

What you can do about tax crisis

Last week we published a very potent letter on this page from two readers that reflected the frustration and the viewpoint of most of us. We are drowning in taxes and feel frustrated to make changes.

During the next three months, there is one place we can make our voice heard and effect change. All school districts are holding balloting for voter approval of the school board budgets and some of the members of the school board will be up for election.

If the budget itself is not to your liking, vote it down. The defeat of the budget is a message to the board. It is the normal practice of the board to resubmit the budget with little or no changes until they wear down the voters and force its passage. This is wrong and the practice must be stopped.

The way to stop it is to throw out those board members who proposed or supported the budget or those board members who have a vested interest, either directly or indirectly, in the creation of such a budget. It is not enough to throw those people off the board. Alternative candidates who care about the community, as they do about the education of the community's students, must be in place and ready to run for the board seats.

In some of the more highly-contested elections over the past several years, the teachers' unions, the administrators and those who are drawing the salaries out of the district have backed candidates who could be counted upon to support increased salaries and increased positions for both the teachers and the administrators. It has not been uncommon for these unions and associations to spend over \$25,000 to elect their candidates. Not only do the unions spend money for advertising and mailings but they use sophisticated phone banks and campaigns that are normally practiced by organized political parties. Unfortunately, candidates do not run under party labels and it is sometimes hard for the voter to determine who the candidates are, who they represent and what they stand for.

The unions are very careful to hide their identity. PTAs have been infiltrated by the unions and instead of being independent have been accused of being biased.

Organized citizens, particularly groups such as Tax PAC and other united taxpayer groups, are charged with being anti-child, anti-education. These campaigns are often ferocious and it makes many good citizens fear becoming involved. Yet, without our involvement, what are we to do?

We have reached the point of maximum taxation. Our earnings have not increased but the demand on taxes to support the schools is accelerating at the rate of \$1,000 to \$2,000 per year in many areas. The teachers and the administrators are now disproportionately paid compared to the average resident and even other people in government. They still want more, even though their cry of being underpaid no longer holds water.

These teachers and administrators know that the valve will be shut off if tax sensitive people gain footholds on the boards. That is the reason they spend as much money as they do and work hard to elect their candidates. It has nothing to do with quality education.

What you must do is either become a candidate or get to know the candidates. Support those candidates who want a good education for the children but equally want a community that is able to support a reasonable cost of education. What do they consider a fair salary for teachers? Should automatic steps, which are raises, be continued? Can the taxpayers afford additional raises above steps? What should teachers receive

in benefits? Who should pay for them? What classes beyond the state mandates should be offered? What electives are they willing to support or discontinue?

Do not fear asking the candidates what their positions are for reducing the administration costs and reducing the number of administrators to what your district had 10 years ago. Find out the position of the candidates on classroom sizes, population. What do they consider a good ratio of teacher to student? How do they feel about transportation? Do they support competitive bidding for the bus services or are they content with going along doing business with the same old boys? Should all children from kindergarten to 12th grade be

provided busing? Should the older students be required to walk? Find out what the board members consider important in education. Is it the three R's or the extracurricular activities and electives that they have their eye on?

Most important is for you to turn out and vote. Vote on the budget and vote intelligently on the candidates. Put candidates on the board who are as mindful of the cost of education as the quality of education and you have a chance. Leave it to the educators, the administrators and those who have a vested interest in education and they will gleefully send you a higher tax bill next November. It's up to you.

And why not?

A little understanding

This coming April 27, South Africa will have its first nationwide vote. These elections have drawn the media's attention worldwide. It is amazing to us in listening to and reading the reports how little understanding there is about South Africa.

Some very fundamental information is being ignored. Most of us here in the United States think of Africa as being one large country rather than a continent with multiple countries. We think of South Africa as a region rather than as a sovereign state. We all know of apartheid and condemn it.

Basically, there are no natives in South Africa. The native tribes of South Africa were wiped out. When the English settled in the Cape Town area, they brought with them disease that took a devastating toll on the native population. Many of those who survived, later died fighting the intrusion by tribes migrating from the north.

In South Africa, at about the same time the whites were colonizing, the nomad tribes from the north were migrating to the south and they killed off what remained of the native population. One of the tribes, the Zulus, who came down from the northwest, fought fierce battles for territory and control. Unlike the nomads, the Zulus had a governmental structure in those primitive days. They had kings, courts and armies. They did not just wander. They established colonies, practiced agriculture and grew as a society.

