

Keep LIPA, but change the rules

LIPA is LILCO ratepayers' best defense against future abuse by this corporation. LIPA was empowered by the legislature to not only be a watchdog of LILCO, but have the fangs necessary to take over the corporation if they subjected the ratepayers to the kind of abuse experienced in the Shoreham fiasco.

LIPA can be an authority responsible to the citizens and ratepayers on Long Island. It was originally intended that politics would be kept out of the board of directors by having citizen activists and knowledgeable Long Islanders elected to that board who

were not politically involved. The timing for the election of these directors was deliberately separated from the general November elections. However, it now appears that having this election at a time other than during the general election can cost as much as \$1.5 million. This, in our book, is too much money for the benefit received.

The legislature should change the date of the election so it coincides with the general November elections. The candidates should still be banned from running with party endorsements. While they are amending this law to change the date of the election, they should also change the law to

eliminate the governor's power to appoint the chairman. The chairman should be selected by the elected representatives, and not be allowed to continue as a flunky of the governor.

LIPA was the creation of the citizens of Long Island. Cuomo came aboard kicking and screaming. To gain his support, the sponsors had to compromise. Cuomo successfully took control out of the hands of the citizens, vested it in himself and has controlled LIPA for his own political good since its inception.

There is no logical reason for the governor to maintain control over this authority. Having the ability to pick

the chairman gives him enormous power, which is taken away from the citizens. The intent and purpose of LIPA is still worth supporting, because without it there is little hope the people will adequately be represented. We will be back under the thumb of LILCO and dependent upon the mercy of the Public Service Commission, which has proven to be nothing more than a utility-oriented agency.

But Cuomo must be stripped of his ability to interfere, and the election must coincide with the general elections to save money.

And why not?

Governor,

Why do you dislike L. I.?

Why does Governor Mario Cuomo display such a lack of sincere concern toward Long Island?

It is estimated the state will be at least \$4 billion in debt this coming year if spending continues unabated. Cuomo last week presented his budget for the coming year which trims the \$4 billion. This was expected and it was a move in the right direction.

However, in offering his budget, Cuomo cut educational spending by 10 percent statewide, but targeted Long Island districts to lose 33 percent to 50 percent. Why, if the governor loves Long Island, is he asking us to pick up such a disproportionate share? The only conclusion must be that Cuomo cares little for Long Island.

Cuomo proposed a 10-cent-per-gallon additional gasoline tax. Long Islanders are almost solely dependent upon their cars for transportation. We have no other way to go to work, shop or move about. There is no real alternative in mass transportation. This tax is aimed directly at suburban communities such as Nassau and Suffolk. Why

does Cuomo direct his venom at the suburbs? Why can't he cast the burden throughout the state by putting a fair and equal tax on all forms of transportation, including buses, trains and subways? If Cuomo loves Long Island, why is he giving our city brothers, who have abundant mass transportation at their disposal at subsidized rates, a free ride?

There is no question the state must cut back on its spending. Slashes must be made everywhere, but it is not fair to expect one small segment of this great state to have to pick up a disproportionate percentage.

Long Islanders have suffered tremendously over the last three years paying for the governor's LILCO bailout, with the highest electrical rates in the nation. Our real estate taxes are the highest in the state, partially due to mandates passed down by the state on local governments and school boards. While the governor estimated a \$470-million savings for local governments through mandate relief, we suspect there is more rhetoric than savings in that prediction. And, in the area where

taxpayers are hit the hardest, education, because of mandates sent down by the state, there is little in the way of mandate relief. Just some rhetoric, some promises, nothing concrete. It had been hoped, based on some of Cuomo's earlier comments, he would announce a host of mandates that would be eliminated and become options for communities and schools to give only if their communities could afford them. But this rollback of state-imposed mandates was conspicuously missing from the governor's budget address. These mandates have a particular impact on Nassau and Suffolk, and are only another indication the governor is not aware or is unconcerned about the problems and needs of this region.

We encourage you to write to the governor and voice your displeasure. Write to your assemblymen and state senators and tell them its time for the whole state to share the burden. Long Island can no longer afford to be the sugar daddy of New York State. It's time we got a well-deserved break.

And why not?

State Senators, Assemblymen

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NYS Assembly

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West Islip, NY 11795

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The Middle East war, what can we do?

