

Just more 'business as usual'

Brookhaven Town has, for years, given out its insurance contracts to politically-connected brokers in the town's Republican Party. For those same number of years it has been claimed by this publication that substantial savings could be realized if the town's insurance were to be put out to bid rather than given as a political plum. Figures recently revealed prove those claims.

According to statistics secured by Brookhaven Councilwoman Pat Strebel, Brookhaven Town residents will be paying \$1.2 million more for municipal insurance than they need to next year. At the same time the town ups fees, cuts services and lays off employees, the town board pays more than a million dollars, needlessly, to continue with "business as usual."

The two primary brokers for Brookhaven Town are the Thomas Neppell and Son, and the Hughes and Still Agencies. Both of these firms have ancient roots in the old guard of the Republican party. Thomas Neppell Sr. is the father-in-law of Brookhaven Town Supervisor John LaMura.

Suffolk Life has long advocated that Brookhaven put its insurance out to bid. Former Supervisor Henrietta Accompra, in her first run for the supervisor's seat, pledged that she would do so. She went back on her word and two-thirds of the insurance has continued to go to the Neppell agency while Hughes and Still has benefited from approximately one-third.

Last year during the election campaigns for supervisor and town council seats in Brookhaven, we repeatedly brought up this subject to the candidates. LaMura said he would address the situation, but would not promise to open up Brookhaven Town's insurance to open, honest and competitive bidding. For this reason we declined to endorse him. During the past year we have prodded him to do so. He has failed to act.

When Pat Strebel ran for a town board seat, she pledged to investigate this situation and try to force the board to put the insurance out to bid. She has kept her word. It hasn't been easy. She has been stonewalled at every turn, even intimidated, and faces threat of political retaliation. But Strebel has gained a reputation as being a bulldog. When she has her teeth into an issue, she doesn't let go until it comes to a conclusion. Through long hours of effort and frustration, she was able to put together a fairly accurate picture of Brookhaven's insurance.

She took this information to a large insurance brokerage firm located outside of Suffolk County which has experience with municipalities as clients. She requested that they examine what was being insured, and to tell her if there wasn't a more economical way to provide equal or better coverage. In essence, Strebel asked for a bid proposal.

The results were not surprising. Brookhaven Town residents this year could save \$1.2 million in the cost of insurance over the current figures. Instead of taking advantage of these potential savings, the Brookhaven Town Board has shown little enthusiasm to

join with Strebel in seeking to achieve these savings.

With knowledge of Strebel's efforts, town officials took actions to make it appear they were seeking to cut costs. They put out Requests for Proposals (RFPs), but then limited these RFPs to insurance carriers only, specifically omitting brokers. The reasoning boggles the mind. "We wanted to be sure we were dealing with reputable companies," said Councilman George Davis, who with Councilman Joseph Macchia, sits as board liaison on insurance matters. In our view, limiting the RFPs to carriers only was a move designed to protect retention of the current brokers while making it look like the board was trying to save money.

Interestingly, Strebel's interest in the town's insurance matters has had some impact, although the savings is not as great. Neppell recently reported to the town's insurance committee the premiums would be some \$570,000 lower next year. According to Davis, about \$300,000 of the savings comes from a cut in premium costs by a company--which Davis labeled "Company A"--the town had dropped last year. That action came because another company--(Company B)--had underbid the first company by \$280,000. Now the first company has underbid the second company by \$300,000. Think about it: a bidding war between just two companies cut the cost of that policy by \$580,000 within the same year. Just imagine how much might be cut from the town's insurance costs if a legitimate bidding process was utilized by town board members?

Strebel asked, "Why are we not

looking out for the people we were elected to represent? Why didn't the town put the various brokers into a competitive bidding situation rather than just a limited few insurance companies?"

In the world of politics, if everything is equal the politically faithful should be rewarded. In the world of good government, no ethical, honest public official would allow a contract to be awarded that is going to cost the residents \$1.2 million more than is necessary. In the world of Brookhaven, where ethics and honesty are open to many questions, it should be more than the citizens should be asked to tolerate that the supervisor's father-in-law has the town insurance without full, open and non-collusive competitive bidding. Sure, he has had the insurance for many years, and, according to town officials, has done a good job. But surely other brokers are equally as good, and, perhaps, much more economical.

Since the FBI has an ongoing investigation into the shenanigans in Brookhaven Town, they should take a deep, hard look at how the insurance is awarded and who benefits. Is it done in an honest and forthright manner? They should also look beyond the town to school districts, bus companies and other large municipal and quasi-municipal operations that can be manipulated by the politically powerful.