The nomads, who consisted of 30 or more smaller tribes, had little structure. They lived off the land. When the animal and plant life had been depleted and the land exhausted, they moved to more fertile grounds. These tribes were in constant warfare with each other and unable to unite in opposition to the Zulus.

The Zulus and the white English and Dutch settlers often fought ferociously. Sometimes they gained ground, sometimes they lost ground. The whites themselves were never at peace or at ease with each other. Both nationalities insisted upon us-

ing their own native tongue and practicing their form of religion. Somehow, in this turmoil, mostly because of its incredible natural resources, the country grew and prospered.

Last year we visited South Africa, and we can attest to not only the natural beauty of the country but the infrastructure that meets or exceeds that found here in the United States. South Africa is not a Third World country by a stretch of the imagination.

We were appalled that in this land of riches there could be such incredible poverty. But we understand some of the whys of how it happened.

We cringed at seeing middle class suburban homes with six- and seven-foot stone walls topped with barbed and razor wire as a norm. We could not understand how people could live in the fear that was so obvious.

We saw the homelands surrounding the cities and in the middle of arid plains. The homelands came about under apartheid. Blacks were regulated to specific areas. The areas, although vast in miles, generally had a central hub that could best be described as a massive slum. Huts or shacks were the normal housing conditions. Amidst them there would be the occasional well-built home or structure, generally made out of concrete or block. Although land and water were available, rarely did we see signs of a garden. There was little effort to use agriculture to make themselves self-sufficient. The people basically lived as they have lived for the last several thousand years. Tribes banded together in communal living. The African National Congress (ANC) has been encouraging people to come in from the plains to the major cities, where additional squatter accommodations were established. The people were promised jobs and a better way of life. Once they paid their way, they were abandoned. The promise of jobs did not exist, just more communal living.

Schools that had been in existence were burned. Teachers were chased away or killed. The ANC decreed no education until the country

voted. Over the last 14 years, a generation of Africans have been denied the right to learn.

We ended our trip in the Natal province and found stark contrast in the people. The Zulus, who consider the Natal area their homeland, are proud people. They revere education, seem to have a purpose in their life, are organized, and what is most frightening, pledged to die rather than be ruled by the nomad tribes.

The nomads have finally found unity under the banner of the ANC. The ANC is considered a communist front with a total socialistic agenda. Supporters have been promised that after the election everything that is owned or controlled individually or corporately by the whites will be disbursed to the rest of the country. These promises will not be able to be kept, if civilization is to be maintained.

The white people of South Africa also have a fringe element that is as frightening as anything we have seen in our lifetime. There is a group of fanatics estimated at about 300,000 who are pure, unadulterated Nazis, right down to the khaki uniforms, the storm trooper boots and the youth corps and camps. They, like the Zulus, are demanding an independent homeland, an independent state and are prepared to die to achieve this aim.

Everyone we spoke to, both black and white, throughout the country prayed for a peaceful resolution but confirmed that they expected a bloody multi-year war to be the result of the election. Life has little reverence to many residents in South Africa. They are accustomed to death and seeing thousands die. The media's attention to the violence is there only because the media is there. On any given day, hundreds are killed and no one seems to notice. The hand of death can be starvation, wild animals or tribal warfare.

South Africa is hard to understand, both by natives and outsiders. It is definitely not a place we should be interfering with our misguided and ill-informed good intentions.

And why not?

It's the message, stupid!

It is not the messenger, it is the message that we should be paying attention to. Unfortunately, public officials recently played politics with a very serious problem that threatens us all.

Two weeks ago, NatWest announced that they were moving a division of the company, a back office operation, from Long Island to Scranton, Pennsylvania. They were honest; they told Long Island what they can't afford to pay the salaries necessary to allow people to meet the cost of living here on Long Island.

NatWest, like so many other Long Island businesses, can't compete on Long Island. They can do their work, perform their functions less expensively elsewhere. Because their competitors are doing the same to compete, they must go to areas where labor and overhead costs are less. NatWest is not the first to move, and won't be the last.

Long Island may be an island, but it

is not an economically self-contained island. The products and goods that are made here must be competitive with the products and goods that come from surrounding states and other countries.

