

Letters to the Editor: Racist ploy to block hospital reopening

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Racist ploy to block hospital reopening

"Keep hospital shut, blacks tell Corzine" (Page A-1, July 10) is the last straw in the politicizing of the proposed reopening of Pascack Valley Hospital in Westwood, as a "for-profit" enterprise.

Assemblyman Gordon Johnson, on behalf of the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus, suggests that the reopening of Pascack Valley Hospital would be "an insult to urban hospitals that have already closed" and would "severely damage the hospitals that employ a large number of minority workers." His suggestion is racist in tone, designed to intimidate Governor Corzine to do what is politically expedient over what is right.

To deny Westwood and the surrounding communities the health care they want and are prepared to pay for because of special interest politics erodes the freedom at the center of this nation's political life.

Corzine should remember that President Obama is proposing a federal government alternative to health care because the market place needs the "competition" to keep health care insurers "honest." Giving Pascack Valley Hospital a chance to compete will keep everyone honest.

Anthony P. La Spada
River Vale, July 10

Regarding "Keep hospital shut, blacks tell Corzine" (Page A-1, July 10):

Politicians and aspiring politicians voice opinions to placate their constituents and followers. However, it is a misconception to suggest that they speak for the black community in the question of reviving Pascack Valley Hospital. The opening of a 128-bed hospital in Westwood is not and cannot become a racial issue.

The issue is about a real need for people of every race. If The Valley Hospital or Englewood Hospital and Medical Center fails because of the addition of a mere 128 beds in Westwood, each was on the brink of failure beforehand. Their motives in blocking the opening of a hospital in Westwood is transparent — money, not people.

They had their chance to purchase the property and lost. However, they lost more than just the chance to expand. In spending thousands of dollars maligning anyone who got in their way, they impeached their character, looking like poor losers trying prematurely to capitalize on the failure of Pascack Valley Hospital.

Shame on Assemblyman Gordon Johnson and Bergen NAACP President Estima Baker for "fueling the fire," adding another layer of controversy and for not researching the reasons behind the closings of those urban hospitals. They have the right to voice their political opinion to Governor Corzine. But do they have the right to speak for every Bergen County African-American, including this writer?

Barbara R. Gardner
Westwood, July 14

Legislators opposing the reopening of the former Pascack Valley Hospital by Hackensack University Medical Center have sunk to a new low. Assemblyman Gordon Johnson, D-Englewood, should be ashamed of himself for politicizing this important issue by attempting to make the reopening a question of race, not the health care needs of Bergen residents.

It is indeed tragic that hospitals have closed in the state's urban centers. However, those patients, many of whom are uninsured or underinsured, have not disappeared because the hospitals are gone.

HUMC provides roughly three times the amount of charity care to patients from across New Jersey as The Valley Hospital and Englewood Hospital and Medical Center combined. In 2008, that number exceeded \$32 million. The reopening of HUMC-North at Pascack Valley will serve all people based upon their need for accessible quality medical care, regardless of race, religion, ethnic heritage, level of insurance or even political district.

The fact of the matter is that the need for another quality hospital in the most populated county in the state cannot be overstated.

John Birkner Jr.
Westwood, July 11

The writer is mayor of Westwood.

Assemblyman Gordon Johnson's injection of race into the question of reopening Pascack Valley Hospital is disgusting and cynical. The question should be about the well-being of all people

Johnson's position displays utter contempt for the people of Bergen's Pascack and Northern Valley regions.

It ignores the fact that the hospital is in a black neighborhood of Westwood and was a prominent employer of the area's African-American residents. My father was a founder of Pascack Valley, and, at a time when racial discrimination in hiring was the hard reality, he always made sure that the hospital took the extra effort to fill positions from among the area's black residents. Johnson is ignorant of this history.

One would hope that this issue is decided on its merits, not on the race card.

Nicholas D. Verrastro
Westwood, July 11

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