

Guest Editorial

Is This What You Call Reform?

Reform and transparency have been the topic of much discussion in the last few years. There has been a lot of talk, some action and now a proposal that would be a huge step in the wrong direction.

We're talking about a push by local governments to take public notices out of newspapers and put them on government Web sites. They claim that it would be cheaper and more convenient for the public. At best, these claims are misguided. At worst, they are misleading and promote government secrecy and cronyism.

Make no mistake about it. This proposal is not about saving money. It's about limiting access and hiding government action from the public.

Let's examine the claims used to promote Senate Bill 419.

First, supporters claim that putting public notices on government Web sites would save money. Not so. Public records show that regardless of a municipality's size - from the City of Philadelphia to the smallest borough - only about one-half of 1 percent of operating expenditures is spent on public notices - and often even less. Even advocates of the bill admit that it won't solve a single fiscal problem.

And don't forget the cost of creating the government Web sites - which must be secure, archivable and current. A Department of State Web database site cost more than \$600,000 initially, with an annual cost of about \$60,000. And that's only one Web site. This bill would invite every local government to create its own.

Of course, those figures don't even begin to calculate the negative cost to the public - of not having an independent, verifiable repository for public notices. What is the cost of not knowing that your school board is about to raise your taxes, because the meeting notice was hidden on its Web site? What about not getting notice that your neighbor wants to build a garage on the property line you share? Don't you want to know that a developer has applied to build a new strip mall on the field behind your home?

Those pushing this bill also claim that it will be "easier" for the public to find notices on government Web sites. Again, not true. First, the bill does not establish any standards for how or

where these notices must be placed. As a result, the 4,000+ local governments in Pennsylvania would likely put notices on their individual sites. Good luck finding them there, if you even know where to look.

Do the bill's supporters know that Web traffic statistics show that very few people go to government Web sites? If this bill becomes law, public notices will be effectively hidden from public view and could be manipulated to benefit "friendly" contractors or developers. No reform there.

Even more significant, census figures show that many Pennsylvanians - up to 30 percent - still do not have Internet access. Those people will be completely cut out of the process. Who are our elected officials serving with this bill? Certainly not those voters.

Finally, newspapers already post notices on the Internet, at no cost to government or the public. In 1999, Pennsylvania newspapers created www.MyPublicNotices.com, a robust, searchable database of public notices published by newspapers across the state, uploaded daily.

Public notices are important. They are part of the three-legged stool that protects the public's right to participate in government - including public records, open meetings, and public notices. Allowing governments to control their own Internet notices would eliminate independent, verifiable notices and would be tantamount to the fox building the henhouse and deciding how strong it needs to be or not. That's not our idea of reform.

Do newspapers benefit from public notices? Of course. But we all benefit when we know what our government is up to. Newspapers, more than perhaps any other business, serve the public interest by informing the public about government activities and spending. They accomplish this by pushing for greater access to government, studying public records, covering local meetings and publishing public notices.

Public notices must remain public. Please write, telephone, or e-mail your senators today and urge them to vote "no" on Senate Bill 419.

*Ted William,
President
Pennsylvania Newspaper
Association*

CF Election

From Page One

of several community members to submit a letter of interest in hopes of being named the school board's newest director. Even though she and other hopefuls were not chosen, Garlock has held on to her dreams of serving the community as well as her children.

"Student education and safety are my main concerns, and those are qualities I will always have and always put first," said Garlock, who, along with her husband, is co-owner of Daljcon LLC Steel Erectors in McConnellsburg.

With 14 years of business knowledge and just as many years being a mom to four children, Marleigh, Dalton, Blake and Donovan, the McConnellsburg resident stated she always remains open to both sides of a story to make an informed and firm decision.

As an example to her openness, Garlock said she sees both sides to the issue proposed by Gov. Ed Rendell in recent months to reduce the number of school districts across the commonwealth through consolidation. Garlock indicated that education may suffer due to larger classes and less one-on-one instruction. In addition, those students involved in extracurricular activities may be left behind due to a smaller number of available playing slots. However, possible taxpayer and state money could be saved through such an action, she countered.

