

GUEST OPINION

Spending taxpayer money to maintain political control

By *RONALD RUDY*

In regards to Chuck Thompson's Dec. 15 Guest Opinion, I believe several corrections are necessary to make the public truly aware of the events surrounding the appointment of Middletown Supervisor Kathy Heuer.

Thompson states the May 9 meeting of the vacancy board was convened for the purpose of curing a "clerical error," of the April 29 meeting. His claim is that the omission of public comment before the vote was an agenda misprint. I believe anyone who has followed the conduct of this board would conclude that this "error" was the result of the same arrogance that was demonstrated by having their choice illegally taking the oath of office at a Penndel notary before the meeting even began.

Thompson further asserts that Republican Jasper Caro, though not a municipal lawyer should have raised the public comment issue, this while the Democrats appointed Middletown solicitor remained silent. Thompson also omits the fact it was Caro who suggested a reconvening of the vacancy board to cure the public comment issue at the supervisors meeting immediately following the vacancy meeting. The Democratic majority promptly rejected this suggestion.

Only when they later realized that their conduct was in blatant violation of the Sunshine Law did they then hastily attempt to reconvene the vacancy board meeting for May 9.

The questionable manner that this meeting was posted to the public then became an issue.

Given the sum of the above infractions of the Sunshine Law, an injunction was sought and granted on behalf of a bipartisan (Democratic and Republican) group represented by former congressman Mike Fitzpatrick. Contrary to the accusations of Thompson and others, this group sought out the services of Fitzpatrick, who as a Middletown resident accepted this case pro-bono as a cause for democracy with no personal gain given or implied.

Fitzpatrick proved that the Democratic supervisors committed "multiple and significant violations" of the Sunshine Act to which the trial judge agreed. McMonagle, Thompson and Heuer did not prevail on the more serious notarizing or public comment issues and were fortunate their only penalty was another opportunity to reconvene their charade of a true selection process.

Regarding this process, Thompson conveniently does not recall the next highest in votes and same-party criteria that were used to justify his own appointment to the board.

Instead he lampoons his former opponent Russ Kavana who when fitting this same criteria following the next vacancy states Kavana's selection would harbor a "return to old-time divisive politics." As if one would have to look long and hard to find anything of that nature on the present board.

Ironically, Thompson and McMonagle have made much of the issue of the expenses they incurred. In doing so they raise more questions than they answer. One could ask why for a simple clerical error did they feel compelled to hire \$550 per hour Philadelphia attorneys when the solicitor they hired could be had for one-fourth that amount. Why should the taxpayers pay for separate legal counsel for Heuer? Better yet, why didn't Heuer simply acknowledge these violations and resign? It took a common pleas judge to remove her.

Finally, and most importantly, why should the taxpayers be responsible at all for defending the wrongs of partisan politicians? Given the road they took, one can only surmise they felt it was well worth the \$100,000 in taxpayer money they authorized to maintain sole control of this board.

Ronald Rudy is chairman of the Middletown Township Republican Committee.