

## Message to Governor, Legislators

# Cut the fiscal nonsense

New York State is in a financial crisis. The bond rating agencies have dropped our credit worthiness quotient because of the financial chaos created by years of reckless spending on the state level.

It costs New York State half as much again to run the state as it does to run the average state. You don't even have to travel to Alabama or Arkansas. New York spends 50 percent more per capita than do Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut or Vermont, our sister states. Even though we have taxed ourselves half as much again as our neighboring states tax their citizens, we have not been able to keep up with the ferocious appetite of Governor Mario Cuomo and the legislature, who propose the spending plans and enact the taxation to pay for them.

This year Governor Cuomo proposed a budget of \$51 billion, 400 million for the State of New York. The governor's proposed budget is one billion, 500 million dollars higher than anticipated revenues from all sources of taxation. If New York was spending at a rate similar to other states, the governor's proposed budget should be approximately \$36 billion.

### Shortfall

All hell has broken loose in Albany over the proposed cutbacks in the proposed budget by the governor. His total proposal for cutbacks amounts to less than one percent of his spending proposals. This, in itself, will leave a revenue shortfall of \$1 billion. A three percent cutback is needed to bring the budget in balance. The proposed cutbacks the governor has announced include a whole mass of people-sensitive items deliberately designed to arouse your anger. They cover everything from school aid to mental health.

The governor is approaching this fiscal crisis out of the same stupidity that has led to the chaos. He refuses to address the total shortfall of three percent, offering only a one percent plan. He is not proposing a huge cut. The total of his proposed cuts amount to one percent. Why is he targeting the people-sensitive issues? Isn't this resorting to emotional blackmail of the taxpayers?

### Blackmail

His message is: Give the folks back home their choice of increasing taxes further or suffering a cutback in the most sensitive programs. This ploy is used from the federal government down to the local school boards. Pick the items that are people-sensitive, dealing with education, health and welfare. Announce the stripping of these programs, cutbacks people can feel, and you will blackmail them into supporting a whole new round of taxes.

The governor announced that he is going to cut back on school aid. Every superintendent, school board member and parent will scream, "save our aid, increase taxes." If the governor is going to propose cutbacks in aid, then let him propose compensating cutbacks in state-mandated programs not funded by the state to offset the loss of local revenues.

### Illusion

They have announced a cutback in state police. Law and order advocates will

protest and create the illusion that the criminals will have a field day. Why not propose cutbacks in the appointed bureaucracy as an alternative?

The state has announced a cutback in mental health and aid to the handicapped. Advocates of these programs will use any stretch of the imagination to depict mentally-impaired people filling the streets; handicapped being thrown to the wolves. Raw emotionalism will run high, common sense and good government won't. Instead of targeting those who need services, why not eliminate the bureaucracy that is hampering the growth and the economic development of New York State?

One of the reasons New York State is in trouble is that its disproportionate taxes have forced business, industry and productive workers, including retirees with real disposable income, out of the state. A recent study indicated that New York lost hundreds of thousands of jobs over the last ten years. These jobs did not flee south. They went to the surrounding states close to the metropolitan area where the tax burden is not as restrictive and the other reasons for doing business are equal and better than those in New York State.

### Crumbling

Governor Mario Cuomo is a skilled orator. He is likened to a magician who can create an illusion. Combining these two talents, he has successfully masked the deep-rooted problems from Buffalo to Montauk and, in doing so, has made us feel good about ourselves while the very foundation we are standing on is crumbling beneath us.

The foundation collapse is now becoming apparent. His solution of increasing taxes is not the medicine, it is the cancer.

The raw politics being played with the New York State budget is disastrous and a disgrace. Most of us have trouble understanding billions of dollars. We do not normally work with this range of numbers, and therefore find it hard to comprehend.

### Just one percent

All must keep in mind that the total of the cutbacks being proposed are less than one percent of the total budget. Taken in context of one hundred percent of the budget, we must demand that the governor and the legislature find avenues that are not people-sensitive from which to make their cuts. We could understand cuts in education, mental health, handicapped programs and social services if the governor had proposed a state budget that would bring New York State's in line with the rest of the nation. The governor is not even talking about a ten percent cutback, just a piddling one percent.

If he can't find one percent in a \$51 billion, 400 million budget that does not affect necessary programs for the people, then he must accept the fact that he is a terribly incompetent executive and does not deserve the honor of being governor of this state.