As the Middle East war unfolds in front of our eyes, we are left with the simple question, what can we do? Nightly on television we see in the Middle East brave men and women fighting and using the latest in technology. Unlike in World War II, where the country was drawn into the war vividly through rationing, air raid drills, victory gardens and massive recycling efforts, there seems little for us to do at home.

Probably the biggest contribution we can make is to pray for the protection of our armed forces, a swift ending to the conflict, and go about our business as usual. The last thing this country needs is to

have its citizens panic and drastically alter their way of life.

Television makes the war seem very close. Television commentators are as much actors as reporters. They can hype the meaningless and instantaneously create emotion. Terrorism is a fear and should be vigilantly guarded against. That does not mean, however, that people should cancel vacations or become recluses in their homes. There is no need to hoard food or other consumables. In fact, these actions would have an adverse effect on our country, causing needless shortages or damage to the economy.

We, as a nation, should continue with our pursuits, work extra hard to keep the economy going and prepare for when our people do come home. Keep those letters and cards going to our men and women. Tell them of your pride, thank them for being there. Let them know what is happening in your everyday life. Let them know, in no uncertain terms, that when they come home they will be coming home to a nation that is proud and grateful for those who have faithfully served their country, and who have offered so much.

And why not?

A blueprint for deja vu?

A gathering of leaders from the education field, organizations, civic groups, government, and other areas of Long Island life gathered last week for an economic summit which, according to its prime sponsors, was designed to help create a blueprint or action plan to resolve the economic pressures of today. While the goal may be commendable, the plan of action is far unveiled, and the cast of characters involved, breeds cause for strong reservation.

It is interesting that the two prime sponsors, the Long Island Association and Newsday, have had firm agendas of their own in the past and many of those agenda items found their way into the summit resolutions submitted and acted upon. Both were strong allies of the Long Island Lighting Company in its quest to saddle this area with a controversial nuclear power plant. Is it mere coincidence then, that a resolution prepared in advance for the summit, and approved, called for the elimination of the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA), a key weapon in the ultimate resolution of the Shoreham controversy?

LIPA was a creation of the people, with help from government officials, that offered an alternative to the heavy hand of LILCO in dealing with Shoreham and rate increases. LIPA was empowered to work toward a public takeover of the utility, and was used by Governor Cuomo as a weapon over LILCO's head in fashioning the deal to kill the plant. Unfortunately, the governor manipulated, through his appointments to the LIPA board, the success of the agency; but, despite this, it has made some progress in working towards the decommissioning of the plant. Without LIPA, the only recourse the ratepayers have against future rate increases, or even an attempt to reactivate the plant, is the Public Service Commission, which has

a history of being more concerned about the utility rather than the people. We don't view that as helping our future economy.

Another summit proposal declared that "a regional plan should be developed and implemented to deal with the Island's locally generated solid waste ash." The word "plan," we were told by one summit participant, was substituted for the word "ashfill" to avoid controversy. Any proposal which lacks the integrity to call a spade a spade, or an ashfill an ashfill, deserves little consideration.

Newsday has strongly urged the creation of a regional ashfill, and has criticized civic groups for opposing Brookhaven Town's ash for trash deal with Hempstead. The state's proposed regional ashfill, which Nassau politicians cleverly earmarked for Suffolk, was killed because of strong opposition. The Brookhaven-Hempstead deal is a side door attempt to breathe life back into it, and now the summit is resurrecting another agenda item of the past as a "cure" for tomorrow. If Newsday, or LIA, or those behind the summit effort, believe that a regional ashfill is totally safe, surely they will have no problem with financially guaranteeing any cleanup that is needed because of future contamination. Until they do, this item belongs back in the dead file.

The courage of the summit's power brokers came through in a resolution concerning educational financing. Prior to the summit last week, a pre-summit report had some hard-hitting things to say about the cost of education on Long Island. But educational forces turned out en masse and voiced great anger. So the resolution was watered down. It said nothing that hasn't been said over and over and over again. So much for solutions.

