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Westfield Leader editorial

Isn't This Wrong? We were astounded last week at the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders meeting when we noticed that health care costs for county employees are rising 34 percent – from \$34 million to \$45 million – and that no action is being taken to prevent this outlandish increase. The bill is just being passed on to the property owners of the 21 towns in the county. Of course, the dollar increase was not disclosed at the meeting. We had to dig it up.

At 2,800 county employees – with retirees bringing the total to 3,493 – the cost is almost \$13,000 per employee! – And this doesn't add in the additional cost of about \$9 million for their prescription program. Isn't "Obama Care" only \$1,800 per person?

Imagine the impact coming to property owners in the various towns. From Westfield's perspective, as the town pays 10 percent of the county bills, the increase being passed on is \$1.1 million; the total cost to Westfield residents for county employee health care and prescriptions will be \$5.3 million.

Just this alone equals the entire cost for the Town of Westfield to run its police department. Westfield property owners are to pay a total of \$28 million to the county this year – up from \$25 million. Many residents ask, "\$28 million? For what?" Businesses and their employees each year encounter the same problems with health care cost increases. To keep costs within reason, employers and employees make adjustments to the coverage, deductibles and co-pays while shopping around with various providers. Ultimately, adjustments are made to deal with matters in a reasonable way and at an affordable cost. Apparently, this is not part of the "modus operandi" in county government. The same disease afflicts school systems and state government. They just open your checkbook and tell you the amount to write. There is no recourse. If you don't pay, they foreclose, seize your home and sell it at a sheriff's sale. We feel there is concurrence with this morass from insurance companies and wonder about how big the commission checks are for the brokers of the insurance for the county and other government entities.

We believe the county must do much more to get itself under control and stop reaching so deep into the taxpayers' pockets. There are many unanswered questions. What can citizens do? We don't know. When will it end?

Isn't this just all wrong.