

# Remember the 'sales tax 10'

Remember these names: Michael O'Donohoe, Donald Blydenburgh, Herbert Davis, Rose Caracappa, William Jones, Joseph Rizzo, Michael D'Andre, Allan Binder, Thomas Finlay, and Angie Carpenter.

They are the 10 Suffolk County legislators who voted last week to ask the state legislature for an extension of the one-cent sales tax increase that was slated to end on December 31, 1993. Although they, as part of the legislative process, had vowed the sales tax increase would only be temporary, and was necessary only to meet the extreme crisis in the county's fiscal condition, they broke their word. They didn't have the guts to make cuts, and therefore the county is sinking ever deeper into the mire of deficit.

Even with the extension of the sales tax increase, the deficit will grow. A low-end prediction puts that deficit at \$15 million, while one legislator, O'Donohoe, puts the figure closer to \$100 mil-

lion. The reason is simple: the runaway spending continues. The legislators have turned their backs on the taxpayers. They promise good government but are not capable of providing it. They are so attuned to the political winds—they got their orders on how to vote on the sales tax extension from Suffolk County Republican Leader Howard DeMartini—that they are not capable of bringing spending under control. Their only solution to a growing deficit problem is to raise the taxes, extend the sales tax increase, coupled with threats of massive property tax increases, and hike the fee structure for county services. Their solution: "More money! Not less spending."

"It's the spending, stupid!" Unless drastic steps are taken to cut back on county spending, the need for additional revenues—otherwise known as taxes—will always be there hanging over the heads of the already-overburdened taxpayers who are being driven out of their homes.

Not all legislators carry the burden

of this shameful lack of concern. Two legislators, Steve Levy, who voted against the extension, and Allen Binder, one of the 10 who voted for it, had filed legislation that would have resulted in cost-cutting measures that would have saved the county millions of dollars, cumulatively more than the sales tax increase will bring in. But those measures got nowhere. The very same legislators who are so quick to dig deeper into the pockets of the taxpayers did not have the guts to take the necessary steps to bring spending under control.

Here's a summary of only some of the cost-cutting ideas which have been trashed by gutless legislators:

Take the Suffolk County police off the state roads, the Long Island Expressway, for example, and insist that the state maintain enforcement of these roadways with state police.

Privatize the Off-Track Betting (OTB) operation. This proposal has

been bottled up in committee because of opposition from political leaders, who use OTB as their political welfare system.

Consolidate the Department of Drugs and Alcohol into the health department, utilize police retirees in police department positions, restrict hiring of outside attorneys, use flex-time to reduce overtime, eliminate \$2 million in administrative positions, strict attrition policy, creation of a floating county work force to deal with peak work load situations rather than hire or pay overtime.

Consolidate the offices of county comptroller and treasurer. Interestingly, O'Donohoe voted against this measure. Word has it he wants to be the next county treasurer to replace incumbent Jean Tuthill who is retiring. O'Donohoe will screen for the position next week. Could it be O'Donohoe is more interested in enhancing his own political future than he is in voting to give the taxpayers a break?

A proposal to put the county bus transportation system out to bid has died each and every time it has been raised. The political connections of those now involved with this operation are viewed as the reason why legislators refuse to seek the lowest possible cost of operation. Instead, they propose cutting bus routes where ridership is low rather than improve the system and cutting costs.

Refusal to implement a meaningful workfare system in Suffolk County. Westchester has over 50% of their eligible welfare recipients working on making that county a better place to live, without an increase in taxes. We should be doing the same, but we're not.

The list goes on and on. We will examine the savings that have been ignored by the 10 legislators who seem to know only one way to solve the county's fiscal problems, burden the taxpayers more, and more. Legislators, when they voted to impose the sales tax increases, declared they were needed to pay off past bonds, and resolve the deficit. That being the case, what is the need, except for County Executive Robert Gaffney's declaration that he needs the money, to keep the increase alive? What happened to the money? Obviously they're spending faster than they are taxing, so they have to tax more to cover their spending.

There is an answer. The "sales tax 10" are up for re-election in November. The extensions of their political lives are up to the people who will, we trust, use the "no" vote these legislators didn't have the guts to cast last week.

And why not?

