchetto
Stamford

Cigar memories

To the editor:

I need to comment on Mark Drought's Viewpoint article (April 24) concerning the changing policy on the Cuban embargo. But his comments on Cuban cigars more than tickled my nicotine nefariousness. I have a long history with tobacco farming and the cigar industry.

During the Great Depression, from age 14 to 16, I worked in the tobacco fields along the Connecticut River. That was a time when tobacco was considered a wholesome product and was used with sophistication. A major motion picture about the tobacco industry ("Parrish," featuring Troy Donahue) was filmed here on location in 1961.

When school let out, Consolidated Cigar Co. would truck us to the fields and return us at day's end. We worked nine-hour days for 25 cents an hour. The tobacco was shade-grown, cultivated under huge fields of white netting.

Picking tobacco was delicate agriculture and required special training. A Mercurochrome marker on the inside of your forearm measured the correct length of the leaf to be picked. A special technique was required to keep from tearing the leaf. When

brought to the shed, the leaves were put in bundles and hoisted above to be dried by charcoal fire pots. Occasionally, a shed (they were as big as a football field) would catch on fire. There were spectacular blazes, especially at night.

When I turned 17, I joined the Navy, and my cigar history followed me. At a ship's store, you could buy a box of White Owls for 50 cents. While at anchor and the smoking lamp was lit after working hours, the crew would gather on the fantail or up in the gun tubs to relax until lights out. Smoking or playing pinocle was the usual. You could gamble down in the sail locker, but it meant brig time if you got caught.

Age was no factor being in "this man's Navy," so the "old salts" expected you to light up to show your toughness. I had difficulty hiding my dizziness and often had to go below to recover. There wasn't much laughter as we headed up the line, but my posturing bravado to snooker a veteran crew provided some.

Home after the war, I would celebrate weddings, birthdays, graduations and anniversaries with a Rosedale or a Ramon Allanos. The White Owls we smoked aboard ship were "ropes" by comparison.

This brings me to the essence of Mr. Drought's article. Being a cigar smoker, he can't wait to taste a premium Cuban cigar. I assume he is referring to a Cohiba at \$25 a pop. I'll pass. Too pricey and dicey for me.

All of this cigar talk reminds me of my two favorite quotes: "There are two things a man never forgets — his first love and his first cigar," by John Bain. And this by Mark Twain: "If I cannot smoke my cigar in heaven, then I shall not go."

Do you know that most presidents, after a trying day, relaxed by smoking a good cigar?

John P. Gawlak
Stamford

Animal-ban vote

To the editor:

The Advocate's editorial, "Still time to act on animals ban" (June 1), expressed concern that with only three days left, the General Assembly might not have had the required time to pass the badly needed wild-pet-ban bill, HB 6552.

For a moment, it did appear that the bill would die because lawmakers from Litchfield County wanted to protect and exempt Comerford Farm in Goshen, a family-run farm that owns several elephants!

The Sunday bow-hunting amendment that was attached to the bill had much opposition from supporters of HB 6552. One might ask, "What does Sunday bow hunting have to do with banning wild and dangerous pet ownership?" Absolutely nothing — as much as the famous credit card bill that included an amendment allowing national parks visitors to carry weapons!

It is time that legislators vote on a bill on its own merits; they should not be allowed to attach totally unrelated amendments — this shameful practice of wheeling and dealing in smoke-filled back rooms should be abolished.

The Sunday bow-hunting amendment created a real dilemma for supporters of HB 6552: In order to pass a badly needed bill, they would in fact also be supporting something to which they were vehemently opposed, such as Sunday bow hunting, which ultimately was deleted.

Gorillas, chimpanzees and orangutans were added to the 2004 list of prohibited animals in direct response to the Stamford incident in which a woman was seriously mauled by a chimp.

After big compromises, a watered-down HB 6552 passed in the 11th hour!

Natalie Jarnstedt
Greenwich

The Advocate welcomes letters reflecting readers' diverse views. Those of 350 words or fewer are given preference. Letters are edited for grammar, clarity, accuracy and brevity. Address and day and evening telephone numbers are required for verification purposes, although this information is not published. Address letters to: Letters to the Editor, The Advocate, 9 Riverbend Drive S., Building 9A, Stamford, CT 06907. Letters also can be submitted by fax (964-2345) or at letters.advocate@scni.com.