We congratulate Strebel for having the tenacity to dig into this abuse and the courage to come forth. Brookhaven and Suffolk County need more public servants who put good government ahead of politics and put their own political future on the line.

In a recent column in which LaMura brags about his accomplishments in his first year of office, he notes: "We have re-thought the way we do things in order to deliver to our taxpayers the best government we can in the most cost effective fashion." To which we say: Isn't cutting wasteful insurance spending a part of good government?

And why not?



Some leftover whys

This column traditionally ends with "And why not?" It is the editor's way of challenging the readers to not accept what he or anyone else thinks, blindly, but to investigate on their own and to form their own conclusion. To get off the fence and become involved in their world.

As the year comes to an end, some "whys" have been left unsaid. Here are just a few:

Looking out over the docile Shinnecock Bay on a beautiful day, with Dune Road in the line of vision, remembrances of the furious nor'easter of just a few weeks before are brought to mind.

Why can't we build a man-made barrier in 60 or 70 feet of water that would diminish the power of the waves and protect the mainland?

Why can't this barrier be made out of the ash that is the residue from burned garbage that is so costly to dispose of?

Why can't the technology that was developed by Stony Brook, through research money provided by our taxes, that creates building blocks from ash, be utilized in this endeavor?

Why can't the manpower required for this process be provided by the inmates in our jails and prisons?

Why shouldn't our prisons be a

human profit center instead of a resource draw?

Why can't the loading and unloading and the transportation of these materials, as well as construction of the offshore groins, be provided under a workfare program utilizing the unemployed and the welfare recipients?

Why can't we give people dignity and provide them with a well-defined mission and satisfaction from accomplishing a rewarding goal?

Looking back at the devastating hurricane that struck Miami and Louisiana, we are forced to ask a whole host of whys, particularly, as the mission of our military is being changed.

Why can't our armed forces be cross-trained and ready at a moment's notice to move in and alleviate natural disasters?

Why can't the military people we are employing be used without needless red tape to build temporary housing, mass feeding stations, repair municipal properties?

Why can't their missions be constructive as well as destructive?

Why can't our army and marines be used in our own inner cities in a war against drugs and lawlessness?

Why should we tolerate innocent children and adults being slaughtered in drive-by shootings, when we have

one of the most sophisticated war machines known to mankind?

Why can't we feed our own hungry when we can find the resources to help feed the rest of the world?

Why can't we stop the DEC (Department of Environmental Conservation), an arm of Governor Cuomo, from imposing ludicrous fines upon local municipalities for not complying with the DEC's ridiculous and ever-changing rules and regulations?

Why can't we force the PSC (Public Service Commission) to represent the ratepayers rather than be sympathetic to the greedy requests of the utilities?

Why can't County Executive Robert Gaffney realize that he was elected by the people to put an end to high taxes, rather than continue to waste our resources on an insatiable government?

Why can't we elect people, Republican or Democratic, who can change Suffolk County and New York State from the highest taxed state and county in the nation to the average?

Why can't the people in a democracy convince their leaders of what is best for the majority?

Why can't we use common sense to solve problems that are opportunities in disguise?

And why not?

End the sales tax

Suffolk County residents are paying 1.5% in "temporary" sales taxes. These sales taxes were enacted as temporary measures to bail out the Southwest Sewer District and the county government from its fiscal bumbling. They were sold to the public as temporary measures that would expire at the end of 1993 and 1994. These taxes were imposed to give the elected officials a reasonable period of time to put the county's fiscal house in order.

Webster's Dictionary defines temporary as "lasting for a time only; transitory." Obviously, Webster didn't foresee temporary to mean permanent. Obviously, the county residents, in accepting these temporary taxes as a stopgap measure, did not expect them to become permanent.

The county executive and many of the county legislators are now saying we can't give up these taxes. We must make them permanent. They have forgotten their promise, their pledge to the taxpayers. These sales taxes have acted as a disincentive to county residents to spend or invest on their homes, their families and themselves. Wherever possible and whenever they feel they can get away with it, county residents are buying outside of Suffolk County and in other states where they can avoid these taxes. Millions of dollars each year are lost to the county not only in taxes, but in business and jobs because the residents are turning to catalogs and buying from out-of-state sources. They buy such common things as cigarettes and liquor, clothing and furniture.

We know of some families that actually go to out-of-state warehouse-type clubs and buy all their staples for three to six months' needs. In so doing, they often get prices that are less, and they beat the sales tax by 3% to 5%.