## No end to their greed

LILCO recently received a 4.15% rate increase in connection with its Shoreham deal. The company is in the process of attempting to increase gas rates by 6%.

This week, it was announced LILCO is petitioning the Public Service Commission (PSC) for an additional 1.5% rate increase in electrical rates starting in June.

LILCO's rates for electricity are the highest in the nation. LILCO's rate here on Long Island covering the meter, billing and the delivery of electricity is \$12.50, compared to \$6 in Florida. The overall cost of electricity is currently over 19.5 cents per kilowatt hour, compared to 6.5 cents in Florida.

LILCO seeks the rate increase because, according to the PSC: "Under the commission's original decision that set rates for 1992, LILCO was entitled to a specified level of revenues after accounting for the cost of fuel to generate electricity and related revenue taxes, based on a 4.15% increase in rates, to provide an opportunity for it to be financially sound. It claims that it did not achieve that revenue level due in large measure to a decline in the sales of electricity. As a result, it seeks to recover an additional \$74.5 million from ratepayers."

In other words, ratepayers cut back because they can't afford the LILCO bills, so LILCO now wants to charge more for less.

LILCO's rates are supposed to be

controlled by the New York State Public Service Commission. Obviously, the PSC has been doing very little controlling. It appears to be nothing more than a rubber stamp for the utilities. Public Service commissioners are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the New York State Senate. The Public Service Commission is the agency that can allow the new proposed increases unless halted. It's time for the governor and Senate Majority Leader Ralph Marino to call upon the Public Service commissioners. They must deliver a very strong message: the PSC has an obligation to protect the ratepayers from a monopoly rather than authorize their every wish. The people on Long Island just can't afford these ludicrous increases that, by far, exceed the rate of inflation.

Under the Shoreham deal, LILCO was only guaranteed rate increases through 1992. The balance of the 10-year agreement was conditioned upon rate justification and, we would have hoped, the Island's ability to fund. LILCO is enjoying record profits, the best in its history. Its chairman, William Catacosinos, just granted himself a whopping wage increase that pushes his salary over a half million dollars. He has a golden parachute that makes Dr. Murphy's look like petty cash. He recently appointed his son to a mid-level executive position at an estimated \$80,000.

According to the PSC: "According to LILCO, new contracts between labor and management in 1992 (which in-

clude, we assume, Catacosinos and his son) result in wage rate increases of \$900,000 more than were provided for in rates." So, LILCO seeks to recover that \$900,000 more from the ratepayers.

Cuomo and Marino must make the Public Service Commission responsible to the public as well as to the utilities and Wall Street. The PSC is not doing its job. The commissioners should be elected, not appointed. The staff should be revamped, from the receptionist to the analyst. The PSC has a reputation of being a revolving door where commissioners and staff rotate between working for the commission and the utilities they are supposed to regulate.

Commissioners and staff members should, by law, be forbidden from working for any utility for a period of at least five years after they have served on the commission. This ban should include direct employment and more importantly, consulting work.

There would be no logical reason for Long Islanders to be paying 200% more for electricity than their neighbors in Florida if the New York State Public Service Commission had been awake and doing its job.

When you are elected to office you are elected by the people, for the people, not by the special interest whose only criteria is greed at the expense of the ratepayers. This must be changed! Come on, Ralph and Mario. Do your job.

And why not?

## The Hamptons are alive and well

Recently we were in Florida and when people heard that we lived in the Hamptons, we were disturbed at their reaction.

The damage from the December nor'easter and the "Blizzard of the Century" had received extensive, sensationalized television coverage. Pictures of houses teetering on poles and crashing into the ocean made interesting footage, but created the illusion that all of Long Island was sinking into the sea. People asked, "Is there anything left of the Hamptons? Are the beaches all gone? Did any of the clubs and motels

survive?"

The answer is that the Hamptons are still alive and well. All that has made the Hamptons the enjoyable place it has become for residents and visitors alike awaits the start of a new summer season, in all its glory.

Long Island is a big island. The East End alone covers a wide stretch of land and sea. The areas affected by the storm represent only a small percentage of the East End. The area that received the most publicity, the western end of Dune Road in Westhampton, has effectively been closed for the last five years due to

prior storm damage, yet it is this area that is most photographed and televised. This area is but a half-mile out of the eight-mile stretch along which Dune Road travels.

