

Unveiling the sacred cow

Education has traditionally been the sacred cow of government that no one dared speak out about. The sacred cow has the largest lobbying group in Albany. Our legislators, whether they be Democrat or Republican, dare not speak out or vote against what the teachers' union demands. As strong as this lobby is and as much as it has had its way, it could not have had that success if we, the citizens, had kept our eye on the ball and were willing to speak out against the abuses that have been heaped upon us. We all love children. It's an American tradition to want more for our children than we had ourselves. We all know the value of a good education. We want the best education for our children.

Recently, a report was issued by Coopers & Lybrand, one of the countries largest accounting firms. The report was commissioned by the Long Island Federation of Labor and the Long Island Association. Coopers & Lybrand was charged with examining the cost and quality of education here on Long Island in comparison to other high tech areas within New York State and other similar high tech areas throughout the nation.

The report confirms what individuals who became concerned about education have found over the last three years. We on Long Island, particularly here in Suffolk County, are paying an inordinate amount to educate each student, yet for this investment our students' test scores are only on par and in some cases far below other competitive areas and the nation's average.

Per pupil cost

It costs us over \$10,000 in tuition to educate a student in grades K through 12. The nation's average is less than half that amount, at \$4,500. The average for the state is 40 percent less. Why are we paying over \$10,000 to educate a student when other competitive areas in New York State are paying an average of \$6,340? The answer is we have elected people to school boards who have either a vested interest or were tools of the teachers and the administrators. It is not uncommon to have teachers or their spouses serving on school boards. They may not serve in the district they work in but what they do ultimately does affect their own income, as one district's union members will argue for parity with other districts.

During the last 10 years, most school districts have seen a huge decline in enrollment. Schools should have been closed and staff laid off. Instead of doing what was practical and what would have been prudent, these school boards elected to expand the curriculum. They offered a wider array of courses in such frivolous subjects as "Safe Boating on the Great South Bay," and "How to Play the Electric Guitar," to name just two. These boards developed a whole host of courses for which credits could be earned, that detracted from the main reason students were in school, to learn how to read and write. These boards also severely reduced the ratio of teacher to student while at the same time increasing the number of aides, administrators and department heads.

Student/teacher ratio

Suffolk County now has only an average of 11.8 students to each teacher. The state-wide average is 15/1. The nation-wide high tech areas average 17/1, and in California's Silicon Valley there is a ration of 23.1 students for every teacher. Each percentage point costs an additional \$105 million in taxes on Long Island. If Suffolk County schools were maintaining the same ratio as is the norm, over \$500 million could be cut from school costs and real estate taxes could be reduced by almost one-third.

The cost of administration and overhead could easily be shaved substantially. Upstate

schools, which have much higher fuel and maintenance needs, spend less than \$350 per student for these costs. In Nassau and Suffolk we spend \$800 and our winters by comparison are much milder. In addition, Suffolk school districts have engaged in a practice of not doing maintenance as part of the normal operations, allowing it to build to a point where the school board claims that the only way it can catch up is to float bonds and spread the cost of what should have been routine maintenance over a period of 10 to 20 years. This transfers everyday expenditures into long-term capital improvements which when finally paid off costs the taxpayer an average of \$2 for every dollar that had to be borrowed.

Administrative costs

Upstate schools in the Poughkeepsie, Rochester and Syracuse area spend \$120 per student on administration. In Suffolk County, we spend 288 percent more, at a rate of \$340 per student. Other overhead expenditures, which include the duplicate layers of administration, have led Suffolk County schools to spend \$2,700 per student, where an upstate system such as Rochester spends \$900. Almost one out of every \$4 we invest in education does not find its way into the classroom.

Transportation

Taxpayers must ask why our Suffolk County schools spend 200 percent more for transportation costs than our counterparts upstate. Although Long Island is basically a suburban community where schools are in close proximity to students' homes, we spend \$700 per student on transportation. Upstate in the Rochester and Syracuse areas, as well as other areas that are rural, these districts spend \$160 to \$450 per student.

