

Time for a change?

Let's take another look

Almost three decades ago, the five West End towns gave up their town police forces and elected to become part of the Suffolk County Police Department. The five East End towns voted to keep their own police forces, which they continue to operate today.

The cost of providing police protection in the West End of Suffolk is one of the biggest single cost factors. As money has become more and more scarce, local patrols and sectors are being cut. Many local communities, concerned they were not receiving adequate protection, have implemented their own code enforcement and peace keeping forces. This is a duplication of expenditures.

It has been frequently charged that the Suffolk County Police Department has become top-heavy with chiefs at the expense of the Indians. Patrick Halpin, when he was county executive, reported there were six officers inside for every four officers on the outside. Police officers are routinely used for non-police functions that can be accomplished equally well if not better in most instances by civilians.

Legislator Sondra Bachety recently questioned why the county has trained police officers teaching ice hockey to kids in the PAL activities? It's a good question that has been asked before, but has not been answered. Why do we have police officers manning video cameras when we can hire trained

video technicians for a third of the cost? These are only a couple of the abuses in utilizing trained police officers that never seem to be addressed.

Recently, Suffolk police officials announced they are cutting back more local patrols and will no longer be able to respond to non-emergency calls. Shortly after, they announced the promotion of 46 cops to administrative positions within the department.

Newly-elected County Executive Robert Gaffney has stated that it is his intention to provide better police protection for the citizens. We suggest to Mr. Gaffney that, quite possibly, the best way to accomplish this goal is to return to the towns the authority for everyday police functions, regular pa-

trols and neighborhood involvement. The funding for this could come out of the existing police district taxes. These funds, combined with the funds in towns which are already allocated for code enforcement and peace keeping officers, can possibly enable the towns to provide beefed up local patrols and law enforcement within the community, with a force that can be far more responsive to the citizens' needs and desires.

Major crime functions, training, and the labs could be retained by Suffolk County. These highly-specialized services are probably much more cost-effective on a county-wide basis than they can be on a local level.

We sincerely hope Gaffney and the members of the Suffolk County

Legislature will give serious consideration to this proposal. A thorough study should be conducted to determine the fiscal impact on the local municipalities as compared to the cost of the present system. The study group should be made up of individuals from within the police department, and from the outside as well, so that all aspects of the matter are explored.

We cannot afford to be without adequate police protection, but under our present financial restraints, we cannot afford the cost as currently structured. If we can't afford the current system, it should be changed to a more economical structure which will provide more protection for less money.

And why not?

Why not one Election Day?

There are over 600 taxing entities on Long Island. Each elects a board of governors, and the voters have an opportunity to approve their budgets.

Many residents are not even aware of these special districts. Their elections are not a major media event, yet the impact of their actions plays an important part in our cost of living here on Long Island. Elections for these districts, whether they be school, fire, water, libraries or mul-

multiple other special districts, are scattered throughout the year. Because there are so many, and they do not draw the public's attention, the voter turnout is extremely light. The cost of holding these elections, cumulatively, is enormously high.

Wouldn't it make more sense for all elected officials to be elected on the same day? Wouldn't it make more sense to approve or reject these district budgets at the same time? Having all elections on one single day

would ensure the maximum voter participation and utilization of our democratic process. The duplication of cost would be eliminated and all budgets could be considered at one time rather than at different times throughout the year.

It would save money, offer better representation, and the voters would have more control over their destiny and financial burden. Isn't it time to put common sense to work?

And why not?

Sachem student voices view:

'You hit the nail on the head'

To the editor:

After reading your editorial on the job actions of the teachers of the Sachem School District, I was compelled to write this letter. You hit the nail right on the head with all the comments you made about how selfish and immature the teachers are acting. I should know, I am a student at Sachem South High School. As a member of both student and class government and a member of the student leadership class, I can tell you that the students have been raising the same points that you raised, for at least a month now.

We even went as far as inviting a representative from the teachers' negotiating team to talk to us in our class. The points she brought up were well presented, but completely reflective of the selfish attitude of the teachers. What we would like to know is how these teachers can be asking for a pay raise when thousands of people on Long Island are without a job. With a contract saying that they will accept a half-year pay freeze, they are guaranteed a job for next year, which is a lot more than most

people can say in a time when the economy is so bad.