It is not uncommon to have tradespeople, when quoting a job, ask you if the payment will be by cash or check. If it is by check, they add the sales tax. If it is cash, they'll wink and say, "You don't have to pay the sales tax." Illegal? Of course it is. But human nature being what it is and financial times trying, many cannot resist the temptation. Not only is the sales tax lost, but the money goes underground and neither business or income taxes are collected on the revenues earned.

It is estimated that between 20% and 40% of Long Island's economy has been driven underground. Too many people have come to realize that the government does not have the ability to enforce these tax codes. The chances of getting caught are slim, and they justify the risk by saying, "I am taxed too heavily to start with, so if I can avoid it, why not?"

These are the facts the politicians refuse to look at. Living in their never-never land, they believe there are enough honest people who will pay their full share of the taxes so that they will be able to squander these resources and not have to run government as a business.

Residents of Suffolk County have given the elected officials two years to get their financial house in order, to bring about the reforms they had promised. The temporary sales tax, to help finance Suffolk County government, expires at the end of 1993. The 10-year Southwest Sewer District stabilization sales tax ends at the end of 1994. The temporary sales taxes should be eliminated. When eliminated, it will reduce Suffolk's sales tax to 7%. The county will get 3% and the state will continue to get 4%. This in itself will continue to give us one of the highest sales taxes in the nation. But the reduction should stimulate spending and encourage those who are breaking the law to cease this practice and become law-abiding citizens again.

County officials are going to whine that if they do not continue with the present high sales taxes they are going to have to increase real estate taxes to make up for this loss. They will come out with scare statements that real estate taxes will have to go up 100% to 200%. This is pure "bull." They have the balance of this year to do what they have promised to do when they asked for these temporary sales taxes.

There is but one answer: reduce the cost of county government so that the residents can continue to afford to live here. These elected officials squandered the past year because they could not make the hard decisions. They were afraid of the political ramifications. They now must make these decisions or continue to tax you for more and more of your resources. How much more do you want to put up with? It's up to you.

For your convenience, we have published four coupons below. The first coupon is directed to County Executive Bob Gaffney who, as a state assemblyman, insisted that Suffolk's temporary sales tax end in 1993. The second part of this sales tax was of his doing as county executive. Again, it was sold as a temporary tax.

The second coupon should be directed to your county legislator. These are the individuals who must vote on this sales tax. If they refuse to make it permanent, it will cease. County legislators are up for re-election this year.

The third and fourth coupons are directed to your assemblyman and your state senator. The New York State Legislature must vote to give approval to the county's request for continuation of the sales tax. Let these elected officials know your feelings.

You may be asking yourself what good is a coupon or expression of my beliefs going to do? Many elected officials have told us in the past that when they receive even basic forms of communication, such as these coupons, in quantity, they stand up and take notice.

Send in your coupons today, it may be the best buck you have ever invested.

And why not?

To County Executive Robert Gaffney:

We demand that you live up to your word. Eliminate the temporary sales taxes. Cut back the size and cost of government to what we can afford.

Name.....
Address.....
Town.....
Signature.....

To Suffolk County Legislators:

We demand that you live up to your word. Eliminate the temporary sales taxes. Cut back the size and cost of government to what we can afford.

Name.....
Address.....
Town.....
Signature.....

To State Assemblyman:

We demand that you live up to your word. Eliminate the temporary sales taxes. Cut back the size and cost of government to what we can afford.

Name.....
Address.....
Town.....
Signature.....

To State Senator:

We demand that you live up to your word. Eliminate the temporary sales taxes. Cut back the size and cost of government to what we can afford.

Name.....
Address.....
Town.....
Signature.....

A new beginning

The 103rd Congress was sworn into office last week. Next week, Bill Clinton will be inaugurated as the new President of the United States. The new Congress is truly that, almost 25% of its members are freshmen. Clinton brings to the White House his theme of change.

The two most important changes that could be enacted by the new Congress and new President are two old ideas that the American public have been clamoring for. The first: term limitations for all federally-elected officials. Like the President, no one should serve more than eight consecutive years in office. Terms of senators should be limited to two. Terms of Congress should be limited to four.

Many of the new members of Congress made this part of their campaign platforms. Many veteran members, such as Senator Al D'Amato, agree on the concept. This is basic and fundamental and should be the first priority of Congress.

The second item is as important, if not more so, than the first. That is, to give the President the power of the line-item veto. We supported this concept for former Republican Presi-

dent Ronald Reagan, Republican President George Bush and we support it for Democratic President Bill Clinton. The buck stops at the Presidency, and the President must have the power to say "no" to Congress on how much spending and debt this country should have.