The fiscal crisis which now envelopes us on all levels is only going to get worse, not better. The federal deficit is an abomination. The state deficit is staggering, and growing larger daily. The growing deficit on the county level is of disasterous proportions. The fiscal problems on the town, village and school district levels continue to increase.

The basic problem has been, and unfortunately continues to be, the lack of fiscal management by our leaders at all levels. These leaders, bolstered by good economic times, went into spending frenzies, increasing staff, adding programs, giving away the store, spending money like it was going out of style.

Well, it's now out of style. The taxpayers have had enough. They can't support these spending frenzies. The tax burden has become unbearable. Businesses are leaving to find more economical places to do business. Homeowners are packing up, searching for somewhere to live where the big spenders are not active. Others are locked in and fighting losing battles to keep financially alive.

Upper levels of government are striving to solve their overspending by eliminating revenue sharing dollars for county, town and school operations. Which makes the problems on the lower levels more acute. County, town and school officials take aim on new and higher fees to make up the shortfall, and target programs—usually those which impact on people the most—to cut to save dollars.

Meanwhile, waste, needless positions, either administrative or patronage, and a host of other wasteful spending practices continue. Examples: two county offices were abolished as a "means of saving taxpayer dollars." But top ranking officials of those two offices were given high paying jobs one

Are our buses that much more luxurious than those upstate? Do the drivers downstate have superior or unusual skills as compared to the drivers upstate, or is it the case that we are not planning out our school routes efficiently and making too many runs to accomodate after-school activities and special interests?

Special education

Superintendents and administrators are fond of pointing to mandated special education as the cause of the high cost of education. Again, Coopers & Lybrand dispels this myth. On average, special education is only one and three-quarter percent of the budget, but, Suffolk school districts have managed to spend three and one-half times as much as the Rochester school district, which is covered by the same state mandates. Aren't Rochester and Long Island part of the same state? Shouldn't we have the same average number of children needing special education that is covered by state mandates? Do you have the feeling that you have been coned and outright lied to?

These statistics go on but all indicate Suffolk residents have had their tax dollars wantonly wasted by school boards across the area. We have invested these huge sums in education and sadly have not achieved our goal of a quality education. We have cheated our students. We have cheated our taxpayers. The sacred cow can be no more. The sacred cow has been unveiled by the Coopers & Lybrand report. The facts are indisputable. In conclusion, we see a group of educational elitists, teachers, administrators, and others in the education business who through their greed, their unionized strength, have taken an excess of our money and through repressive property taxes have feath-

ered their own nest. They have cheated the children out of the quality education we thought we were investing in.

Reduce costs

School boards must be replaced with thinking, caring, concerned individuals who have no vested interest other than providing a good, quality, basic education for our children at a price that we can afford. Put the right people on the board. Allow them the freedom to cut the electives. Consolidate schools and classrooms, increase the teacher/student ratio and slash the administration and overhead costs.

Overall school costs can be reduced by up to 50 percent. Let these school boards redirect the curriculum so the emphasis is returned to teaching children the basics of education. Let's put our investment into teaching children to read, have a good command of the English language, the ability not only to automatically make simple change without a calculator, but understand the concepts and be challenged to think by the logic of advanced mathematics. Teach them the history of the United States and the world so they can understand what has happened and what may happen in the future. Let them marvel at science and be challenged by technology.

We owe our children a good education and our taxpayers a reasonable return on the contributions they make in the investment in our future. We strongly urge every taxpayer, every resident, every parent to become actively involved in the educational process. Support those candidates who do not have a vested interest in education and give them the freedom to turn this wasteful institution around.

And why not?