We have lived in a fool's paradise. During the 80s when the good times rolled, we let our cost of basic governmental services get out of hand. We accepted arbitrators' awards to the police without as much as a cringe. These awards not only granted salaries that made Suffolk police the highest paid in the nation, but granted loopholes through which officers are able to retire with accumulated benefits and buyouts amounting to over \$100,000.

We allowed the cost of education to double and triple the cost in other parts of New York State and surrounding states. Today, we pay teachers on an average of over \$60,000 per year, not counting the benefit packages which add

tremendously to the total cost. When classroom sizes declined we added electives instead of decreasing staffs. Within 10 years we have increased administrative costs tenfold. We now pay administrators in single districts more than we pay the county executive of all of Suffolk.

By taking our eye off the ball, we created a situation where Dr. Edward Murphy, former superintendent of BOCES III, was able to bail out and retire with almost \$1 million worth of goodies that he took from the taxpayers under the guise of "doing it for the kids."

The cumulative effect of this reckless spending on public service is that our residents and our businesses can no longer afford to live and do business here.

It is sickening to see elected officials who never had the courage to say "no" resort to grandstanding by publically declaring they are pulling our accounts out of NatWest in retribution. They seem to have forgotten that NatWest still has 3,000 people employed here on Long Island with branches in most communities. They are fooling no one.

These very same officials give lip service to solving the problems. They have done little to end the wanton, wasteful spending in government that has caused taxes to escalate. When they spend us into a deficit, they dig deeper into our pockets with increased tax rates or higher sales taxes.

It is no secret our energy costs are the highest in the nation. What have they done to resolve this problem? Have they fought for a fair share of low-cost power to ease this crunch? The New York Power Authority (NYPA) handles approximately 8,000 megawatts of low-cost power annually, which it distributes to municipalities and school districts in upstate regions. We get approximately 600 to 700 megawatts here. Is that a fair share? Have our local officials fought for more for our schools and governments to bring some tax relief? What have they done to fight against the endless increases imposed by LILCO and its friends in the state Public Service Commission? Nothing! They give lip service, but no leadership.

Islip Town officials, on the other hand, took LILCO to court over an attempt by LILCO to breach a contract concerning electricity generated by the town's resource recovery facility. "This arrogant attempt by LILCO to dip into

the taxpayers' pocket was an outrage I could not allow to continue," said Islip Supervisor Peter McGowan. The result? Islip Town won, and more than \$6.4 million in disputed revenues will be restored to the town. That's leadership in standing up for the taxpayers.

Have the other grandstanding public officials done anything to put an end to the disgraceful flow of taxpayer dollars into patronage pockets? Do they look for more economical ways to provide services, such as putting bus contracts out to bid to take advantage of a competitive market? No! Instead they bicker, they talk, they offer platitudes, buy new cars, and continue to squander tax dollars.

These fools are the ones responsible for the mess we are in. Instead of leadership and courage, they are trying to pass the blame for their sins onto the shoulders of a firm forced to leave because of official malfeasance. The elected officials, whether they be school boards, town boards, county legislators or the county executive, are the ones that have brought the hangman's noose to Long Island.

Companies like NatWest came to Long Island to do business. They provide the jobs. They are the economic powerhouse which has been led to slaughter by the killers of the golden goose. Until these leaders are simply willing to attack the root core of our problems—real estate taxes and utility rates—all the rhetoric will be for naught.

Business groups offer simple solutions but never look into their own ranks where some of the problems originate. Just recently one business leader cut up his NatWest credit card to illustrate his chagrin over the company's decision to move to Scranton. We would suggest he now turn his attention and his scissors to his LILCO bill, and his tax bill. They, more than anything else, are the root cause of Long Island's economic woes.

The facts are simple. If people cannot afford to live here, they can't afford to work here. If businesses can't profit by doing business here they will do business elsewhere.

Our elected officials can face this problem today, or continue to let Long Island die by ignoring the facts and camouflaging them with rhetoric. Instead of resorting to political antics, they should lead or get out of the way and let someone else sit in positions of power to bring about the solutions we all need.

And why not?

Thank you!

Last January we asked our readers to voluntarily pay for their subscription to Suffolk Life. We were overwhelmed by the response.

Last week we published another reminder for those who may have forgotten or hesitated. The next day, we were flabbergasted at the response.

