

willmotts and why-nots

David J. Willmott, Editor

Off To A Bad Start

It is disappointing to see the state government off to such a bad start. Unlike many governmental levels that are realistically facing a faltering economy, the state seems to go on its merry way.

Under the control of the Democrats, Stanley "Santa" Steingut, the Assembly majority leader and his legislative elves are handing out patronage as if it were Christmas. The Republican controlled State Senate has become an old age home and refuse dump for discredited Rockefeller appointees.

Governor Hugh Carey, the first Democrat in the statehouse for more than a decade, seems to be overwhelmed by the wake of the Rockefeller-Wilson years. He apparently wants to ride out the tidal wave on the proposed 10 cent per gallon increase in the gas tax.

When the legislature goes to vote on the proposal we hope they drop Carey and his tax on his Irish duff. Maybe the Albany politicians will act where it is really needed -- paring the state payroll.

Making Of A Death Trap

On Monday, January 26, 1975, Suffolk County officially opened the Cross River Dr., a four lane limited access highway east of Riverhead hamlet. The road is a good one.

Much needed, it will save motorists who want to go from north to south shore up to a half hour in driving time. It will also eliminate part of the bottleneck in downtown Riverhead, a problem which has plagued the shopping area for years.

So far, so good. But at the north end of the road where Cross River Dr. intersects Northville Turnpike, it is only time before tragedy strikes unless present conditions are corrected.

A concrete road stretching over open farmland, Northville, could have been built as a speedway.

It is not uncommon to see average drivers buzzing along at 60 to 75 mph--- illegal, yes, but very much a common fact of life.

In the past, Cross River was a secondary far road with a stop sign at the intersection while Northville was the main drag. With the completion of the new roadway, however, the situation has reversed---Northville has stop signs and Cross River, the right of way.

Years of drivers' subconscious conditioning cannot be wiped away overnight and we can see the county's abrupt change result in a headline like, **INTERSECTION PILE-UP KILLS DRIVERS.**

We presume there is a logical reason

The only public service all taxpayers are asking for these days is a cut in taxes so they will have more real income left in their paychecks. The people are demanding it. Even the politicians who wear earmuffs to the people's voice should be able to hear the message loud and clear.

To meet that demand the state will have to cut back on services and chop the wasteful patronage in the payroll. There is no other way. Unlike big brother in Washington, the state can't print money to pay its' debts.

Last November, the voters threw a lot of bums out with the hope something would change. If that hope is not justified they will repeat themselves next time around. They will continue the merry-go-round until those in office learn a lesson.

The newly-elected legislature and the few old hands better get this message to the leadership pronto or there won't be a tomorrow for anyone. And why not?

for stop signs on the Northville rather than the new road. But we think saving someone's life should be the most logical reason of all.

Although some accidents are unpreventable, a great number of potential fatalities could be eliminated at this highway death trap.

At least during the interim period, we think it would make sense to make the intersection a four-way stop. Doing this will at least double the chances of avoiding a major accident. If both drivers have a responsibility to stop there is a 50 percent better chance at least one will see the sign and obey.

The county should make the change now. The danger is already there and will only increase with the warmer weather when visitors from the west who have used the road for years will be returning.

Where there is a chance to minimize traffic danger, we should seize the opportunity. And why not?

Selecting Our Judges

There is a controversy currently raging over whether judges should be elected or appointed by the governor. Those in favor of appointments say the judges would be of higher quality and would be free of political tarnish to serve us all.

At present, almost all judges are

elected to their positions but get there by coming up the political ranks. They join a party, and "pay their dues" through legal work for the party, campaign activities, including electioneering and fund raising.

Once a judge is nominated for office, his campaign usually consists of a "very proper and dignified" low key effort. It does not afford him the opportunity to become well-known before the public.

Especially with inter-party agreements, the candidates don't have to sweat because their names appear on multiple lines and are shoo-ins.

Even where there is no endorsement ban, the low profile campaign means the party with the heaviest registration will usually win, without anyone really knowing who they voted for.

A few weeks ago, David Susskind had as guests on his talk show a group of high level judges. Although they each represented various viewpoints, almost to the man, they could be considered radicals.

We wonder whether the people would have elected these men had they known their positions before the balloting.

