

Journal Inquirer

EAST WINDSOR • ENFIELD • SOMERS • SUFFIELD • WINDSOR • WINDSOR LOCKS

The JI tells it like it is.

► HEALTH & MEDICINE



Snow dazed

Stress levels tend to rise with the arrival of snow, which for most people means back-breaking shoveling and white-knuckle driving. Is it any comfort that increased stress is a normal reaction? **Page 21**

► EAST WINDSOR

MAN FACES 13 YEARS FOR MOLESTATION

A twice-convicted child molester and former truck driver entered a guilty plea Monday for molesting another child over four years. **Page 7**

► WEATHER

TONIGHT: Low 32.
WEDNESDAY: HI 40
Breezy, rain. LO 30

PAGE TV4

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BURGER CHIEFS

Manchester Police Chief Marc Montminy, foreground, and Manchester Fire, EMS, and Rescue Chief Robert Bycholski bite into burgers Monday as they participate in a taste test as part of a benefit for MARC Inc.'s building fund.

Jim Michaud
Journal Inquirer

■ More photos and details of the event on **Page 3**

Somers school board approves \$19.3M budget

By Kala Kachmar
Journal Inquirer

SOMERS — The Board of Education has approved a \$19.3 million budget for 2010-11, which represents a 3 percent increase over the current year's spending plan.

School Superintendent Maynard Suffredini Jr. said the board is going with a level service budget, meaning the increases are the result of contractual obligations and increases in health insurance costs.

"We basically have frozen or cut all other line items," Suffredini said.

The education budget will be presented at a public hearing Monday, March 8, at 7 p.m. at Somers Elementary School. It will go to the Board of Finance on Monday, March 15, at 7 p.m. in Town Hall.

The budget represents a \$563,785 increase over the current year's budget, which is \$18.7 million.

"I think it's a reasonable budget,"

■ SEE SOMERS / PAGE 5

► AND IN SPORTS ...



HUSKY REVIVAL

Monday night's win over West Virginia was the third straight for the UConn men, including two victories over top-10 teams in the last eight days. **Page 44**

EAST CATHOLIC WINS CCC NORTH

The Eagles clinched the title with a win over Manchester. **Page 36**

ENFIELD CLINCHES TIE IN NCCC

Monday's win gave the Enfield boys basketball team at least a tie, but it can still win the title outright. **Page 37**

Rolling!

Film studio plans moving forward

By Kory Loucks
Journal Inquirer

SOUTH WINDSOR — Hollywood dreams are one step closer to becoming a reality for Connecticut with the announcement Monday that Connecticut Studios LLC is expected to file plans with the town's Planning Department on Friday.

If approved, site preparation would begin in April with construction commencing in June, according to town Economic Developer Craig Stevenson.

The owners of Connecticut Studios are negotiating with production companies to occupy the sound stages by the end of 2010, he said.

The studio is being developed through a partnership of Rhode Island developer Halden Acquisition Group and California's Pacifica Ventures, which own New Mexico's Albuquerque Studios.

The proposed studio would consist of eight sound stages, each approximately 20,000 square feet, a 75,000-square-foot mill building, 104,000 square feet of production and executive offices, and a 30,000-square-foot digital media and postproduction facility.

■ SEE SOUTH WINDSOR / PAGE 2

Elections official urges quick action on campaign finance measure

By Christine McCluskey

Journal Inquirer

HARTFORD — Legislators on Monday heard from supporters and opponents of bills that would tweak the state’s campaign finance law in response to a judge’s ruling that it’s unconstitutional.

At issue is whether candidates running for election in November should plan to finance their campaigns on their own, or should bank on getting funding from a system that’s fate is uncertain.

Beth Rotman, director of the public financing unit of the State Elections Enforcement Commission, said the campaign finance law “suffered a serious body blow” from the judge’s decision. She said the legislature must act quickly to fix the law, and added that the commission supports bills proposed both by the legislature’s Government Administration and Elections Committee and by Gov. M. Jodi Rell.

Sen. Gayle S. Slossberg, D-Milford and the co-chairwoman of the committee, said she believes the law is a good one that’s constitutional and enforceable. But the court decision “throws our system into question,” she said. “We want to be prepared to address any ruling that the 2nd Circuit hands down.”

The committee’s other co-chairman, Rep. James F. Spallone, D-Essex, said the two bills don’t equal a final product. Spallone said he’s confident, however, that the system will be preserved. Those interested in changing federal and other states’ campaign finance laws are looking to Connecticut for an example, Spallone said.

Connecticut in 2005 joined Maine and Arizona as the only states that offer public grants to candidates willing to forgo most private funding. Just over three-quarters of legislators participated in the first statewide run of the public finance system in 2008.