"Whether the situation pertains to our students, faculty, taxpayers or district issues, I will make the best decision for our students and all involved," she said. "... I want to be involved in the decisions that affect our children's future, no matter how big or how small. I feel it is pertinent that we have a group of people making these decisions that are not only knowledgeable and caring but that have regular interaction with our children, parents, staff and taxpayers."

Eric S. Hollinshead (D/R - 4 yr. term)

Like Garlock, Eric S. Hollinshead of Harrisonville also became interested in serving on his local school board in 2008 and after a line of questioning began the official election process of circulating nominating petitions and going door-to-door earlier this year.

Hollinshead, an avid enthusiast of the outdoors and father of two teenage children, told the "News" his strong ethics would be critical to his success as a school board director. Among

those ethics Hollinshead holds dear to his heart are honesty, sound judgment, dependability, integrity and loyalty.

"My children are in school, and I have always been involved in their education. I believe I would be an asset to the many residents with kids in the district. I want everyone's voice to count, and I can do that," added Hollinshead, who is employed at the Staples distribution center.

Hollinshead related that the number-one role of a board member should be listening to issues and proposals and helping pass or initiate changes based on all the information presented. "We need to keep the parents, children and teachers in mind when making decisions," said Hollinshead.

Hollinshead stated he is opposed to the proposal for consolidation of school districts and made reference to teacher/student ratios as well as possible transportation expenditures and vacant and expanded facilities. He concluded that while the proposed consolidation was launched with the notion that money could be saved through the elimination of administrative positions, there would be no guarantee that jobs would be lost, but additional jobs could be created.

Ryan B. Richards (D/R - 4 yr. term)

When his eldest daughter, Lexi, started school approximately four years ago, Ryan B. Richards again found himself immersed in school life. Years later, the 1995 graduate of McConnellsburg High School now has two daughters, ages 9 and 7, enrolled at McConnellsburg Elementary. His active interest in serving the district and community as a whole has become so overwhelming, he decided to try his hand in politics this spring by vying for a four-year seat on the school's board of directors. The number-one role of any board member, according to Richards, is to best represent the needs of the community for the students and the taxpayers.

Co-owner of Richards Dairy LLP for nine years, Richards stated his wide range of traits would enable him to contribute to the success of the school district.

"It was my desire for our students to have access to the best primary and secondary education possible that prompted me to run for school board ... I understand the importance of conservative budgeting but at the same time equipping our school with the best tools available for educating our children," he said.

"I would like to see all necessary changes made that would en-

hance the education of our students while still remaining fiscally responsible."

Looking at the governor's proposal on school consolidation, Richards noted at first the idea may seem fiscally responsible. However, he stated it could have an "eroding effect" on children that now receive education in small schools and are in turn forced into a larger system.

"Large public school districts have many different problems due to their scale," Richards stated. "The cost per student could be less but at what cost to their education?"

Matt Wakefield (D/R - 4 yr. term)

Previously interested in filling the vacant seat held by former board member Jeff Culler in early 2008, political newcomer Matt Wakefield, who is far from being a newcomer at the Central Fulton School District, is hoping to bring a new perspective and possibly some fresh ideas to the district he graduated from in 1991.

A resident of McConnellsburg with his wife, Robin, and young sons Elliott and Jasper, Wakefield has been employed at JLG Industries since 1993 and currently serves as the director of technology and infrastructure services.

"I have extensive experience managing people, leading large-scale projects and developing and working within a budget," Wakefield told the "News." "I feel there is a need for continual fresh ideas on the board, and I hope that my experiences may allow me to contribute new ideas and leadership to the board."

If elected, Wakefield he would be interested in seeing the district move toward a "merit pay basis for employees as well as greater transparency in the district's workings" while continuing to stay within budgetary means and providing the best education possible for students, as is the role of any board.

Dealing with finance and figures in his daily employment, Wakefield stated until there is more detail released on Gov. Rendell's plans for consolidation, he could not support it. "While it has been presented as a cost-saving measure, there has not yet been enough detail released to determine if it would in fact save money and what impact it would have on the quality of services provided," he concluded.