There was some minor damage in East Quogue. Some dunes were damaged and eroded, but the road leading to the Shinnecock Inlet remains intact. However, many people believe that all of Dune Road was lost.

We are concerned how this adverse image will effect our tourist industry this summer. Our town and county officials should be working with the net-

works to do a positive story on the resort areas. It would help overcome the adverse publicity we have received.

You can do your part by writing and calling your friends who are out of the area and assuring them that we are whole and well. We are a little bruised here and there, but we and our island are tough and resilient. We have bounced back and the welcome mat is out for our summer visitors.

Let's all become public relations agents for our home area.

And why not?

# Chassin playing politics with life?

What started out as an effort fueled only by the dedication of a small group of West Islip women has grown into a county-wide group which is targeting on a major health problem in Suffolk County: breast cancer. While the focus of attention on this problem is growing, much more needs to be done, especially on the New York State level.

Many of those involved in the initial community effort know of the subject firsthand. Many are afflicted with the disease. In an effort to determine the extent of the problem within their own community, they organized the West Islip Breast Cancer Coalition of Long Island, undertook a study to determine the number of cases in the West Islip community, and logged the responses on a large map to pinpoint cluster areas.

The effort involved many hours and lots of hard work, but it was important because the New York State Cancer

Registry is years behind in compiling such important information. By law, all confirmed cases of cancer must be reported to the registry, but that information is backlogged at least two years at the state level.

Assemblyman Robert Wertz has filed legislation which would force the Cancer Registry to update its information. In an exchange of letters last December with state Health Commissioner Mark R. Chassin, Wertz declared: "A Cancer Registry which reports in December of 1993 incidence figures reported in 1991 is totally unacceptable to me and also totally unacceptable to the millions of women who reside in the State of New York, particularly those women who reside in my county and our neighboring county of Nassau. You do not need an outside data processing service to report data two years after the fact. We can do that with scribes and quill pens."

We agree with Wertz's observation. In this day and age of high technology, with computers everywhere, allowing a cancer registry to operate two years behind the times is nothing less than malfeasance.

Chassin's views on the backlog did not sit well with Wertz, nor with us. "I take serious issue with your statement that your investigations indicate that a two-year lag time is consistent with the best tumor registries in operation in the United States today, and also that registry data less than two years old would have spurious results," Wertz wrote. "That is certainly not the opinion of the physicians with whom I have discussed this issue. Your comments would draw nothing but rage from the cancer patients who are the forces and the impetus behind my attempts to bring a New York State Cancer Registry into the 1990s."

Wertz's legislation currently sits in committee. Some reports indicate it is being stalled by behind-the-scenes lobbying by Chassin to defeat the measure. If there is one ounce of truth to those reports, Chassin does not deserve to sit as the head of the state's health department. Such a lack of sensitivity has no place in dealing with the life and death issues of state residents.

A number of reports have indicated Nassau and Suffolk counties have higher than the state average in breast cancer cases. Where are these cases occurring? Are they more prevalent in certain communities, specific neighborhoods? Why? Without sufficient information to focus on such questions, the answers will not be forthcoming. While there is no guarantee that more current update information will magically help find the cause for breast cancer, there is far more chance it will help more than hurt that cause.

It is sad that the hard work of private citizens is not matched by a display of concern from our state's health officials. The West Islip effort is soon to be duplicated in Huntington, and in other parts of the county. Grassroots efforts to come up with this vital information are underway. Some medical experts, county officials, and others are joining this effort in a partnership of concern.

In fact, the efforts of the West Islip Breast Cancer Coalition caught the attention of Senator Alfonse D'Amato, who immediately became a strong ally to the group, fighting for the implementation of studies, and successfully fought for additional funding for these efforts. D'Amato showed the kind of compassion and concern that seems lacking on our own state level.

The focus of attention on breast cancer launched by the West Islip group has resulted in an increased awareness on the part of many women for the need to have a mammography done. As a result, a number of these women have been tested and learned they have breast cancer. Discovering they have the problem before it has progressed can help enhance treatment and recovery. If for no other reason than that, the efforts of those involved in the surveys have been a tremendous success.