But even under an appointive system, politics would never be eliminated from the selection of judges as governors are political animals and view the jobs as patronage plums.

Despite the current state of affairs, we still prefer to see judges elected but we would also like to see them run more aggressive campaigns, campaigns where the candidate's basic philosophy of life and its application to law can become known.

The legal community says this would be bad for the judiciary claiming the campaign infighting would tarnish the image of the court itself.


What value is this image to the defendant or prosecutor who has to face a judge that is biased or just incompetent. Is justice really being served? It makes more sense to have the community know first hand and before the vote who is being entrusted to act as judges. And why not?

SUFFOLK LIFE

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Have You Been Sued?

Chances are you will find yourself in court some day. It may be to answer a charge as minor as a parking ticket or as serious as a civil action or felony.

In every case you are entitled to be represented by a lawyer. Depending on the seriousness, you may decide to speak for yourself but in most cases you should be represented by a professional. As a result if you are innocent, you still have to pay the price of proving it.

For instance, say you are being sued by a credit card company for a bill you've already paid but the computer won't reconcile. You are hauled into court and the chances are you will engage an attorney.

The attorney will generally know the right channels to go through and for some strange reason the computer will answer his letter while ignoring yours. You will probably be able to settle the matter.

If not, the case might become a long entangled court action. Even if you win in the end you will have to pay a hefty fee. Although you were innocent to start with and didn't begin the action, it cost you both time and money to prove it.

The same thing happens regularly in traffic court. You are given a summons for an alleged violation. In some cases, you might be innocent, but to plead not guilty will take extra time and almost always involves the services of a lawyer.

At the time you are through and found innocent, the costs involved are higher than the fine itself.

You are a loser for being a winner and exercising your right as a citizen. There is, however, an alternative.

Yes. Justice would be well served if we used the English system. Under their system, the party bringing suit, whether a person, corporation or branch of government, is automatically responsible for all legal expenses if their case doesn't stand up.

The logic behind it is that it isn't fair for an innocent person to have to pay the cost of defending himself when he had no part in bringing the action to court.

This problem is becoming more and more important as governments readily use the courts as a club to bully people. Their attitude is they have nothing to lose. Most municipalities and larger corporations have law firms on retainer. One more suit, more or less, is not going to make or break them.

To the individual or small business man such suit could destroy them. As a result, they will take the course of least resistance -- capitulation.

This is not justice.

The state legislature can protect the consumer and the small businessman by enacting legislation, making it mandatory for the prosecuting party to pay all court costs and defendant's legal expenses on any case settled out of court or where the defendant is found not at fault. They should also pass similar legislation at the national level. And why not?



Untouchable, they proceed to dine at restaurants, while we, the taxpayers, can only watch helplessly with our noses pressed against the window.

BOCES spokesmen indicate the dinner meetings are a "tradition" to compensate members for the extra distance they have to travel to attend the meetings. It's a tradition taxpayers could well afford to do without.

We urge residents in the guilty districts to apply pressure to their school boards to stop their gourmet indulgence.

We also hope all district boards will force BOCES to stop their dinner outings even if it means deducting the cost of the meals from the fees they pay to BOCES.

Not only will it be healthier for our pocketbooks, but board members should thank us because they will probably shed a few middle-aged pounds they don't need. And why not?

Eating Up Tax Dollars

The job of school boards, as we see it, should be to give students a sound, basic education to prepare them for the adult world, while trying to squeeze every penny of education out of each tax dollar.

A story, reported in last week's Suffolk Life about the practice of some boards to dine in restaurants on hard-earned taxpayer's money, runs directly counter to that job description.

In these inflationary times when property taxes are nearly confiscatory, we find those boards incredibly insensitive to those people who had the trust to put them in office.

School officials who have participated in dinner meetings claim the cost is legal and miniscule compared to their entire multi-million dollar budget.

The Middle Island board, who spent \$270 on a single dinner, should try telling that to a resident who has a large portion

of his annual school taxes "eaten up" without paying for one textbook.

While the amount might be only a small fraction of the district's yearly outlays, those board dinners reveal an attitude of wasteful disregard for both taxpayers and students. It might be legal, but it certainly isn't right.

Being a school board member is often a long, tiresome and thankless job. But it is a job the board members asked the voters for and not the other way around.