Putting aside the question of how they can have the nerve to even suggest that they want more money, the question must then be raised as to how they think punishing the students is going to accomplish this. No, taking down bulletin boards and covering up showcases with newspapers is not devastating for the older students, but how do you explain to a five-year-old kindergartener who is so proud of a drawing he just made that he cannot have it hung up in the hall because the teachers in his school are acting less mature than he is? The thing that is hurting the older students, however, is the refusal of most of the teachers to give extra help to struggling students before or after school. This is only hurting the student. In addition, students that have worked so hard to receive good grades in school, despite the job actions, are being denied induction ceremonies into the National Junior Honor Society and the Foreign Language Honor Society because the teachers have made it known that if the ceremonies take place, they will ruin them by pick-

eting. What is the teachers' justification for this behavior? They say that they only want the public to be informed! Why? So that the students and parents can hate them even more than they already do? Because that is all they will accomplish by using those tactics.

Do these teachers honestly think that there is enough money to give them a pay raise when the budget in New York State is so tight? Why don't these teachers wake up and smell the coffee? There is a recession going on in this country! Are they blind, or just plain ignorant? I have only a few words for the Sachem teachers who insist on carrying out these job actions: "Grow up, and do your job because you like teaching and helping students, not because of the money you can get out of it. You are lucky you have a job."

The reason this letter must be anonymous is because if any of them ever found out who wrote this, it might be reflected in my grades, and I might be refused recommendation letters from some of them.

Anonymous
Lake Ronkonkoma

The 25-percent factor

Traditionally, when a person considered buying a home, banks which provide mortgages looked at the income of the applicant with a 25-percent factor in mind. The total cost of the annual payments for principal, interest, taxes, insurance and upkeep should not exceed 25 percent of the applicant's earned income. It was felt that any additional increases in the cost of servicing this mortgage, such as higher insurance premiums or real estate taxes, would be in proportion with the income of the individual borrower as the income was adjusted for inflation. Income would keep up with the cost and within the means of the borrower's ability to manage.

This economic principle worked well until taxes rose faster than inflation and people's ability to earn. During the 80's, taxes skyrocketed to two and three times the rate of inflation each year. Borrowers were able to meet these demands because there was an abundance of overtime and second jobs were available for the asking. Today, with our down-turned economy, overtime is rare, second jobs have been eliminated.

Although 93 percent of Long Island's work force is employed, the total annual income has decreased.

School districts, towns and county governments have had a difficult time accepting this reality. The result is an unprecedented increase in foreclosures and homes being put up for sale as people try to get out from under their mounting debt.

Recently, a Sachem school teacher, upset by a fact-finder's report that recommended a salary less than the teacher felt she should receive, declared the district should have raised the taxes more, perhaps double the in-

crease that had been put into effect, so that teachers could receive what they felt they deserved. She simply doesn't understand the realities of the burden most taxpayers face.

Most taxpayers who had originally calculated the cost of owning a home are way beyond the 25-percent factor. Their first income in most cases has not gone up any faster than inflation, and they have lost the overtime and the second job income that provided the cushion above the 25-percent fac-

tor that, in past years, allowed them to continue owning a home.

Government employees who have benefited from increases in wages that have substantially outpaced the private sector today must realize that they must bear some of the pain too. Wages in many cases must be frozen in an attempt to allow the taxpayers a chance to catch up. Until the cost of owning a home can again be in the 25-percent range, government cannot grow.

And why not?

An honest approach

Robert Gaffney gave his State of the County Address this past week and, as expected, painted a picture of very dire financial consequences. Suffolk County is broke. We do not have the revenues, nor do the taxpayers have the ability, to pay more to continue business as usual.

The day Gaffney came into office, he inherited a severe budget shortfall, a debt of at least \$80 million. Expenses will have to be cut or taxes will have to be raised. To make up part of

the shortfall, he has proposed selling the H. Lee Dennison Building as well as the OTB. The sale of the Dennison Building, and the county's lease-back, makes economic sense, as the county will not only end up with the proceeds of the sale—estimated to be between \$25 and \$40 million—but the cost of a good portion of the rents can be picked up in reimbursement by the state and federal governments.

There is a twist in the law that does not allow the county to charge

the state and federal governments for rent if they own the building. If the county itself is renting the space, the federal and the state share is reimbursable.