Remember this address: Mark Chassin, commissioner; New York State Department of Health, Empire State Plaza, Corning Tower, Albany, NY, 12237. Please write a letter to Commissioner Chassin, demanding he put the full might of his office behind Assemblyman Wertz's bill to upgrade the state Cancer Registry. Send a copy of that letter to Governor Mario Cuomo, who named Chassin to his post, so that he is clearly aware of the actions of his appointee on this vitally important matter.

Please help those who are working so hard to help themselves, and others. Let's flood Chassin's office and let him know we will not accept an outdated registry. The lives of our friends, neighbors, perhaps our loved ones, are too important to allow him to stand in the way of an effort to bring answers to this growing problem.

Please, write that letter today. And why not?

## Legislators must say 'no'

In 1983, then County Executive Peter Cohalan gave away the store to the county work force. When the dust settled, county workers received pay increases from 42% to 76% with salary increases and steps calculated together. This single giveaway has led to the financial problems we have experienced and are still experiencing here in Suffolk County.

County Executive Robert Gaffney is about to make the same mistake. He recently negotiated a contract with the faculty at the Suffolk County Community College that gives them step and salary increases that range from just under 25% to over 41%. Gaffney claims that these increases are actually less than half those figures, but either he deliberately or naively fails to take into consideration the step increases this staff is enti-

tled to, additional funding which represents raises by any other name.

Most residents in Suffolk County have seen their incomes stagnate. Raises have been all but nonexistent. Overtime has been cut back. Second jobs have evaporated. Residents are barely keeping their heads above water, let alone keeping up with inflation. The college contract is being looked at as a bellwether by AME (Association of Municipal Employees), which represents the vast majority of Suffolk County workers. The police are also looking at the college settlement with an eye to bettering their contract in their negotiations.

Our real estate taxes have been raised. We have had two sales tax increases in the last three years. The first one, under former County Executive Patrick Halpin, was a 14% increase, the

second one, under Gaffney, was 12% plus. All of these increases have not restored Suffolk County's fiscal health.

The Suffolk County Community College labor contract, which could pave the way for the other municipal contracts, is reckless and fiscally insane. The legislature has the final approval. Hopefully, they will display an unusual sense of courage and refuse to ratify these outlandish increases.

The county executive and the legislators have forgone their raises for this year. They have set the example, the work force must follow suit. We can hear the county workers saying this is unfair. We suggest that if they believe this to be true, they make application outside of government and find out what the realities of life today are.

And why not?

## Democrats' idea of fairness

Governor Mario Cuomo is a liberal Democrat. There is not much room for discussion about this. People often ask, "What is the difference between a Republican and a Democrat?" At times, there does not seem to be a big difference. Recently, our phones have been ringing off the hook with people calling about the new health insurance laws that went into effect on April 1.

We believe the effect of these laws give a very clear example of the difference between Republican and Democratic thinking. Liberal Democrat Cuomo, in his quest to provide health insurance to those who were uninsurable because of previous medical problems and other causes that the insurance companies rejected, ordered the re-vamping of how insurance companies operate in New York State. The Republicans fought his proposal, insisting the market should be able to set the rates and conditions.

Under the new law, all insurance companies must take everyone, regardless of their health, into the insurance plans. On the surface, this seems fair and good. What has happened, however, is that the insurance companies are adjusting their rates to compensate for the known losses that they will be incurring by having to insure everyone.

People who have been diagnosed as having AIDS, cancer and other long-term catastrophic illnesses now will be able to get insurance. In the case of AIDS, the projected medical care cost could exceed \$1 million. To cover this cost, the insurance companies have raised the premiums on all ratepayers. The calls that we have been getting are from anguished people, mostly from young and middle-class families, people who previously were paying between \$150 and \$300 per month for minimal insurance only. To continue with this insurance, they are being given an option of either having their coverage greatly reduced, or pay premiums of over \$600 per month.

Most of the callers were struggling to pay the old premium for minimum coverage. They do not have the additional income to meet the new demands. One caller went so far as to say he is being forced into self-insurance. He will bank the \$250 he had been paying for coverage and, if and when an illness or a tragedy hits, he will use these funds that he has saved to meet the anticipated cost. When these funds are exhausted, he will offer to make restitution on a monthly basis on the balance he owes out of the \$250 per month that his budget can support. He ended the conversation by saying he was left with no choice.

