

# Let's work together to reverse state's 'brain drain'

By Nariman Farvardin

The end of April is final decision time for New Jersey's high school seniors. Colleges have offered acceptances and students are now evaluating where to spend their college years. If they are like the graduates before them, however, many will choose a school outside New Jersey — leaving the state, and their potential contributions to it, behind.

Despite significant challenges, New Jersey does a commendable job of K-12 education. It ranks second in the nation in fourth- and eighth-grade reading scores, fourth in fourth-grade math scores and third in eighth-grade math scores, according to the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress.

And New Jersey's high school graduation rate consistently ranks among the highest in the United States.

Meanwhile, all this progress comes at significant cost: Per-student spending on K-12 public education for

2009-10 was highest among the 50 states and second-highest in 2010-11, according to National Education Association research.

New Jersey residents clearly care about education and invest heavily in it. But are we benefiting from the investment?

The answer is surprising and a bit disturbing: Many of our talented students leave New Jersey for college. And it is known that when students leave their home states for higher education, they often don't return afterward. This human capital flight, otherwise known as "brain drain," is costly and must be reversed.

In fact, New Jersey ranks first in the nation in annual net loss of graduating high school seniors to colleges and universities in other states. Each year, the state loses 28,000 more highly educated high school seniors to other states than it attracts, according to the organization Postsecondary Education Opportunity. This number comprises more than one-third of all annual college-bound high

school graduates from New Jersey.

Why does this matter? Let's focus on dollars and cents. Using conservative estimates, the cost to raise 28,000 children to age 18 and cover their college expenses for four more years is more than \$10 billion per year. That bears repeating: The citizens of New Jersey spend \$10 billion each year to ship 28,000 of our talented young men and women to other states.

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And this figure doesn't even account for the opportunity cost of losing the labor and intellect of these 28,000 after they join the workforce: taxes they pay, homes they buy, companies they build, new jobs they create, the overall positive impact they have on the state's economy and

the societal contributions they make.

New Jersey's economy is larger than all but 19 nations in the world. The state's total annual economic output — approximately \$500 billion — exceeds that of Belgium, Sweden, Norway, New Zealand, Argentina and Ireland. Each dedicates significant effort and resources to educating, training and retaining its most talented students. New Jersey cannot afford not to do the same.

We must ensure that talented young people remain in New Jersey in greater numbers, living and working here, building families and communities, paying taxes, buying homes and creating a vibrant economic future for the state that has paid to educate them so well.

Other states such as Maine, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Iowa and Nebraska are experimenting with incentives, tax breaks and other innovative methods to stop their brain drains or achieve a brain gain. One simple and fairly inexpensive solution is to develop

a scholarship program, crafted to focus on the cream of the crop and on students in targeted fields who are more likely to contribute to economic development or address the state's critical workforce needs.

By retaining more of its best and brightest students, New Jersey will position itself to recruit and retain more of the enterprises that have historically made the state's economy innovative and formidable: the Johnson & Johnsons, Mercks, Honeywells, ADPs and Bell Labs, for which this state is famed, and perhaps even the next Facebook or Google.

New Jersey can begin building an even brighter future by making the state a more attractive and financially viable option for its own most-talented students. An in-state scholarship program is one step. It is imperative we explore remedies and begin a critical dialogue immediately.

*Nariman Farvardin is president of Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken. Have an opinion? Go to njvoices.com.*

## Tea party: Republican friend or foe?

By Rob Eichmann

Faced with a tough primary re-election battle with a fellow incumbent Democrat, U.S. Rep. Bill Pascrell (D-8th Dist.) has reached into his election bag of tricks and pulled out the one he hopes will turn it all around — the tea party.

No, the congressman isn't running with the tea party; he's running against it. And that could make the difference for him. Gone are the days when the tea party hoped to be a bridge between the parties of those fed up with "politics as usual." Nowadays, the tea party is viewed by many voters — especially swing voters — as angry, divisive, partisan and, in some instances, racist.

It's not hard to see why. Tea party websites post representations of President Obama as a ghetto pimp. E-mails compare the first lady to a chimpanzee. Until recently, one website had a whole section devoted to "racial issues." And while most tea party members steer clear of this, some of the biggest mouths in the movement promote it.