The President should not have to, or be forced to, approve a two-foot high document on a "take it or leave it" basis. Congress must be stopped from putting funding for research on the sex life of a tsetse fly into a bill that primarily affects feeding the hungry or senior citizen entitlements.

Let's take the straps off the President's ability to control taxes and spending. Let's give him real power to be the President he is capable of being, whether he is a Democrat or a Republican.

If Congress does nothing else during this session, it should attempt to return the government to the people by making it responsive. They can do this by enacting these two provisions.

And why not?

County address:

**H. Lee Dennison Building
Veterans Memorial Highway,
Hauppauge, N.Y., 11788**

State address:

**Senate Chambers,
The Capitol,
Albany, N.Y., 12247**

**New York State Assembly,
Legislative Office Building,
Albany, N.Y., 11248**

The arrogant art of secrecy

The secrecy practiced by local governing bodies is fast becoming a work of art. "There's more than one way to skin a cat," appears to be the motto as the various boards seek various ways to escape the glare of public exposure as they dispense public monies and make politically-motivated decisions.

An example: most towns have work sessions before the public sessions during which town business is conducted. Most towns had work sessions before they went through the annual reorganizational activities at their first meetings of the year. Work sessions, a gathering of public officials held to discuss actions that would be the subject of votes at the official public meeting, are subject to the open meetings law, which requires notification to the media and opening the meeting to those who may wish to attend. Those who wish to conduct town business without the prying eyes of the press or the public are not happy with this, so they seek ways to circumvent the law.

Brookhaven Town Board members held a gathering on January 4, the day before the scheduled January 5 reorganization meeting. But it wasn't a work session, although it had been previously announced one would be held. It wasn't even held in town hall. And it was not announced.

When Suffolk Life attempted to contact public officials, we soon learned

they were all "at a meeting." But, we were told, no one seemed to know where they were meeting or what it was about. The fact is, the town board was meeting at the Medford Inn, but instead of a work session, the gathering was labeled a "political caucus," which doesn't come under the open meetings law.

A political caucus, of course, is where public officials of one particular party get together to decide how they are going to vote on certain issues. In areas where strong and dominant political leadership exists, it's when the "marching orders" are given. In Brookhaven Town, where all the public officials are of the same party, however, it's more of an opportunity to plot moves, to speak openly without fear of exposure of the reasoning or maneuvering behind their final votes.

Undoubtedly, one of the items on the agenda was the town's insurance contracts because the town board did, with one vote in opposition and one abstention, as we had predicted, granted the town's insurance business of more than \$3 million in premiums to the same politically connected-brokers, Thomas Neppell and Son and Hughes and Still, they have favored in the past. Councilwoman Patricia Strebel voted against the resolution, and for good reason. She had labored long and hard to dig into the insurance business, and had sought some outside counsel. She came

up with a proposal that could have resulted in a potential savings of \$1.2 million. But other members of the board, enamored with their broker friends, couldn't be bothered to explore the matter further. Supervisor John LaMura abstained because one of the brokers is his father-in-law.

In Islip Town, the board skirts the open meetings law by avoiding work sessions. Instead, the board is "briefed" by a town attorney, one by one. Since the public officials don't gather together for such briefings, when all could ask questions and benefit from the answers given to another's questions, there's no need to publicly post a meeting notice or notify the media. All can be said and plotted behind closed doors.

Towns are not the only schemers in the art of secrecy. At a December 15 meeting of the BOCES I (Board of Cooperative Educational Services First Supervisory District) board in eastern Suffolk, the resignation of an assistant superintendent was announced. BOCES I Superintendent Raymond DeFeo was asked if this position would be filled. He said no. He was then asked if his duties would be divided up among existing staff and administrative members. DeFeo said, "Yes, that is a correct assumption."

At that very same meeting, however, the BOCES board members approved the hiring of a \$70,000 administrator

who, it turned out, would handle some of the duties of the retiring administrator. The action went unnoticed because it was listed on the agenda only as a personnel matter. No name, no details, no information on how the taxpayers' money would be spent. You can hide a lot with those kinds of agendas, as the million-dollar Dr. Edward Murphy retirement fiasco has proven.

The arrogance of those involved in these examples is nothing less than appalling. In Brookhaven Town, where town officials operate under a dark cloud of suspicion based on charges of corruption made by disgraced developer John McNamara, one would think the town board members would want to operate in the full light of day, rather than the closed doors of secrecy. Indictments are rumored to come at any time. The ruling Republican Party will face an uphill fight in the elections for town seats to come later this year. Hiding behind the label of "political caucus" to do town business is only adding fuel to the cry that it is time for a change in Brookhaven Town.