We cannot tell you how much we appreciate your support. It has been just incredible. We desperately want to bring you the best newspaper we are capable of being. Your support will go a long way toward helping us reach this goal.

Oftentimes we have had to kill stories, letters or photos because we did not have room. We have had to hold back on improvements in the publication that would make Suffolk Life more enjoyable for you.

With your outpouring of support, we are going to be able to bring you a better Suffolk Life.

Thank you for your generosity, your kind words and for giving us the opportunity to serve you.

And why not?

Free tax returns

Forget H&R Block or your local accountant. There is a way you can have your tax return compiled free of charge. The only hitch is you must be a member of Congress or the executive branch of government.

These dear folks who write the complicated tax laws that require accountants and tax firms have a little perk we average taxpayers can't avail ourselves of at tax filing time.

Your congressmen, senators and members of the executive branch are afforded the opportunity of having the United States taxpayer-paid Internal

Revenue Service agents do their tax returns for them at no charge. You can bet their returns won't be audited either.

This is just another little perk our congressmen have helped themselves to, at the expense of the United States taxpayers who will be laboring through this Friday to complete their returns, and will work until the end of May to pay their tax obligation for next year.

Does anyone believe these Washington folks deserve all the perks they give themselves?

And why not?

Beyond a reasonable doubt

There is almost no doubt the average taxpaying resident of Suffolk County rents our legislators granting themselves brand new cars to drive around in.

The legislators recently rewarded themselves with brand new Fords. The legislature's presiding officer, Donald Blydenburgh, even got a car befitting his crown, a top-of-the-line Ford Victoria, while County Executive Robert Gaffney and his top aide, Eric Kopp, are also sporting new Victoria models as well, with other lesser-ranking staffers getting

the Taurus models, as did the legislators.

This is the legislature that officially meets 12 times a year. These overworked public servants reduced their schedule of meetings after being elected to office.

Why do they need cars? They don't! Most legislators' official business is to attend county legislative meetings and a few committee meetings held during the rest of the month. Sure they go to work other days or at least show up at their of-

fices, which are funded through our taxes. Of course they use their cars for commutation and to go out campaigning, which they start doing the day after election.

Can they function without official cars? You bet! Does your employer provide you with a car? Do you function? There is not a need nor a reason they should have cars to start with.

Four members of the legislature have turned down this perk, including Steve Levy (D-Sayville), Dave Bishop (D-Lin-

denhurst), Herbert Davis (R-Shirley) and George Guldi (D-Sag Harbor). These people are to be congratulated for they have put into action more than their mouths.

Every chance you have, go ahead, rib your legislator and Gaffney staffers for being on the take. Taking from you without conscience, abusing the powers that you entrusted to them. In case they haven't heard, you are hurting and they are enjoying it.

And why not?

Babies are not mandated

If you believe Governor Mario Cuomo, the state's fiscal dilemma is caused by the federal government. The federal government mandates that the state provide services for its citizens. One of the biggest numbers is Medicaid.

Medicaid is the medical insurance for the poor. The federal government only requires the state to provide some medical coverage for the indigent, but does not require the coverage that New York State gives.

Professionals have compared the Medicaid coverage to the coverage provided by private employers, and has concluded that the state's coverage

is 50% to 100% better than private coverage. A lot of the coverage doesn't even make sense.

On April 4, Newsweek revealed that New York State, along with a handful of other states, have taken Medicaid coverage to such extremes that the coverage provides fertility assistance to welfare moms who are having trouble having additional children.

Yes, that's right, we are providing expensive medical technology to mothers who can't afford their current children to help them have additional children.

Of course, this is coming out of our taxes. You and I are being asked

to pay for this elaborate coverage, even though we can't or barely can afford to pay for our own medical insurance.

Liberal states like New York have totally prostituted the original intent of Medicaid. The federal government originally planned the system to provide basic coverage for people who could not afford coverage on their own.

Governor Mario Cuomo's New York spends one-third more on Medicaid while serving half the number of clients than does California. In most states, Medicaid is paid for solely by the state government. In New York, half of the cost is forced upon the

counties to fund. Yet, the counties do not have any say as to the quality, quantity or eligibility for these funds.

