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Reaching for the stars includes finding answers in disasters

COLUMN: GREGORY J. RUMMO

Man has always pushed the envelope; whether to travel faster and by a means not tethered to the ground, to explore space or the ocean depths or to split the atom. With each advancement there is always risk associated and often of catastrophic proportion, whether through human ignorance, complacency, bad luck or simply the unpredictability of cause and effect.



GREGORY J. RUMMO

Perhaps it was a safer time when all we had to do was shovel manure from the streets of our towns, when it took months to get a letter in the mail, or to travel coast to coast, when we had to salt our food, eating it by candlelight, and afterwards use the bathroom out back behind the house.

But not content to sit around in the dark smelling horse manure, the great inventors of the world, restless and gifted men that they were and still are, began playing around in their laboratories with the goal to improve life.

Words and concepts such as electricity, antibiotics, radio and TV, internal combustion, airplanes and rockets, nuclear power and microwave radiation, all with the incredible potential for

improving human existence yet, at the same time with the potential of literally becoming "death, the destroyer of worlds," have become a part of our vocabulary and a part of our daily lives.

When Orville and Wilbur Wright invented human flight, did they count the cost of the risk of their discovery to future generations of airline passengers who would die in crashes? Similarly did Henry Ford understand the physics of inertia and momentum, the latter being a function not only of mass but also of velocity and that inertia dictates that a (human) body in motion inside an automobile traveling at 65 mph tends to remain in motion even when the automobile comes to a sudden and violent stop?

When NASA was commissioned to put a man on the moon and subsequently, to develop a re-usable vehicle that could launch into space and return to the earth, what cost to human life was factored into the equation? Apollo 1 immolated three astronauts in the command module (when they were pressurized with pure oxygen) before it ever left the ground. And what of the Space Shuttles Challenger and Columbia — two heart-rending disasters that took the lives of the entire crews of both vehicles; one as it left the earth and the other upon re-

entering the earth's atmosphere?

Disasters are unfortunately one of the unavoidable consequences of great leaps forward in technological innovation. And so it should come as no surprise that after 50 years of off-shore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, we are now dealing with an environmental disaster of significant proportion because of doing what we do best — pushing the envelope to extremes.

Politics and science are like oil and water; they simply do not mix. Playing the blame game of who was responsible for the BP-Transocean-Halliburton-Obama administration oil spill will solve nothing. A disaster of this magnitude was bound to happen.

Now we need to once again do what we do best; innovate and move to solve this crisis. Improvise, visualize and utilize whatever is at hand much as the team of NASA scientists did to bring the crew of Apollo 13 home safely.

And when this is finally over, to develop or fine tune whatever technology is necessary to prevent it from happening again, knowing that even our best efforts might prove futile as long as we continue to reach for the stars beyond what perhaps wisdom dictates.

 (Gregory J. Rummo is a businessman and author of "The View from the Grass Roots." Contact him at GregRummo.com)

Goodbye to COAH

Though perhaps not the "masterpiece" he claims it to be, state Sen. Raymond Lesniak's affordable housing bill is much more pleasing to eye than the Fair Housing Act that created the oppressive COAH mandates.

Lesniak's bill, S-1, the first of the current session, easily cleared the Senate last week, passing on a lopsided 28-3 vote that in its own right should be cheered for achieving bipartisan support on meaningful legislation. Maybe Trenton can work together after all.

The bill that would abolish the Council on Affordable Housing, transfer those duties to the State Planning Commission and allow towns to determine their own housing obligations, now moves to the Assembly, where Sussex County Assemblyman Gary Chiusano has urged swift passage as well.

"There is strong desire to gut COAH, and we can't stop now that we have the knife halfway in the belly of the beast," the colorful Chiusano has been quoted.

Chiusano correctly described the previous system as "insane, unpredictable and unstable."

Once the bill is approved by the Assembly and signed into law by a supportive Gov. Chris Christie, it will no doubt be tested in court.