Those who demand should pay

in the presiding officer's office, and the other by the county executive. And, it was learned last week, County Executive Patrick Halpin has hired, at a cost of \$4.7 million, employees laid off because of the growing budget gap. There was much fanfare when the layoffs came, but the rehiring were quietly accomplished.

No one likes to see anyone impacted by the loss of a job. No one can be happy that teachers are being laid off in a number of school districts. But the happenings of today are a result of abuses of the past, which cannot be repeated. Cuts have to be made. Excess positions have to be eliminated. Meaningful cuts, not token gestures.

Unions have been successful in gaining large salary and benefit increases for their members. They have fought against proposals which would ease costs and save jobs, such as voluntary furloughs. They have cited examples of lower paid employees as arguments for salary hikes, then demand percentage increases which increase the salaries of the higher paid even more than those at the lower end. Why not give the taxpayers a break?

With the current fiscal crisis, salary increases should be put on hold, most especially for those on the upper levels of the scale. Priorities must be established. Raises will cost jobs. Paybacks are a must. While no one likes to lose what they have had, the choice is give a little or lose your job. The taxpayers have had enough.

The reports of layoffs of teachers in one school has caused some parents to declare they want a choice, keep the teachers or pay higher taxes. For those who are willing to pay more to maintain the status quo, let them do so. Put into place the recommenda-

tion BOCES superintendents recently made. Tax the taxpayers for the basic educational curriculum, and let the parents pay for the extras. You want foreign languages? Fine, this is the fee. Computer instruction? Another fee. Programs for the gifted and talented? A fee.

Fair is fair. Those who want more should pay more. Don't expect everyone else to subsidize your demands.

What about volunteers? Schools offer a variety of club activities. But the taxpayer pays. Teachers who are advisors to these groups earn stipends. All together these stipends add up. If the teachers won't volunteer their time for these clubs, offering the taxpayers a break, then fees should be implemented to make them self sustaining. The same could be said for sports. Sure, sports are important for school spirit, and to help some athletes achieve a college education. But there are alternatives to having the taxpayers foot the bill. Fees could be implemented. Volunteers could be used. If coaches refused to do so, then all those who push for sports programs should raise funds to pay those salaries. Those who don't mind paying more should have an opportunity to do so. But those who can't afford the burden, should be spared the added expense.

These ideas won't sit well with a lot of people. They are quick with their "wants" but slow to back up those demands with dollars. But the only demands that carry any weight in these days of fiscal crisis are the demands from the taxpayers for relief. They have carried the burden far too long. They deserve relief. Now.

And they're going to get it. From those who now control the purse strings. Or others who will.

And why not?

Take down the roadblocks

We have lived through several recessions. Long Island traditionally leads the country into them and leads the way out. During the last major recession we came out of it 18 months before most other areas.

This recession was late in being declared. We felt the beginning of our recession nearly three years ago. Other parts of the country already are reporting an upturn in their economy, they are rebounding. Long Island this time seems to be slow on the rebound. What's different?

We believe a number of factors are at play. Discretionary income of Long Island residents has been severely limited. The culprit, the highest energy rates in the nation. The Public Service Commission currently is holding hearings on LILCO's guaranteed five percent rate increase that was part of

Cuomo's Shoreham deal. LILCO, not satisfied with five percent, is reported to be looking for 100 percent more. LILCO wants to expand the energy adjustment clause to include a whole host of additional expenditures that it has had difficulty passing through to the consumer.

LILCO's demands are again casting a dark shadow on the Long Island economy. Falling real estate values and rising real estate taxes have not only put a real squeeze on discretionary spending that fuels consumer buying but have cast a pall that is causing consumers to think twice, stay with the old and hope for better times.