Suffolk County legislators are about to vote on a bill that offers 1% of the county's sales tax revenues in exchange for a state takeover of Medicaid. The theory is that since the state mandates, and has control over the program, they should also foot the bill. Federal regulations require eight categories of Medicaid aid, according to legislators, but the state offers 22 categories. If the state faced the full brunt of the rising costs, instead of passing them off to the county, state officials would be faced with the need to make necessary cuts to bring the costs under control.

Medicaid is a typical program gone crazy. It is the type of program that is too big for the government to administer effectively or intelligently. Federal and local government spending on Medicaid are directly responsible for the outrageous costs of all medical care in the United States. In New York, the best is none too good if you don't have to pay for it.

At election time we have heard cheap talk about reform. Yet, when elected or re-elected, our governor and the state legislators fail every year to bring about any kind of reform, and just continue to send the bill to the taxpayers.

If California can treat two times as many people at two-thirds the cost, New York can afford to do no less.

Maybe instead of giving welfare mothers fertility treatments, we should cap their Medicaid benefits based on the amount of children they had when they came into the system. Then let's see how fast they get pregnant again.

And why not?

You never really own it

Contrary to popular misconception, no one in the State of New York can ever own property free and clear. The property always is liened by a perpetual tax bill. Failure to pay your tax bill results in the confiscation of the property by the government.

All so-called property owners are nothing more than renters. In a sense, we are tenant farmers who are allowed to improve our property, raise our families but we never own the dirt that is underneath us.

Ludicrous as it may seem, under this lease deal, we allow our masters to raise the cost of our leases annually by any amount that they see fit. We are supposed to have some control over these masters through elections. They are supposed to be the representatives of the landholders. Yet, they rarely listen to the taxpayer and although we are allowed, by law, to terminate their terms as overseers, their replacements are not much better.

We are supposed to be able to direct and control the largest portion of

our lease payments by directly having a say on how much we spend on our schools. We are allowed to approve the budgets and select the local overseers of these expenditures.

When we reject the budgets, the overseers of these expenditures, the school boards, place us on what they call an austerity budget, which allows them to spend up to 90% of what they wanted to spend in the first place. If we turn down these budgets on re-votes, they then place us on contingency budgets which, by the stretch of the imagination, allows them to spend more than what was actually called for in the voter-rejected budget.

There is nothing in the law that forbids those who are going to approve or benefit from the expenditures from serving on the boards, even through there is quite an obvious conflict of interest.

We doubt this is what the framers of our state constitution had in mind. But then, they lived before we had a Department of Education that is ap-

pointed and outside of the direct control of the people who are paying, through their taxes, for the educational establishment.

Our current crop of legislators, who can do something about the problems that we are enduring, are faceless and gutless. They dare not stand up to the state education lobby or the wrath of the local unions. From a political sense this may well be the way it is. Because of their excesses and the legislators' lack of courage, this Island is breaking apart financially and the golden goose that has funded more than its fair share of local and state expenditures will die a death from benign neglect.

The Constitution of the United States guarantees us the right to own property. The Constitution of the State of New York and the laws developed under it, have undermined this freedom and, as a result, we have been reduced to leaseholders who can never own property free and clear.

And why not?

The 'pass the budget' cry

'It was just for the children'

You have heard the cry, "It's for the children." Pass the budget, it's for the kids. Increase salaries, increase administrative positions, it's for the kids.

Sorry folks, it wasn't for the kids. It was for those who were reaping the financial rewards for such actions.

While enrollment dropped in many districts by 50%, the cost for salaries doubled and tripled in the last decade. Administrative costs went up tenfold. As enrollment shrunk and classes were consolidated, excess teachers had to either be terminated or new positions created for them. The easiest place to put them was into the bureaucracy, the administrative staff.

Today, Long Island school districts have five times the amount of admin-

istrators that upstate school districts of comparable size have. Not only do we have more administrators per student ratio, we are paying them much more.

We have 581% more administrators making over \$80,000 per year than the rest of the state's high-priced school officials.

State Senator Joseph Galibre and State Senator Mary Ellen Jones last week released a report outlining the high cost of administration here on Long Island, suggesting that it is one of the problems causing the high cost of education we endure here.

We have written several editorials about this in the past, as it is one of the most glaring examples of waste in our school system. It is the fat that is sizzling in a panful of lard.

In one of our editorials, we recommended that the state tie state aid to the school districts' ability to control administrative costs. We recommended that if a school district exceeded the state norm for administrators to students, state aid would be reduced. If the district exceeded the state's administration norm for salaries, they additionally would be penalized.