Regrettably, it was the Mount Laurel court cases 40 years ago that led to the current system of state-set quotas and costs mandated onto municipalities, far exceeding the original intent of the court rulings.

Opponents of the S-1 bill claim it will force affordable housing onto rural and environmentally sensitive areas.

But statSen. Steve Oroho, an early proponent of the legislation, said he finds it interesting that the opponents either love mandates or don't want anything built. Oroho points out the new bill gets rid of the quotas, allows for existing housing stock to be taken into account and allows towns to determine "if they want to grow and how they want to grow."

A key attraction of this bill is that it does not penalize towns for job creation, unlike the current system.

The bill also includes options for fulfilling affordable housing needs including paying a fee, which will lead to some challenges.

The "masterpiece" legislation may have some flaws, but as Oroho says, if it doesn't pass, we're left with the one we have and we know that hasn't been working.

ON THE WEB: READER POLL

Question

Do you vote in primary elections?

Yes	79.3	531
No	20.8	139

Comment

I don't usually vote in the primary but I am this Tuesday for Dan Storey for sheriff.

I vote in EVERY election. I was always told, "If you do not vote, then you do not have the right to (complain) when things do not go right." Stands to reason if you are not interested enough to put the right people in office in the first place, then do not complain when some fool buys the office and makes a big mess. ... So I vote and I complain a lot! If you do not vote and do not like the outcome then you got what you voted for ... NOTHING.

You can't complain, unless you vote!

For the first time in my memory, I am considering not voting on Tuesday. I am very disheartened by the lack of suitable candidates for sheriff, and the freeholder contest is very lackluster.

If you don't vote, you can't complain. I always exercise my right to vote.

That's why I vote to always complain. The many intellectual scholars in the world that got all the answers. They can't fix a leak and it's just amazing. Perhaps this Nostradamus character and his predictions will come true.

You vote for the person who you think is likely to make smart, well-considered and informed choices which would be closest to your interest/choices.

If the majority of the voters chose a different candidate, you hope and pray that the end of the world is not imminent and vote again in the next election.

If you find that you cannot speak fondly of your country because of their choices, run for office and try to get the people to elect you because you can do better. If again you cannot get the majority to support and elect you, and you must speak degradingly of your country, exercise your right to move to a country which has the closest beliefs as you.

Sad news. Strada was elected as sheriff. Look out, Sussex County. Watch for double dipping when he appoints his staff. Instead of saving money we will pay more with his ideas.

Who cares which person was elected to sheriff! So little money is allocated to the department anyways and plus they make next to nothing compared to the state police.... The state police should also have their salaries reduced since everyone is supposedly sharing in the economic crisis ... right?! Starting salary \$57,000 with several benefits. I think the 4,000+ state police are the problem, not the teachers or unions!

I think Strada's comment in the Herald story today is very concerning. Looking toward November, Strada told supporters, "We're going to build momentum and we're going to destroy anybody that comes our way." If the comment is accurate, is this the attitude that our public servants should have?

In this country one can't be an independent and vote in a primary as one. Also, with this one-sided county, being either a Dem or an independent doesn't make any difference. Why bother wasting the time!

Sparta voters asked to make a commitment

Editor:

Hail Spartans!

To be a Sparta councilman or not to be. Why would anyone want this job? With Sparta's massive financial difficulties compounded by cutbacks in state funds, you would think that no one would place themselves into this snake pit. Yet, here we are with six candidates still vying for this position. Any inquisitive person must ask why. Certainly the job pays only enough for coffee ... yet, they are all eager for the job.

So, the big question is, who has the morals, brains, talent and intestinal fortitude to be successful as a councilman?

The most important prerequisite for this job must be that the candidate understands how to manage money successfully and have that success in their personal life.

Robert Spetz has successfully operated an auto repair facility and has a growing successful financial history. Jesse Wolosky has donated his time as a people's advocate and is financially independent as a successful investor.

