

## Mike Ferguson

Union County's Hard-Working Man in Washington

By Julie Jacobs

**H**e may be among the youngest politicians in the United States House of Representatives, but Congressman Mike Ferguson can be credited with numerous accomplishments that rival many of his senior colleagues. Having just started his second term representing New Jersey's 7th Congressional district (Union, Hunterdon, Somerset and Middlesex Counties), the Congressman recently spoke with the *Union County Voice* about important issues affecting both New Jersey and the nation and his plans to improve the quality of life for residents in his district. We're pleased to name Congressman Ferguson one of our People of the Year.

### Background Check

Born in Ridgewood, New Jersey in 1970, Ferguson has lived in Bergen, Morris and Hunterdon Counties; he recently settled in Somerset County with his wife Maureen and their three children. He received a Bachelor's degree in government at the University of Notre Dame, after which he taught history and coached basketball at Mount St. Michael Academy in the Bronx.

After earning a Master's degree in public policy at Georgetown University, Ferguson taught political science at Brookdale Community College in Lincroft, NJ and founded an educational consulting firm that championed school reform. The venture prompted his move into politics. "Through my experience as a teacher, I saw how public policy can determine a kid's success in life and how government can have an enormous impact on education," says Ferguson. "The political life can be difficult, what with being away from your family a lot. But you really can effect positive change in people's lives."

### Health Matters

Ferguson has written legislation to increase funding for special education programs in New Jersey and voted for smaller class sizes and greater accountability from low-performing schools. He now sits on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which has the broadest legislative responsibility of any House panel.



Ferguson also believes in making doctor and hospital visits more affordable by reducing malpractice costs for physicians. According to the New Jersey Hospital Association, medical liability insurance soared 152 percent, from an average of \$373,428 in 1999 to \$942,539 in 2002. Plus in 2000, New Jersey ranked eighth in the country in the amount of money paid for malpractice awards.

Uncontrolled costs have forced many doctors — particularly in the high-risk field of obstetrics — to either scale back or leave their practices altogether because they can't afford insurance.

Ferguson recently introduced legislation that would place a financial cap on damages for pain and suffering. "In New Jersey, this situation has become critical and is jeopardizing patient care. If we don't take corrective action now, it will only become more grave," says Ferguson.

Ferguson supports improved prescription drug access for the elderly. Before the House passed last month's controversial prescription drug benefit under Medicare, he pushed through an amendment to protect seniors with excessive prescription drug costs from bankruptcy. The amendment will save New Jersey's Pharmaceutical Assistance for the Aged and Disabled program — with its 220,000 low-income seniors — upward of \$400 million over 10 years.

### Cutting Taxes and Combating Terrorism

Ferguson voted for an economic package that would provide tax and investment incentives to job-creating businesses, while offering tax relief to families and seniors on a fixed income. "The economy has always been a signifi-

cant issue. It is vital that we lower taxes if we want to stimulate economic growth," stresses Ferguson. Experts predict that such legislation could create as many as 25,000 new jobs in New Jersey by the end of 2004.

The Congressman is just as passionate about the war on terrorism and eradicating the ever-present threat to daily life in the U.S. Ferguson advocates awarding grants to local programs that we rely upon in times of crisis. In Fanwood for instance, the fire department recently received a grant from Homeland Security to enhance its community emergency services. In 2003, the 7th Congressional district of New Jersey received nearly \$150,000 in federal fire grants.

### Here in Union County

Ferguson's involved with many different issues, but which ones does he think pertain to Union County? "All of them," he says. "Certainly, there's the tax issue, as New Jersey residents pay the highest tax burden in the nation. Healthcare issues affect our citizens, the many doctors and hospitals in the county and the county's major pharmaceutical companies. As for fighting terrorism, many of Union County's families were directly affected by 9/11."

Whether he's visiting the Cranford Senior Center or joining local school children in making cards for U.S. troops, the Congressman truly loves the communities he serves. "There's a wonderful cross section of America in Union County, as well as incredible ethnic diversity. What Union County residents have in common is their values and their commitment to work hard and grab the tremendous opportunities available to them," he says. "From a demographic perspective, Union County represents the largest part of the 7th Congressional district."

While Ferguson's "main pursuit is to be a good husband and father," he plans to stay in Congress as long as his constituents will have him. "There's still a lot to be done," he says. "And I want to get good at this job before I move on to something else."