Christopher R. Hann (D/R - 2 yr. term)

When he first became a dad eight years ago, Christopher R. Hann of McConnellsburg knew a stint on the local school board should be something he should avidly pursue down the road.

on May 19 in hopes of retaining her seat as magisterial district judge for residents of the McConnellsburg Borough and Ayr and Todd townships. She is currently unopposed on the ballot.

Mellott stated she is seeking her third six-year term of office and touched briefly upon her involvement with and the benefits of the community service program. Mellott said along with fellow judges Devin Horne and Carol Jean Johnson, a total of 100 jail days were saved in 2008. The current cost to house prisoners is \$65 daily.

In return, Mellott noted those ordered to participate in the program are completing a lot of work in the area, which is a direct benefit to the community and area organizations.

Matt Wakefield

The lone school board candidate to appear at the function, Central Fulton School Board candidate Matt Wakefield said he had initially submitted his name a year ago for consideration when a vacancy came to light due to a sudden resignation. Wakefield, who is seeking a four-year term of office, said he views the position as "an opportunity to do something useful in the community."

Wakefield said he is a 1991 graduate of McConnellsburg High School and has served as director of IT infrastructure services for 16 years. He oversees a staff of approximately 30 in his duties at JLG.

Doretta Mellott

Jury commissioner Doretta Mellott is seeking re-election for another term of office and thanked members of the community who have served in the capacity of jurors. Mellott added that her position includes compiling lists of possible jurors and ensuring the selection process is just and fair.

Mellott concluded that several bills have emerged in the state Legislature trying to abolish the position of jury commissioner. Residents were urged to speak to local state representatives and area officials to retain the positions.

With the time now upon him, Hann is one of two area candidates who have chosen to cross-file for a two-year term of office.

A graduate of Forbes Road High School, the now father of three daughters and one son ranging in age from 8 to 1-1/2, is vice president of George S. Hann & Son construction company. "In the fall, I will have three of my children in school. Now more than ever, I feel the need to be involved," said Hann. "I have never shied away from leadership roles. I excel at managing time and a budget."

Hann stated in light of difficult times facing the entire nation, he would look forward as a board member to implementing any necessary changes to aid the district's teachers and staff in continuing to provide the student body with a "priceless education." Furthermore, with so many public schools facing financial difficulties, Hann indicated he would support a decision to consolidate the school district if it meant the continuance of a quality education.

Erika D. Hendershot (D/R - 2 yr. term)

Deeming herself as fair, honest, caring and a good listener, McConnellsburg resident Erika D. Hendershot believes those three characteristics or qualities would serve her well as a school board director with the Central Fulton School District.

A 1995 graduate of McConnellsburg, Hendershot told the "News" she was prompted to run for office now that she has three children of her own attending McConnellsburg Elementary and, if elected, hopes to have a positive influence on the decision-making process at the school. Among those decisions would be finding ways to address the need for additional resources for gifted and special needs students.

"I have grown the desire to want to be aware of school board issues," said Hendershot, who has been employed with Keystone Family Practice for 12 years and in her spare time serves as an assistant coach with the Mercersburg Rockets cheerleading squad.

"Our number-one priority should remain the children and their quality of education," Hendershot said, who noted the educational process locally may be threatened if schools were consolidated. Hendershot noted consolidation would also affect issues such as transportation.

"The children need to be what we consider first. However, I do believe that there could be some good aspects to combining some schools," she concluded.

JLG

From Page One

"The ATLAS units are deployed to many bases and then deployed worldwide. So they could end up most anywhere we have an Army base," said Ford.

The first ATLAS II units are scheduled for delivery in September.

The company also got a Foreign Military Sales order valued at \$3.6 million from the U.S. Army's Tank-automotive Armaments Command (TACOM) for 54 JLG G6-23A telehandlers. JLG said in a statement released Friday that this order is the latest under a 2006 contract with TACOM for JLG telehandlers. It brings the total value of that contract to \$26 million and 386 units, all of which are working in the field for the Afghan and Iraqi governments.

The G6-23A telehandler has a maximum lifting capacity of 6,600 pounds and a maximum lifting height of 23 feet. It can be used with a side range of attachments, including buckets, bale clamps and work platforms, to enhance its flexibility. "JLG telehandlers have a myriad of applications and have proven to be exceptionally useful and reliable tools for military forces around the world," said Buterbaugh.

