

**Candidate for Which Open Position: Ron Lucarini President**

**Your Building: OVMS**

**Your Position: Social Studies 8<sup>th</sup> Grade**

**Years in the District: 38**

**Leadership within the Association: See Narrative NA**

**Other Leadership Experience: See Narrative NA**

**Career Achievements: See Narrative NA**

**YOUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE WTEA:**

My vision for the WTEA, given our past, coupled with the political world in which we live, is not a very rosy one. I say that because if and when Donald Trump gets his next Supreme Court Justice named and New Jersey becomes a “right to work” state, thereby, leaving it solely up to you as to whether you want to pay over \$1,700 dollars in dues to your local, you will be forced to ask yourself the following question: “Is the product I am receiving worth the amount of money I am paying?” And, I will bet that many of you, including those of you who voted for this last contract, will not answer in the affirmative.

While I won’t be able to say I blame you, it will be a sad day for the NJEA, WTEA, you and me. Sad, because unless we change our approach and the delivery of this product, based on statistical information across the country, there will be a significant drop in union membership, as many you will opt not to pay dues. In states where this has already occurred, there have been basically two strategies to combat it. Some state union organizations, refusing to self-inspect and improve their product, are trying to rule by force and intimidation. Other state unions have actually tried to improve and put members first.

Regardless of what approach the NJEA/WTEA will take if and when it does happen, I think it might be a good idea to start improving the product now. You can’t have a vision for the future if you can’t recognize what is wrong in the present.

**Narrative:** This narrative is not written to appeal to anyone who thinks an informed decision can be made by glancing over self-aggrandizing listings of one’s achievements and reducing what should be a deeper analysis of our approach to a two hundred and fifty word essay telling

us that one person is a “builder” and the other guy is a “destroyer.” (See last election’s profile narratives by Gerry.)

I am also under no delusions that I am going to win. This is written for the people who think on their own. Who find it disrespectful to be bamboozled every contract and scratch their head wondering why comparable districts are ten to twenty thousand dollars above us in salary. And, most importantly, don’t want to make tired excuses for the product they are receiving by saying, “I didn’t have time to read it.” Most importantly, for those who are intellectually insulted and disenfranchised, it gives you an opportunity to vote and express your opinion. Maybe there are a couple hundred people out there who want to at least send a message.

### **So here is my narrative:**

I read recently where Mario Cuomo once said that you campaign in “poetry” and govern in “prose.” Unfortunately, while this particularly insightful statement shouldn’t be applicable to union elections, and specifically the WTEA, it is. Unfortunately, the members of the WTEA “poetry” group who hold office, not only campaign in “poetry,” they govern the same way. There’s never a moment of humility no matter how much the reality falls short of their campaign “poetry.” Is it any wonder things seem to never change? You can’t change anything and improve if there is never an admission that expectations have fallen short.

Let me provide one example: The givebacks on the contract weren’t a result of a misguided negotiation strategy that found all of us paying more in dues to hire professional negotiators (Lawyers to the tune of \$30,000) to do the talking and, instead were told by the “poetry” group that these same lawyers decided that it would be best if Shaun and Gerry did the talking at the table. The attorneys would remain as consultants. No, that wasn’t the reason for these numerous “losses” compared to the gains. Instead, the losses were explained by telling us that other district are giving back more. Really!

I have decided to look at various topics for discussion and critique them; something the “leaders” should be doing.

### **The Lawyers:**

Nothing exemplifies the “poetry” vs. “prose” idea more than the changing spin related to the lawyers. Let’s try examining the facts:

**Fact 1:** We voted for professional negotiators. And the negotiators were chosen. No sooner did that happen and Gerry, who was adamantly opposed to the idea of professionals doing the talking at the table, attempted to get a different local attorney from down in Salem County.

**Fact II:** Among the arguments made by those of us who were for a professional was that the professional would do the talking at the table. There were supportive reasons given for that in writing but I am not going to exhaust them here. After the lawyers met with our negotiating team several times, Gerry, in response to comments about the lack of input from the lawyers, wrote a blurb that clearly indicated that in his opinion the lawyers were more or less useless.

**Fact III:** Subsequent to reading that the lawyers were more or less useless, suddenly, and without provocation, we received an email from either Shaun or Gerry (Does it make a difference?), telling us that they had met with the lawyers, and after one of their strategy sessions, it was decided and recommended by the lawyers that Gerry and Shaun do the talking at the negotiations. **In true poetic fashion, we were supposed to believe this.**

There is no lawyer who has specialization with a particular area of the law, who you are going to go to for help, who will take your money and determine that you are best suited to do your own talking. If that was the case, you wouldn't be going to them. Now, if you insist on paying them and you insist on representing yourself as the lead attorney in court, sure they will take your money. I know one thing.

**Fact IV:** After this story was concocted, we heard from Gerry and Shaun again and this time we were told that the lawyers were doing a wonderful job. In only a month or two, without any discernable change or occurrence other than the lawyers telling Gerry and Shaun they were better equipped to take the lead despite the \$30,000 we were paying them, these lawyers were now wonderful.

