What's in a name?

Two assemblymen plan to introduce a bill in the state Assembly that would change the current title of elected officials who preside over county government. Those individuals currently bear the title “freeholder” and they sit on a board of chosen freeholders.

The Assembly bill, which has not yet been introduced, will call for a change in the title to “county commissioner” who will presumably serve on a “board of county commissioners.”

The reason for this change, according to sponsors of the bill, is that the current name is confusing.

Before commenting on this vital issue, let us state very clearly that we side with those who believe county government should be eliminated, that this extra layer of government in our state costs far, far more than any advantages it provides and that the services and leadership necessary to maintain order and safety in our lives could be well supplied through a sensible restructuring of municipal and state governments.

We do not advocate the elimination of the offices of county prosecutor or county sheriff, just county executive and boards of chosen freeholders. That being said, let’s address the issue of a name change and try our best not to say, “Hasn’t the Assembly better things to do with it’s time and energy?”

The title “freeholder” may be less self-explanatory than “county commissioner,” we concede that point. But we believe New Jersey residents are up to the challenge, having overcome other quirks in state vernacular. Many of us know what duties are performed by the register and surrogate, two other elected officials at the county level with oblique titles. Most of us know what Drumthwacket is, and we can spell it, too. And every time we see a motorist parked on the Parkway, we just figure they’re out-of-state tourists who became lost trying to go down the Shore.

If this bill does come up for serious consideration by the Assembly, we believe a cost analysis is warranted. What would be the expense of tossing out all those business cards, letterheads, envelopes and official documents and then having them all reprinted? How much for the change in signage? Then multiply this by 21 counties.

Freeholder is not a perfect title. But we believe it is well-enough understood and that the cost of such a change and its introduction into the Assembly when so much more needs to be done may cause residents to wonder about the focus and sincerity of their legislators.

We all weathered another storm

By 9:30 a.m. last Sunday, the main damage of the torrid rains of the weekend had passed through Union County. Railway Police Officer Tara Hannan had returned from an evening shift to supervise traffic at a major tree collapse on Westfield Avenue, just before the intersection with St. George’s Avenue.

Hannan, wearing one of those ugly police slickers, was moving briskly, directing traffic setting up cones and used her blinking cruiser to divert new traffic. The crew from the local Department of Public Works, with some huge equipment, was moving a stump that would have fit in one of the horror movies with monster-sized trees. Hannan skillfully did her job moving cars.

A few miles east on St. George Avenue in Elizabeth, a fallen tree in front of the newly formed Lake Warinanco Park was also tying up the few vehicles that ventured out.

For Winfield official David Wright, the morning was time to assess the previous evening’s mess. After a day in New York with his wife and grandchild came the swift end to train service, forcing the family to hop a PATH train to Journal Square in Jersey City where just like the refugees in Casablanca they set and waited. A lack of information and virtual mob scene ended when a friend of the Wright’s oldest son drove in to do a car rescue.

For some, the rains offered the opportunity to just sit back and read a good book. For this corner, the right field line on the first base side near foul pole side in the third row. The weather of the day was a fact I got to tell Barry Pepper years later while sitting together. Pepper played Maris in Billy Crystal’s movie “61*.”

I even got to meet Maris in 1980 after the playing days were long gone, but before the cancer struck. Even though he was on a bus tour for candidate Reagan, the idea of shaking hands with Maris made it exciting. When I told him my attendance that day, Maris said I was one of 250,000 who attended the game with a listed attendance of only 32,000.

By 1993, client and friend Irene McFhail an Executive at Cablevision dug up a tape of the majestic swing for “61*.” In one precious frame is a shot of a very crew cut kid his father, uncle and best friend present for the event.

Another memory we will some day be assessing was reported by the Federal Reserve report this weekend.

It turns out just like our fathers and uncles we have started to save a lot more and spend less because of the recession.

It may be that when we look back a half century from now, some of the ugliness of the recession will be tempered by the fact that it forced Americans to save more and look to the future.

You might say we all weathered another storm.

An attorney, Frank Capece is a resident of Cranford.