

An Act Of Government

To the Editor:

British philosopher and Nobel Prize winner Bertrand Russell once said, "There is no nonsense so errant that it cannot be made the creed of the vast majority by adequate governmental action." Nowhere is this truer than in Readington.

This spring Readington residents witnessed an extraordinary event. On the heels of the perennial defeat of the local school budget, voters approved, by a margin of about 5 to 4, a jumbo bond that would pave the way for two disturbing things to happen.

First, the \$22 million borrowing would bloat our municipal debt by around 47%. Second, these funds would enable our Township Committee to condemn 624 acres of private property. Of course, the ballots didn't mention anything about eminent domain. They referred only to "preservation" efforts around the airport.

But the unusual bond did pass, and a lot of good people voted for it. It passed because our public officials insisted that Solberg Airport was about to blossom into a big jetport and the state Department of Transportation was going to back the expansion. After all, the Solberg land area is bigger than LaGuardia, we were told. Just think of what might happen.

And this unwelcome development would be propelled by a document that the DOT created. It was called an Environmental Assessment report and it was a forgone conclusion, according to our mayor and committee members, who had never actually read the report, that it would recommend a major expansion of this small airport that predates most of our homes. Our china would be rattling off the shelf and our kids would have to shout to be heard in our schools.

Then came the big surprise. The report actually recommended just the opposite of what Readington had told us. The DOT advised against any expansion of Solberg. The Federal Aviation Administration and the Port Authority also disclosed that they had no expansions planned. Without the huge grants and approvals from these government agencies, infrastructure changes at Solberg Airport would be virtually impossible.

Curiously, we were told the environmental assessment was no longer relevant. That's when it became obvious that the committee's campaign to garner bond support was to justify a huge land grab.

Still, how do you get voters to buy into such an underhanded and expensive agenda? If you are the Township

Committee, you hire a powerful PR/marketing firm with public money. You deny that a condemnation is being considered. You don't threaten, a family business and you speak fondly of its history. You insist it won't cost much per household in taxes. You offer reassurance that the purchase price is a "not to exceed" figure. You add that not supporting the bond could damage home values. Finally, you tell parents that the airport is a threat to their children's well-being.

I recently obtained copies of some of the bills Readington has incurred in this effort. A clear picture emerges of just how many overpaid consultants and lawyers worked around the clock to effectively promulgate the hoax. All the fliers, speeches, PowerPoint presentations, letters to the electorate, even remarks called into a radio station, were crafted by marketing pros. And they delivered.

Some say it is illegal for elected officials to spend tax money to promote a particular outcome in an election. I am not a legal expert, so I don't know. What I do know is that Bertrand Russell was very astute in his observation.

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Readington Township