

For Long Island's future

Extremism should end

The Court of Appeals decision, which rejected the demand of environmentalists for a cumulative impact study on all proposed development within the pine barrens area, has sent shock waves through the environmental sector. It should also cause serious reflection on the part of those who were the leaders of this legal effort, and who insisted on proceeding with an attitude of demand rather than compromise.

The goal was commendable, the preservation of sensitive lands to protect our water supply. But, in fashioning their journey through the courts, the environmentalists all too often put forth words of doom rather than

statements of fact. The scare tactic methods—"all the water is going to be polluted"—have been the motivating force behind many of the environmentalists' pet projects. We must buy all the land, we must stop all development, we must, we must, we must. All or nothing.

These tactics have brought programs of land acquisition without any priority listing of the most sensitive lands which should be preserved first. We have spent millions of dollars on claims, not fact. Such claims caused Suffolk County to purchase some 1,200 acres at a cost of \$19 million when, by accepting a limited development plan, the county could have

received 90 percent of that acreage free. The same is happening with the proposed purchase of Robins Island. A limited development plan, 28 to 30 expensive homes, would make available the remainder of the island for nature preserve purposes.

No! We must have it all, environmentalists cry. And so the county is paying high legal fees to pursue the purchase of this land, which will cost \$9.2 million initially and, including interest, about \$20 million in the long run.

On the other hand, developers put forth project after project with little thought, or concern, for the ultimate impact. Profits are the ultimate mo-

tives which are targeting price clubs, major shopping complexes, manufacturer outlet centers and a host of other development plans for local areas. The spread of strip shopping centers on virtually every empty piece of land along major roadways is ludicrous. We're fast coming to a condition where there are almost more stores than there are people. Every new store, sooner or later, leads to the death of another. The influx of price clubs and outlet centers threatens the existence of our communities' main streets.

Developers, because of the economic times, are getting strong support from construction union workers who have created a strike force of sorts to support developers' plans. They appear at public hearings for large projects, Sam's Price Club in Medford, the Breslin Mall plan in Brookhaven Town, at a county hearing on the proposed construction of a minor league ballpark. They appear in large number, 200 to 300 strong, are loudly vocal, often shouting down the words of those who appear to oppose projects.

While it is easy to feel sympathy for their plight—they want and need jobs—we had the feeling recently they are being misled and used. The construction workers were out in force for a recent information meeting which focused on the construction by the New York Power Authority (NYPA) of an electrical generating plant in Holtsville. The facility is unneeded until 1998 at the earliest, according to LILCO which will purchase power from the plant. It is being built on orders from the Public Service Commission (PSC), based on an erroneous projection that the power would be required by 1994.

The message from the union workers was loud and clear, "We need the jobs." They were lavish with praise for NYPA for providing jobs. The fact is, however, the NYPA plant is a prefabricated structure, being built elsewhere and trucked to the site. The average number of jobs during construction will be 100, short-term positions. And, some of the equipment for the plant is being made in foreign countries, something unions speak out strongly against. Lower electric rates would result in more long-term work—for businesses expanding and others moving in—than the temporary generating plant positions that will be created. In effect, by supporting a project that will cause LILCO rates to go even higher, the union workers are supporting the very problem that has driven many businesses and thousands upon thousands of jobs out of the area to places where energy costs are far lower.

Common sense and compromise are vitally needed. Environmentalists must learn to compromise, towns must be more stringent with their requirements, and the cry for jobs must not be a "build anything, anywhere, we need the jobs" demand.

The future of Suffolk County deserves no less.

And why not?

Hurry, hide the key!

State Senator Norman Levy (R-Merrick) cautioned during an interview at Suffolk Life shortly before the November elections that the "next big battle" will be over the use of a dedicated fund earmarked for transportation improvement projects. He was right, that battle is about to begin.

The spending habits and fiscal mismanagement by Governor Mario Cuomo and New York State officials have caused a projected \$2 billion deficit in 1993. In order to offset the state's mounting fiscal woes, Governor Mario Cuomo has announced he wants to steal \$500 million from those dedicated funds to help plug the deficit. In short, he wants to take taxes raised through gasoline-related sources which have been specifically dedicated for transportation to bail him out of inept fiscal management. The governor is wrong.

