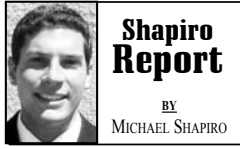


editorial

We want to hear from you. Letters to the editor will be published weekly on the editorial page, as space allows. All letters must be typed and must include a daytime telephone number at which the writer may be reached for verification. Letters should be as concise as possible. Letters to the Editor must be received by noon Friday to receive consideration for the next week's issue. Holiday deadlines vary. Letters may be edited for clarity and space. Material published in this newspaper does not necessarily reflect the opinions of CMD Media, our employees, or our advertisers. CMD Media reserves the right to edit all letters for grammar, spelling, length and questionable content. Letters may be mailed to: CMD Media, P.O. Box 1061, Rahway, NJ 07065 or e-mailed to CMDeditor@gmail.com



Shapiro Report

BY
MICHAEL SHAPIRO

By Michael M. Shapiro

Although he has not yet formulated a proposal regarding the state's toll roads, Governor Corzine's recent announcement that he would not sell or lease them to a for-profit company or a foreign operator is a wise one. Residents of New Jersey generally opposed the sale or lease of the state's toll roads and the Governor's initial plans to study the

issue raised Republican opposition.

Given the beating Republicans have taken at the polls in recent elections in New Jersey, that party views the sale or lease of the state's toll roads as an issue that could resonate with voters and cause them to seriously consider voting for change in Trenton this November. Corzine's announcement helps to blunt the impact of the Republican's use of this wedge issue. If the sale or lease of our toll roads to a for-profit corporation or foreign operation were to

take place, what would it mean to our residents? What problems could arise?

First, putting aside the legislature's proclivity to spend even when the resources do not exist, would the legislature institute adequate protections for our residents to ensure that the roads were well-maintained and that the tolls would not be unreasonably increased? Since the state government has difficulty maintaining New Jersey's toll roads now and the roads are currently under its

control, is there any reason to believe they would be well-maintained if owned by a for-profit corporation or a foreign operator? Furthermore, since New Jersey has not been shy about boosting the costs of tolls, what would make anyone think that a for-profit corporation or foreign operator would be rigidly limited by that same government?

The lease or sale of New Jersey's toll roads to a for-profit corporation or foreign operator would raise serious concerns regarding

On The Right Track?

consumer protection. The possibility of additional billions of dollars in the state's budget might not find its way to the intended coffer. The governor's decision to refuse to sell or lease the roads to a for-profit corporation or a foreign operator is the right one at this time. Hopefully, his rejection of such a sale or lease is genuine and not an incumbent protection plan meant to assuage voters as we head towards the November election.

'SiCKO' Is The Best Science Fiction Film Of The Summer

By Diana Ernst

The wait is over. Michael Moore's "SiCKO" has hit the theaters. For 123 minutes, the film kowtows to the socialist healthcare of Europe, Cuba and Canada, while demonizing the American system.

Moore calls it a documentary, but it's so far removed from reality, it really ought to be categorized as science fiction.

For example, the film repeatedly attacks America's "for-profit" health care, yet ignores the fact that 85 percent of U.S. hospitals are non-profit, and almost half of privately insured Americans have policies from non-profit health insurers.

At a recent press conference, Moore railed against the Martin Luther King Jr. Harbor hospital in Los Angeles, where a patient died of a perforated bowel after lying on the emergency room floor for 45 minutes. Since 2004, the hospital has received more than a dozen state and federal safety citations. Hospital errors included leaving sick patients unattended, which resulted in death for three of them, giving patients the wrong medications, and using

Taser stun guns to restrain psychiatric patients.

This hospital is not private, however. It is owned by the County of Los Angeles. So much for reliable government care. Even the private insurers Moore criticizes are not free of government interference that raises the cost of their health policies. Most states force insurers to sell health policies laden with mandates that many individuals would not voluntarily purchase.

In some states, mandated benefits have raised the cost of individual health insurance by 45 percent. In New Jersey, for example, it's actually cheaper for a family of four to lease a Ferrari than buy health coverage. At \$6,048 per year, the average individual healthcare premium is the highest in the country.