We hope you are all as sick and tired of the Albany shell game as we are and are ready to do something about it.

We urge every reader of Suffolk Life

to write to the governor, encourage him to cut taxes, eliminate programs that must be eliminated, cut the political fat out of the state budget, and bring our costs of doing business in this state in line with the rest of the nation. The same message should be sent to our state assemblymen and senators. They have to hear from you now, because they are hearing from every group with a vested interest which holds its favorite project sacred.

If there ever was a time that it was imperative for you to sit down and write, or call, it is now. For your convenience, we have listed the names, addresses and phone numbers of the governor and the Suffolk delegation of assemblymen and senators:

Gov. Mario Cuomo, The State Capitol, Executive Chamber, Albany, N.Y. 12244. (518-474-8390)

Senator Ralph Marino, Senate Majority Leader, State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. 12247. (518-455-2392)

Senators Kenneth LaValle, James J. Lack, Caesar Trunzo, Owen H. Johnson, Senate Chambers, The Capitol, Albany, N.Y. 12247. (518-455-2800)

Assemblyman Mell Miller, Speaker of the Assembly, Room 932 LOB, Albany, N.Y. 12248. (518-455-3791)

Assemblymen Joseph Sawicki, John Behan, Robert Gaffney, Paul Harenberg, Robert Wertz, Thomas Barraga, John Cochrane, John Flanagan, James Conte, Robert Sweeney, New York State Assembly, Legislative Office Building, Albany, N.Y. 12248. (518-455-4100)

And why not?

## Competition is key to success

Last November, every Suffolk County legislative candidate expounded on the need to cut costs, reduce taxes. A week ago last Tuesday, the Suffolk County Legislature had an opportunity to stand up and be counted. But 12 legislators didn't. They failed.

The county runs a bus transportation system. The county provides the operators of the bus companies with the buses to operate. The county pays the operators an overhead fee plus costs to maintain the buses, plus guarantees the operators a profit.

County Legislator Fred Thiele, at the urging of citizens and outsiders involved with the transportation industry, had a bill on the floor of the legislature that would have required Suffolk County to offer the franchises for the operation of the bus service in Suffolk County on a competitive bid basis.

According to the Wall Street Journal, municipalities that have gone to competitive bidding have experienced a reduction of up to 50 percent in the cost of transportation. There was no noticeable deterioration of service. In fact, under competitive bidding, municipalities reported better service, and were able to expand service. In one particular instance, a 50 percent increase in ridership was achieved.

Currently, six operators hold the

franchises. Audits have cited a lack of substantiation for claimed expense costs, and a lack of oversight by the county. Record keeping was poor in some instances. The county, in other instances, was overcharged and had to seek repayment.

The legislature was, or indeed should have been aware, of these facts. They realized the savings to the taxpayers. But they ignored the facts. They insisted "if it ain't broke, don't fix it," claiming they have had few complaints about service. From reports we have heard, bus drivers were using scare tactics, telling riders that the service would be discontinued if the legislators approved the competitive bidding proposal. The bus company provided transportation to express fear about losing their bus transportation. And that gave 12 legislators an excuse to hide behind when they voted against Thiele's proposal.

In order to meet the current fiscal crisis, several bus routes have been eliminated. East End routes were targeted for elimination because of the "high cost of ridership." The legislators apparently don't realize that the cost per rider can be reduced by increasing the number of users, OR cutting the initial cost of operation. Rather than eliminate service in areas where other transportation is lacking, why not strive to decrease the cost

of that service? Why not try, as Legislator Michael Caracciolo suggested, competitive bidding in an area where the service is discontinued. Or on the East End, where the "cost of ridership" is high? The following legislators voted against competitive bidding and the potential savings of up to 50 percent of our transportation costs. Herbert Davis, Rose Caracappa, Stephen Englebright, Michael D'Andre, Sondra Bachety, Allan Binder, Richard Schaffer, Michael O'Donohoe, Thomas Finlay, Rick Lazio, Maxine Postal, Joseph Rizzo.

The following legislators voted for the taxpayers, voted for those who need public transportation. They voted yes. Fred Thiele, Michael Caracciolo, Steve Levy, Donald Blydenburgh, James Gaughan.

We can only wonder what hidden motives caused legislators to walk away from an opportunity to save the taxpayers of Suffolk County a lot of dollars. Why are they afraid to try a pilot project to determine what savings can be accomplished, instead of eliminating routes that serve a need?