Unfortunately for all of us, Sparta voter apathy has been the norm. Of the 13,426 registered voters, less than 22 percent of the voters have been making our decisions at the municipal elections. This is disgraceful for a community such as ours. Even though we have some difficulties with our school system, there can be no deigning that we work for our children and their future. Part of that future is the direction, which our government will take. Councilmen are our primary link to this township's future. Providing good management and fiscal responsibility are the most important tasks that they must be capable of providing.

Make a commitment to participate in our future. Please reserve the needed time to go out and vote Tuesday, June 15. Every vote is important.

Phillip Lid
Sparta

Former Sparta manager sees politics in his case

Editor:

This letter is written on the eve of the runoff election to make voters aware of my view of the state of politics in Sparta. It is my hope that the paper will print it before Tuesday. However, given their coverage of my leaving the employ of the township, it may not appear.

I was employed as township manager for just over 10 years. During that time many issues and projects were addressed. Some you may agree with, some you may not. Throughout my tenure I worked to represent the best interests of the residents of Sparta and always administered the official policies.

It was with great dismay that I learned of council's intent to undermine my reputation. In fact just a few months earlier, I received an annual review and nothing was said about poor performance. In fact, I was granted the same raise as other employees. Why the change? Politics.

They would have you believe I was fired, as reported in the New Jersey Herald, even though the reporter sat in the meeting where they accepted my resignation. This action took place the day before the May council election. Not a coincidence. It was a pre-planned action to affect the election. I have learned that there was a plan to remove me that started at least two months earlier.

Why before the election? Sitting council members want to have certain candidates win. Two were hand-picked and assisted by them. If elected, they hope to have a majority vote and move their agendas forward. Similar to the way council votes (3-2) went over the past four years. Agendas that are self-serving and not necessarily in the best interests of the public. You saw evidence of this in the form of e-mails that came out just before the last vote.

Why speak out? In part to clear my good name. This is not an attempt to regain my job. Rather, I am urging the voters of Sparta to come and vote in the runoff. Review the candidates and vote for those that do not have a pre-set alliance.

Vote for those who will be independent

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

and decide issues based on the information provided to them and based on the interests of the community as a whole.

Henry M. Underhill
Sparta

Settle SCCC issues, bring back Mierendorf

Editor:

First let me commend the Herald for their excellent research and findings regarding the problems at the college. It has been fair as well as informative. In fact, it may be that the Board of Trustees should have hired you instead of Mercadien.

Day after day and week after week, you have debunked or expanded our knowledge about the finances and the alleged reasons to fire Dr. Mierendorf. I am sure that her lawyers appreciate your efforts. I am not so sure that the freeholders are happy about the holes in the board's reasoning.

It is clear that the board will now spend even more of the students' money to fight the litigation as they did for over three years to fight the unions.

The overriding question is why the board did or did not act with due diligence over the many years. Their purpose in only going back two years with Mercadien may have been to ignore the long standing process of fiscal irregularities. To put the problems only on the head of this president is questionable. And you have reported that when the problems were brought to her attention, she acted quickly and began to correct the problems. There is no question in my mind that she could have followed up on the report and completed the corrections which we know will take about two years to do (the same as the length of her contract).

I have spent the last 20 years at the college as an adjunct and worked with the various administrations during that time. Dr. Mierendorf, with all due respect to the others, was the best of the rest. Her involvement with the students, faculty and community is commendable. It is time to settle this and bring her back. As Judge Gannon noted, the money can be better spent on education than litigation.

Henry Pomerantz
Senior Adjunct Instructor
SCCC

Former candidate sets the record straight

Editor:

In 2008, I ran as a write-in candidate seeking a seat on the Sparta Township Council. At that time, I supported Councilman Seelagy in his efforts to be re-elected. I agreed with most but not all of the decisions Scott had made as a member of the Council and found him to be, if nothing else, thoughtful and thorough, unbiased and intelligent. During the campaign, I met with Scott and his wife, Kim, on several occasions along with other members of the community, and was of the understanding that I had their full support in my efforts to become a member of the Council.

