



ORGANIZATION OF STAFF ANALYSTS

220 EAST 23rd STREET - SUITE 707
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10010
TEL.: (212) 686-1229 • FAX: (212) 686-1231
WEB: WWW.OSAUNION.ORG
HOTLINE: (212) 330-8833

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T. Davis

Editor, The Village Voice

36 Cooper Square

New York, NY 10003

To the Editor,

I am sorry that even a writer known for his honesty and integrity can be led astray by his starting hypothesis. Wayne Barrett's article (3/5/03) about union welfare funds is just such a case.

I am quoted as stating that Roz Yasser "put me on" the selection team for the new drug program. That quote is accurate along with the information that I had previously complained about Merck Medco and Roz knew it. The conclusion, that I was placed on the team as a sure vote for NPA and against Merck, is Wayne's and I don't believe it at all.

In fact, not only Roz Yasser, but also the entire Municipal Labor Committee was aware that I had been furious over the implementation of an earlier required mail-order program of GHI as then handled by Merck Medco.

The other parties aware of my anger were, rather appropriately, both GHI and Merck Medco. Each, I had criticized, in front of their representatives, Roz Yasser and the entire committee regarding the flawed implementation of that program. At the same time, a mistake is a mistake, so long as it is not repeated.

My own assumption was that my presence on the selection committee might be due to Roz's expectation that I would pay close attention to the proposed details of "start up" put forward by all the vendors seeking to handle the program.

I did.

By the last weeks of the selection process, I had decided, for a number of reasons, that Merck and NPA were the finalists. My vote rested on the issue of the proposed implementation. NPA came equipped with a self-explanatory sample "PICA" card and detailed plans for rendering the start up "seamless". Merck Medco, on the other hand, asked us to accept their professional skills and prior experience in starting new programs. Since it was precisely their prior implementation of a new program that had angered me (and about 20,000 other plan participants) the last time, they could not have chosen a worse argument. I said as much to them immediately after their presentation.

I started this letter by regretting how a writer can be led astray by his initial theory.

Wayne Barrett has been informed by the Office of Labor Relations that some union welfare funds are less well run than others (probably true). As a result, he has concluded that we will benefit greatly by turning all the funds over to the City.

Nonsense. These funds are not slush funds, nor is the money "dollars from heaven". In each case, over the years, a collective bargaining agreement diverted money that would have otherwise gone into a pay increase.

Of course the City would like to take over the funds. Why Wayne Barrett (of all people) would believe that the City would be "cleaner" is beyond me. The record shows otherwise.

During the eight years Rudolph Giuliani was a Mayor, my own union welfare fund put aside the reserves recommended by the Comptroller's Office. As a result, we now have millions in reserve. During those same years of prosperity, the City debt rose by more than half to about \$42 billion in loans outstanding. As a result, we now have a fiscal crisis.

Most welfare funds do provide vision, dental and a variety of other benefits including drug cards, but, to my knowledge, no fund has ever erected a single stadium.

Fraternally,



Robert J. Croghan

Organization of Staff Analysts

Member, Municipal Labor Committee