We also question how many of these board members can turn around, with bellies full, and plead poverty to the state for more aid, go to court for a fairer aid distribution or drive a hard bargain with teachers' unions.

If the individual school boards have acted brazenly, the BOCES boards, who were not elected by the voters, are flagrantly taking advantage of their insulated status.

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They Have Been There Before

Up and down the coast of California, the people, the leaders, and newspapers are opposing further drilling for oil offshore before failsafe methods can be devised.

Oil is a way of life in California. In the middle of residential areas of Los Angeles, there are rigs pumping day and night. All along the coast, you see rigs inland next to homes, stores and on the open range just pumping oil.

In Santa Barbara, sitting just off the coast, is a number of capped oil rigs. At present, they are mute monuments to the disaster they caused this beautiful beach area.

Residents we talked to tell us it was hell -- gooey oil contaminated everything. They said the destruction was incredible. They have been there once, and never want to go through it again.

They once listened to the oil companies. Slick as their product, company officials told them of improved drilling methods . . . of how accidents could not happen . . . of the great benefits to the area and mankind tapping the God-given resource would provide.

They listened. They believed. And then they witnessed a black plague upon their

beaches. Now they have been successful in closing down those offshore wells.

The oil experts say there is a big deposit of oil off our beaches. President Ford and our Interior Dept. are anxious to tap it as a possible source of domestic oil. Anxious at any cost. . . even the destruction of the Atlantic seashore.

Today there are no failsafe methods for drilling for oil. There are just enormous profits to be gained from pumping the free black gold from under the sea floor to the surface.

Oil companies are interested in enormous profits. They are used to them. They have a history of being one of the most ruthless industries in the world. People have died, lands have been spoiled, communities ruined but the oil interest has always profited.

Now they want us to risk what we hold great and beautiful -- our ocean, our waterfronts -- to possible devastation.

The oil companies say a Santa Barbara accident cannot happen here, the same thing they told those people. Our President and Interior Secretary say nothing except the oil is needed to make ourselves self-sufficient.

What price should this country pay for oil? It's not a dollars and cents price east

coast residents are being asked to pay. It's an irrevocable price. Should a major accident occur, it would contaminate our shoreline and wipe out all marine life and wildlife in its path.

The area they want to drill is one of the most important in the sea life chain. When disturbed, it breaks the entire cycle of marine life, down to the seafood farmed from our waters and eaten by us. Who knows where it might lead?

If it were just a case of having boating, swimming or beach walking disturbed, we might see taking the chance. But advocates want to fool with the very delicate chemistry of the sea world which could hold the key to the world's food problems.

Suffolk Life believes the price, we, as humans, are being asked to pay, is too great. The balance of payments is a short term problem. The energy crisis is largely mythical. The continuation of life is something we all must protect.

Accidents, like Santa Barbara, that could not happen, will continue to occur until a foolproof way of drilling oil from the sea is found. Until it is, we vehemently oppose the practice in the Atlantic, the Pacific or anywhere else in the world. And why not?

What Is The Difference?

Back when we got out of college we decided it was time we became interested in what was going on in our community. We should become interested in government. Logically, we tried to determine whether we were a Republican or a Democrat.

In thinking about it, we could come to no hardcore decision. On the local and county scene, and, for the most part, on the state and federal levels, there seemed to be little difference in the philosophies of the Republicans and the Democrats.

To help us in our search for truth and facts, we went to both Democratic and Republican club meetings. As we recall, we asked the people there if they could give us a clear-cut answer. They couldn't either. As a result, we determined that the best course was to register as an independent, which we still are today.

Over the years, we have observed various politicians, how they act and how they vote, and have come to the conclusion even officeholders do not know what they are. The label they wear is more a social label that indicates their

preference in friends and social contacts rather than any political beliefs.

Therefore, it amuses us when somebody gets upset or emotional about being a Democrat or a Republican. Often when we are involved in these discussions we will ask the loudest protester to define what they are. Usually they are stumped and come up with a frivolous answer like their side is the good guys.

Likewise, when we hear the charge this paper is anti-Republican, or anti-Democrat, we laugh. We are very anti-incompetent-politician, regardless of his label. If we seem to be picking on Republicans this week it is because there are more of them doing arrogant, dumb things. Next week, it may well be the Democrats' turn as they are not without their sins, either.