We expect the issue of competitive bidding for bus routes to come up again. You might drop those who voted against this a note. The next time they come out into the public, let them know how disappointed you are with their betrayal.

And why not?



Threatened by county officials:

Your right to have a voice

The Suffolk County Legislature recently passed a new and greatly involved Initiative and Referendum measure which would give the citizens of Suffolk County an opportunity to voice their opinion, through referendum, on issues the legislature does not have the courage to face.

The county's current Initiative and Referendum measure is full of loopholes and traps which prevented

citizens from using the I & R mechanism effectively.

Before the new measure can become law; however, County Executive Halpin must sign it. Halpin is already under pressure from Newsday not to sign this bill into law. Newsday argues you should not have the right to make decisions for yourself, that should be the sole prerogative of your elected officials.

on the inside, they could not do on the outside.

As a citizen of the United States, you do have your right to a vote, and I & R gives you the right to decide issues that have meaningful impact on your life. To get a measure on the ballot, proponents still must draft their argument skillfully, they must develop an army of people to circulate petitions.

five percent of the gubernatorial voters from their towns.

The new measure only clears up some of the impossible technicalities and streamlines the signature process. It will be no easy task for proponents to get a measure onto the ballot. For a measure to get on the ballot, it must have general support and adequate concern.

Newsday calls that kind of people action "Distorted Democracy," and declares the new proposal means any individual and organization, responsible or crackpot, could propose legislation to be voted on in a referendum.

Printed below are two messages, one to the county executive urging him to approve this measure. The second is to county legislators, urging them to override Halpin's veto if Halpin disregards your right to determination.

And why not?

County Executive Halpin:

We demand to be given the right to express our opinion by having a working Initiative and Referendum mechanism here in Suffolk County.

Name
Address
Town

Dear Legislator:

We want to have the opportunity to express our opinion through a workable Initiative and Referendum law here in Suffolk County.

Name
Address
Town

Nothing wrong with work

A few days ago, I was in a discussion with our director of sales and one of my sons. Both have been successful because of their dedication to hard work and their desire to achieve.

My son remembers his impetus was walking three miles to a job on a duck farm, finding his first chore of the day was to shovel duck manure that covered his knees.

Our director of sales worked, as a young girl, in a sweat shop. She worked alongside immigrants, legal and illegal, who spent long, hard and tedious hours producing items by the piece.

I, as a young boy, also worked on a farm picking potatoes and strawberries and cutting cauliflower alongside the migrants who were then considered among the lowest forms of humanity.

This past week I heard from another self-made man, Tony Pierra of Aid Auto Stores. He started with nothing, and by working long hours, has built a major business here on Long Island.

Tony called because he was disturbed

about a proposed law that will change the hours students can work. The proposed changes in the law were not brought to him by his legislator, they were brought to him by young people he has working for him.

They asked rhetorically, "If by law I can only work three hours after school, rather than the four I am working, if my hours are cut back from 20 to 10, will I be fired?"

Many young people go to work after school, not only to Aid Auto Stores, but to McDonald's and other fast food restaurants. They work in automotive shops and other trades, doing what apprentices have done from the start of the crafts.

Other kids, those who have athletic abilities or special interests and have the parents' income to afford the luxury of not working, go out for sports and extracurricular activities. Those that don't possess these interests or do not have the family income to support their luxuries, are left with two choices, they can go to work, where they learn and they earn or they can hang out on the streets, where they learn how to get into trouble and are pressured into doing drugs and crime to support their habit.

A group of state labor leaders and human engineers has lobbied to increase the restric-

tions on work by youths. They want the state legislature to further limit the number of hours teenage students can work.

These people may be well intended, but we believe they have lost sight of the value of work.

The state labor leaders have the value of work very much in sight. They see youngsters taking jobs away from adults. We think this is nearsighted. Most of the jobs that kids do are entry level positions.

The money they earn helps the family meet the demands of an expensive society. It provides them with some of the luxuries they would otherwise be denied. In many cases, it is the difference between going on to college or dropping out.

If you agree, drop a card or a note to your legislator. Let's give the youth some help in preventing what could be a serious injustice.

And why not?

County Executive PATRICK G. HALPIN (D), H. Lee Dennison Building, Veterans Memorial Highway, Hauppauge, NY, 11788, 360-4000.