Our unemployment is rising rapidly as business responds to the first two major factors. In addition, the government itself has established such an inordinate number of roadblocks to

new construction and revamping of former buildings that the trades are not only in recession but a real depression. The bureaucracy has become such that it takes six months to two years to get a project from application to building permit. We are not talking about those users that require elaborate changes in law or variations from the norm, most of these roadblocks and bureaucratic minefields were set up during good times, to slow growth and idealistically to artificially preserve open space and the environment. A lot of people complained but nobody really got upset as everyone was still making money. These roadblocks were considered annoyances, nuisances, but could be lived with. Today, they can't. They are costing workers jobs, they are making investors flee, banks falter and governments collapse.

Every government, town, county and state, must look at the elaborate permit and regulation system they have set up and streamline these procedures so they become lean and mean, fast and efficient. The permit system, where there are no unusual variations, should be completed in a matter of days instead of a matter of years. The review processes that only enrich attorneys and consultants and cause the wanton waste of capital, natural resources and manpower should be evaluated and eliminated where possible.

We can no longer afford the luxury of wasted time and resources. We need leadership and action and we can't wait for projects to be studied to death.

And why not?

Good news:

Bring back the track

There is renewed interest in re-establishing Parr Meadows as a racing and entertainment facility. That's the best news we have had on the local scene in quite some time.

We understand applications have been made and are about to be granted for both trotter and flat racing. The owners of the property envision a complete rebuilding of the Parr Meadow facility, turning this facility into not only a race track but a stadium capable of offering basketball and hockey events. This could be an enormous shot in the arm to our resort capabilities and could provide much needed jobs and recreation for the 1.4 million people who

call Suffolk home.

The drive to the Meadowlands is out of the question for most of us. The drive to the Nassau Coliseum is just too far to make it enjoyable for many Suffolk County residents. A Suffolk County racing and sports complex would improve the quality of life and provide much needed jobs both during construction and operation.

We hope our leaders in Brookhaven, where the complex is located, will give every bit of assistance they can and that the county will join hands with them.

And why not?

I would like the right to choose the form of government I want. As a citizen, I volunteer to make this a reality by circulating petitions.

Name:.....

Address:.....

Town:.....

Phone:.....

Send to "The Right To Choose"
c/o of Suffolk Life Newspapers,
P.O. Box 167, Riverhead, New York 11901.

Right to choose

Petitions are being circulated throughout Suffolk County to finally put on the ballot through Initiative and Referendum the question of what form of government you want. The petitions will allow you to cast your vote and choose for yourself whether you want to continue with our current Suffolk County Legislature or opt for a County Board of Supervisors with a weighted vote.

Many of us who watch government closely have been appalled by the county legislature. It has traditionally been considered a "funny farm" that is counterproductive and immensely costly. There are those that argue that the legislature is a more representative form of government. Many of the supporters of the current form of government feel this way because they are able to bring their limited vested

interest before this body of government and have their will imposed upon the majority.

The signing of the petition will only help guarantee that the question will be placed on the ballot. It guarantees that you, in a free, democratic society will have the opportunity once and for all to accept or reject this measure.

Politicians have, in the past, successfully blocked this measure from being put on the ballot. The law as it was constructed denied the citizens the right to choose. The new Initiative and Referendum law that the county now has allows us to bypass the legislative approval and directly place the issue on the ballot.

If you would like to volunteer to circulate petitions, fill out the coupon on this page and we will contact you.

And why not?

Protect our assets

One of the basic responsibilities of government is to protect the cumulative assets of the residents. In the last few weeks, Suffolk Life's East End editor, Mark Wooley, has revealed in stories in Suffolk Life the wanton waste of our material assets and precious records due to the cavalier attitude of those charged with safeguarding these properties.

The county has put in storage office equipment, automobiles, parts and inventory, some old, some new, some used, some abused. Records belonging to the courts and the county clerk have been piled and thrown into unlocked storage sheds in the county's Westhampton facility. Out of sight, out of mind, but not out of the reach of those who want to help themselves.

Security was so lax that Wooley on his first visit to this facility drove through the gate. He was never asked for identification or challenged in any way. Once inside he was free to wander with no security in sight. He could have filled up his car with his choice of valuables. In fact, he probably could have picked one of the hundreds of other cars that were supposedly under lock and key and driven off.

