If Creighton takes the money, who takes the blame?

by Tom Murse, "Politically speaking" – Lancaster *Intelligencer Journal/New Era*, January 6, 2012

If Republican state Rep. Tom Creighton follows through on his plan to draw a pension, tossing aside that meaningless little campaign pledge he made a decade ago, he deserves every ounce of the grief he's been taking in recent weeks.

But he shouldn't shoulder all the blame.

No, there are plenty of other folks who ought to be taking a long, hard look in the mirror, too.

Let us start with the political party in his legislative district, which threw its considerable muscle behind Creighton, unequivocally and enthusiastically, every couple of years.

Never mind Creighton's support of the stunning and shameless 50 percent pension hike for himself and other lawmakers in his very first year in office. Never mind his vote in favor of the infamous midnight pay raise for himself and other lawmakers four years later. Never mind his driving around in a pickup truck leased at taxpayer expense despite a campaign pledge to never do such a thing.

Meh.

That Creighton was busy milking the system to benefit himself and his fellow legislators while voting against such things as helping senior citizens pay for the rising cost of prescription drugs was apparently No Big Deal.

(Look it up. The man's very first vote after taking office and enrolling in his generous taxpayer-funded pension program in 2001 was a "nay" to the use of Pennsylvania's multibillion-dollar settlement with the tobacco industry to help out a few seniors. He said at the time that the plan had "too many holes" and could be superseded by federal programs being discussed in Congress.)

The point is this: The Republican committee in Creighton's district, whose duties include vetting and endorsing candidates for the citizenry, had plenty of warning signs.

And it ignored them.

That, my friends, is an epic failure.

If it was an even-numbered year, you can bet the good Republican committee people in the 37th Legislative District, which stretches across the Hempfield area and much of northern Lancaster County, were working hard to re-elect Creighton to another term in the state House.

That's if they weren't too busy pestering potential challengers to back off, or working to knock other Republican hopefuls off the ballot. ==Of the five times he sought re-election, Creighton faced a primary opponent exactly once.==

Once.

That's a shame.

Oh, there were folks who had grown fed up enough with Creighton's shenanigans to enter the fray. But they were quickly swatted away like so many nigglesome flies.

His most formidable opponent would have been Randall O. Wenger, the county prothonotary, but a few of Creighton's wealthy and influential supporters gently "encouraged" the would-be challenger to reconsider.

In 2010, another Republican, retired schoolteacher Barry I. McFarland, tried to take on Creighton in the primary but was slapped with a legal challenge to his nomination petitions.

He called it quits after the folks who signed his papers started calling him up one night, worrying about the subpoenas they had just gotten from a Harrisburg law firm hired by Creighton supporters to knock the challenger off the ballot on technical grounds.

So what of that lone Republican candidate who did manage to get his name on the ballot against Creighton, in 2006, amid the pay-raise furor? He was businessman Henry Federowicz, a legitimate candidate backed by

Operation Clean Sweep, the grass-roots group that literally did sweep many of the payjackers from office that year. What happened?

Well, you know what happened.

==Creighton won the primary that year with 61 percent of the vote.==

Which brings us to the next group of people who deserve some of the blame for Creighton's latest affront to good government, his willingness to walk away with a nearly $30,000 pension for authoring such farcical pieces of junk legislation as the doggy seatbelt bill.

==You. The voters. The 61 percent who helped put Creighton back in office just a year and a half ago.==

What were you thinking?