

## The Hour

Chet Valiante PUBLISHER  
Chris Bosak INTERIM CO-MANAGING EDITOR  
Jerrold Ferrari INTERIM CO-MANAGING EDITOR  
John P. Reilly EDITOR EMERITUS

## Effort to merge agency functions common sense

We are pleased to see that the city of Norwalk and the Board of Education might be amenable to merging some department functions, all in the interest of saving the taxpayers money and becoming more efficient in the bargain.

To us it's a no-brainer to combine the city's purchasing activities under a single entity to take advantage of the big box mantra, buying in bulk.

Also a subject of combining efforts is the city's technology structure. To this end, a consolidation study group will be formed to include one school board member, one tax board member, Director of Finance Thomas S. Hamilton and Dan Cook, acting chief operating officer for the school board.

The group could explore other areas where savings could be made by combining functions of separate departments.

Too often, trying to establish such saving measures runs up against a turf war as some segments of city government seek to oppose change.

The school system may think it is unfairly the target in the search for savings, but that's not so. We want the system to remain strong and to improve; it's just that the school budget makes up two-thirds of the city budget.

The city still has to deal with unpredictable forces — what the General Assembly will do as it begins its session and the weather — we don't need any more snowstorms, thank you.

## Good mass transit news for one state rail link

We have nagged continuously about the need to improve the Danbury branch of Metro-North to become a more vital commuter link.

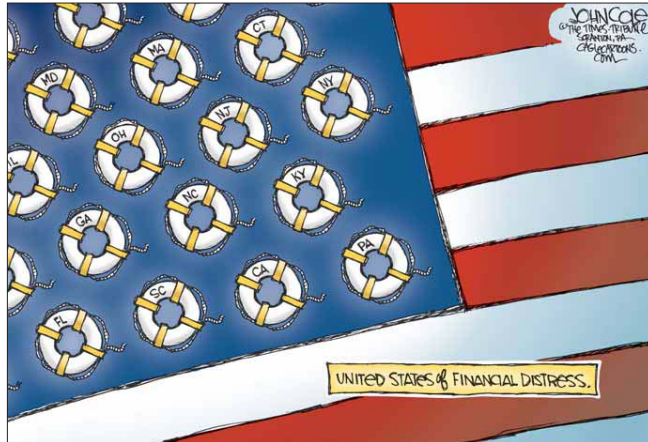
Plans for new signalization are about to happen, the first step in what needs to be done.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the state a similar scenario is being carried out.

The rail link from Bridgeport to Waterbury is in line for an upgrade, and its biggest need is for a second track to allow two trains to operate on the single line. Just like the Danbury line.

The good news is that the ridership on the Waterbury line rose by 38 percent in the first eight months of 2008.

The valley area is growing, and as traffic grows on Route 8, improved rail service will become a necessity.



## Parental involvement an essential factor in making Norwalk schools exceptional

You are your child's best advocate. We at Norwalk Education Foundation have always believed this and have consistently called for parents to become more involved in their child's education. The recent situation involving Norwalk parents and Spectrum Kids is, in our minds, an excellent example of this.

For those unfamiliar with the story, Spectrum Kids, LLC, is an organization contracted by the Norwalk school district to provide therapy for children with autism. Several parents of special needs children working with Spectrum Kids claim the organization holds none of the necessary credentials.

For children with disabilities, parental involvement is crucial to getting them high quality educational services. Just as important, the key to effective educational programs for all students is collaboration — as equals — by parents and educators.

Research has shown that schools where parents are involved in decision-making and advocacy have higher levels of student achievement and greater public support.

This cannot be done in an atmosphere of mistrust and secrecy. There must be a process where all parties involved communicate with each other and provide accurate information that addresses the needs of both the school as

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well as its students. To achieve this, educators need to identify strategies to include parents in decisions regarding their children and that of the school.

Parents, on their end, need to feel as if they are full partners in the decisions that affect children, and show support for school programs.

NEF itself was started by concerned parents and educators who wanted to expand technology resources in their schools. In 11 years, NEF has grown into a local education fund that works to improve student achievement through teacher quality, classroom innovation, and after-school excellence.

Another good example of parent/school partnership comes from Cleveland, where cooperative efforts helped a high school go from being on the state's "Academic Watch" list to being rated an "Effective" school. At Cleveland Heights High, a local nonprofit hosted forums where parents and others in the community shared their hopes for the school with teachers and administrators. Governance boards — including students, parents, community leaders and school staff — were created to guide the school's direction. Working on a

common mission built trust between the school and parent communities and helped make the school a more effective learning environment for the students.

To all parents and others in the community, here are just some of the ways you can help make our schools exceptional:

- Learn the facts about the public schools in your community — read the papers, research Web sites, attend PTO and other school meetings, hearings and functions.
- Have high expectations for every student.

- Support programs, both innovative and tried and true, that help students achieve.