We wish there was a definite difference in the parties. We wish the Democrats could be liberal in all instances and the Republicans would be conservative. We wish the Javits, the Rockefellers, the Percys and Hatfields would go over and be Democrats. Democrats who believe in a Con-

servative philosophy would become Republicans.

It would make life a lot easier for the voter and the citizen. Then you could be certain of the merchandise you were picking instead of voting for a person only to find he votes opposite of how you hoped he would. And why not?

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Why Not New York?

This past week we were in California on business. While there, we had a firsthand opportunity to compare this state with our own. For the first time in our life, we were not proud to say we were citizens of the Empire State.

We are so far behind California it is bewildering. Their roadwork is amazing. Freeways and arterial roads move traffic smoothly and rapidly, and every safety device known is used.

Their school system is outstanding. Colleges are almost as bountiful as high schools. All state schools are absolutely free to all who want to pursue a higher education.

Streets are clean. Nowhere is there litter, and even in low income areas, streets are cleaned regularly. Nothing like the filth our slums are known for. We even saw a street sweeper make three passes over a single road because he wasn't satisfied with the job.

Californians also have an abounding number of parks and recreational facilities -- all well-maintained and people-oriented.

To this New Yorker it was just incredible what they have been able to achieve.

New York State has the highest tax rate in the nation. California isn't far behind. The difference lies in the accomplishments they have achieved with the dollars they are spending. It's one thing to pay high taxes and get something for your money and quite another to pay in and get nothing out. That's what Californians are enjoying and we are not.

One of the foundations of the Californian quality of life seems to be the people themselves. They seem to have a different attitude toward life that many of us in the east lack. They have a goal and purpose - they know where they want to get and aren't afraid to work for it.

No matter what station in life, whether it be laborer or executive, every single person with whom we came into contact wanted to do the best job they knew how.

Can you imagine a cab driver bending over backward trying to be of help and really making you feel they appreciate a tip? Waitresses in restaurants greet you with a smile suggesting particular types of food you might like and then serving with maximum efficiency. Store clerks in a supermarket thank customers for coming and asking them to come back again. A rental car agent even offered to drive us to his competitor whose drop off rental rates were cheaper than his. Each person just went overboard giving customers their best.

Talking with the people, we found most looked on their jobs as a means to reach their goal. By becoming as skillful as they can in their current job, they reason they can attain their goal and feel a sense of accomplishment in whatever they are doing. Work isn't just a means of eking out an existence.

Maybe the attitude is the reason California appears to be so far ahead of New York. Maybe it isn't, but we know the New Yorkers haven't been getting their money's worth compared to west coast residents.

Should we expect any less or settle for mediocrity as we have in the past. Maybe it's time we all determined our goals and work towards accomplishing them. Taking an attitude of "just getting by" is crippling and can only lead to failure.

The people of California demand excellence from themselves and their government. They get it. New Yorkers should too. And why not?

Oh can you see on Sunrise Hwy., east of Patchogue at night?

As far as we're concerned, it's nearly impossible.

Not the road itself, the headlights do a pretty good job there. But trying to read the signs along the side of the road is ridiculous. Even with high beams on and car stopped, some of the signs are so muddled and deteriorated they cannot be read.

This is not only annoying, it is dangerous. Cars buzzing along at 55 MPH are upon a turnoff before they have any warning. In one week alone, we were cut off twice by drivers who were upon their exits before realizing it and had to swerve recklessly to the outside lane to make the ramp.

Put there for the safety and convenience of the motorist, their current state of disrepair make them more a hazard than a precaution.

If commercial signs were in that condition people would hoot and holler for them to be torn down as an eyesore.

It's a disgrace to see this deterioration and willful disregard for the life and safety of our residents. These signs have been in their present sorry state for more than two years. The first time we became aware of the hazard, we thought it might be our eyes playing



Oh, Can You See

tricks. A visit to the optometrist revealed there was nothing wrong with the eyes. It was the signs. We thought, at the time, that the state would replace them shortly, but the two years have gone and the signs have only deteriorated further.

Those highway signs must be replaced or renovated now, before a serious accident occurs. The state has an obligation and we, as residents, have a right to expect prompt action. And why not?

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