Most troubling of all is what is the motivating force behind the summit

idea, the creation of a powerful authority to promote regional economic growth. This authority has been described as one which "would have the power to cut across parochial interests in an effort to advance the economic aims of the Nassau-Suffolk region." What that means, really, is an authority that would have the ability to put aside the concerns of local residents or municipalities under the guise of "regional benefit." That could mean a nuclear plant, the reactivation of Shoreham, or the creation of a regional ashfill—surely not in Nassau, but here in Suffolk where there is "room" to meet the stipulations written specifically to keep it away from areas the power brokers seek to protect.

Certainly, there is a need for regional solutions to many of our problems. But not imposed through a power-wielding authority, or with the same tired solutions voiced by many of those who were in responsible positions in the past and helped lead us into the problems of today. People must work together and share the burden. Resolutions prepared in pre-summit gatherings by the same clan of yesteryear do not provide solutions. They help create a blueprint for deja vu.

New faces and new ideas, devoid of agenda items of the past, would be a better way to face the future.

And why not?

The lawyers win

The Suffolk County Legislature was recently sued by the Suffolk County Executive over the budget plan devised and adopted by the legislators, who rejected Halpin's budget proposal. The suit had little to do with actual dollars and a lot to do with who has the power to spend your hard-earned tax dollars.

Just prior to the start of a trial, both sides reached an agreement. They agreed to agree, finally! In a sense, both sides won, because each got input into the budget matter. The loser was you, the taxpayer. Your taxes have been used to pay a contingent of lawyers who have been hired at your expense to defend both branches of your government.

The lawyers were the big winners, with fees estimated, thus far, in the neighborhood of some \$200,000. And the taxpayers are forced to foot the bill because these governmental leaders are incapable of curbing spending, and waste money in squabbling over how to efficiently run our government. And because they do, our tax burdens will ultimately grow.

How much better it would have been to use this money to serve the needs of the county and its people. How much better it would have been if the money could have been taken off the backs of the taxpayers, leaving them more money for food and for other normal, everyday needs.

Every dollar of our taxes that is wasted in court has to come from some place. If taxes can't be raised, then it must come from services. The last place you know it is going to come from is the salaries of the county executive or his staff, or the members of the legislature and their staffs. If they had to sacrifice their own budget dollars, or paid the legal fees out of their own salaries, perhaps they could find ways to put politics aside and to work together for the good of the people.

We have a shameful form of government here in Suffolk. And politicians who, because they callously waste needless dollars, deserve our scorn.

And why not?

Another license, another fee

Here we go again! If at first you don't succeed, just keep bringing the issue up again, and again, and again. Just as is done with school budgets. This time it's a saltwater fishing license, the source of controversy in the past, and today.

The newest proposal for the saltwater fishing license came in Governor Mario Cuomo's State of the State message, in which he vowed to "work with the marine sportfishing community to develop a marine recreational fishing license designed to provide resources for improved management and protection of the fisheries resources."

When you say it fast, it sounds good. But if you remember some of the words of the past, and how the rhetoric turned into promises not kept, you being to look past the verbiage.

Take the New York State Lottery,

for example. The lottery was going to provide us with the educational dollars we needed to maintain the educational system while easing the burden on the taxpayer. It didn't work out that way, did it? The lottery dollars went into the general fund, and became part of what the state doled out to local districts. But because the lottery dollars were there to start with, the state simply came up with less and spent it elsewhere.

The newest fishing license proposal, we have heard, will direct the funds into a dedicated fund within the DEC budget. If that isn't enough to kill the idea, it should be a good starting place. Some of the dollars, from what we hear, will go toward boat ramps and fishing program, and increased enforcement staff for the DEC. We wonder, will that mean that some of the enforcement dollars that

currently come from the state budget will be replaced with license fees, freeing those state dollars to be used elsewhere? Who will do the accounting?

The saltwater fishing license proposal is being strongly supported by the the New York Sportsfishing Federation, which is fine because there are two sides to every issue. But it should be clearly pointed out that the federation does not speak for all anglers. There is another strong point of view out there, being expressed by anglers not affiliated with any fishing organization, and also by various fishing clubs who do not share the federation's confidence in the DEC. The views of these individuals, although not combined in the powerful force of a lobby, are equally important.

State Assemblyman Joseph Sawicki Jr. (R-Southold) vigorously fought the issue last year, and was the first to sound the alarm this time. Last

year, Sawicki got a bipartisan group of Long Island lawmakers to join in a letter urging Cuomo to drop the proposal. And many in the fishing community on Long Island registered their opposition as well. Since last year was an election year, their effort was successful. But now that the elections are over, Cuomo is seeking to give it another shot.