With this in mind, you might be able to understand my surprise when on Election Day this year I was forwarded an e-mail questioning my credentials as a candidate for office, an e-mail with the "From" address of Mrs. Seelagy.

E-mails supporting candidates are nothing new and an accepted part of the election process in today's world. People sent e-mails out supporting my candidacy. I'm sure other candidates had e-mails sent out in their support. However, I can tell you this; no one sent out e-mails supporting me in one breath while blatantly lying about other candidates in the next breath.

Here are the facts. I did serve on the Board of Education for three years and did vote yes on all budgets presented to me as a board member. These budgets were put to the voters of Sparta and overwhelmingly approved on all occasions.

I did serve on the Sparta Township Budget Advisory Committee. The committee was formed in 2008 and consisted of five members of the community — Mr. Kulsar, Mr. Cofrancesco, Mr. Nicholson, Mr. Schroepfer and myself. Contrary to Mrs. Seelagy's statement, we did not meet in "a garage" but met several times at town hall. Many of us attended

budget meetings throughout the 2009 budgeting process and in June of 2009 met with then Township Manager Henry Underhill to present our recommendations. Mr. Underhill prepared a document detailing our observations and recommendations for improving the budget process and presented this document to council. All five members of the Budget Committee were present at this meeting with Mr. Underhill.

While a member of the Board of Education, my attendance record was far from "horrific." According to records, I attended close to 80 percent of all meetings held, including committee and special meetings. As many of you know, I am a career firefighter and we work a 24-hour shift. On several occasions I took vacation time off from work in order to attend meetings.

I am a "union guy," a member of my local chapter of the NJFMBAA and I sit on the executive board of this organization. I am also a free-thinker and would never allow my affiliation with any organization to cloud my decisions. That's how I operate.

What happened between the election in 2008 and this year's election to change Mrs. Seelagy's opinion of my candidacy? I wouldn't know; she never contacted me this time around. If she had, she would have seen that I am the same man I was two years ago.

Would I have been elected if this e-mail were never sent? Probably not; the voters of Sparta spoke loud and clear. This is not a case of "sour grapes." However, people should base their support of a candidate on their own opinions, backed by facts. I felt it important to tell this story in the hope that when we go to the polls that we all choose our candidates not so much on the recommendations of others but on what we really know about who we are choosing to lead us in the difficult times ahead. I hope we all do our research and make the right decision.

Jonathan Rush
Sparta

Bankruptcy increases depth of understanding

Editor:

It has been disheartening to witness the negativity and personal onslaughts that have reached a crescendo in the campaign for Sparta Township Council. We did not expect such ignominious tactics, which have become so commonplace in politics, to take hold in the town we love ... Sparta. Most recently, there has been a widely circulated e-mail, identifying Donald R. Ploetner II, one of the candidates running for council, as "currently part of a three-person bankruptcy filing..." Supporting legal documents were attached.

This disclosure has been deliberately timed in order to impugn his integrity and cast doubt on his fitness to serve on council mere days before the runoff election. If one reads the documents, it is evident that the statement is a deliberate distortion in that Donald Ploetner II is not sued in the filings. Moreover, the important fact that there is a countersuit that may render the bankruptcy filing moot is not even mentioned.

Bankruptcy is a deeply personal issue. Disclosure in open forum such as e-mail or public debate says more about those responsible for the disclosure and their motivation than it does about the individual targeted, particularly when the facts are distorted and intentionally "spun" to elicit a particular response. Contrary to the intent of disclosure, this issue has not had a negative effect on his qualifications and fitness to serve on the council. Rather, it has had a positive effect.

The experience, while difficult for Donald and his family, has had a deep impact on his outlook and purpose in life. It has increased, beyond measure, his depth of understanding and compassion for those facing financial difficulties in these tough economic times. It has also instilled a deep appreciation for the critical importance of living within one's means and doing more with less. Sparta must learn that as well.

His caring is genuine and his passion to serve is real. Our town is in dire need of a sincere, dedicated, independent thinker committed to serving the best interests of its citizens and

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