## **Negotiations:**

**Salary Guide:** The last time I looked we were 10 to 20 thousand behind comparable districts and those figures were based on last year's numbers. I was using our new contract numbers. The failure to move the top of the guide and the long history of moving money around the middle, accompanied by a history of gimmicks, is **the reason** why we have fallen so far behind.

Whether you think it is a "fix" or just a result of the incompetent seeds we plant, the result, and the argument for it, are inescapable. If the cause is so easily identifiable, why don't we correct it? This is where the poetry comes in again. Correcting it would first require admitting a mistake. It would also mean that we'd have to tell you something you might not want to hear.

That is why I am the better candidate over the next several years. I am not going to be around to reap any benefits from any of this. We can't close the gap with these other districts if we don't get a larger than average raise (and I don't mean comparing us to the county using fuzzy math percentages that don't take into account that many places getting 2.6% of a bigger pot is better than getting 2.8% of a smaller pot. A smaller pot that is directly related to contracts that have moved money around the middle of the guide saving the BOE millions.) or make the sacrifices which will require telling people something they don't want to hear.

**In order to get where we want to go, and it will take a few contracts, you can't put steps in places where there is not a big gap between them. You must put steps in bubble areas to free up money to place at the top of the guide. We hired lawyers. I'd like to know for what? I can't believe for a New York minute that we gave them a copy of our history of salary guides and asked them how we could make the WTEA Great Again, and there answer was: "Just keep doing what you have been doing?"**

**Making losers winners:** Plain and simple, when the defense for the number of givebacks and losses in this last contract isn't met with an equal number of just as important gains, and, instead, we are told that other districts are giving back more or that the Board wanted more, then the contract is a **loser**.

However, as stated before, we deal in poetry so the definition of a "winner" is constantly changing. This year part of the selling point was based on an unimportant lie. I believe the spin was that this was the first contract in the history of the district that was settled this fast. This fast? It's almost April as of this writing and we still have not received the retro. As for the lie, does that ever matter? We have settled contracts before March of the next year? Were they good ones? No, but they weren't as detrimental as this last one.

If you do believe that this is a barometer, then please tell me how we elected Gerry the last time. That contract was one for the history books. Gerry was the original "builder" of that contract. He set the stage for a three year debacle that resulted in one of the most unethical presentations of a contract that ever occurred here. We had to vote on two contracts at once, and it was obvious that the first three years were flipped to the back three and the back three to the front. No has ever refuted that. We still voted it in.

### **Divide and conquer, on the wrong side of issues and asleep at the wheel:**

Full day kindergarten, redistricting and the new schedule were all connected in some way. Unless you are located at the high school, you were victimized by the "poetry" once again.

First, as an organization that is supposed to be "Working Together Educating All," we took a powder when it came to the ethical position of "right" and "wrong" on this issue; especially, when it came to our students from lower income homes. The failure to redistrict in Washington Twp. had left this school system vulnerable to a Federal Civil Rights Complaint in relation to institutionalized discrimination. I know because I was the guy who threatened to file it. Instead of getting out in front of this, our leadership didn't take a position. Why? Because they knew that fighting this cause was not only going to upset some parents in the district, it was also going to upset some teachers. They should have demanded more of us but we refuse to offend sensibilities. We pander to the worst element.

What was the result? Redistricting occurred and because we were so busy taking a powder on it, we really didn't have a say in how it was going to occur. More importantly, we were left with no strategies to help make that transition a little smoother.

Our next act of political cowardice occurred when the debate over Full Day K vs. the program we had in place transpired. We had a few people on the wrong side of this issue right from the start. They were in the minority but they were plenty vocal. Under the guise that we needed more time to implement Full Day K, they were making arguments that flew in the face of all modern educational research. We allowed that to happen and we did not take the proper educational position on Full Day K.

As I recall, Mr. Taraschi, forever the poet, alluded to these same people in his last “be all things to all people” campaign narrative, when he told them in more words or less that he supported them. The inference they were to draw was that the “destroyer” (That was Me.) did not support their personal preference to keep half day K and, if elected, he (the builder) would fight to maintain an antiquated system whose time had come and gone. I might also add that the system discriminated against students from low income homes.

Of course, the result was the same. Full Day K came to Washington Township. Most of the people who were at that school were relocated to other schools and the WTEA was basically nowhere to be found. As a result of the pandering and not getting out in front of an issue, not to mention being on the wrong side of it, we had very little input into its implementation. Of course, the poets will site some committee controlled by the administration with maybe two teachers on it and point to that as having input. However, we know how those committees work.

Ditto for redistricting and the new schedule that all of a sudden resulted from all of the above. Where were we before all of this went down? Well, Mr. Taraschi was on a medical leave and was not available many times when we emailed him about these issues and inquired as to what we were doing to guard against a structure that many of us found not in the best interests of the students. If I had a dollar for everyone over the last three years who has emailed that office and not received a response, I’d be able to pay the top of the guide.

**Divide and Conquer:** Let’s examine what a strong union we have built since this high school dominated leadership has been in place.

