



VIEW POINT

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Several Weeks ago Viewpoint reported on a bill sponsored by Staten Island Assemblyman Eric Vitaliano to bar school board members from running for other offices without resigning their posts. There were scores of school board members running in the Council primaries, and some who believe the non-salaried position might be a convenient stepping stone to further electoral glory are now gearing up to run in the next year's CSB contests.

The Vitaliano measure has come in for some strong criticism, the most articulate of which has to be from Staten Island school board member Jerry Cammarata. Cammarata was the Republican candidate against Vitaliano in last year's election and quite understandably argues that the bill has an air of revenge to it.

In any event, Cammarata has written a letter to all elected school board members in the state urging them to oppose the measure. We think the bill should be fought as well but let's look at Jerry Cammarata's arguments which are very sound indeed.

Cammarata wrote in part, "school board members are elected officials, just as assemblymen, senators and councilmen. If these incumbents choose to seek other political office, are they obligated to give up their offices? To all those who aspire it would be laughable."

The only elected officials who must resign if they run for another post are judges; they may run for other judicial office, however. Cammarata continued, "Mr. Vitaliano has gone so far as to compare an elected school board member to a sitting judge....Clearly, to bar one group from having the opportunity to run for another elected position is tantamount to making one group more privileged than the next. The fact of the matter is, we, as elected school board members, understand the educational/political process quite well and I know, if any school board member decided to run for another elected office it would be because revelations discovered while an elected school board official necessitated a move to serve constituents in a greater capacity."

The 1989 Serrano bill which barred educators and political leaders from running for the board (resulting in the loss of such great people like our own Lucretia Marcigliano from CSB service) passed the easily passed assembly no doubt in some measure because legislators felt threatened by CSB members in their own districts. Indeed some legislators are often shifting between attempts to influence CSB elections or attempting to limit political competition from sitting CSB members. Indeed some CSB members are already potential contenders in the 1992 legislative elections. Thus Vitaliano's move may have a sympathetic air. Yet as Jerry Cammarata points out it is not only unfair but a variant of sour grapes.