County Legislators:

- Dist. 1: MICHAEL CARACCILO (R), Main Road, Aquebogue, NY 11931, 722-3130.
Dist. 2: HERBERT W. DAVIS (R), 640 Montauk Highway, Shirley, NY 11967, 399-0500.
Dist. 3: JOHN J. FOLEY (D), 31 Oak Street, Patchogue, NY 11772, 475-5800.
Dist. 4: ROSE CARACAPPA (C), 248 Middle Country Road, Building 1-Suite 3, Selden, NY 11784, 732-2000.
Dist. 5: STEVEN ENGLEBRIGHT (D), 149 Main Street, East Setauket, NY 11733, 689-8500.
Dist. 6: DONALD BLYDENBURGH (R), Presiding Officer, 50 Route 111, Suite 208, Smithtown, NY 11787, 724-4888.
Dist. 7: MICHAEL D'ANDRE (R), 49 Landing Avenue, Smithtown, NY 11787, 724-5705.
Dist. 8: STEVEN LEVY (D), 22-30 Railroad Avenue, Sayville, NY 11782, 567-0460.
Dist. 9: JOSEPH RIZZO (R), 32-50 Sunrise Highway, East Islip, NY 11730, 581-3621.
Dist. 10: THOMAS FINLAY (R), 1235 Suffolk Avenue, Brentwood, NY 11717, 435-8658.
Dist. 11: RICK LAZIO (R), 4 Udall Road, West Islip, NY 11795, 661-1800.

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# It's a shame they haven't learned

Last year around this time, the taxpayers of Suffolk County organized under the banner of Tax PAC, the Taxpayers Political Action Committee. This organization was born out of frustration. County taxes had just increased from 40 to 60 percent. Town taxes had been on the rise. Although the number of children attending schools had been declining rapidly, school taxes were rising at alarming rates.

The tax burden had grown to a proportion where people were not only feeling the pinch, but were forced to cut back on necessities. Steak had become hamburger. Doctors' visits were being postponed. The needs of everyday life were being put aside so that folks could meet their tax obligations. As their obligations increased beyond their ability to increase their own income, "For Sale" signs started to pop up in just about every neighborhood across Long Island. The grim reality was that many folks who love Long Island had to move. They simply could not afford to live here anymore.

After Tax PAC was created and focused its attention on school budgets

last spring, many schools reduced their announced intention of increasing taxes from 15 to 20 percent down to 5 to 10 percent. But even those lower increases were not acceptable to those homeowners who had cut back all they could.

Forty-nine percent of the school budgets proposed last year went down to defeat on the first ballot. School officials and those in the educational system reeled with disbelief. How could those who had gone along in the past with increases in their taxes of 15 to 20 percent reject budgets, finally say "no more, enough is enough, we have had it?" They panted in agony. They howled: "the voters do not know what they are doing to themselves. Those who voted "no" are anti-education, anti-children."

Quite the contrary! The great majority of the members of Tax PAC are pro-education, they want our children to be properly taught to read. And, through an understanding of the English language, be able to communicate and seek out the truth. They want their children to understand math, to learn to calculate and arrive at conclusions through logic. They want them to know science so that

they understand their bodies and the composition of the world, and how to use it to better the quality of life for themselves and their children.

As upset as they were about the cost of education, they were equally concerned about the quality of education which has led to the United States being ranked 59 and 60 of the 60 industrial nations in the world in science and math. They were sick of seeing young men and women arrive at the work place and not be able to read an employee application, employee handbook, or an instructional manual on how to operate a piece of equipment.

They knew something was wrong, they did not know what. During this past year they have tried to work with the educational establishment to understand the finances of the schools, the curriculum, and learn why emphasis is not being placed on the fundamentals and the basics as it was when they were young.

Many of the groups have been met with outright hostility. They were told they were interfering where they did not belong. When they sought information, particularly information con-

cerning the funding of the schools and how expenditures were allocated, they were told in order to secure this information, they had to file under freedom of information. This procedure is time-consuming and costly.

Many Tax PAC members sought out and were sought out to join citizen advocate committees whose purpose was to help develop the financial plans for this year. Those who did have complained about groups being stacked with educators, parents and others who have a vested interest in the perpetuation of the status quo.