Dedicated funds are designed to protect vital projects from governmental misuse. Funds raised through transportation-related taxes are placed in a "locked box" to prevent officials from diverting them to other uses. The dedicated transportation fund was created in 1991, based on a commitment by state officials to dedicate these tax revenues specifically for

much-needed transportation projects. The governor gave his commitment. Now he wants to break his word. He should be prevented from doing so.

It is ironical that the governor's raid on the locked box funds follows the defeat of his jobs bond referendum proposal which sought voter approval of bonding \$800 million, much of which was to have been earmarked for infrastructure improvements. The voters said, "No! Enough is enough, you're loading this state with too much debt. You're just going to have to learn to better manage the ever-increasing tax dollars you already get." The governor's jobs bond act was defeated by the voters.

Now, despite the pre-election claims that the \$800 million was vitally needed to boost our economy, to create jobs, to improve our infrastructure, the governor wants to raid funds earmarked for transportation projects, which would accomplish all of those goals, and plug his administration's budget deficit. That gives us cause to wonder if the \$800 million jobs bond act was for real, or just a scam to get extra bucks to help plug his deficit. If we can't believe what he said in 1991, when he agreed to commit these funds to transportation projects, how can we

really believe what he said in 1992 when he talked about creating jobs? How can we ever believe anything else he tells us, now and in the future?

Not all of the state's fiscal woes are the governor's fault, of course. But much of it is. In last year's budget, he tampered with pension funds, diverted \$800 million into the general fund to deal with the budget. "You can't do that," said the unions, "It's illegal." Cuomo disagreed. Trust me, he said, it's legal. The unions went to court. They were right. The governor was wrong. The court ordered Cuomo to repay the funds, starting in 1993. Another dubious "one-shot" scheme failed, and the deficit grows.

That should have been a learning experience. Proof positive that the one-shot schemes serve no useful purpose. They may mask the problem for a limited time, but the piper has to be paid sometime, in some way. It wasn't. Now Cuomo, instead of facing the very obvious need to cut waste, needless spending, to bring government under control, is trying to play the same tired old game.

Hopefully state legislators will have the gumption to do what has to be done, and to stop Cuomo from raiding the locked box funds.

And why not?

You are to be commended

Congratulations Suffolk County, you turned out in record numbers to vote during the recent balloting. Close to 80 percent of those who had registered went to the polls on November 3. This is heartening for so often, the turnout is less than 50 percent. Democracy only works if people take part in it.

When you consider the kind of laws that are imposed, the regulations and the taxes, it would seem to this editor that everybody would want to have their

say. It has often amazed us that in Third World countries they can rack up 95 percent participation even though voting can be a time-consuming and often onerous process.

On January 20, we will have a new President. Although Bill Clinton only received 38 percent of the vote, hardly a majority, he swept the electoral college. We have long advocated doing away with this archaic election process. We fear that someday, and it has almost happened a few times, the President

elected by the people will not be the President selected by the electoral college. One man, one vote has been the rallying cry of democracy. Why should this principle be bastardized here in America, the cradle of democracy?

As Congress prepares to reform itself, it should also address the election of our President and eliminate the electoral college procedure.

Again, congratulations to so many for taking part in democracy by voting.

And why not?

The need is so great

Look into the eyes of a small child. Tell the youngster that "Santa Claus is coming" and those eyes will sparkle with excitement, anticipation, joy. That is an important part of the spirit of Christmas for most of us. There is a segment in our society, however, that, through no fault of their own, must deliver a different message: "Santa Claus won't come to our house this year." The look on the faces and in the eyes of the youngsters who are given this message reflect a reaction far different. Those eyes will be filled with despair, with tears.

The goal of The Group, a consortium of volunteers who band together each year during the holidays, is to banish that despair and wipe away those

tears. That goal is to bring a message of love to those who are facing hard times, a helping hand to ease their plight, a shoulder to lean on to let them know they are not alone.