Go on the Facebook pages of some of these tea party groups and you'll find references to "shooting lefties." One group posted a photo of its Obama punching bag. Really, a punching bag? There's an image to win over swing voters: Middle-aged tea

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partiers punching and kicking the president's picture. I bet the Taliban has one just like it.

I don't like Barack Obama, and I don't like his policies, but he is the president. To the world, he is the face of America and that's just the way it's going to be until we have an election. One thing is certain: We won't win that election if some of our friends in the tea party keep up their antics.

It didn't start out this way. There was a time when the tea party represented a hope for conservatives and for America. The tea party started out as a grassroots reaction to the liberalism of the new administration in Washington and its overreaching programs. The new movement focused on the bailout, cap-and-trade and Obamacare. Across the country, there was a kind of awakening among those who had been disconnected from the political process.

Unfortunately, there were so many new volunteers, they burst the old pathways of activism, spreading in all directions. Existing conservative groups simply couldn't organize them quickly enough and, without a leadership to provide focus, dozens of local warlords — each with his or her view of the world — began to call the shots.

In place of the old Reagan coalition, we now have many tribes. The chiefs of these tribes do not have much political experience. Many didn't even bother to vote before 2009 and most will tell you that they "woke up" only after the election of President Obama. They don't understand that democracy — especially representative democracy — requires patience and compromise. That's the way a republic works.

Conspiracy theories abound. Neophytes nurture distrust toward anyone active before 2009. Veteran conservatives are attacked simply because they were fighting for conservative principles when many in the tea party couldn't be bothered to vote. It is too early to tell how this will turn out. The tea party could incorporate itself into the larger conservative movement, adding new strength, or it could go down its own road — making eccentric demands of candidates that destroy their prospects for election. Oddly enough, we faced this before. Back then, Ronald Reagan and Bill Buckley drove out the conspiracy theorists and racists — and the modern conservative movement was born.

*Rob Eichmann is a Republican state committeeman from Gloucester County. Keep the conversation going at njvoices.com.*



ILLUSTRATION BY BARRIE MAGUIRE

## People are going green, but governments forget

By Jeff Tittel

I have been involved in every Earth Day for 40 years and this is the most difficult one I have seen. As more people "go green," buying green products, recycling and driving electric or hybrid cars, the government is doing the opposite.

The environment is now a big part of our economy. We have more than 50,000 green jobs, 25,000 in clean energy. New Jersey is No. 2 in solar in the nation. We installed more than 80 megawatts of solar in one month and have surpassed 10,000 solar installations. The government's actions undermine clean air, clean water and our economy.

Gov. Chris Christie is playing to the national Republican Party by weakening environmental protections in New Jersey. The Koch brothers-funded American Legislative Exchange Council is behind the blueprint for Christie's

rollbacks, including the executive order calling for no state rules stricter than federal standards, the DEP waiver rule, the Red Tape Review Group and pulling out of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. He is putting polluter interests before our state's interests.

Christie diverted \$210 million from the Clean Energy Fund for this year's budget. This money is supposed to be dedicated to energy efficiency, weatherization and renewable energy programs. An additional \$42 million is being taken to pay for the lights in government buildings, diverting almost all the funding.

The governor is trying to weaken protections in the Highlands with appointees to the Highlands Council who have actively opposed the law they are charged to implement and removed the council's executive director. The governor's State Strategic Plan weakens protections in the Highlands and Pinelands by requiring those plans to conform to the Strategic Plan's growth goals.

The DEP has been holding "stakeholder" meetings with special interests to rewrite and weaken important water quality rules, including groundwater protection, the Stormwater Management and Flood Hazard Area rules, and sewer service areas under the Water Quality Management Planning rules. This will allow more development in environmentally sensitive areas. The governor also vetoed three bills that would have cleaned up pollution in Barnegat Bay.

In Washington, congressional representatives have introduced and voted on bills to gut major EPA regulations on cleaning up and regulating climate change pollution, and reducing pollution from coal-fired power plants. Some of these measures have been passed in the House.