In Smithtown, a group of Tax PAC people became sincerely involved in such an effort. The school had established two committees, one pro-education, one pro-taxpayer. The two obviously came to different conclusions, but had the good sense to reconcile and attempt to work out their differences. They met with the school board to present their findings. They sought additional time to further explore the important financial issues. But the school board called the meeting to an end and announced the board members had already made up their minds, they had already approved their budget proposal. It became obvious to committee members that the board had created these committees solely to allow those who had been involved to vent their frustrations and anger. One member of the volunteers who had put in his time, energy and effort related this incident to us in utter disgust and contempt. He is right, and we should be as disgusted as he is.

The citizens, both pro-taxpayer and pro-education, have tried to work together to develop an educational product that will give our children the education they deserve at a cost the taxpayer can afford. Too many superintendents and school board members consider themselves gods. They treat the citizen taxpayer as an idiot who is expected to toil in the vineyards and pay his dues, but never open his mouth.

This year, if budgets presented are too high for the taxpayers to accept, the administration and the school boards have no one to blame but themselves for budget defeats. They deliberately set out on a course that ultimately will hurt the children. The taxpayers gave fair, square warning last year—they wanted reform now. School boards that propose budgets above last year, budgets that do not reflect realistic reductions, should be defeated. Defeat is the only language that has any meaning or can bring about the reform in education that the establishment has mandated on the taxpayer. Sooner or later the educational leaders must get the message that the days of wine and roses are over. That they can no longer keep dipping into the taxpayers' pockets as they have in the past. That a new day has dawned.

# We're out of control!

We're in a period of time when things are getting so bad, it's almost funny. Almost, because when the bills come in for some of the idiotic happenings, we'll all be taken to the cleaners. The fact of the matter is: We're out of control!

Some examples: Towns throughout Suffolk County are under the heavy guns of the state's Department of Environmental Conservation. They are the so-called "enforcers" of the state laws handed down from Albany concerning matters of environment and waste disposal. The DEC has a system of filing "consent orders" against towns for alleged violations found at landfills, orders which are generally accompanied by stiff fines. The towns have two alternatives: fight the orders, which requires a hefty expenditure of dollars for legal fees, or negotiate with the DEC. The latter process can result in reduced fines, but they are still pretty expensive.

Southampton Town, for example, paid the DEC a fine of \$100,000 as part of a consent order to close a section of its North Sea landfill. The town envisioned utilizing those funds—which the DEC placed in an "environmental fund"—for various projects at the landfill, such as methane collection and well monitoring. But the DEC rejected these proposals.

Recently it became quite clear why. Regional Director Harold Berger appeared at a town board meeting and said he wanted to use the money "for things that you would not ordinarily do, things that will make your life better."

He wants to establish an environmental camp, at an estimated cost of \$100,000 to \$200,000, for youth between the ages of 11 and 14.

Frankly, there many people in Southampton Town—who will now have to foot the bill for the methane collection and well monitoring—who could find uses for \$100,000 that might make their lives a little better. Town residents everywhere are facing unbelievable costs in the future to meet the requirements of the landfill law, which is forcing towns into multi-million dollar incinerators and composting facilities. They are going to need every bit of help they can get to meet those costs, and creating an environmental camp is not the way to do it. If such a camp has value, why not solicit the support of the environmental groups throughout the area? Let the private sector pay for the frills, utilizing taxpayers' dollars for the essentials.

Another example: as noted, towns are being forced into construction of multi-million dollar incinerator facilities. These facilities are based on a minimum tonnage to make them financially feasible. If they don't receive that base amount of garbage, the costs go up tremendously.

This has established a new mindset on the part of town officials. It used to be towns would have spotters trailing garbage trucks to make sure "out of town" garbage did not wind up in their landfills. Now, however, towns are out attempting to identify those carters who are taking the garbage out of town, to outside locations where tipping fees are cheaper.

Babylon is in the midst of this turnaround now. Because Hempstead's waste to energy plant is charging lower tipping fees than Babylon, carters are taking garbage there. The Town of Hempstead is not only charging fees lower than Babylon, the outside carters are charged less than Hempstead Town's own residents. The carters pay from \$48 to \$60 a ton, while town residents, through their taxes, face a charge of \$70 per ton.

Babylon officials are so concerned about the problem, they are eyeing the creation of a municipal garbage system to do commercial pickups, just to guarantee the garbage collected goes to the town facility. According to Jeff Morosoff, town spokesperson, "Every time garbage leaves town, we lose revenues and our taxpayers are going to suffer for it."