OTB should be a big money maker, instead it is a welfare system for has-been politicians. The cost of their salaries and perks skim the profits off the top, leaving a ridiculously low return for the county. It's ironic that the mob, running illegal gambling operations, has been able to offer better pay-offs and still make billions in profits. The sale of OTB to the New York State Racing Association or other responsible parties can produce another needed one-shot financial gain that can help reduce the 1991 carry-over of debt, and possibly eliminate the need for a tax increase this year.

The most remarkable aspect of Gaffney's presentation was the lack of political rhetoric and its honesty. One of the few pledges that Gaffney had made during his election campaign was to restore honesty and integrity to Suffolk government. Gaffney is carrying through on his pledge that he "will determine the actual and truthful financial data surrounding Suffolk County and then share this information freely and openly with the legislature, the comptroller and the treasurer, as well as the bond community. No more smoke and mirrors. Let the facts stand on their own."

Suffolk County is in for some very hard fiscal times. We do believe that we are off on the right track toward facing and solving these problems.

And why not?

Who added the jobs?

Suffolk County Police Commissioner Daniel Guido has submitted his resignation from the department, opting to retire rather than continue at the helm as he had been asked to do by County Executive Robert Gaffney. While we have not always agreed with Guido on issues, most especially his frequent urging that taxes be raised to support added needs of the police department, overall he receives high marks for his accomplishments while commissioner.

Guido took over the job at a time when the department was at a low ebb, the target of investigation and controversy. That condition no longer exists. He has successfully turned things around, making many changes that elevated the efficiency and reputation of the department.

In recent times, battling the fiscal crunch faced by the county and its impact on the department, Guido made some unpopular decisions that made him the target of criticism. His decision to reduce sector car operations brought forth a storm of concern. When he announced promotions within the department shortly after the cars were to be reduced, county legislators went off the wall. Guido said the promotions were needed to ensure proper supervision. Legislators were miffed because the promotions were made at a time sector car cuts were going into effect.

Strangely enough, the majority of legislators—there were six exceptions,

Legislators Donald Blydenburgh, Tom Finlay, Joseph Rizzo, Fred Thiele, Steve Levy and Allan Binder—set the groundwork for 22 of those promotions. They added the 22 abolished positions back into the budget last year, urged on, we have no doubt, by pressure applied by the department's Superior Officers' Organization. Now the legislators are saying, "Yes, we added them back, but they didn't have to be filled."

That's hogwash. We knew at the time those abolished positions were put back into the budget that they would, without doubt, be filled. Somehow, some way, some day. And so did the legislators. Their major concern now, however, is that it looks bad. Sector cars are being cut back, and promotions are made. Bad timing. How will that look to the public?

Interestingly, the legislators were circulating a letter last Thursday demanding the Gaffney administration oust Guido. But Guido beat them to the punch and resigned.

A cutback in sector cars is, in our view, a deplorable action. There is more need today for added police protection than ever before. The crime rates are going up, not down. Foot patrols and neighborhood crime units have been eliminated. There have been many proposals aired that might have helped this situation, but most have been stalled in the legislature. Greater use of auxiliary police, removal of county police from state

roadways, reassignment of trained police officers from nonessential duties—such as PAL activities and video camera operation—the utilization of retired police officers for traffic control and other duties are but some of the examples. It has been often said that six out of 10 members of the department work within the precincts and headquarters, with only four out on the street and in the neighborhoods. Another potential solution which the legislators have yet to look at is the possibility of towns creating their own police forces, with a supporting county force for specialized needs such as homicide, arson, and others.

East End towns have their own departments and are not facing the financial crisis faced by the county.

Bowing to pressure to restore abolished positions, and then complaining when they are filled, is pure lunacy. If the 22 positions were not needed, they should not have been put back into a budget already suffering a huge deficit. Adding to the deficit problem, and the tax impact, to satisfy pressure groups is the kind of legislative action that has brought us to the brink of bankruptcy.

There are tough times ahead, and much pressure that is going to be brought to bear. Hopefully the legislators will learn a lesson from this fiasco: add today and pay the price tomorrow. If not, perhaps another letter needs to be circulated, this one seeking the ouster of some legislators.

And why not?