Our health system is a disaster. The cost of doctors and hospitalization is the highest in the world. Instead of attacking the problem, liberal Democrats like Cuomo have attempted to socially engineer the problem by shifting the burden from those who cannot get coverage to those who are barely able to provide it for themselves. This misguided approach is going to leave thousands of new families vulnerable. They will have no coverage whatsoever. Yes, we will take care of those who have AIDS and other catastrophic illnesses, but in doing so we will strip away the self-esteem of our young working force and their financial ability to provide for their own. That's the difference between the Democratic and Republican approach to the problem.

Free enterprise rates are set by competition. Regulations diminish competition and although they may be well intentioned, too often they end up hurting many more than they help. Cuomo and his liberal Democratic allies should go back to the drawing board to come up with some meaningful solutions to the problems their insurance changes have caused.

And why not?

# Some common sense for a change

The Suffolk County Legislature and the county executive have worked out a possible compromise on Robins Island. The county would end up owning approximately 93% of the island, free of charge. The owner would be able to develop seven homes, clustered, on the remaining acreage.

The Robins Island scenario has dragged through the courts for several years. At one point the county had agreed to buy the island for around \$9 million. It would have cost an equal

amount of interest to pay off the bonds. Before the transaction could take place, the owner went bankrupt and all contracts were null and void. Since that time, the county, along with the Nature Conservancy, has accrued an estimated \$1 million in legal fees.

During this period, our economy has changed. Also, the claim that the island is "pristine" and "virgin" has turned out to be untrue. The island has no significance in protecting the groundwater. Ecologically, it is a developed area that has regenerated itself. The island was

once used for farming, lumbering, and was the site of a commercial brick works. It has been determined that some of the vegetation found on the island is the result of importation from Europe. It is not natural American vegetation.

Regardless of man's transformation of the island during its occupied era, it is still important from an ecological standpoint and as a preserve for the future. The common sense compromise worked out offers over 90% of the island to the county at no charge. This can be kept forever wild or developed as some

have suggested as a living preserve. The balance of the island would be clustered, keeping the need for roads to a minimum. All the home sites would be five acres and located in one area, leaving the rest of the island undisturbed and uninhabited.

Of equal importance is the fact that the land would remain as a taxpayer producing revenue for the school district, Southold Town and the County of Suffolk. The island, its upkeep and its maintenance would not be a drain on the taxpayers. It is this type of common sense approach that has been badly lacking, resulting in the squandering of hundreds of millions of tax dollars. Only through compromise can we acquire the tracks of land that the environmentalists desire. We no longer can afford an all or nothing mentality.

The county executive and legislators who have come up with this compromise are to be congratulated. Hopefully, common sense will continue to prevail and the entire legislative body will accept the proposal, which offers benefit to both the taxpayers, who must foot the bill, and the environmentalists.

Hopefully, the politicians who spend our hard-earned tax dollars will not back off this common sense proposal in favor of their business as usual approach. Hopefully, they will consider the plight of the taxpayers for a change.

And why not?

# Where the power exists

Although funding for education and the quality of education has become an unholy mess, residents should not look to Albany to solve their problems. We must look to home and to ourselves. Yes, there is something we can do about it. We can take control of our school boards. This is where the power is.

The state requirements for a basic education and the associated mandates use up less than 50% of most school budgets. Additional curriculum, entitlements and non-austerity items make up the balance. It is not the state legislature, nor is it the state law that decides what enhancements and additional curriculum will be offered. This is within the power and the prerogative of the local school board, whose members are local residents who have been voted into office by the people within the school district.

In most school districts, the school board is made up of "pro-education" people. This does not necessarily mean that they are there for the kids, but may well be there for their own best interests. All too often, school board members have a vested interest in the educational system ranging from being educators in other districts, or former superintendents, to being a provider of a product or service to the district, or to parents who have a special axe to grind, such as an interest in the continuance of their favorite programs and sports.

Minority representation on a school board is made up from the ranks of taxpayers, citizens who fund the cost of our schools. You rarely see business people or professionals from outside of the educational establishment serving on a board. Oftentimes, those who appear to be clear of conflict themselves have a wife, a child or another family member working within the system. This incestuous-type of oversight has resulted in Long Island spending more on education than anyplace else in the continental United States.