Likewise, if the school board brought the administrative costs in under the norm, they would receive bonuses proportionately in state aid. This could be used for education rather than bureaucracy.

These suggestions in the past have fallen on deaf ears. Maybe now that the Democrats in the Senate have

started to take an interest, their Democratic counterparts who control the Assembly might begin to get the message.

The Republicans in the Senate, on numerous occasions, have addressed the high cost of education. They have introduced bills and passed them only to have the Assembly leadership lock the bills up in committee and never allow them to come to a vote in the legislature. This is the way the game is played in Albany.

The teachers' unions know the game well, and since both branches of the legislature kowtow to this lobby, little gets done except the taxpayers get the bill. It's time for this to change.

And why not?

Spend now and worry later

The members of the Suffolk County Legislature had three options during a meeting last week when it discussed and finally, after a nearly two-hour debate, voted on a new contract for the faculty of the Suffolk County Community College. In a prime example of previous legislative mismanagement by a majority of the group, it took the option to approve the contract but ignored the lack of funding available to pay the bill.

In doing so, 10 legislators ignored the advice of its own Budget Review Office (BRO). They approved an expenditure that, unless they now pierce the county's expenditure cap in a separate action, will cause an increase in the county's allocations to the college, or, the college will have to institute layoffs because of the lack of funds.

With County Executive Robert Gaffney's director of labor relations, David Greene, urging the legislature to approve the pact, 10 legislators bought the message. What they didn't consider was firm advice by the BRO which said that if the legislature approves the contract, "... a companion resolution also be adopted which would appropriate the additional funding for the contract. This will allow the college to conduct its operations in a normal fashion, plan for the purchase of replacement equipment and allow for the payment of the self-insured health benefit cost this year...Because the adopted budget is at the expenditure cap, an appropriating resolution will require a 14-vote supermajority to be adopted."

Approving a contract without assurances the funding is in place is the kind of action that has caused the county to operate with deficits time and again. It has proven in the past to be the prelude to a tax increase, sales or property. It is not good government.

Greene's actions in this and other labor negotiations gives cause to wonder who it is he is representing, the unions or the taxpayers who must foot the bill. Greene had negotiated, and strongly recommended, the community college contract rejected by the legislature last year. He insisted that contract was the trendsetter for other contract negotiations to come, and bragged about "two zeros" it contained, (two years of a no increase "salary freeze"). Greene didn't bother

to point out those two years contained 4.4% step increases, a fact revealed in a BRO report which noted that instead of the 12% to 13% increase Greene was projecting, the impact ranged from 24% to 42%.

In his support for the now-approved contract, Greene's figures are again suspect. He insists this new contract saves the county some \$6 million over the rejected pact. BRO puts the savings at \$2,157,717. Using Greene's figures, one must also suspect he could have done a much better job for the county in his first negotiations.

The approval of the college faculty contract leaves the long-stalled negotiations with the Association of Municipal Employees (AME), which contains the bulk of the county's work staff, still to be settled. While we don't advocate Greene-type raises for the AME workers, it is time for this matter to be put to rest. It's time for Gaffney to become involved in that negotiations process to bring about a fair and equitable resolution, one that is fair for the workers and the taxpayers. AME employees have endured lag payrolls and furloughs, and they are working without the step increases that the faculty enjoyed. It's time to settle the issue, determine the financial impact, and concentrate on finding cuts in county spending to pay for the future contract costs.

When that financial impact is determined, however, it is our fervent hope that the BRO's cost analysis is used, not Greene's projections which seem to be done on a calculator that is malfunctioning.

And why not?

The inactive trio of power

New York State's trio of power, Governor Mario Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader Ralph Marino, and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, are causing local school officials sleepless nights, and taxpayers needless millions in wasted interest costs. How? By doing nothing, which is what they have accomplished in putting together a state budget. The budget deadline was April 1.

A growing number of school districts have either postponed budget votes or the unveiling of proposed budgets because of the lack of information concerning state aid they will receive. If the present impasse continues, they may face the need to obtain tax anticipation notes to make up for state dollars that will be delayed because of their lack of action. This will cause an additional hardship for taxpayers who will have to pay for interest costs when there should be none.