I asked Joe Bollendorf the other day why a middle school student with less attention span than a high school student was in a classroom for **50** minutes and a high school student was in a classroom a much shorter amount of time. Shouldn’t it be just the opposite? He gave an explanation about the educational reason for the middle school which we have all heard. Whether you agree or not with his opinion, that is irrelevant here. However, I asked him what happened with the high school “smart schedule.” He said that they, Taraschi and Giberson I assume, would not give up on the sixth period stipend.

I said I know that it couldn’t be changed this last year, but why wasn’t it changed for the next two years. We negotiated the middle school schedule right into the contract, why couldn’t we do it with the smart schedule? He repeated that the obstacle was the sixth period schedule. I am not advocating that we introduce a “smart schedule” at the high school so misery can love company. I am a real union guy. I wouldn’t advocate playing one against the other as was done in this last contract. However, I find it more than a little interesting how our great negotiating team was asleep at the wheel for the middle school schedule and the assault on ELA, and yet they were wide awake for the “not so smart” schedule.

Adding insult to injury in terms of dividing and conquering, they negotiated our grievance at the middle level of the contract right out the window. In fact, when I spoke with Mr. Bollendorf about a subject matter I titled “**The Death of Reason,**” (Basically, a complaint, backed by facts

and occurrences, about the insane reasoning that accompanies many implausible things that go on around here.) and pointed to the stupidity of anyone who thinks that after agreeing to the middle school schedule in negotiations that the grievance that we were told was still alive and kicking was a winner, he had a quizzical look on his face and asked, "What grievance?" When I told him that we were, supposedly, still pursuing the middle school grievance, which was so poorly written by Shaun Giberson that it will be dead on arrival even if we do pursue it, he was unaware of it.

In any case, even if it is still alive, you are in total denial about what is going on around here if you think that grievance has a shot of winning. Moreover, based on Mr. Bollendorf's expression, you might have been the victim of another WTEA misunderstanding.

**In the end, answer this question? Analyze what went on and tell me: Who are the real destroyers of the union and this togetherness they pretend exists? Is it the people who pandered to our emotions and then left us hanging? Or, is it those of us who point it out?**

Do our union brothers and sisters at the high school expect us to be happy about this? I don't blame them for not wanting that "not so smart schedule." However, if they vote for business as usual and paint me as some sort of heretic for pointing out the FACT that the actions of these union leaders have resulted in the promotion of an "every man, woman and school level for themselves" mentality, then they too own the division that exists.

### **Death of Reason:**

I am sure Gerry, ever the poet, will paint this last negotiations as a success, which fits like a glove to what I am about to say. I also assume that he will try to say that I don't go to the Rep Meetings and I am the senior building rep here at OV. Therefore, I would be a president who wouldn't go to the meetings.

I became the senior building rep here at OV after a month into the year because no one wanted it and internal concerns were popping up between a few teachers and the administration. I also felt it was important to allow anyone who wanted to voice their opinion about something to be able to do so on my home email list which is **open to anyone who wants to reply all**. However, I made it crystal clear to everyone in the building that I was not going to go to those meetings and listen to the mind numbing explanations that accompany their constant contradictions (see the lawyer) and political maneuvering. This is a union and we are not running for senator. In fact, I think Washington politicians are more open to a critical argument than that governing body at the head table. I am not wasting my time. I don't mind a difference of opinion but it should be backed by salient reason.

Also, I wasn't going to give them the ammunition which in the past has always been the "blame bullets" they fire. It seems that the reason why we couldn't get the job done all of these years was because "destroyers" decided to invoke reason into arguments and wouldn't accept these ridiculous explanations like putting new steps in a salary guide when just three years before the mantra was just the opposite. They didn't have that excuse this time as I watched Rome crumble

from a distance. In fact, I'd say that my work in the community actually contributed in a small positive way for the WTEA.

Not having that excuse, they have decided to spin this contract using fuzzy math stating that we received a 2.8 percent raise over the county (no schools in our peer group I don't think) average of 2.6%. Again, that's fuzzy because we more than likely are getting 2.8% of a smaller number and they are getting 2.6% of a larger one. Regardless, between the givebacks, losses and a structure that saves the Board millions, now and over time, I am hard pressed to ascertain how it is a winner. I think if you work at the high school and reason that you didn't get hit that hard in the areas previously mentioned, you might call it a winner. However, if you are a true union person, there is no way that contract is a winner. In fact, it isn't even a draw. It is, by almost every standard, a loser.

This is why we lose. There is no respect for reason. Emotion and feel good "poetry" rule the day. What organization would allow for a one way propaganda machine to which you cannot respond or share opinions?

**Until you send a message that you want to hold people to a higher standard, so that if and when we become a "right to work" state we'll pay our dues willingly, you are going to get the same product.**

**As I said before, I am under no delusion that I can beat this institutionalized mentality that has been fostered with the help of the administration and BOE. I thought long and hard about even taking the time to write this. However, I feel it is important to allow you to express your displeasure.**

**I welcome all comments, pro or con. My home email is [luggier@comcast.net](mailto:luggier@comcast.net).**

**Thanks for your time!**

**Sincerely,**

**Ron Lucarini**