Claims of past vs. words of today

"Who would want to build a power plant to generate electricity Long Island doesn't need? The answer should be 'nobody.'" So said Newsday recently in an editorial that decried the efforts of the Long Island Power Authority to go out for bids on converting the Shoreham nuclear power plant to natural gas.

The criticism against LIPA's bid soliciting efforts is mind-boggling, especially since it was that same publication that pushed Shoreham so hard with claims of future doom and gloom, of potential shortages of electricity, of brown-outs. And the same editorial voice that warned constantly of the need to eliminate the use of oil as a power source for LILCO's generating plants, and the problems of older plants that would soon have to be replaced.

Remember these Newsday words during the Shoreham fiasco in an editorial headlined "LI needs more power than LILCO can provide": "This summer's peak demand on Long Island is expected to reach 3,500 megawatts. LILCO's total generating capacity in the summer without the Shoreham nuclear plant is about 3,700 megawatts. But that does not mean 3,700 megawatts are ever actually generated. On an average day, 700 are not available for various reasons. And because LILCO lacks reserve capacity, the company schedules all regular maintenance and overhauls during fall, winter and spring. So for eight months a year another 600 to 700 megawatts a day are out. As LILCO's plants continue to age, the downtime can be expected to increase..."

Aren't we concerned about such matters today? Shouldn't we seriously consider the use of natural gas to eliminate the oil-fired plants that, if Newsday's past claims had any accuracy at all, will need to be replaced one day in

the future? If Shoreham can be converted to natural gas, wouldn't that be a logical alternative to replacing the older LILCO facilities which, it has often been claimed, are harmful to our environment? What are the cost comparatives for converting Shoreham and for replacing older plants?

The bid process could well provide some of those answers. Just as the study to determine the feasibility of a Calverton jetport is a good idea to determine the facts and figures, and the pros and cons, of the proposal, the bid process could provide valuable information about possible conversion of the Shoreham facility. What on earth is wrong with that? It doesn't commit anyone to anything. It's getting answers.

If, indeed, Long Island does not need any additional power, why is the New York State Power Authority planning to build a new generating facility at Holtsville? Why are there no questions about the need for that electricity? The transmission lines already in place at Shoreham could be used to transport electricity from a converted Shoreham facility, and a spur from the Iroquois natural gas line which is now in place could provide the source of fuel. How does that compare to the need for new transmission lines at Holtsville?

Newsday concocts some devious scheme that LIPA is pushing the Shoreham conversion to protect its future of promoting energy conservation here, "and wants revenues from the proposed plant to pay for them." Never mind, says Newsday, that "LILCO and the state Public Service Commission have conservation programs in place now." Check your electricity bills. How much have these "in place" plans lowered your LILCO costs?

A consortium of four firms has

registered its intention to submit bids on the LIPA proposal. That's good news. Let's find out what the dollar and cents answers are. Let's do some cost comparatives. What would be the cost of generating electricity with private enterprise rather than the monopoly that LILCO now enjoys?

We have been fed many claims in

the past—the "need" for Shoreham, the need for the power it would generate, the need to lessen our dependence on foreign oil. Strangely, Newsday's current stance ignores its declarations of the past. We think LIPA is on the right track, and should continue its quest for bids, and answers.

And why not?

Action, reaction

A wave of fear has invaded the lives of those who depend upon the financial assistance of Medicaid to meet their prescription needs. Proposed cuts of up to 40 percent in reimbursement of costs for prescription drugs has raised a threat from pharmacists that they will no longer accept prescriptions which depend upon Medicaid coverage.

Those who genuinely require such assistance, living in a world of limited income and escalating costs, are, quite understandably, very fearful about their medical futures.

It did not have to be this way. While the fiscal crisis of the state does demand curbing costs where possible, an ounce of sensitivity on the part of Governor Mario Cuomo, who proposed these cuts, might have achieved economies without striking terror in the hearts of those in legitimate need.

Pharmacists say the proposed cuts will force them to lose money with every prescription, which they claim, is the reason for their threatened withdrawal from the Medicaid program. They launched legal action, unsuccessfully, to block the cuts. But now, Cuomo, in a reaction to the storm over the original action, has agreed to delay the cuts to allow for

further discussions, and reports aides will be working with the Pharmaceutical Society and state legislators in an effort to work out the disagreement. And a governor's aide said the State Department of Social Services plans efforts to guarantee Medicaid recipients can find the prescription drugs that they need.