**We're out of control!**

We're paying for the wish lists of DEC officials, and spending tax dollars to make sure we get all our garbage. Bargain rates are offered to outsiders, and residents pay more. Incinerator and composting consultants and contractors get rich, while the taxpayer goes broke.

It's time, we think, to go back to square one. Take a good look at the edicts and mandates handed down by the state and its "enforcers" and start flexing our own muscles. It's often been said that the best defense is a strong offense. It's time we started fighting back!

And why not?

And why not?



## This is your money they're spending

Last week, Suffolk County Executive Patrick Halpin announced with great flair the county's purchase of the Hampton Hills property. He spent \$17.8 million of your money. He has indebted you for at least the next 20 years to pay not only the principal, but the interest on the bonds. When all is said and done, you will have paid more than \$50 million of your money, taken from you in taxes, to accomplish this feat.

In addition, Pine Valley, the Town of Southampton, the County of Suffolk and the Riverhead School District will have lost an estimated \$50 million in tax revenues that would have been raised from the three hundred, \$2,000,000 plus homes, that would have been clustered on less than 200 acres of the 1,500 plus acres that are involved in the complex.

Under the deal, the owner of the property has retained the use and the profit from the golf club. It will remain private six days a week and open to the public on Monday, when 100 lucky golfers, who are county residents, can pursue their sport.

The tragedy of this mistake is that the developer had attempted to give the county, free of charge, over 1,200 acres of the land. He had agreed to do this so that he could use the land that he had bought for the building of the 300 homes. The land was zoned five acre. He did not propose to build one house on each five acres, but cluster the homes around the golf course providing his own water, sewage treatment plant and security. The homes were designed to be built for wealthy New Yorkers as second homes. They were expected to place few children into the school system, and require only the minimum of services.

Suffolk County residents have gained a huge parcel of land made up of scrub oak and pine. In reality they have paid \$89,000 for each acre they bought that could have been developed. They have turned down the donation of 1,200 acres. They have left the golf course in private hands. They are paying \$50 million in taxes. They will lose \$50 million in tax revenues. They have lost an estimated \$30 million in work that would have gone to the trades and fueled the economy.

Wouldn't it have made more sense to allow the developer to build the 300 clustered homes on the 200 proposed acres? Ensured, through proper rules and regulations and using modern environmental technology, that the land and the air would not be polluted. Accepted the donation of the 1,200 acres and make sure that this would be kept forever wild. And, at the same time, saved the \$50 million in cost while providing a base for local municipalities through the taxes the 300 homes would have paid. Wouldn't we have been eating our cake and having it too?

Is there no sense left in our government? We were always taught that politics is the art of compromise. We

do not have the resources, and our children do not have the resources, to fund every environmental dream. Are we using our taxes wisely and properly when we could achieve the same result by being realistic, and allowing limited growth while protecting the vast acres of our land?

With the county in a state of fiscal crisis because of governmental over-spending and declining revenues, isn't it time to take a long, hard look at the way we are spending our limited resources? The politicians are crying day after day about sales tax "shortfalls" which are causing havoc with the county's operating budget. But aren't those "shortfalls"—which are nothing more than over-estimations of antic-

ipated sales tax revenues—cutting into the money that will be available for land purchases under the one-quarter percent sales tax extension approved by the people to preserve water? Where is the priority list that will designate the most important lands to protect the water? Unfortunately there is none. Politicians and "environmentalists" want to have the leeway to play games with the land purchase dollars, with no scientific data to back up their claims that "under this land lies the purest water on Long Island."

Last week was Earth Week, a fitting occasion for the announcement of this purchase. Last week was also tax week. We fear that unless a compromise is found between those who are

spending our money to protect us from ourselves, and we who are living here trying to finance ourselves, there will be no tomorrow for Long Island. For those who are today's residents will be forced to move. Those who are being asked to pay the bills today will be leaving behind this "environmental wonderland" being promoted by the environmental groups who want all or nothing at all, with no room for compromise.

The highest goal of the environmentalist should be to protect the human being. We are not doing a very good job of this by spending our limited resources when we can be conserving them.

And why not?

## Your responsibility to vote

Tragically, all too often, only a handful of people come out to vote on school budgets and for the selection of school board members. Sometimes it is only a few hundred, rarely does the figure exceed a thousand. In many past elections, less than five percent of the eligible voters voted on what affects over 60 percent of their real estate tax bill, and as important, the quality of education our children will receive.