We are paying millions of dollars in taxes and yet our county officials do not deem it a necessity to protect our assets. Something is seriously wrong and a lot of our tax dollars are being wasted. Something must be done to tighten security and stop this waste.

And why not?

What does Newsday want?

Suffolk Life last Friday won a preliminary injunction in federal court barring Newsday from engaging in illegal competition.

The preliminary injunction was granted by Judge Leonard D. Wexler of the United States District Court. It continues a temporary restraining order the judge made on March 28.

We had charged Newsday with violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. Newsday had entered into a program we felt was designed to put us out of business. Newsday had gone to the many automotive dealers who had found that Suffolk Life is an effective means for merchandising and selling cars. They offered these car dealers a program which stipulated if the car dealer advertised with them on Friday, and did not advertise in Suffolk Life or any of the other newspapers, they would give them an equal size ad free in subsequent editions. To us, this was a very clear-cut violation of the

Sherman Anti-Trust Act. The judge agreed in his decision to bar Newsday from continuing the program until a trial is completed.

As I was coming from court, elated, all of a sudden I took a chill. I realized the far reaching implications of what would happen if we had failed. If Newsday's actions had been allowed to continue, they would have expanded this offering from car dealers to all other categories of advertisers in Suffolk Life and other publications. They systematically would have wiped out our primary source of income, advertising. If this practice had been found legal, all competitors would then attempt to make similar types of arrangements. The end result would be the survival of a few large, strong newspapers and the demise of the rest.

What would be the benefit of such a program? Newsday, who we estimate already controls almost 80 percent of the market, would be stronger, but

would they sell any more advertising? We doubt they would, because with a multitude of media out competing for the advertising dollar, the awareness of businesses of the need to advertise is heightened. If those various media people no longer were in the market competing against each other, Newsday might well become more complacent than they already are towards their customers. This could lead to declines in the amount of advertising that Newsday presently enjoys.

The business people who are not being made aware of the advantages of advertising might well cut back and become less competitive. This could lead to declines in sales for those business people and, as a result, another blow would impact the soft economic climate of Suffolk County.

Even more threatening for the businesses themselves, one dominating newspaper, without competition, would be able to impose whatever rate structure it desired. The only game in town—LILCO is a prime example—without alternatives, could well have a field day at the expense of those in business.

As an editor and journalist, the most chilling thought that crossed my mind, which might well be Newsday's true motivation, was the elimination of Suffolk Life's voice as well as the other alternative voices to Newsday here on Long Island.

Suffolk Life has presented a strong, vocal and alternative viewpoint to Long Island to that voiced by Newsday. We have been, many times, at odds, on the opposite side of a question. Newsday does not like to be wrong. They do not like opposing points of view.

For example, Newsday had the opportunity of being right on Shoreham. They had the opportunity to stand up and protect the health and welfare of their readers. But they didn't. They had the opportunity to stand up for the ratepayers and fight LILCO's greed. But they didn't. Instead they fought for the opening of the plant, ignoring the possible consequences. And they became apologists for LILCO, ignoring the impact the soaring rates were having on the people.

Suffolk Life was concerned. We fought a long hard battle to stop Shoreham from becoming a health menace to the citizens. We fought a long hard battle with the Public Service Commission, and the governor, over the rates. We fought the governor's sweetheart deal that gave LILCO enormous profits at a tremendous cost to the ratepayers. Newsday was for the deal, for the plant, but not for the people.

In our own back yard, with the printing of newspapers, Suffolk Life has turned out to be an embarrass-

ment to Newsday. Suffolk Life is printed almost entirely on recycled newsprint. We are environmentally aware, we care about the ecology. Newsday, which had the opportunity of also printing a good portion of their newspaper on recycled newsprint, when it was available and could be contracted for, chose to print 90 percent of their paper on virgin paper. When Suffolk Life was used as an example of an environmentally aware good citizen, Newsday chose to fight in their editorial columns and their news pages against the newspaper recycling law in Suffolk County. They lost this battle and have been seething since.