Why wasn't this done before the cuts were announced? Why weren't Medicaid recipients assured needed medicine would be available? Why must there be fear, and a storm of protest, before such problems can be resolved?

Is it possible to cut Medicaid costs to ease the current fiscal crisis? Undoubtedly. Are there abuses of the system, overcharges in reimbursements? Yes, there are. Is enough being done to weed out these abuses? Unfortunately, no.

Isn't it time to rule with understanding instead of by edict? To carefully study the problems and seek solutions before the action is taken, instead of reacting afterwards? Isn't it time to consider the impacts on people before, not after, such edicts are applied?

And why not?

Point of view

Parr Meadows: Can it be resurrected?

By George Sidoti:

In the first place, there is no political candidate, national or local, who can pull this nation out of its recession. It would take a combined effort of all levels of government and the private sector to cooperate in a sincere effort to put people back to work. Budgetary woes are faced throughout Suffolk County, New York State and the nation. Reinvestment and imagination must be a high priority.

On April 26, 1985, in the United States Bankruptcy Court, Eastern District of New York, Parr Meadows Racing Association accepted the offer from the Suffolk Meadow Corp. to assume full control of Parr Meadows.

On March 13, 1987, Suffolk Meadow Corp. sold Parr Meadows to Kens Realty Corp. and assigned, transferred and set over unto Meadowridge Corp. ("The Assignee").

Currently, that racetrack, which unsuccessfully operated quarter horse racing, is in total shambles. Vandals and thieves have ruined a large area within Suffolk County that has tremendous potential for employment,

which in turn, would reduce the unemployment and welfare rolls, plus create a huge source of revenue for Suffolk County.

There is no love in the eastern part of the United States for quarter horse racing. Thoroughbreds and standardbreds dominate racing within our part of the country. There are many breeders and owners within New York State looking to race. The purses offered by the New York Racing Association (NYRA-Saratoga, Belmont and Aqueduct) are high and in turn so are the training costs, which feed off the high purses. As a result, many horse owners race in New Jersey (over 20 percent of New Jersey horse owners are from New York) or other less costly states. Finger Lakes racetrack is too far to ship a horse, for those living in the southern part of New York. After the failure of Roosevelt Raceway (trotters-pacers) due to yet undisclosed reasons pending court disposition of all matters, Yonkers Raceway remains.

Even if a racetrack operates as a revenue neutral source of income for Suffolk County, the amount of taxes from other sources directly attributed to the track and the place-

ment of able-bodied workers will reduce budgetary expenditures and bring the Suffolk County budget in balance.

In a letter to Suffolk County Executive Robert J. Gaffney, the Economic Summit Coordinating Council recently "recommended a sports complex which would include horse racing. All ideas and recommendations are definitely being considered and examined."

Efforts to revitalize Parr Meadows by Suffolk County Legislator Michael O'Donohoe (C-East Northport) and Suffolk County Legislature's Presiding Officer Donald R. Blydenburgh (R-Smithtown) have been outstanding.

By reducing the purses to half of those offered by NYRA, allowing for night-time horse racing (e.g. Meadowlands, Garden State and Atlantic City racetracks in New Jersey), and a redeveloped one-mile track with strict-minded stewards, would benefit all of Long Island.

Post time for the first race would be at 8 p.m. and with a nine-ten horse racing program, the track will be closed by 11:30 p.m.

The racing would be on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights, with Saturday and Sunday day racing commencing at 1 p.m. There would be on-track housing offered for grooms and horsemen/horsewomen. With existing nearby horse farms, off-track training and lay-ups could be offered. When NYRA goes to Saratoga for five weeks, a full daytime program could be offered the local betting fans. And, if NYRA wishes to stay at Saratoga for the entire summer—GREAT!

With traffic, parking, security and other obvious obstacles ironed out, eventually the Meadowridge Realty Corp. would find Parr Meadows very lucrative.

As I stated previously, a joint effort by the public (government) and private sectors would be needed. Tax abatements and start up revenue sharing costs must be realized. However, from the beginning of the project, throughout its developing stages, and when completed and operational, there will be a need for jobs, jobs, jobs...