The town sends you a tax bill the first week of December. Because it comes from the town, many people mistakenly believe their elected town officials are the ones responsible for the spending plans, including the schools, they are being taxed for. The tax bill is composed of four parts: county taxes are approximately 15 percent to 20 percent; town taxes are between 15 percent and 20 percent; special district taxes, such as water, sewage, fire, amount to generally around five percent. The balance of the tax bill is for school taxes, which normally accounts for a total of 60 to 65 percent of the total taxes you are being mandated to pay.

Each spring, during May and June, the school districts throughout Suffolk County, as required by law, give the residents of the community an opportunity to vote on the planned school expenditures for the coming year. Residents are also given the opportunity to select a board of education, the board of directors who represent the taxpayers who elected them, with powers that supersede the authority of the superintendent and principal. They set school policy, select the curriculum to be offered, determine the salaries of the teachers and principal salaries, and the benefits they receive. They are responsible for developing the budget which determines the taxes you will pay.

Too frequently, board members, or their spouses, have a vested interest in the educational establishment, or they come out of the PTA, the parents' and teachers' lobbying group for education. These board members have great latitude in determining the quality of education children will receive, and the expenditures needed to support the programs they approve. The taxpayers are then asked to pay the bill.

Over the last ten years, boards of education have led Long Island down the primrose path. The cost of education on Long Island is almost triple the average cost of the nation. It is more than double the amount that is spent by our neighboring states of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Connecticut. For a long time, many people went along with the theory that nothing was too good for our children. Spend whatever the board feels necessary today and we will reap a better educated student tomorrow. Unfortunately, the results are not there.

Students on Long Island, in comparison with students throughout the nation, are not significantly better educated to warrant the huge expenditure taxpayers are making. On a whole, American students are being educated poorly, although we spend more than any other industrial nation on a per capita basis. Business leaders and university professionals alike deplore the inability of our children to understand what they read. In math and science, in a study released last year, the United States students were 59 and 60 out of the 60 industrial nations in the world.

In the early 1970's, average classrooms on Long Island housed 20 to 25 students per room. School officials, projecting for future growth, used historical data to demonstrate the need for new schools. As the population of school age children started to decline, school officials had two choices, they could consolidate classrooms, lay off teachers and administrators, or enlarge class sizes in order to maintain and enlarge their staffs. The school boards, whose members often come from the educational field or have an interest in maintaining the status quo, cut the size of classes to maintain staff. School taxes continued to increase in the face of declining enrollment. School officials blamed the problem on "mandates", but less than 50 percent of the average educational package is state mandated.

During the 1980's, accepted the inevitable, an increase in taxation without any expectation for a return on their investment. In late 1987, Long Island's economy came to a screeching halt, home values dropped, and resi-

dents looked at their tax bills more seriously.

Last year, Tax PAC, a taxpayers' political action committee comprised of thousands of Suffolk residents, formed in an attempt to lobby our schools, town and county boards to halt their reckless spending and to reduce the tax burden. Many school districts which had originally announced 15 to 20 percent projected increases in their budgets, scaled back their expenditures and offered budgets with more modest increases. This still was not enough—49 percent of the budgets went down to defeat on the first ballot. Tax PAC has attempted to work with these boards that would cooperate in trying to improve the base core curriculum of education, while, at the same time, examining ways of cutting the expenditures. It has been a year of frustration and hard work.

There are few of us who enjoy saying "no" on a school budget. Yet, what choice do we have when the budget does not represent the financial realities of life? Those of us who have cut back not only on our luxuries, but on the necessities of life, cannot continue to spend without restraint on education. How can we support a system that has doubled in cost in just a few short years, and yet has failed to produce a much better educated student? Austerity seems to be the only thing that gets the attention of administrators and the boards of education.

We hope the voters will do two things this year. We hope they will carefully weigh their selection of school board members, support those who have business experience and are willing to give equal weight to the needs of the children and those of the people who are paying the bills. Most important, we hope everyone who has ever griped about education or grumbled about the high cost of taxes will turn out and vote. You will be voting on 60 percent of your real estate taxes, on how well our children will read, comprehend and develop skills that will allow them to logically explore their universe. It is time that your voice is heard. Let the silent majority become a raucous uproar.

And why not?