Christmas is more than tinsel and wrappings, ribbons and bows. It is more than bright lights, and carols, and festive holiday gatherings. Christmas is special because it signifies a very special event, an event that offers hope and love. Christmas is a feeling, one of good will to all, of love, of hope. While The Group's efforts take the shape of gaily-wrapped presents for the children, contained in those efforts is the feeling of reaching out and touching someone's life, of sharing, of human kindness, one to another.

Last year, The Group was successful in helping the eyes of more than 150 children to sparkle. Despite the plight of their parents who were facing the problems wrought by the loss of employment, serious illness or other dilemmas, and a very bleak outlook for a happy Christmas, Santa Claus did come into their lives. The special dreams they harbored, although they did not dare to hope, were realized in many instances. Since each child was individually shopped for by a member of The Group, with funds donated by others who share the dream, they found that special toy they wished for beneath the tree on Christmas morning. They found warm clothing. There were gift certificates for

shoes, for food. They found many presents, but most of all they found love. The love of those more fortunate, willing to share with those who are not.

Unfortunately, there may well be fewer eyes sparkling this year. The need is so great, more so than ever in these hard economic times. But the economy is presenting an obstacle in The Group's efforts to help as many young children as is humanly possible. While there has been a generous response from many, contributions are not keeping up with the growing need.

You can help. A contribution, no matter how large or small, will help make it possible for The Group to reach out and touch the lives of many more families who are facing very hard times. "There but for the grace of God go I" has a very special meaning when the plight of others less fortunate is known. You can show your appreciation for your good fortune by helping to help those in need.

Every penny contributed goes to those in need. Not one cent is spent for anything but the gifts for the families helped by The Group. There are no administrative, accounting, or postage costs. All are donated, as are the wrappings and bows. Volunteers shop for each family's needs, many merchants offer generous discounts helping to make the dollars stretch further.

Won't you be a part of The Group's efforts to bring that certain sparkle to the eyes of the innocent victims--the children?

And why not?

The mouse must roar!

Governor Mario Cuomo and Assembly Speaker Saul Weprin are both New York City Democrats. Street fighters who are tough and mean, cutting and often devious. They are a formidable foe to the third part of the trio that runs New York State, Senate Majority Leader Ralph Marino.

Marino in stature is a big man. By pure size alone he can be intimidating. Once he opens his mouth, he projects an image of meek and mild mannered, a softness that his opponents perceive as a weakness. It has been said that although Marino may look like a lion, he is more of a mouse. He never learned how to roar. Marino should be roaring in outrage at the governor's latest guerrilla raid on suburbia.

Cuomo, to make up for some of his fiscal mismanagement, is attempting to raid the dedicated lock box funds for transportation. New York is only one of four states that, up until last year, did not have a dedicated fund for transportation. Forty-six other states save as they go by taxing transportation, fuels and imposing tolls. These monies go into a dedicated fund and are there to maintain, rebuild and build new transportation facilities.

Cuomo has not been hesitant about imposing transportation taxes and user fees. While most thought that these taxes were earmarked for transportation, Cuomo and Company wasted them by putting them into the general fund where they could be spent on anything and everything.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which runs the buses, the railroads and the commuter lines, has a deficit in the New York City Transit System. The logical and the fair thing to do would be to raise fares on the lines that are causing the deficit. The people who are directly benefiting should pay their own way.

Cuomo opposes this; he wants to raid the dedicated transportation fund and again have suburbia bail out the City. And he wants to grab revenues from the commuter railroads, the Long Island Rail Road and Metro North, to allow MTA officials to bail out the city operations. Cuomo labels these funds as "surplus" in an effort to cover his actions.

Senator Levy charged last week that Cuomo "knows full well that those resources are vitally necessary to meet commuter rail capital and operating needs. If a person has \$5 in his pocket today, that \$5 isn't a surplus if he or she

has \$10 worth of bills due tomorrow."

Levy, who has been a staunch fighter against Cuomo's raid of dedicated funds for transportation projects, and of the commuter rail revenues, added: "Such mischaracterization occurs because it suits the governor's purpose in what is just the latest chapter in the continuing saga of suburban bashing--seeking to rob Peter to pay Paul--and when all else fails, just take the commuters' money and neglect to mention that the Transit Authority already receives more subsidy money than what is generated in New York City."