Letters of support to your local county legislators and state representatives would be very beneficial to all Long Islanders.

Foundation of fiction or truth?

The battle lines are drawn. There are those who are staunch proponents of using the Grumman facility at Calverton for a "cargoport" and those who are vehemently opposed. A study is currently being conducted to determine the feasibility of the proposal, and we support waiting until the results of this study are in before jumping on one bandwagon or the other. But we are becoming more and more concerned that those who are pushing the proposal are saying one thing while they mean another. If the study follows this trend, it won't be worth the paper it is written on.

For example, are we talking "cargoport" or commercial passenger jetport? One which includes connecting international flights? Evidence we have seen and heard thus far indicates the passenger jetport is the ultimate goal. It's not a new idea, it has been bandied about for years. About 20 years ago, it ran into problems because a businessman involved in the planning process became embroiled in a controversy over his involvement in the purchase of property in the vicinity of the proposed jetport. Opposition reared its head and the plan died.

The proposal emerged in recent times under the "cargoport" moniker. The timing was right. The economic downturn, the rise in unemployment, the flight of businesses from the area because of the skyrocketing cost of doing business here, all of these factors provided good cover for an old idea. The cargoport was heralded as the answer to our sluggish economy, even though it is a fact that most of the air freight of today is carried within the bellies of the passenger aircraft. It would be the boost to get us going again! So said the proponents, many of the same people who have been involved in the plan over the years.

If this proposal is to have any chance at all, it must be based on a foundation of truth. Don't call it one thing while planning another. Don't make grandiose promises of new jobs unless they are accompanied by factual documentation: what kind of jobs, what kind of skills will be required, who will create them? What time frame are we dealing with? The economy is bad now, a jetport would not be anywhere near becoming a reality for at least the next 10 years. The

study is scheduled to take about a year and a half. The way the costs of education, garbage removal, sales tax and energy are escalating, there might not be many of us left on Long Island by the time this proposal reaches reality, if it ever does.

People are hurting today! They are being taxed out of their homes. The escalating taxes have driven the cost of owning a home far beyond the 25 percent of income factor, which now prevents people from buying a home. Health services are cut, police protection is down, the education of our children is declining. We need answers TODAY to meet these problems.

Why talk about a "cargoport" when the real goal is a passenger jetport? What are the differences in traffic, the types of planes used, the flight schedules, the traffic patterns, the noise levels, and the pollution caused? Theoretically, the study should provide the answers. But if we can't rely on the integrity of a study which purports to study a "cargoport" when the actual plan is for a passenger facility, how can anyone accept the "results" of such a study? If the premise is flawed, why shouldn't we assume the end result will be skewed?

And there's another problem. While proponents focus on the "great economic impact" a Calverton jetport will have, another proposal was slipped in quietly by Governor Mario Cuomo: a Long Island Transportation Authority. An authority which would oversee the development of this facility and assorted other projects not yet revealed. An authority which would have powers beyond that of local governments, that could ultimately overrule local opinion for the sake of regional benefit. Legislation proposing this new authority, according to a spokesman from the governor's office, was to have been filed early this year. It hasn't surfaced yet, and it is our guess it won't until the jetport plan advances further.

Tom McAteer, former chief deputy county executive under Pat Halpin, recently hired by the Eastern Long Island Execs to spearhead the jetport plan, told Suffolk Life recently he did not agree with the authority's proposal "at this time." Well, now, those three words are not acceptable. "Not at any time" is our view. A transportation authority manipulated by Cuomo as he has manipulated the Long Island Power Authority is totally unacceptable.

Those who are staunchly supportive of the jetport plan, and those opposed, are, in our view, jumping the gun. We owe it to the future of our area to look at all sides of this issue, the good and the bad, before going to war. It is a time for common sense and logic, not emotionalism or "not here, in my prime, pure and pristine environmentally sensitive area where the tiger salamander lives." People live here too, and if there is economic benefit to the public, the idea certainly deserves honest study. Stomping out of a study committee meeting in anger, as Pine Barrens guru Dick Amper did recently, is shortsighted. It serves no purpose other than seeking publicity.

