

**OPINIONS & VIEWS**

**The Federation Corner**

*From Election Reform Legislation in Annapolis to Ambulance and WSSC Rate Increases . . .*

**It's Time to Do Something**

**Support Election Reform Legislation**

The Hurson-Clagett-Pinsky bills (SB 725 and HB 1317) need your support. Special interest groups are working hard to defeat them, and the grass roots movement supporting the bills must grow fast and deep. Please call or write your state legislators (800-492-7122) now in support of the bills, especially if you live in District 20. Although a co-sponsor, Sheila Hixson is under heavy pressure to kill this bill in her committee.

responsible for sharing the views of our volunteer fire and rescue service leadership with the County Council and larger community as the council debates Bill 36-03. Andy's quiet, careful, thoughtful, reasoned remarks would, in a reasonable world, be enough to convince sponsors of Bill 36-03 that this legislation has serious flaws. We commend and thank him and those many with whom he volunteers for their efforts on behalf of our entire community.

—By *Luella Mast, Treasurer.*

**Proposed WSSC Rate Increase**

In a press release on Dec. 17, 2003, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) proposed a 3 percent combined water-sewer consumer rate increase in its fiscal 2005 preliminary proposed budget, which earmarks \$691 million to achieve its goals. The proposed rate increase would amount to \$12-15 per year per household.

In the release, WSSC Chairman Jinhee Kim Wilde stated, "While the sudden tragic events of September 11 are behind us, we continue to address their lasting impacts on our operations. More than \$100 million in facility improvements are being accelerated because they offer enhanced security benefits in addition to upgrading our products and services. This is one of the major factors contributing to the proposed rate increase."

The WSSC Chairperson did not provide specific information on possible improvements in the security of the sewer and water supply lines. But vulnerability to terrorist attack notwithstanding, our sewer and water system clearly needs upgrading and modernizing. Much of the blame for chronic pollution in the lower Anacostia watershed has been on its tributaries in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties, namely, the Paint Branch, Northwest Branch, and Sligo Creek, where major sewer lines routinely leak and pollute the streams. A number of environmental organizations in Montgomery County support this evaluation.

In early February 2004, representatives of the Anacostia Watershed Society and Friends of Sligo Creek attended a WSSC public hearing on the rate increase.

These environmental organizations are working actively in partnership with Montgomery and Prince

Georges Counties and with the Washington Council of Governments (COG) to improve water quality in the Anacostia watershed.

The environmentalists requested that the WSSC allocate some funds derived from the 3-percent rate increase to increase the monitoring of the aging sewer lines in the upper Anacostia watershed. Simply finding sewer leaks will expedite their repair. The resulting improvement in water quality dovetails nicely with the Prince George's and D.C. plans to carry out the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, which is an ambitious long-term program of urban renewal in the Bladensburg-Peace Cross area.

—By *Charles Pritchard, Environmental Chair.*

**County Seeks to Impose Fees For Ambulance Services**

*The following represents the position of the Community Volunteer Fire Rescue Association (CVFRA) on the County Council's proposal to charge ambulance fees to emergency medical patients.*

"In its efforts to find money anywhere possible, Montgomery County is strongly considering sending bills to patients who use an ambulance or paramedic unit for transport to the hospital."

"Once our residents are aware there will now be a charge or transport, many may hesitate to call for critical help, denying themselves or their families urgent medical attention because of fear of incurring a bill. Next, our residents are already paying \$120M a year in taxes for fire rescue service. Ambulance fees are a form of a tax on a tax. We believe this is an unfair burden which, in effect, means the residents will be paying twice. The entire concept of changing to a fee-based service has the potential to threaten the health and safety of our residents. We believe that any increase in costs to an insurer will most certainly result in greater premiums being passed on to consumers. It is a basic business principle that increased costs will be passed to the customer."

*The viewpoints expressed above may not necessarily be those adopted by the Federation. Any resident who would like to contribute to or respond to this column should contact federation Delegate Alyce Ortizar at (301)774-6617*



**Andrew White Honored as March Community Hero**

The Civic Federation takes pride in recognizing local residents who contribute to the civic vitality of our county.

In the January Newsletter, Civic Federation President Cary Lamari wrote: "For more than a century, volunteer firefighters and rescuers have risked their lives to protect the lives and personal property of their neighbors. This form of volunteerism is probably the oldest and most noble form of citizen participation we have. Montgomery County has been well served by these heroic individuals, and we taxpayers have enjoyed significant fiscal savings due to their volunteer work."

Over the years, the Civic Federation has often recognized the heroic efforts of the volunteer and paid members of our fire service delivery system. This month we focus on one individual, standing for many, who has given uncounted hours of time to ensure efficient, effective, safe fire and rescue services in his local community, in communities throughout Montgomery County and throughout the State of Maryland.

Mr. Andrew (Andy) White is currently on the Executive Board of the Community Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association, serving as liaison with the 19 local fire and rescue departments. As such, Andy has been

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