Government solutions that create more government amount to nothing but expensive salt in the wound. We should encourage insurers, and all players in American health to be more competitive, not scrap them for big-government bureaucracy. Mr. Moore's foolish preference for abolishing

private insurance in favor of government-run, single-payer health care will not create universal care, only a government monopoly.

"SiCKO" also ignores the Canadian Supreme Court's 2005 decision that government monopoly health care violates basic human rights. Mr. Zeliotis, the winning plaintiff in this case, needed hip surgery. When he tried to pay privately for his operation rather than wait in the government queue (which takes two to four years) the government stopped him. The denial of such a choice prolonged his pain and threatened his safety.

Mr. Moore likes the single-payer system in Cuba, a one-party communist dictatorship. Some 11 million Cubans attend run-down facilities, receive dated prescription drugs, and are even required to bring their own sheets, food and soap to the hospital. Communist Party bosses get better treatment, but when it came time for the great dictator Fidel Castro to go under the knife, he flew in a specialist from Spain.

Government-run health care already

presents problems right here at home. Medicaid was instituted in the 1960s for the poor, but it has grown far beyond its capacity, putting taxpayers under great strain. In order to keep costs down, Medicaid underpays physicians, who have increasingly stopped accepting Medicaid beneficiaries as a result. Government restrictions also make it challenging to get prescription drugs for Medicaid patients.

Mr. Moore's remedies fail as health-care reform and don't even amount to effective propaganda. His film should have featured a Canadian on a waiting list for treatment. He should have gone undercover to experience the real system that serves most Cubans. He should have followed a Medicaid patient's struggle to get health care from the U.S. government.

But that would have entailed filming an actual documentary, as opposed to a fluffy work of fiction.

Diana Ernst is a public policy fellow in Health Care Studies at the Pacific Research Institute.

Plastic Pellets And Rail Freight Safety

Any time a citizen of Union County asks Gordon Fuller, CEO of the Morristown & Erie Railway, a question about the "unspecified cargo" that his freight trains will be hauling through our County, he is very evasive. One of the specifics he frequently mentions, however, is a seemingly harmless commodity, "plastic pellets."

Some research on "plastic pellets," thanks to the US Environmental Protection Agency, and other technical sources are noted below:

- Plastic pellets are sponges for oily toxic chemicals that don't readily dissolve in water, such as the pesticide DDT and polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs.
- Some pellets have been found to contain concentrations of these pollutants 1 million times greater than the levels found in some ground water.
- Once plastic pellets are released into the environment they cannot be easily recovered.
- An individual rail car can carry 260,000 pounds of plastic pellets. That's nearly 130 tons of plastic pellets per rail car.
- Federal law requires that the person responsible for sealing the ports on rail hopper cars and bulk trucks carrying

plastic pellets document the completion of the seal.

- The Federal Government requires those shipping plastic pellets to: "Consider vandalism exposure when selecting leased sites. Establish security procedures as needed (SPI, 1991).

There are volumes written about the safety and security measures required in transporting plastic pellets. Numerous news reports give accounts where residents in a several mile radius suffered serious, sometimes fatal consequences to freight derailments, accidents at grade level crossings, and various crashes involving freight trains carrying hazardous materials.

Recently I requested OPRA documents from UC from 2002 (when the County Freeholders signed the contract with M & E) until the present. I asked for any information regarding safety, security and environmental reports and studies done by the County or by M & E. I received the reply of "no documents to provide."

Residents who have attended numerous "Community Outreach Meetings" heard Fuller say these studies have been done, everything is cleared, etc. Fuller actually promised to send these reports to the Mayor of Roselle

at a large public meeting two years ago. Roselle is still waiting.

I would also like to know what M & E, and Union County Freeholders did to secure the six grade level crossings in Roselle? I want to know what the Freeholders in 2002 did about the "vandalism exposure" when they leased the defunct Staten Island RR site to M & E. In 2003, while the Freeholders smirked at a woman who, at their meeting, brought up the threat of gangs like the Conrail Boyz who were in the jail across the street from the meeting. The Conrail Boyz were arrested for robbing freight trains between 1992 and 2003 of millions of dollars worth of "high end goods." Before County Manger Devaney signed the M & E Freight contract, did he consider this gang threat to the 8 towns he was leasing freight rails through? What procedures has Devaney, the Freeholders or the M & E established for addressing this threat?

Richard Lenihan
Roselle