If Suffolk Life and other alternative voices were not here, Newsday would have no opposition. They truly would have the absolute franchise that they crave. Suffolk Life, because it is a weekly newspaper, must fight twice as hard for every advertising dollar earned. Suffolk Life is sent by mail to every household in Suffolk County. None of our copies are thrown on the lawn as are some of Newsday's total market distribution packages.

Suffolk Life is broken into 34 local zones. This is very costly and manpower intense, but it gives the advertiser the opportunity of picking and choosing the areas of circulation desired, without having to buy wasted circulation as businesses have traditionally had to do in Newsday. This also gives us the opportunity of covering the news that pertains to the everyday life of our readers, the news that Newsday does not consider worthy to print.

Our readers are loyal to us. They respond very well to our advertisers' messages, often times in such proportions that we are able to dwarf Newsday's response. This also could have been a reason why Newsday was willing to violate the federal law and engage in antitrust actions. If you can't develop a better mouse trap, get rid of the one you have to compete against, or gobble up your competitors, as they have already done.

We do not know what really motivated Newsday, but we thank God we had the resources to respond adequately, and that Judge Wexler proved that there is justice. We're thankful, too, that we chose a well qualified attorney, Martin London and his firm, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison, to represent Suffolk Life. And that the size of your checkbook does not always determine who will be victorious.

Newsday must realize that they do have to compete fairly, and that they are not above the law. We do not intend to roll over and play dead. We will continue to fight, as long and as hard as necessary, to ensure that the people will have an alternative voice to protect their interests.

And why not?

Defense for our seniors

If Mom had a gun

This past week, Suffolk County Police Commissioner Daniel Guido revoked the lifetime gun permits for those Suffolk residents who had gun permits prior to the time the county became involved in issuing such permits.

The group of Suffolk residents who were affected had been "grandfathered" when the county took over the issuance of pistol permits. These people had been promised they could continue to legally own handguns for as long as they lived.

This announcement caught everybody by surprise. According to the records, none of these permit holders had been involved in an accidental shooting or had used the guns in illegal ways. Some are avid target shooters and still active. Some had the guns for self-protection.

This moment brought back bitter memories. My mom was a kindly soul who was always willing to help anyone in need. One day, she was working outdoors and a man approached her. He said he was hungry and needed money for food. He asked if she had any jobs he could do. There was nothing she really needed help with, but she found some odd jobs for him to do, gave him some food and some money and thought that was the last she would see of him.

I was at a friend's house when I received a call at 8:30 in the evening from the police. My mother was in the hospital. As it turned out, the person she had put out her hand to help came back to her house. He awakened her

from sleep. When she went to the door, he smashed the window, opened the lock, physically assaulted and robbed her.

Mom never recovered fully from this episode. She withdrew into herself. She lost all desire to live. Her home had been violated, as was her person. Life seemed to lose its meaning. Gone was the zest, the smile, the will to carry on. She passed away a few years after this incident.

I often thought that if my mom had been trained and knew how to use a gun and had one for protection, she could have had the opportunity to defend herself. She didn't, and the result was tragic.

Police Commissioner Guido's edict will deny lifetime Suffolk residents the right to bear arms, a right guaranteed under the Constitution. The police commissioner's edict will place these seniors in jeopardy, and the police cannot guarantee their safety. We would feel a lot better if the police commissioner had announced that he was ordering all criminals to turn in their weapons. Of course, this is ludicrous, the criminals would not obey him. But a lot of the law-abiding senior citizens will, and will leave themselves defenseless in the process.

Patrick Halpin, the county executive of Suffolk, Guido's boss, should order him to reverse his stand so that the county can live up to the commitment they made to these legitimate permit holders.