Levy has fought an admirable fight on behalf of the suburbs and their residents. But he needs help from the Long Island Democrats who are a part of the political majority in the Assembly.

While these Democratic assemblymen may share a political bond with the governor, they have an obligation to the people who elected them to serve. They must follow Levy's lead, stand up to their leadership and to the governor. They must let them know the suburbs' taxpayers can no longer be expected to foot the bill for the city's problems.

Cuomo's major support, and the major support of the Democratic Assembly, comes from New York City. Cuomo and Weprin will do anything to protect this base. Marino is the only person who can stop these thieves in the night. He must roar like a lion rather than squeak like a mouse. He must become as tough and as devious as those he is dealing with.

And why not?

Profile without courage

The Suffolk County budget fiasco played out to the final minutes of the final day last week. Suffolk County legislators finally, after being stalled for two days, approved the county's tax levy, one which will bring varying percentages of tax rate increase in the various towns. The average increase across the county is predicted to be 5.8 percent.

Last week's haggling is a prime example of why the county is in such a fiscal dilemma. Politics was the key ingredient. Despite the fact that the tax levy had to be signed last week in order for tax bills to be sent out on a timely basis, at first seven, and then six, legislators voted against approving the levy. Their reason? Because they face election next year, and they did not want it said they voted to increase taxes.

A profile without courage!

The county's fiscal crisis does not come as a surprise. The legislators voted to increase the county's sale tax twice in order to raise additional funds to offset a deficit that grew almost daily. They had ample opportunity during this past year to face the problem head on. They could have, and most certainly should have, spent every available moment

going through the budget with a fine-toothed comb, weeding out every bit of waste, cutting costs. They didn't. They left that task up to County Executive Robert Gaffney, and when he produced a budget that called for a tax rate hike of about 20 percent, they went wild.

They produced another one of their specialties, an omnibus bill that contained more fiction than fact. A host of imaginary savings. In one instance, the bill took a county cost obligation, funding tuition costs for county residents who attend out-of-county community colleges, and simply switched that cost to the towns. They did the same thing last year, and only one town, Shelter Island, paid the bill. Town officials this year are threatening legal action to thwart this move, which simply transfers the tax burden to town residents, who, of course, are also county taxpayers. Simply transferring the obligation is not the solution, providing some leadership to eliminate this senseless charge is what is needed. But is sorely lacking.

This is but one example, there are many others, of ducking the real issue with imaginary solutions.

The Suffolk County legislators must put partisan politics aside. They must end the senseless bickering between

their branch of the government and the county executive's office. Everyone, Democrat, Republican, Conservative, must work together to resolve the financial problem. The problem is clear: there is too much spending. More taxes, sales or property, are not the answer. They are an admission of failure.

The time for one-shot budget schemes, transferred obligations, imaginary savings is over. It's bare bones time. The county needs to work with the towns to end duplication, not saddle them with added costs. There must be careful scrutiny of all spending, all positions.

Suffolk County officials must face up to the realization, once and for all, that the solutions of the past didn't work. The problem still exists. Hiking the tax rate isn't the answer. It simply worsens the plight of the already overburdened taxpayer.

The clock is ticking for the Suffolk County legislators. Election Day 1993 looms large. The months ahead represent the ultimate, and final, deadline for the legislators to show they are up to the task of managing the county's fiscal affairs.

And why not?

They say: 'It's for the kids'

The rallying cry of the educational establishment has always been, "It's for the kids." Who could be against spending money on the kids' education? If you dare speak out against it, you are ostracized.

Over the last several years, Suffolk Life has spoken out and we have taken our share of heat for it. We saw this spending on the kids in a different light. We saw the waste, the greed, the utter disregard for the taxpayers, and how not all of the money being spent on education really benefited the kids.

Nothing has quite brought this sad state of affairs to the public's attention more than the recent retirement of Superintendent Dr. Edward Murphy, BOCES III. Dr. Murphy has just ripped off the system for close to one million dollars, \$963,833 in actual fact, in retirement benefits, payment for 261 unused vacation days, 551 unused personal and sick days, and a retirement incentive of \$100,000. Money that was raised for education that was sup-

posed to go to the kids is going to fill his greedy pockets. That money won't help any child read or comprehend better, or be more capable of doing basic math.