The Obama administration released a draft plan to allow oil and gas exploration off our coast. This testing could eventually lead to oil and gas drilling in the Mid-Atlantic.

Unconventional natural gas drilling through "fracking" is one of the biggest threats to our water in generations, as more than 700 chemicals — many known carcinogens — are used in the process. Fracking is exempt from important federal environmental laws, including Safe Drinking Water Act and Superfund under the "Halliburton loophole." Legislation to end these loopholes has been blocked. Christie blocked legislation banning fracking in New

Jersey. We have failed to deal with climate change at the state and national levels.

In 1971, 16 million people nationwide took part in environmental workshops and trainings. When President Richard Nixon vetoed the Clean Water Act in 1972, half a million people showed up to protest, leading to its final signing into law.

It is up to us if we want to make environmental changes. Public outcry ended ocean dumping and passed the Clean Air and Clean Water acts. The protection of the Great Swamp, Sterling Forest, Highlands and Pinelands all came about because of citizen action.

Forty years ago, we saw rivers catch fire. Now, we need to light a fire under politicians to protect the environment again.

The only way to counter this anti-environmental agenda and special interest money from the Citizens United decision is to learn the lessons of the past.

We must become a mass movement again, educating the public and becoming more politically active. It's not just what we do and what we buy; we need to change the political system.

As we celebrate this Earth Day, we have to realize we are the only ones who can make the changes needed to protect our families, environment and green economy.

*Jeff Tittel is director of the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club. Share your thoughts at njvoices.com.*

## State should butt out of Medco merger

By Jerry Cantrell

The Federal Trade Commission's April 2 approval of the \$29 billion merger between St. Louis-based Express Scripts Inc. and Medco Health Solutions Inc. of Franklin Lakes raises interesting questions due to the New Jersey Legislature's recent attempt to block the joint venture.

Sponsored by Assemblywoman Linda Stender (D-Union), AR64 urged Gov. Chris Christie to oppose the merger.

Express Scripts, the largest U.S. pharmacy benefits manager, received regulatory approval for its acquisition of Medco Health Solutions in an agreement that may drive down medication costs for the company and consumers. Yet some New Jersey legislators opposed the deal, claiming local Medco operations could be "cut back significantly, leading to ... layoffs here in the state." Ironic, as the hostile resolution is an encouragement for Medco to leave.

As with most mergers, there are redundancies. The emerging company has two accounting, human resources, legal and information technology divisions, where immediate savings can be found.

Understandably, there is concern over the impact on employment. With any merger affecting New Jersey, discussions should occur in state government departments responsible for our overall fiscal health. But government should not overstep its bounds by interfering in the private sector, except where there is an obvious breach of law. If that occurs, statutes already exist allowing swift consequences for violations. This is not such a case.

The rush to judgment should not ignore the obvious upside. If the proposition is successful, and New Jersey is supportive in a business-friendly way, there is just as likely to be an expansion of the local employment base.

As noted by Bloomberg News, "The Federal Trade Commission approved the purchase by a 3-1 vote. ... The combined company will save as much as \$1 billion in costs. ... The benefits manager's ... size will give it the negotiating power to drive down prices on prescription drugs and from retailers."

Success begets success and some potentially displaced workers could become vendors to the new entity — or entrepreneurs spinning off competitive ventures. That's the way the free market works. Shouldn't we be looking at the overall consumer benefit?

Free-market based competition is a good thing for the economy and, since virtually everyone uses medicine, it stands to reason that, in the end, we will all be better off with lower prices. While there's always fear of the unknown, we must look at what has made our economy the world leader. America's economy is based on competition, and this is especially true as states compete to attract and keep business. When did competition become a bad thing? Without competition, we'd still be carrying mobile phones the size of bricks.

Legislatures should not dictate winners and losers in the private sector. That would be a formula for disaster. We have enough problems balancing what our economy can sustain against the high cost of the public sector.

This merger should not be second-guessed by elected officials. Let the market decide its fate and welcome all comers to the Garden State. In the end, it's the most logical approach.

*Jerry Cantrell is president of the Common Sense Institute of New Jersey. Join the conversation at njvoices.com.*

**Government shouldn't interfere in the private sector, except when the law has been broken.**