What's your view? Do you want your voice heard? If so, we encourage you to state your position in a brief letter to Assemblyman Sawicki, 107 Roanoke Avenue, Riverhead, NY, 11901.

If you are content to allow others to speak for you, you must accept the consequences that follow. If you believe your views are important enough to be considered, speak up now!

And why not?

Lobby power: A place to start

Fiscal crisis looms at every level. Taxes are soaring, governments are running themselves into larger and larger deficits, the search for solutions breeds summit, task forces, and a host of other schemes designed give the impression the solutions lie within reach. Don't bet on it.

One place to start seeking out relief is to diminish the power of the lobbies who represent special interest groups. Those lobbying forces take advantage of political fear and greed by dangling votes and campaign dollars. They speak with a loud voice designed to intimidate public officials into a desired course of action. And, all too often, they are successful in doing just that.

An interesting case in point developed recently. During the legislative session in Albany last year, the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) union organization was successful in pushing through legislation which would have mandated health benefits for retired educators. Benefits of this kind are generally a product of the negotiation process. Those negotiations involve give and take, a "we'll give you this if you give back that" kind of transaction. The result is that worthwhile benefits are offered, but the burden on the taxpayer doesn't grow to astronomical proportions.

Legislators should not be involved in the negotiation process unless they

are providing the dollars to pay the costs. If they mandate such benefits, they deprive those representing the taxpayers an opportunity to ease the impact with a trade-off. Most legislators simply went along with NYSUT's desire. Most said they checked their own districts, and the impact would not be great so they voted for the legislation. Most admitted there was a lot of pressure from NYSUT, and what they didn't say, but in fact did, was they went along to get along. They were, in effect, currying favor with NYSUT, hoping for votes and campaign dollars.

One legislator in Suffolk, Assem-

byman Thomas Barraga (R-West Islip) didn't take the easy way out. He not only opposed the legislation, citing the increased burden it would put upon the taxpayers, he also debated against the bill. That didn't sit well with NYSUT, and Barraga, who had received their endorsement in years past, was shunned when he ran for office again in 1990.

But NYSUT didn't stop there. Barraga was the ranking Republican on the Assembly Education Committee, a position he relished and worked very hard at. He isn't any more. Assembly Minority Leader Charence P. Rapplea, the leader of the Assembly Republicans, decided Barraga should be replaced on the Education Committee. Instead, he named him as vice chairman of the Assembly Republican Steering Committee. From the standpoint of the taxpayers, Barraga's new position is not nearly as important. As ranking Republican on the Education Committee, he had a strong voice, and he used it on behalf of the people who foot the bill, you, the taxpayer.

There is no doubt in our mind that NYSUT put pressure on Rapplea, and he folded. He was bought off by the power of the lobby who could promise votes and dollars. And that is a shame. Because little will change until that power is diminished. Or the politicians who yield to such power are removed from office.

Campaign financing reform is desperately needed if we are to solve the problems we face. Take away the lure of dollars or campaign help from political action committees and lobbying groups, and we just might get some legislation passed that benefits the people rather than the special interest groups. Strip away the lobbying power of NYSUT and other teacher groups and we might well see some meaningful educational reform, a change in the tenure law that virtually offers a job for life for teachers, good or bad, unless positions are eliminated. As long as that lobbying power continues, and politicians bow to the pressure, the problems of today will continue far into tomorrow.

The first step toward any solution must be a change in the current priorities, putting the people first.

And why not?

It's time for a change!

The news out of the financial offices of Suffolk County gets gloomier day. Almost weekly comes a new report that the county's budget deficit has grown larger. First predictions estimated the budget gap between revenues and expenditures at \$10 million. Then it was \$20 million, soon growing to \$30 million. At last count last week, because of anticipated reductions in state funding and a sharp decline in sales tax revenues, the deficit prediction had soared to over \$47 million.

At the rate this is going, bankruptcy will soon be upon us. Not only because anticipated revenues are falling off, but because our big spenders, the Suffolk County legislators, continually refuse to accept the fact that it is time-in fact long overdue-to start doing things in a different and better way.