The members of the Board of Boces III granted Dr. Murphy this golden parachute on top of a salary that topped \$200,000 per year, along with an estimated \$100,000 in additional perks. The board defended this giveaway by claiming that Murphy was some kind of superstar when it came to administrators. They cranked up the copy machine and put out all kinds of puff pieces lordling his accomplishments in order to justify this rape of the taxpayers and robbery of the students.

Murphy is only the tip of the iceberg. Other top administrators in most school districts have gone out to pasture with exorbitant payouts. The system gets raped, the kids get hurt, and the taxpayers see their real estate taxes increase to fund this squandering of the resources.

Our assemblymen and senators are fi-

nally waking up and are beginning to demand that controls be put on BOCES and the individual school districts here on Long Island. Maybe they will now consider, very seriously, putting caps on state aid that are tied to keeping the overhead factors of schools in line.

During the last ten years, while enrollments have decreased by over 50%, many districts spent ten times the amount on administrators than they had a decade ago. Salaries for administrators skyrocketed as the administrative staffs swelled. Today most superintendents rip the system off for salaries of \$100,000 to \$150,000. Are they worth it? Why are we so generous? During the same period, the achievement level of the students faltered and declined. Kids are being graduated from high school with less than an eighth grade ability to read or a seventh grade comprehension of math.

The New York State Education Department, headed by Thomas Sobol, has

persistently ignored the cries from the citizens on the Island. They refuse to do anything to hold either the administrators or the educational establishment responsible for keeping expenditures intact, or upholding the quality of education. Instead of insisting upon adequate time being spent on the three R's, they have mandated social programs that have cut into the three R's time. How much longer can we afford this insanity?

In fact, Sobol did nothing to control his own representatives. BOCES superintendents are, as a matter of fact, official representatives of the State Education Department, and receive at least, it could be more, \$43,000 from the state.

Murphy's payout was based upon unused vacation and sick days as well as other prerequisites. Now that the state has taken a belated interest, they should demand verification for every day that Murphy was supposed to be at work. When you are talking about a million dollar payout, there should be some guarantee that the person put in the time, that all the time was spent on the business at hand, and the taxpayers are not paying for unrecorded days off. They should also determine why payments for unused vacation and sick time is based on Murphy's final daily rate, rather than the value of the day when it was earned at a lower salary.

We hope the state's anger and promised action will result in a return of the money that Murphy has received, and that it is used for the children whom it was raised to benefit.

We hope, too, that this million dollar ripoff will result in audits of BOCES operations to determine how much of this wanton waste is going on. It should also lead to a total revision of the BOCES system to prevent this from ever happening again.

As for the BOCES III board members - V. Michael Pick, president; Eleonore Roll, Edward Blankenhorn Jr., Herbert Charnes, Sydney Finkelstein, Elizabeth VanBourgonien, and Michael Vinciguerra - they should be removed from office. Their complicity in this million dollar ripoff should bar them from ever having access to taxpayers' dollars again.

And why not?

Work for welfare

In Westchester County, 45% of the people who are on welfare must work for it. Here in Suffolk County, only five percent take part in workfare.

Legislator Allan Binder is holding hearings to find out why Suffolk is not imposing the state's approved workfare rules in this county. The information that comes from those hearings might well prove very interesting.

Under the state's rules, adults who are physically able, and who have applied for welfare benefits, must present themselves for employment in either the private or the public sector. If private sector jobs are not available, make-work jobs within not-for-profit organizations or within government are to be created.

The purpose of these jobs is to accomplish a mission while, at the same time, giving the recipient an opportunity

to become retrained and get back his or her self-esteem.

One only has to look at the infrastructure in Suffolk County and you can see needs for labor. These needs range from the mundane pickup and cleanup to the painting and repair of buildings and facilities. From what we have gathered, there are two main obstacles which must be overcome, the social service commissioner, who is not a supporter of workfare, and the municipal unions who are opposed to non-union labor performing any job its membership can fill.

The first problem could be overcome by a strong message from the county executive and backed by the county legislature to the social service commissioner ordering her to implement a workfare plan. Her refusal or procrastination in complying with the order could be considered insubordi-

nation, and a move could be instituted to remove her from office.