But in August, U.S. District Court Judge Stephan R. Underhill found unconstitutional the law’s extra requirements for minor-party and petitioning candidates to qualify for public funding. Underhill also rejected the system’s method for providing publicly funded candidates with additional dollars if they’re the target of attack ads from privately funded sources.

The judge suspended both of these components, but the state received a stay of those injunctions when it appealed. The case is pending before the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals in New York.

The Democrat-controlled legislature’s Government Administration and Elections Committee and Rell, a Republican, have each proposed bills that address the judge’s criticisms.

Quick action urged

The committee’s bill lowers the thresholds for minor-party and petitioning candidates to partake in public financing, while the governor’s bill establishes the same requirements for both major- and minor-party candidates, Rotman said.

Both bills also lower the amount of money campaigns can receive, in response to Underhill’s statement that the public grants total so much more than what was spent before in most races, particularly General Assembly races, that they amount to windfalls for candidates.

The governor’s bill removes from the law the “trigger” provision that gives more public money to a candidate facing privately funded attack ads, while the committee’s version keeps that provision alive unless a court strikes it down.

Both bills also would eliminate a provision that says if a court strikes down any part of the system, it reverts to the old system. That would mean no public funding and no limits

on lobbyists, contractors, political action committees, and business ads in program books.

Rotman said an alternative to the trigger system could be to tie the amount of additional public funds candidates could receive to the amount of additional private funds they can raise, instead of to the amount of private funds their opponents have raised.

She also urged quick action. If no revisions are made before the 2nd Circuit decision arrives, the legislature has only seven days to change the system, which is “just not realistic,” Rotman said, adding, “Participating candidates need certainty.”

Underhill’s decision already has driven some candidates away from public financing for this year’s campaigns, Rotman said.

In her testimony in support of her bill, Rell wrote, “We do know that this uncertainty has created confusion about what rules will govern our elections this year. These candidates should not have to wait for an appeals court decision, which we may or may not win, and have the rules change on them mid-campaign.”

American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut Executive Director Andrew Schneider said the bills “make significant strides toward correcting the constitutional flaws” in the system, but “do not go far enough.” Schneider said the state should have the same requirements for all candidates, whether they are members of major or minor parties. The state also should eliminate the trigger for matching public funds because it discourages those who don’t use public financing from spending money on campaigns, Schneider said.

Restrictions on lobbyists, state contractors, and their families should be removed because they restrict free speech, Schneider added.

Manchester Republican Town Chairman Heath W. Fahle, policy director for the Yankee Institute for Public Policy, said while he doubts the system has accomplished its goals and is opposed to the idea of spending public funds for political campaigns, he recognizes “that the cost of political campaigns has become so burdensome that it deters many well-qualified citizens from running for office.” He opposes both bills to fix the system, saying that transparency and disclosure — such as more frequent reporting and electronic filing requirements — should be addressed.

Others oppose system

State Republican Chairman Christopher C. Healy also opposed the bills. He said the law “denies free speech, limits electoral competition, and puts the burden of funding political campaigns on the citizens of this state at a time when revenues are down and deficits overflowing.”

He said the bills only exacerbate unfair advantages of incumbency through the trigger provision and by limiting the ability of lobbyists and contractors to donate.

The state Republican Party has filed a friend-of-the-court brief in the lawsuit before the 2nd Circuit.

Government Administration and Elections Committee ranking member Sen. Michael McLachlan, R-Danbury, said the legislature’s lack of action on the issue since the court decision “has clearly dissuaded” candidates from participating in the system.

And he said the bills don’t fully address last summer’s court decision or the one last month in Arizona in which a judge said the state’s matching funds program infringed on privately funded candidates’ free-speech rights.

Derek Slap, spokesman for the Senate Democrats, said Monday that Senate President Donald E. Williams Jr. and Majority Leader Martin M. Looney “are committed to keeping the program.”



Smell, taste, see

Five burger lovers got the chance to make their mark on the menu at Corey’s Catsup and Mustard in Manchester as part of a fundraiser for MARC Inc.’s building fund. Corey Wry, owner of the eatery, picked and prepared five custom burgers from recipes submitted by the public. Judges picked Marissa Cadieux’s Spice Italian Aglio e Olio Burger, which will be on Corey’s menu during March, when 20 percent of the receipts will be donated to MARC. At top, Mary Gonzalez checks an entry’s aroma during Monday’s tasting; center, Manchester Board of Directors member Rudy Kissman bites into an entry; at right is one of the runners-up, the Tim-oh-poh-tate-er, submitted by Tim Marchand.

Jim Michaud / Journal Inquirer