This comes to mind as the result of a proposal which was before the legislature last week. A public hearing was held on putting the county's busing contracts out to competitive bidding. This same proposal has been rejected in the past, and we hold little hope it will fare any better this time. The rejection in the past has been based on a "it isn't broke so why change it" view expressed by certain legislators, who have successfully swayed the minds of others. In reality, however, there's a lot more politics and political favoritism involved.

We have editorialized in the past that competitive bidding for the county's public bus contracts could be the source of genuine savings. Currently the contracts are doled out to busing companies, with the county providing the costs for the buses, the expenses, and for a profit margin. One busing company owner who has been excluded from the process has maintained that placing the contracts out for public bids would save the county a lot of dollars, and has provided us, and the legislators, with reams of material to bolster that point of view.

Competitive bidding is used, in fact required by law, in many areas which involve purchasing of equipment and services. It is designed to

achieve the lowest cost. There are, of course, ways of circumventing this procedure by writing specifications so tightly they can be filled only by favored firms or individuals. But the public exposure of the bidding process, at the very least, can provide scrutiny of such instances and offers some accountability on the part of those involved in such actions.

Time and again in the past bus routes have been eliminated from the county's transportation system because of financial problems. Such cuts are accompanied with claims that the "cost per rider" is too high on these routes. Earlier this year, a number of routes were cut because of budget problems, and an outpour of protest came from those who would be impacted because they rely on the bus transportation. In at least one instance, a legislator scurried into action, declared he would fight to prevent this from happening, and, lo and behold, money was found somewhere to put the buses back.

Why don't we stop playing games with the people? Instead of cutting a route, why not put that route out to competitive bid? If the total cost of service could be lowered, the cost per rider could be eased. What is to stop the current companies from bidding for the routes? If they weren't guaranteed they would get the route, as they are now under the contract system in effect, they may well sharpen their pencils and come in with lower figures. And provide better service. What is wrong with trying the competitive bidding route? Even if it is only on a pilot project, which has already been suggested. Are our legislators afraid it might prove the point that bidding can result in lower costs? And political benefit might be lost?

Transportation is not a luxury here in Suffolk County, it is a necessity. For those who do not drive, who can't afford a car or the insurance it requires, for those who have lost a loved one who was the driver in the family, a bus could be the only source of mobility available.

There are a couple of things that are drastically needed here. First, a complete study of the county's transportation system to determine if the routes are established to service the people best, if the services are economically efficient. Would it be possible to downsize the buses in areas where ridership is lower? What improvements could be made in routes or schedules to increase ridership? Why not create a transportation task force, not to study the issue to death but to strive for improved transportation for all who are in need of such services.

And then we need legislators with some common sense to look for new ways of doing things. Legislators who put cost efficiency above political consideration. The "if it ain't broke, don't mess with it" mentality should be replaced with a "if it can be done as well at a lower cost, let's do it."

The fact is the county budget is going broke. The taxpayers are going broke paying for the spending habits of our public officials. If we can't get these officials to start looking for new ways of doing things to bring costs under control, then it is certainly time to start looking for new legislators who will do so.

And why not?

Let's get serious

The proposed cuts in state aid included in Governor Mario Cuomo's budget proposal has local school district officials pondering the future of their districts and the cuts that will have to be made. In some instances, serious plans are being made, including the closing of schools. In others, officials seem content to take a "wait and see" attitude to determine what the final aid figures will be.

The serious planning is to be applauded, the sit back and wait attitude is a serious mistake. Planning must begin immediately for a worst case scenario because the financial aid future is very dim, and it's not going to get better. Any effort to place a larger burden upon the taxpayer will create a tax revolt never before witnessed. Those who

wait are inviting disaster and are doing a tremendous disservice to the people and to the students.

It's time to look for new ways to save money. The superintendents of Suffolk's three BOCES groups did just that recently in endorsing the implementation of fees for educational extras beyond the basic programs offered, including fees for summer school, drivers' education, after-school programs and gifted and talented programs. That proposal deserves serious consideration, and, hopefully, is a start towards some innovative planning which will weed out waste without impacting on the educational programs.

These are serious times. It's time to get serious.

And why not?

There's hope if we are serious

Is there any hope for Long Island? We think so, but we must be serious. Serious about reducing the cost of living here and improving our quality of life with the funds we tax ourselves for.