The unions might be more difficult to deal with, but common sense might prevail if they realized that this program is not only good for the government, but good for them as employees of the government. They are taxpayers too, and when the membership is given a choice of seeing their taxes paid out in benefits with nothing tangible coming back in return, or seeing things accomplished, we are sure they will opt in support of workfare.

Nobody wants to deny aid to anyone in need, but nobody wants to see someone else getting part of their paycheck for doing nothing, while they are out working their butts off to create the taxes to fund the system.

Suffolk's goal should be to be the workfare capital of New York State.

And why not?

We must not project our values

No one can turn their eyes or their hearts away from the images of the starvation in Somalia. Deep down in each of us there is a voice that cries out, we must do something.

America's intervention in the Somalia problem has the support of the majority of the population. Our invasion is being touted as humane intervention through the auspices of a military operation.

We recently visited Africa. Like most Americans we only had a smattering of knowledge about this continent. The three weeks we spent there gave us an opportunity to see, to feel and to understand a little about the country and its people.

Contrary to popular conceptions, Africa is not united, but is a continent of very diverse and widely divergent countries. Each country is made up of different people and different tribes. Our visit was limited to South Africa and a few of the surrounding countries. We had the freedom to go where we wanted to go, to ask questions we wanted answers to. Nothing was held back.

South Africa itself is a very advanced First World country. Its infrastructure matches that of the United States. The roads, sewage, electricity, and water are

superb. It has modern hospitals, universities, shopping malls and cultural centers. It also has its ghettos, squatter camps, refugee camps and homelands. Frighteningly, it is believed they also have a nuclear capability.

We complain about a seven percent unemployment rate in the United States. In South Africa, it is estimated that the unemployment rate exceeds 45 percent. South Africa, as has the rest of Africa, has suffered the effects of the El Nino winds which produced a three-year drought. This was coming to an end when we were departing for home. The rains had finally started to come. Meteorologists felt that the weather would return to normal during the next two to three years.

The people of South Africa are diverse. In South Africa the official population has been established at 24 million. Approximately five million are white, six million colored (those neither black or white) and the balance are black. The blacks are broken into at least 30 different tribes. Each of these tribes have heritages and cultures, bigotries and hatreds that go back before the time of Christ. For centuries they have been at war and to this day are still locked in fierce battle, routinely killing each other.

Most of the African natives are nomads who for centuries have roamed over the landscape. Their pattern has been to find an area that was deemed suitable, create a crude encampment, live off the land, consuming the natural growth and the animal life, putting nothing back into the soil. When all life had been exhausted, they would move to a new area.

The tribes are communal. The women do the work. A man who is able to acquire possessions is honored. A man who is not able to protect these possessions is considered weak and a chump. The man who takes the possessions away from one who cannot protect them is revered as a hero.

Many of the rules of their society we would consider obscene and offensive. We do not understand their culture, and probably never will. We do not see life through their eyes yet, we want them to see life through ours. They want the possessions we gather and the quality of life we enjoy but, they do not want the regimentation that is required to obtain it, to earn it.

We fear our entry into Somalia is a bloody trap that we may never get out of. It is one thing to provide aid and another to take over a country militaristically. There can be no question that we could not have gotten the aid to those who are

starving and in need of medical attention without a full-scale military operation. For all intensive purposes, we are occupying a country that does not have a government. We will meet our short-term humanitarian goal of feeding the hungry and saving lives, but in the future we will be faced with the hard choice of continued occupation or a pull out which will mean a return to life as it was. We cannot, and will not, change thousands of years of history by one act of kindness or even a lifetime of military intervention.

We should be realistic and go beyond the television sound bites. Starvation and man's inhumanity to man is not limited to Somalia, it's rampant through most of Africa, South America and much of Asia.

Do we have the right, the will or the force to project our values on the rest of the world? Can we afford the consequences?

The whole question goes far beyond a 10-second sound bite that is included in today's news and sensationalism. When television has long forgotten Somalia, the problems will persist and it is questionable whether our intervention will have helped, or hindered, in the long run.

And why not?