And why not?

The business of blackmail

Once upon a time, schools taught honesty, ethics and morality. They taught by word and deed. School systems traded in these virtues and qualities for blackmail and extortion. This has always been very apparent on school budget votes.

Okay, you nasty voters, turn down our budget no matter how high or unreasonable it is and we will put the school on austerity! Austerity is the tool the State Education Department gives the school boards to use in their blackmailing scheme.

Under an austerity budget, the Mommas and Poppas of the students are held up like a thief in the night. If the school is on austerity there is no busing of students beyond the state limit. The cry goes up that the kids are being placed in danger, there are no sidewalks, children may be hit while crossing the street. To Mommas and Poppas this means that the kids will have to be driven to school, and you know what kind of inconvenience that can be. With that bloc of angry parents in the school board's hip pocket, it then goes after the parents whose children are involved in extra-curricular activities.

These afternoon endeavors, which range from football to golf, modern dance to stamp collecting, are people sensitive items the school board can cut out, to bring the parents to the voting booth. There are a whole host of nasty little scenarios the school board and the administration can conjure up to force the approval of the defeated budget. If the children do not have these activities, they will get on drugs. They will get into trouble.

In addition to these vile, little games, the board has the ability to bring the vote up as often as it likes. It knows it can eventually wear down the

electorate and engineer a victory. These little games may be legal under our current educational laws, but they are far from ethical and demonstrate to our children, in their most vulnerable years, that winning at any cost is more important than winning by the rules, with dignity.

These nasty little games have now taken a new twist. With the proposed cutbacks in state aid coming down from Albany, the superintendent of Riverhead Schools, Richard Suprina, is lobbying the Nassau/Suffolk School Boards Association to present budgets to the voters that reflect all the waste of last year without the state aid funding.

In a letter to Alice Willet, executive director of the Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association, Suprina said: "At the last meeting of the Board of Education, some residents implored the board not to make any cuts in the 1991-92 budget despite Governor Cuomo's recommended reductions in state aid. Instead, they suggested that all school districts make a commitment to place before the voters in their respective communities a budget that reflects the continuation of 1990-91 services. Their belief is that if the citizens defeat the budgets and austerity becomes the norm, the pressure on Albany for fiscal reform would be tremendous."

In other words, cause a gigantic increase in real estate taxes, the voters will get up in arms, and he believes, defeat all budgets to place school districts on austerity, which will, he hopes, force the state lawmakers to reinstate former levels of state aid. He asked if the school board groups would spearhead such a move.

But what happened to the "harmful effects austerity has on the children? Their education and safety?"

Are they spared all these long-heralded dramatic problems if austerity comes at the whim of the educators rather than as an edict of the taxpayers?

What Suprina does not realize is the state has an empty barrel. There is no more money in it. The blackmail and the unethical tricks of yesterday can't work today. Suprina might just get the opposite reaction of what he is looking for. Our state legislators might finally find courage to do what they should have done a long time ago, put teeth in austerity budgets that allow only for the offering in schools of those courses necessary to provide an adequate education that will lead to a Regents Diploma. Those legislators might also react by mandating a cutback in the administration, the elimination of the fat caused by the enormous overhead factors and ludicrous high salaries paid to superintendents. Those legislators from both

sides of the aisle from upstate and downstate might also finally pass the proper legislation that eliminates budget revotes and forces the school boards to develop an austerity budget that reflects a reduction from the previous year's budget.

Those like Suprina, who act out of personal greed rather than care and concern for the students, must be reined in. They should not be allowed to use school budgets and school expenditures as a weapon of blackmail.

These are hard fiscal times. Everyone, from every segment of life, is going to feel the impact of the careless spending of the past which has led to the deficits of today. And everyone has to bite the bullet. The fiscal problem will not be solved by pressure gimmicks the likes of that proposed by Suprina. Those who concoct such schemes should be reined in, or kicked out!