New York State's system of government, which puts all the power in the hands of those who hold these three positions, would be laughable if it wasn't so tragic. They control the budget preparation and the legislation which is ultimately voted upon. Those who serve in the Assembly and the Senate are delegated into meaningless seat-holders. They have little part in the actual budget preparation, with the exception of caucuses where they are given whatever information the trio of power are willing to share. While they may ultimately be asked to approve a budget, and are prone to take political credit for "increasing" aid to schools or municipalities, they more often go along to get along to protect their own political necks.

It need not be this way. It is those who fill the seats of the Assembly and the Senate who choose the leaders who keep them under their thumb. If, collectively, they took a firm stand, and demanded more of a role in the budget-making process, they might begin to earn the salaries and perks it costs the taxpayers fund to send them to Albany. But the reality is they are afraid to speak up, fearful they will get the smallest offices, the least desirable committee assignments, if any, and little hope to pass legislation. And so

they go along to get along, permitting the trio of power to run the show.

Senator Ralph Marino (R-Huntington Station), a member of the Long Island delegation, has, as one of the trio of power, the ability to use that power to bring benefit to his constituents here. He could yield that power to bring an end to unfunded mandates, a state takeover of Medicaid, tax relief for the taxpayers and tax breaks for businesses to keep them from fleeing to other states. He could also prevent further reductions in aid to education, meaningful welfare reform, invoke controls over the skyrocketing cost of education. As one of the three most powerful people in this state, he has

the ability to make a difference.

But will he? If the lack of action in putting together a state budget was based on Marino taking a strong stand to force some of these issues into reality, the delay would be meaningful. Marino, however, has never been known as a fighter. Low-keyed and laid back, we fear he is being bamboozled more than he is forcing needed changes.

It would be nice to be wrong on this. It would be great to see a state budget produced which would, finally, address the issues which have caused this state to become a place to run from rather than a place to move to.

And why not?

Arrogance of government

When does the placement of a natural gas line or a nuclear waste disposal site magically become devoid of any environmental impact? When the project is affiliated with an upper level of government that uses its governmental power to run roughshod over populace.

Residents of a Centereach neighborhood became painfully aware of that arrogance of power recently, when, suddenly and without warning, they saw signs of construction in their residential neighborhood. To their dismay, they learned that a Brooklyn firm was about to dig up their neighborhood to place underground gas lines along their street. In light of the recent gas line explosion in New Jersey which destroyed an apartment complex and caused death, injury and emotional havoc, this news did not sit too well with them. Worse was the knowledge that this could be imposed upon them without benefit of prior notice, without any public meetings in which they could voice their views.

According to a spokesperson for the firm involved in the pipeline, "an environmental review was not required because this falls under two lev-

els of government. All the appropriate paperwork has been filed, and permits have been issued by the state and Brookhaven Town. There are no requirements for a legal advisement or public notification of any kind."

No requirements for a public notification of what is going to happen in their neighborhood? No legal requirement? What about a moral requirement to inform people about something that could impact their residential neighborhood?

The New York Power Authority decided no public hearings were necessary on the construction of their generating plant in Holtsville. Since they are a state agency, they have the power to override local controls, evade local taxes, to do whatever they want because they are the powerful.

Interestingly, last week a diesel-fired turbine at the plant was being tested and in the process sent up a plume of diesel fumes which invaded a nearby local school. The result: 90 children were treated by the school nurse for the effects of those diesel fumes, 50 impacted enough to be sent home. The power and the arrogance to ignore local concerns and public hear-

ings or notification doesn't prevent possible accidents, it simply avoids having to answer questions about the problems that might lie ahead.

The same may be true, we fear, about the reported listing of the Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) as a site for nuclear waste. Just including the site on such a list boggles the mind. Here is a facility that has contaminated its property and waters enough to become a federal superfund site, with plans in place but no action to remedy that condition. The contaminated BNL site lies in the pine barrens area, the source of great concern for the preservation of water. How in the name of sanity could this site be listed for nuclear waste disposal, another possible source of contamination? And yet, those who fight so mightily to protect the pine barrens say nothing about this problem. It's kind of like plugging the holes in the sides of a pail to prevent water from running out, while ignoring the holes in the bottom.

It's time the arrogance of government is eliminated to offer the public an opportunity to become aware, and have a say, about the schemes of those who propose projects in our midst.

And why not?