One of the major problems facing Long Island is taxes. Taxes on our real estate, sales taxes on our purchases, income taxes on individuals and businesses. New York State has had one of the highest business and income tax rates in the nation. Because of this, in the late 70's and early 80's an exodus began of businesses, industries and jobs—900,000 positions were lost. The state government, alarmed by these decreases, started reducing their taxes, which seemed to slow down the exodus.

As our economy peaked in the mid-80's, real estate taxes which fund county, town and school districts accelerated alarmingly. County taxes, in some instances, shot up 160 percent. Many towns increased their portion of the tax burden by 15 and 20 percent. School districts, which eat up almost 70 percent

of the real estate taxes, were increasing at the rate of over 20 percent per year. Taxpayers revolted and cold, hard looks started to be taken at how the county, the towns and particularly the school districts were spending our resources.

Taxpayers particularly began to zero in on schools and school expenditures. Most residents, both with children in school and those without, were appalled when they found that Long Island schools were spending three times the nation's average to educate our students. They were further disheartened when they found out that even though they were investing so much more, the children were not receiving a better education.

In comparisons through testing, our students did not have reading, writing or abilities superior to those students who had as little as one-third of our costs spent on their education. Further investigation revealed that school boards and administrators had not been totally honest with the voters. School

boards persistently told the voters that 85 to 90 percent of the budget was mandated. They failed to distinguish between hard core state mandates that provided the necessary education to allow students to graduate with a Regents diploma, and those additional subjects being offered by the district that were purely electives by the school board but, once offered, fell under the mandates of the state.

These electives went beyond the core curriculum that provided the basic, quality education. The offering of these subjects and this curriculum was the reason many school districts, whose enrollment had dropped in half and whose schools had been built to accommodate twice the amount of students, were finding themselves short of space. It was this additional curriculum that required twice as many teachers, administrators and service personnel than were necessary. School boards responded they were only meeting the demands placed by parents on the educational establishment, that taxpayers wanted all these

enhancements. We don't think this is quite true.

In addition to the funds raised through real estate taxes, school districts receive funding through state aid. Last year, state aid amounted to anywhere from 35 to 48 percent of the school districts' expenditures. These percentages are very close to the percentages that would be allocated to the hard core state mandates for a basic, quality education.

We have proposed in the past that the state assume the full cost of the basic, quality educational package. Every student throughout the state, regardless of the wealth of the district, would receive an education allowing him or her to achieve graduation and a Regents diploma without any burden on a real estate holder, although taxes will continue to be raised on a broad-based level as they currently are, through income, corporate and sales taxes. School districts then could offer, under a menu plan, enhancements to the basic, quality education package that the taxpayers would vote upon according to the financial ability and the majority's desires within the community.

It was interesting to note recently that the superintendent of the three BOCES districts also addressed this problem by recommending that all expenditures beyond the mandated quality education be supported through tuition arrangements, whereby the student and the student's parents would pay-as-they-go for these educational entitlements and enhancements.

We would go one step further if the relief could be developed for the taxpayer and suggest that the community establish large scholarship funds to aid the students who were deserving, but economically could not afford some of the enhancements that they deserve and could benefit from. If the plan we are suggesting was adopted, real estate taxes would be cut by over 50 percent, making housing and home ownership on Long Island affordable.

There is no question in anyone's mind we can no longer continue to do business as we have in the past. We must find a way to provide our young people with a basic, quality education, and at the same time, reduce the burden that is facing homeowners to give up ownership of their homes and their residency on Long Island.

And why not?

If not LIPA, who?

As we noted recently, there is an effort afoot to kill the Long Island Power Authority, created to bring an end to the threat of a nuclear power plant, Shoreham, in an area that cannot be safely evacuated. Using the threat of a possible LIPA takeover of LILCO, the governor used this weapon to fashion an agreement that, it was thought, ended the Shoreham threat.

But the Shoreham threat is not yet over. The federal government is still pushing to put the plant on line, or, at the very least, mothball it so that it could be put into service in the future. This would serve no useful purpose except to buy those in the federal government additional time to ram the plant down our throats with some future contrived excuse. Killing LIPA, as some politicians propose, would fit nicely into those plans, but serve no useful purpose for the people.

