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Courier Post

Burzichelli, Villare get our nod in 3rd

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In the 3rd Legislative District, voters face an unusual grouping of candidates. The Democratic incumbents -- John Burzichelli and Celeste Riley -- are a unified ticket. The Republican challengers, however, are running separate campaigns.

Dr. Robert Villare of West Deptford is endorsed by the county and state Republican Party. Lee Lucas of Gibbstown is not endorsed by the county or state GOP. Their reasons for not supporting him: A police report that said Lucas made racially insensitive statements to neighbors in a 2006 dispute and wrote newspaper letters to the editor that were racially insensitive.

There are certain things that take away one's ability to effectively represent a large, diverse district in elected office -- and making racially insensitive statements is one of those things.

So that leaves Burzichelli, Riley and Villare as the real choices.

We think Burzichelli deserves another term. Burzichelli has been part of a powerful team with soon-to-be state Senate President Stephen Sweeney. The two of them brought about the countywide tax assessor's office being established in Gloucester County and they have worked together to bring a new cargo port to Paulsboro.

Burzichelli envisions more combined government services to save taxpayers money: He thinks countywide police could be the next thing coming. We'd like to see him push that in Trenton.

However, Burzichelli, like Sweeney, ignores the state's ban on dual-office-holding. He's mayor of Paulsboro and says he wants to see how far along the port project is before deciding whether to run again for that office. The port is going to happen; Burzichelli needs to give up the mayor's chair.

That leaves Riley, who's been in the Assembly since March, and Villare. We like both candidates; they're thoughtful and earnest -- real people, not politicians.

We're endorsing Villare because he has a lot of fresh ideas. He wants to fix New Jersey's Medicaid program, which he says is one of the worst in the country. As a doctor who serves as medical director at Memorial Hospital in Salem, he knows the ins and outs of this issue and would be the right person to work on this reform in Trenton.

We like his strong support for many of the 20 points for fixing New Jersey we laid out on this page following the Tax Crush series. We like his ideas about making the salaries of government workers more easily accessible to the public and going to a 4 1/2-day work week for government workers in New Jersey.

Villare really gets that the size and expense of government needs to be cut if property taxes are ever going to be lowered. Trenton needs people who are clear about that.

So, we're endorsing a split ticket of Democrat Burzichelli and Republican Villare.