And why not?

Who's calling shots?

We wonder if others have noticed that since just before the beginning of the ground war, Saddam Hussein has disappeared from view, absent from television appearances and other visibility.

During the last minute talks with the Russians, the ambassador went from having to confer with Hussein to having to confer with the central government. During the war itself, television reports from Iraq were blacked out.

Since the war ended, we have only seen clips of Hussein that were obviously made prior to the war. We have

heard his voice, but have been left to wonder if it was not pre-recorded.

Who is causing the persecution of the Kurds? Who has been trying to annihilate the Shiite Muslims? Is Hussein still alive and kicking, or is it the military men with whom he had surrounded himself who are calling the shots today?

We have been surprised by the various television commentators and the daily media for not making the observation we have, and one is left to wonder.

And why not?

Why was information withheld?

Brookhaven's Ash For Trash deal is ripe with speculation and suspicion. The public is well-advised to be suspicious. There are millions of dollars at stake; some people are going to get very rich at the taxpayers' expense.

The deal has been pushed by a small group of insiders. It's been opposed by two councilmen, John Powell and Eugene Gerrard. Powell has raised at the board level what residents have been asking for a long time: "Why should Brookhaven have to assume the liability for the ash if anything goes wrong?" Powell questioned the content of the ash, voicing concerns about potential for long-range harm. Powell questioned why the town had to become involved in an 18-year contract. He stated a shorter term, 3 to 5-years, might be in the best interests of the town.

Powell has also raised doubts about whether this is the best deal for the residents. He, like we, can foresee the day when garbage can be a valuable asset to a community rather than a liability. Why lock yourself into a

long-term contract that requires you to pay a fee to dispose of the garbage when, in the future, a municipality might be able to bid out its garbage and be paid for this asset?

Recently, a situation developed in Brookhaven Town that Powell should also be questioning. Peter Scully, the assistant supervisor of Brookhaven Town, knew on April 12 that Babylon was willing to accept 400 tons a day of Brookhaven's garbage at its incinerator, and would dispose of the ash themselves, saving the town this cost. Babylon also proposed to handle separation of the contents of the garbage, saving the town this cost also. Scully did not inform some members of the town board until this information was made public at the executive session prior to the board meeting on Tuesday, April 16.

Why was this vital information withheld? What gives a bureaucrat such as Scully the right or the power to deny the elected government officials this knowledge? Who is being protected and why? Scully told Suffolk

Life that when he heard of the proposal he took the information to "my waste people" for their input. Their immediate reaction was the Babylon proposal would not be as cost effective as the Hempstead deal.

Which does not surprise us one little bit because his waste people have been the major pushers of the ash for trash deal.

However, the full facts about the Hempstead deal are not yet known. While the recent draft agreement that town released gives tipping fees Brookhaven will be charged by Hempstead, the cost of hauling is not included. And how much will town taxpayers have to shell out to build and maintain the landfill where Hempstead's ash will be deposited? Shouldn't that be a part of the equation in determining the true cost of the deal, which should then be weighed against any alternative measure that may develop, such as the Babylon proposal? What other costs, such as insurance coverage against future pollution problems, are involved in the ash deal? At what cost?

Supervisor Henrietta Acampora has virtually retired on the job. Others are making the important decisions. Even though this is the case, it does not give Scully, or his waste people, the right to assume her powers or to withhold vital knowledge from the elected members of the town board. They are nothing more than appointed bureaucrats who owe their jobs to political leaders, not the people.

The future of Brookhaven Town residents' quality of life is at stake in this venture. The ash for trash deal can impact on the already exorbitant taxes Brookhaven Town residents pay. If blatant attempts such as the one revealed here to withhold vital information from the peoples' representatives is any indication of the shenanigans that have been going on, Brookhaven residents should take a renewed interest in their government. It better watch its ash before it is too late.

And why not?