Homeowners are faced with unmanageable real estate taxes, with 70% of their hard-earned tax dollars going to fund education. Up to one-third of all funds raised statewide are invested in education. These huge investments of our capital have too often been for naught. We are not providing our children with a proven, superior education. In fact, it is just the opposite. Many students graduating from high school today on Long Island can barely read on an eighth grade level. They can only comprehend seventh grade math. The students in the United States rank 59th and 60th out of the 60 leading industrial nations in math and science. Obviously, money has not been the answer to our quest for a better life for our children.

Although there are numerous reasons for this sorry state of affairs, one of the most outstanding is the local citi-

zens' refusal to become involved. We must put our apathy aside. We must become involved as candidates and as voters. We must take back control of our schools. Our survival as taxpayers, and the future of our kids, is at stake.

Yes, you should consider running for the school board. At the very least, you should be informed about how your district is spending its money, and cast your vote during budget and board elections.

And why not?

## A late night caper

# Thieves in Albany

Late in the night of April 4, Governor Mario Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader Ralph Marino and Assembly Minority Leader Saul Weprin agreed to the new New York State budget. It calls for \$60 billion, \$6 billion more than the 1992-1993 budget, almost a 9% increase

in state spending when inflation has been around 2.5%.

There are damn few of us who have been able to increase our spending by 8%. We have been lucky if we remained constant, for our wages have not increased nor have the profits from our businesses. We have had to tighten our belts, eliminate the luxuries, and cut back on the necessities to make our income meet our expenses.

Those holy folk up there in Albany, our local elected representatives, have not gotten the message. Do not be surprised that tucked away somewhere in the budget will be funds for increases in their salaries. The New York State legislators are the highest paid in the nation. They work part-time, generally less than four months a year, on legislative work. When their salaries and lulus are combined, most are making between \$70,000 and \$100,000. Talk is rampant that they will attempt to increase their salaries during this year's session. No one can quite figure out yet whether they will attempt to do it within the budget or will attempt to sneak through a pay increase in the closing hours of the legislature. They believe that because they have raised your tax burden, their compensation should keep up with their spending habits.

Keep tuned. If and when this salary hike scam materializes, be prepared to come out swinging.

And why not?

# Do you want more taxes?

Governor Mario Cuomo's Secretary of State, Gail Shaffer, held a hearing in Riverhead on the governor's proposed mandate relief recommendations. At the invitation of Councilwoman Harriet Gilliam, I was in attendance. Although the conference had been billed as a roundtable discussion dealing with mandate relief, it became readily apparent that it was a political rally for the governor.

Shaffer said that New York State's taxes are not that high when compared to other states. She's wrong. New York State's taxes are the highest in the nation.

Shaffer went on to say that New York State's taxes appear to be high because they combine local taxes with state expenditures. She would have you believe your local town boards are the real culprits.

Shaffer proposed that instead of mandate relief, local governments be given the opportunity of imposing a local income tax. The audience, almost to

a person, responded by saying: "Eliminate the mandates and have the state assume its constitutional obligations by funding and providing for the education of our youth."

Shaffer turned to Medicaid which, along with welfare, eats up almost 50% of the taxes raised by the county and 41.6% of the entire state budget. She said the governor had proposed a reform package, but it is being held up in the Senate which happens to be controlled by Republicans. She complained about the Senate version which puts a 6% cap on the Medicaid and Medicare growth rate. She claimed that this goal is unrealistic. The governor wants no cap.

Medicaid and Medicare in New York State is one of the most liberal systems in the United States. California serves twice as many recipients at half the cost of New York. New York State patients have options that are twice as generous and lucrative as those offered under private health plans. Without a cap, expenditures for medicine, that have been accelerating at four to 10

times the rate of inflation, could bankrupt the state.

Cuomo does not want any limits on spending or the taxes that are needed to finance it. Shaffer attempted to paint the Republicans as the bad guys because their bill put a cap on these expenditures. The cap happens to be two to three times the rate of inflation. What more do they want?

Shaffer seemed to be saying to the audience that the governor is looking for new ways to tax. Little was said about the elimination of mandates from Albany on local municipalities and school boards. Nothing was said about either mandated cuts in governmental services, or elimination of mandates which have led to increased spending. Suffolk County government alone operates under 2,600 separate state mandates.