- Let elected officials and the school administration know that quality public education is a top priority.

- Vote for issues that make a positive difference for public education.

Parents, we invite you to join with your schools. Get involved. Know what's going on. This way, we can ensure all children achieve their personal bests in school and in life.

Lauren Rosato is executive director of Norwalk Education Foundation, an independent nonprofit group committed to quality education for all of Norwalk's children. For information, call (203) 854-4068 or visit [www.norwalkeducation.org](http://www.norwalkeducation.org).

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### U.S. should demand an Israel committed to justice for all

To the Editor:

Israel's high-tech military could easily pinpoint and aerially destroy the few rocket launchers the Palestinians own. They don't because that would defeat Israel's purposeful provocation, which included breaking the cease-fire back in November and the horrible 16-month starvation siege of Gaza that preceded this nightmare. Shame on every ignorant American who believes the media lie that Israel is the poor victim and that the Palestinians deserve to be slaughtered like fish in a barrel trapped behind the walls that Israel built.

The last time the Likud Party used violence as an election ploy Ariel Sharon succeeded in getting himself elected. His purposeful instigation also kicked off the second Intifada — nine years of bloodshed including our own 9/11. Now the Likud Party is at it again. No doubt Israel's current massacre will end with the Likud party candidate Netanyahu winning the election in February '09 and another bloody Netanyahu reign.

Israel is not a democracy. Hamas was duly elected in a United States-sponsored election and deserves to be represented in the Knesset — not slaughtered.

We should demand an Israel committed to justice for all, due process in court, one person one vote, representation, reparation to those wronged, laws against religious discrimination. Israel needs to be forced to evolve into the 21st century. Our blind support of Israel has created a monster that now controls us through AIPAC's financial stranglehold on our members of Congress. It's no wonder pressure is never applied, nothing ever changes, and Israel's barbaric massacres continue.

Lee Whitnum  
Greenwich

## Loss of Richardson from Obama Cabinet only a minor distraction

By JULES WITCOVER

WASHINGTON — The sudden departure of Bill Richardson from President-elect Barack Obama's cabinet is the first conspicuous chink in the smooth transition of power to his supposedly calm, cool and collected regime.

Until the New Mexico governor withdrew his nomination to be secretary of commerce, Obama's transition team had appeared to be functioning so flawlessly as to give the impression that the prospective administration was already up and running.

Even as Obama was making a point of repeating his one-president-at-a-time mantra and keeping his hands off the latest Arab-Israeli crisis, he had already jumped into the economic crisis. On the opening day of the 11th Congress, he conferred with its leaders of both parties on the stimulus package he plans pursue soon after Inauguration Day.

But Richardson's withdrawal raised questions about the supposedly super-efficient vetting process of the new administration. It had been spewing out nominees en masse with unprecedented speed, reinforcing the image of a presidency hitting the ground running.

Critics pointed out that the federal grand jury investigation into campaign contribu-

tions to Richardson political action committees by a recipient of state contracts had been well-publicized in his home state.

Perhaps because he was already so prominent a public figure, as a former Clinton cabinet member and U.N. ambassador, the assumption within the transition team may have been that he had already been adequately vetted.

Richardson, insisting he was involved in nothing that would have prevented his further service in another Democratic administration, said he was stepping aside to avoid any impeding of Obama's fast start in the Oval Office.

In the scheme of things, the loss of Richardson to the Cabinet and its urgent efforts to tackle the economic crisis should turn out to be a minor distraction.

One also had to wonder whether the man himself may have had second thoughts about having accepted the appointment in the first place. It was no secret that in light of his impressive experience in international diplomacy, both personal and as a ranking bureaucrat, he had entertained hopes of being named Obama's secretary of state.

In the wake of the latest Middle East flare-up, he might have better served Obama, for example, as a personal envoy on the Israeli-

Palestinian question, not requiring Senate confirmation. But the grand jury investigation would not have vanished and would have remained a cloud over his administration service. Such a move might not have sat well, however, with the presumptive Obama secretary of state, Hillary Clinton. Richardson, a former Bill Clinton Cabinet member, after all had endorsed Obama's candidacy at a critical point in his 2008 Democratic primary campaign fight with her.

As for the seamless appearance of the Obama transition until now, much depends on whether the glitch is an isolated one. Bill Clinton got off to a bad start in 1993 when he suffered withdrawals from key cabinet and agency positions after appointees supposedly were inadequately vetted.

Incoming White House press secretary Robert Gibbs has emphasized the transition team's efficient performance in assembling the large Obama Cabinet with such notable dispatch. Sure-footedness has been an element in the public approval the president-elect has won so far and can help sustain him in the new administration's critical first days ahead.

## TheHour.com POLL

Should high school tech-ed courses be cut?

No: 84.44%

Yes: 13.33%

Unsure: 2.22%

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