Delivery of the 54 telehandlers, which, according to Buterbaugh, are headed to Iraq to assist the Iraqi military with construction and rebuilding, is scheduled to begin in August. Both the ATLAS II and the G6-23A will be built at JLG's McConnellsburg plant.

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Spring Banquet

From Page One

and time management. He added after much deliberation he opted to launch a campaign for the county office as a result of missing involvement in the court system.

"My background and education would serve me well in the position," Fletcher stated. "... I don't have a lot of political experience but when you select a candidate do you want knowledge and background or someone with 15 years in politics?"

"Nobody starts a job as an expert. Everything has to have a starting point ... I'm looking for that starting point," he concluded.

Eric Weisbrod

Making references to his personal background and legal experience, Eric Weisbrod was one of two judicial candidates for the Fulton/Franklin County Court of Common Pleas to appear before local Democrats at the McConnellsburg Firehall on April 18.

Weisbrod, a graduate of Mansfield University and Dickinson School of Law, has been practicing law since 1997 and currently operates his own practice in the Waynesboro area. He has practiced criminal defense, family law and civil law over the years.

Weisbrod mentioned both his personal and legal background would serve him well if elected to one of two available judicial seats. Due to the death of his father at a very young age, Weisbrod stated he was raised solely by his mother, who was responsible for instilling in him both a good work ethic and a sense of perseverance.

"I want to take those attributes with me to the bench," said Weisbrod.

Weisbrod told those on hand that not one candidate knows everything and urged registered voters to make an educated decision by looking for a solid-core person with a good foundation.

Angela Rosenberry Krom

A native of the Chambersburg area, Angela Rosenberry

Krom also touted her folks' parenting skills as the reason and basis for her "good foundation" in life. Since graduating from Elizabethtown and the Dickinson School of Law, Krom has been employed for 13 years with the Franklin County District Attorney's Office as a full-time district attorney.

Krom noted she has "more than held her own" against criminals and some of the best defense attorneys around on a variety of cases, including armed robberies, drug trafficking and sexual assaults. Outside of the courtroom, Krom said she has worked with current District Attorney Jack Nelson in revitalizing the county drug task force that now consists of a three-person department.

Krom said further that while the campaign trail often takes its toll on a family, and especially young children, her son, Riley, realizes that her work stems from wanting him to have a safe home and environment.

"I believe in our communities and keeping them safe and secure for our children and grandchildren," she concluded.

Julie Shearer

One of two Democratic candidates seeking the party's lone nomination for Ayr Township tax collector on May 19, Julie Shearer noted, if elected, she hopes to serve in a way similar to current tax collector Arlene Nesbitt.

"Everytime I've paid my taxes, Arlene always greeted me with a hello and a come on in," said Shearer. "That's how I want to be."

Shearer is a stay-at-home mom and helps operate her family's rental business. She said that being at home and not always on the go would be an asset to Ayr Township taxpayers, who need a tax collector who is available for them.

Fellow Democrat candidate Kim Fisher was also scheduled to speak at the annual banquet but was unable to due to an emergency.

Wendy Richards Mellott

Incumbent Wendy Richards Mellott, a Democrat, has cross-filed to be listed on both the Democrat and Republican ballots

Let Them Eat Toxic Assets

To The Editor:

As most readers know, the CEOs of the large banks receiving government bailout money have insisted on paying out huge executive bonuses with our taxpayer money, even though the banks performed so poorly that they required huge bailouts in order to just survive. When there was public outcry about the bonuses not being deserved in the face of the economic crisis we are in, CEOs used a variety of justifications and essentially made excuses as to why they had to pay the bonuses anyway.

I was encouraged to read recently that someone, somewhere, suggested bank executives should receive bonuses in the form of toxic assets, instead of our tax money. After all, if toxic assets are good enough for our government to purchase with taxpayer money, then they should be good enough to use as incentive pay to executives who helped make them that way to begin with. If only our leaders would think this logically more often.

Sarah Schoen Duvall
Hustontown

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