Shaffer's comments reflect the views of too many in Albany. Cuomo and the crowd in Albany have turned a deaf ear to the pleas of citizens. That must change!

And why not?

# The state must fund education

Under the State Constitution, it is the responsibility of New York State to provide a basic education for every student. To meet this goal, the state provides state aid. State aid makes up, on average, from 38% to as high as 50% of Long Island's school districts' budgets.

The state mandates that each district provide a specified minimum curriculum which will enable every student to receive a Regents diploma or be prepared to enter the workplace as an educated citizen. The financial requirement for this mandated education ranges from 44% to 48% of the normal school budget. The balance of the budget is made up of electives or entitlements as determined by the local school boards.

Local school board members, elected by the residents of the individual districts, are empowered to add to the basic core curriculum as they see fit. These electives can cover the gamut from kindergarten, which is not a requirement of the state, to multiple languages, advanced mathematics and a hybrid of other curriculum offerings. They include courses that border on the extreme of wastefulness, such as sailing, dancing and a host of others. They also include after school activities, which range from traditional sports such as football, basketball and baseball to chess clubs, stamp and coin collecting, etc. All of these items, from the basic core curriculum through all of the electives, are offered as a package.

Voters technically have an opportunity of approving or voting down the budget. In recent years, school districts have put the budgets, if defeated, up for revote as many as four times. When the voters turn down the budget, the school district is supposed to go on austerity. Under a normal austerity budget, only the necessities of education are to be offered. Sports, busing and extracurricular activities are supposed to be eliminated. School boards have become creative and have found ways to circumvent the traditional austere budget by claiming that they are operating under a "contingency plan" that allows them to do as they want.

The cost of education on Long Island today consumes up to 70% of the taxes raised through real estate. This is on top of state aid. Education is not even. Because of the complex aid formulas and the wealth of the various districts, some kids have as much as \$50,000 per year spent on their education, while in other districts, it may be as low as \$3,500.

The State Education Department is responsible for overseeing education throughout the state, but has failed miserably in this mission. The state has become a puppet for the administrators, the school boards and the teacher unions. The lawmakers in Albany have shown an absolute reluctance to take on the State Education Department or correct the injustices and the wasteful spending created by local school boards.

Governor Mario Cuomo, recognizing the burden that has been placed on real estate taxpayers, recently proposed allowing municipalities to develop a local income tax to fund education. This is a cop-out and just transfers the horrendous cost of education from one pocket to another. It does not attack the core problem, the cost of education and the inequities from one district to the next.

The governor and the state legislature should consider developing a

statewide school system. A system that has the state funding and provides an equal educational opportunity for every student from Niagara to Montauk. The state would provide the buildings, the administration, the teachers and the core curriculum that is mandated by the state. With these basic obligations being met directly by the state, local school boards could then be empowered to develop additional curriculum and offerings on a menu basis that would require district voter approval.

To ensure maximum voter turnout, these budgets should be voted upon and board of education members could be elected on Election Day. Communities should determine the educational advancements and the degree of taxation they wish to impose upon themselves. Every student would be guaranteed a basic, quality education. The salaries of teachers and administrators would be set on a statewide basis rather than being allowed to leapfrog from community to community. Reasonable limits could be placed on the administrative staff both in number of positions and in salaries and benefits. Teachers should become employees of the state rather than of individual school districts. Where the state currently is funding through state aid, a fairly close percentage of the actual mandated programs, the cost of implementing this program by the state would be a wash. Local real estate taxpayers could determine the additional burden they wish to absorb. Sanity would be brought back to education and maybe even emphasis would be redirected on teaching the kids to read, write and do basic math.

We can no longer afford the waste of precious young minds or the communities taxes on the wasteland that education has become.

It's time for a change. Does the governor or the New York State Legislature have the courage to take on the unions and the educational establishment?

And why not?

## VAT's all right

Almost 20 years ago, we examined the concept of a VAT (value added tax), as a replacement for every other tax that Americans endure. At that time, it appeared that if a value added tax of 13% was imposed in the United States, every other tax, starting with local taxes through state and federal, could be eliminated.