The existence of LIPA has played an important part in what was thought to be an improvement in LILCO's attitude. The utility seemed to be recovering from a reputation of being arrogant. Its efforts to convince the public "we're try-

ing harder, we care" had appeared to lessen the anger being aimed at the company. Ratepayers were not very happy about the prospect of higher rates—far higher, in our view, than they should be because of the terms of the governor's give-away deal—but at least they got something in return; the end of the Shoreham threat.

Just recently, however, top LILCO officials were given very substantial salary hikes by its generous board of directors. LILCO's chairman, William Catacosinos, earned a pay increase of about \$60,000 to a new salary of \$455,000. Other officials received similar, but not as high, salary boosts. And, the LILCO directors decided, the ratepayers, not the stockholders, would have to foot the bill.

Who will protect the ratepayers from such actions? From future salary increases, the bonuses and infamous Golden Parachutes of the past? The Public Service Commission? That's what our short-sighted politicians, who seek to kill LIPA, suggest. Unfortunately, they must have short memories as well, because they forgot, or seek to

ignore, the problems of the past, when the PSC simply rubber-stamped salary hikes, bonuses and Golden Parachutes.

Who will continue with the decommissioning efforts which LIPA is currently involved in? Who will offer an alternative to protect the people from the problems of the past? The New York State Power Authority? Will they be as concerned about Long Island's problems as would a local authority with locally-elected trustees? Of course not!

Those who propose an end to LIPA use the cost of a special election as an excuse. But that's a cop-out. Simply move the balloting to the November elections and the extra cost is resolved.

No, there is another agenda in the works here, and from where we sit, it is not one that is in the best interests of the people. The people fought and won, and LIPA was instrumental in achieving that victory. Kill LIPA and we're back to square one.

The people need protection. LIPA was in the past, and continues to be, that protection.

And why not?

Who owns the Vanderbilt planetarium?

The Vanderbilt Museum and Planetarium in Centertown has been the target of frequent controversy in the past, and controversy has erupted again. In days gone by, the facility—owned by the county but operated by a board of trustees with funds received from a \$12 million endowment from the late William K. Vanderbilt II—was the target of political featherbedding charges. Today the charge is different, but no less controversial.

The newest charge deals with the future of the Vanderbilt Planetarium. Actions taken last November resulted in the firing of four staff members, and the downgrading and slashing of salaries of others. That action, planetarium supporters insist, threatens the future of the facility. Museum officials claim the action was needed because of a budget deficit. Planetarium supporters insist there is, indeed, a deficit but that the planetarium operation is not the primary cause and is a source of income. The board chairman and executive director claim the planetarium's operations will not be affected, while others claim it will be seriously impacted.

Although the facility is owned by the county, its operation has been placed in the hands of the trustees. They have full authority over the operation and administration of its affairs.

County legislators, who appoint the trustees, are powerless to do much except to withhold funds for capital improvements, which the county pays, or change the board members when their terms are up. The planetarium, considered by many to be "the jewel" of the Vanderbilt operation, hosts some 65,000 students each year, and almost as many adult visitors. It is lauded by educators as a valuable educational tool. While the trustees have the authority to make the decisions, the Vanderbilt Museum and Planetarium is not their personal property to do with as they wish. It belongs to the people!

There are two sides to every story, and both sides must have a full opportunity to air their views if this matter is to be resolved in the best interests of the people. The trustees should be required to offer financial documentation to prove the validity of their actions. They should prove future

planetarium operations will not be impacted by the changes made.

Members of the Suffolk County Legislature's Parks Committee had sought to provide that opportunity by requesting Vanderbilt officials to appear to air the matter. The chairman of that committee, Michael D'Andre, refused. Instead, he created a subcommittee, naming Legislator Michael O'Donohoe as its chair. The appointment of O'Donohoe has come under fire because, some legislators claim, he has close ties with John Stevenson, chairman of the Vanderbilt board. O'Donohoe denies this. Anthony Dimino, who serves as vice-chairman, was O'Donohoe's campaign manager in a recent election campaign.

It would be in the best interests of all if the matter is heard by the parks committee, instead of a subcommittee, to avoid any appearance of conflict of interest. The future of the facility is more important than any political maneuvering.

There are, in this entire controversy, too many unanswered questions. It's time for some answers before the quality of the people's planetarium suffers.

And why not?