But this much should be clear: the memory of the Shoreham fiasco still burns bright. We were given all kinds of assurances about what a blessing Shoreham would be, only to find out we were had. The people of Long Island are wiser today because of Shoreham. We were fooled once, we won't be again. Therefore, we would urge that "cargoport" proponents begin calling a spade a spade, and level with the public as to what we are really talking about, rather than hide their motives, hoping the proposal will gather steam and be unstoppable.

Without a foundation of truth, the jetport plan is doomed to crash. Sooner or later.

And why not?

A waste of time

Suffolk County is in the throes of fiscal calamity. Services—including health and police—are being curtailed. One-shot gimmicks, which include the sale and refinance of county-owned facilities, are utilized as an immediate Band-Aid to stall bankruptcy, an immediate infusion of funds which will cost millions in added interest in the future. With all this going on, it would be logical to expect our county legislators to be concentrating on possible solutions, on ways to cut costs, means to ease the burden on the public.

You be the judge:

Two legislators, Joseph Rizzo (R-East Islip) and Herbert Davis (R-Yaphank) are filing legislation that would declare the week of May 25 through May 31 "Buy American Week in Suffolk County." Their legislation, they claim, is in response to "Japan's recent attacks on the American worker."

Is there anyone out there who believes we need legislation to urge Americans to buy American? That this legislation will ease the tax burden on the taxpayer? That our fiscal problems will be resolved by wasting the time of legislators to vote on such legislation?

The same two legislators also sent out a press release extolling the need for a special hotline for residents to secure information about silicone gel breast implants. Why would it take a press release from two legislators to get the health department to do what it should do on its own?

If, as the two legislators claim, they are concerned that "Long Island has the highest incidence of breast cancer in the state..." why haven't they taken action by directing the health department to conduct a study to determine why that is the case, if it is?

Unless those responsible for the

safe and sane operation of county government stand up and speak out against such action, this county will never rise above its present problems. There must be better things for legislators to do with their time than to spend it on frivolous resolutions or proposals. That time would be better spent on solving the pressing matters of the current fiscal crisis.

What we need is an honest effort to solve problems rather than seek headlines!

And why not?

Step away from steps

The Suffolk County fiscal dilemma—which has put the county on the brink of bankruptcy—worsened in recent days because of the provisions of a police contract which recently expired. That contract provides for a \$10,643 step increase for 181 officers hired two years ago, which will hike their annual salary from \$33,336 to \$43,979. Another 16 officers, hired later, will also receive the same increase shortly.

These increases will cost the county approximately \$1.8 million per year. They will add to what is already a growing police problem, a tight fiscal crisis which has caused a shortage of manpower, elimination of foot patrols and neighborhood crime units, and reduction of sector car responses during certain time periods.

A PBA official was reported to have said the increase "is not a raise" but rather a step increase included in the union contract. And therein lies a problem not only in county govern-

ment and the police ranks, but in schools and other levels of government as well. Step increases are new money, an increase of salary, not something to be brushed away lightly. Step increases are given for each year of service within a salary schedule, and in the case of school districts, for earned additional educational credits as well.

Because they are, by contract, automatic, the step increases are ignored in the negotiation process when salary increases are asked. What is worse is the attitude exhibited, "that's not an increase, it's a step..." There are a couple of possible solutions to this: One, eliminate the step system, which amounts to an approximate 1.5 percent salary increase in most instances, in future negotiations. Then negotiate from scratch. If the settlement is four percent, that's the figure, not four percent plus 1.5 percent, which equals 5.5 percent, as it is now. All the taxpayer hears is the "settlement is four percent," when the actual new money added to the budget is 5.5 percent.

Another solution is to keep the step increases and give a cost of living increase as well. Period. That would eliminate a lot of time spent negotiating and allow districts to know well in advance what the added costs will be.

There needs to be an attitude adjustment on this matter. There needs to be accountability for every dip into the taxpayers' pockets for more money. Steps are an addition to the budget which adds to the taxpayers' burden. They should not be taken for granted, or waved away with a "this isn't a raise, it's a step" comment.

These are tough fiscal times, the taxpayers are hard pressed to economically survive. Every extra dollar they are charged in taxes is a dollar they must eliminate from their own budget. That burden should not be taken for granted. It should be appreciated, and acknowledged, at the very least. Better yet, it should be eliminated.

And why not?