A value added tax is a form of a sales tax that is applied along every step of commerce, from the beginning of the harvest or creation through development, manufacturing, distribution and final sale. At each step, as a material or product changes hands, the tax is imposed, adding the tax to the value of the product. The final tax is imposed when the item is sold to the ultimate consumer.

In the purchase of lumber for building a house, for example, the farmer would pay a VAT on the seeds or seedlings he grows and sells to a forester. When the forester sold his grown trees, a VAT would be added on their new value. The lumber mill that bought the trees would pay a VAT, as would the distributor who sold them to the lumberyard. The lumberyard which, in turn, sold them to a contractor would add his VAT and the contractor who built the house would add a VAT onto the final selling price of the house.

When the homeowner sold the house to a second buyer, a VAT would be added on to the profit, the difference between what they bought the house for and what they sold it for.

Many countries throughout the world use a VAT as a major source of raising governmental monies. In countries where they have other forms of taxation, the VAT has proved to be stifling and has had a regressive affect on the economy. As a single replacement for all other taxes, it is an idea whose time may have come.

In the original editorial that we wrote on this taxation mechanism, we recommended that the VAT be imposed nationally, but collected locally. Each unit of government, from school boards through towns, county, state and federal, would each receive a prescribed percentage of the total tax. As the monies were collected locally, the local portion would be taken out and the balance of the funds passed upward to the other levels of government. As this would be the only form of taxation each entity of government would have for revenue, it would be forced to live within the prescribed percentage. The only way government could increase the amount of

money it took in would be by increasing the value of the product, goods and services produced. The VAT would be collected not only on the production of goods, but on services, salaries and gross profits.

President Bill Clinton has dropped the concept of the VAT on Americans as another form of taxation. This would be a good time to examine exchanging all other forms of taxes for one unified VAT that would fund the country. Since 20 years have passed and all forms of government have grown and increased taxes, we have no idea of the percentage a VAT would have to be today to fund all governments. This concept should be explored, and the answer found. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have no income tax, sales tax, real estate tax, corporate or inheritance tax. Just one single value added tax.

President Clinton's idea of adding a VAT to fund Hillary's health plan is ridiculous. It would be the final breaking point of the American economy.

Clinton should be looking to change, not add to the tax burden.

And why not?

## Layers of bureaucracy

The Ed Murphy rip-off at BOCES III, where he was gifted with almost \$1 million in retirement benefits, has started a lot of people thinking. What is a superintendent? Do we need them? Are they worth the money we are paying them?

When many of us went to school, the chief honcho was the principal, there were no superintendents. Today, we not only have building principals, but layers of other bureaucracy up through the local school district, the BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) districts as well as in the New York State Education Department. The building principals have a layer of administration beneath them also, which includes assistants, department chairmen and heads of specialized areas. Administration has been the fastest growing segment of education.

In several school districts we have examined, enrollments have dropped up to 50%, yet the administration has

grown 10 times larger in the last decade. Are all these bureaucrats needed? Can we afford them? Do they benefit the children? The answer is probably no, yet, the system feeds upon itself and grows.

In a couple of small school districts out on the East End, the cost of the administration has driven the cost per pupil close to \$50,000. Recently, Tuckahoe, one of the smallest school districts on the Island, replaced the departing superintendent with another at a cost of \$80,000. The district has less than 150 students. The cost of the superintendent comes to \$550 per student. What benefit is this to the kids? Could the cost of administration be contracted out?

In Amagansett, the superintendent, at a recent public hearing, defended his \$87,000 salary by stating he had a doctorate. So what! According to Assemblyman Joseph Sawicki (R-Southold), in conversation after the meeting, the dis-

trict also supplied that same superintendent with a house in East Hampton at taxpayers' expense. The cost of educating a student to the Amagansett taxpayers is almost \$50,000 per student. These kids should be in Yale or Harvard and living in gold-plated residences for this kind of taxpayer investment!

There has been much talk about consolidation, but consolidation is being resisted because many districts wish to maintain home rule and control over their school systems. Possibly we should be exploring the consolidation of administration and the business aspects of schools. Leave the principals and the staff below them up to the local boards, but have all positions above principal provided on a county-wide basis, overseen by a county-wide elected board.

Those at the top, as demonstrated by Ed Murphy, have honed their "it's for the kids" phrase into a golden parachute for themselves. This abuse must come to an end.

And why not?