Islip Town has been cited in a state audit for dipping into garbage funds to hide its spending habits in the town budget, and have been ordered to repay those funds. Private "briefings" to avoid holding open meetings may well be the best way to plot such actions, but it does little to enhance trust or insure integrity in town government.

And BOCES, already a target of disgust over a million-dollar giveaway for the retiring Murphy, and for its "good old boy" operational habits which excludes the taxpayer from any voice in BOCES spending, is proof positive that the calls for consolidation and drastic changes in the operation of BOCES should be immediately heeded.

If officials spend their own money, they can hide behind all the closed doors that they can find. But when they are dipping into the hard-earned dollars taken from the taxpayers, there is only one right way, the open door way.

The public has the opportunity to turn off the lights of the political careers of those politicians who choose to do the taxpayers' business in the dark. The light switch is the lever in the balloting booth. It's time for the public to use that switch.

And why not?

PAL is a duplication

Through election and budget debates we often hear about the elimination of duplication. School districts duplicating the efforts of the towns, the towns duplicating the efforts of the county and state.

PAL, the Suffolk County Police Athletic League, is such a duplication. PAL provides sport activities primarily for our youth that are a duplication of similar types of activities offered by school districts and town recreational programs.

Contrary to popular belief, PAL is not a volunteer organization of the po-

lice department. Officers putting in time on PAL activities are paid officers who receive salaries and who are taken out of and away from street duties. In Suffolk County, there are eight officers drawing police salaries, often exceeding \$60,000 per year plus benefits, assigned to PAL.

The Suffolk County Legislature has refused to continue with this practice. They agreed to continue to allow PAL to exist, but only as a county-sanctioned volunteer agency. The police responded that unless paid officers are assigned, they would disband PAL.

It is a shame that kids will be the

losers, but in these tight times every officer we can afford should be on the street rather than in a gym. If the police wish to continue with PAL as a voluntary organization, funded through their union dues, they should be allowed, in fact encouraged, to do so. This is what people thought PAL was all about to begin with. They didn't realize they were funding PAL at a rate of over a half-million dollars a year with paid cops at the helm. Given a choice, we're confident they would much rather have the police on the streets dealing with crime, rather than in the gym.

And why not?

Wrong time for raises at the top

The elected county officials received a backdoor raise on January 1. This increase has the rank and file staff in Suffolk County livid. They should be, for they have worked without a contract for the past 15 months. They have not seen a raise due to the horrendous financial conditions this county is, and has been, in.

Part of the county's financial dilemma can be blamed on the area's economy and the recession, but a major portion of the blame must be laid at the feet of the elected county officials.

The county executive and members of the legislature have not demonstrated or shown the courage of leadership. They refuse to make the hard choices that would have reduced the cost of government and re-established fiscal stability. Instead of doing what needed to be done, they have schemed and slithered through the financial mess, transferring

the problems of today to tomorrow, utilizing one-shot gimmicks and simply postponing financial obligations. They have increased both sales and real estate taxes, which has helped further depress the economy. Those who are forced to pay the higher taxes have had to cut back on their spending. Many of these productive citizens have come to the painful decision to sell their homes on Long Island, give up their jobs, their businesses and proximity to their families, to emigrate to other areas where there is not such an oppressive tax burden.

For the county executive, the legislature and other elected officials to accept a backdoor pay raise at this point is not only arrogant, it is absolute greed. The mechanics for these pay raises is a bill that passed in 1987 that granted all elected officials an automatic pay raise every year. This is ludicrous. Pay raises

should be based on performance and production.

Can any elected official, based upon their performance in their job or in the job collectively done by them, truthfully look at themselves in the mirror and say Suffolk County is more secure economically or a better place to live today because of their efforts as an office holder? Is the cost of living here, and the tax burden, less? Are the services to the mainstream taxpayer better? Are our communities safer? Are the recreational opportunities more abundant? Is the environment and our quality of life noticeably improved? Is our government more streamlined, productive and user friendly?

Honest elected officials would be forced to say no on all counts. Failure should not be rewarded, even through the back door. The county executive and the legislature, and other elected officials, should not only reject these in-

creases but reduce their salaries to reflect the hard economic times we are facing. Even a token 10% cut in salary at the top would signify to the rank and file county worker and to the taxpayers, that those who are elected will lead. That they are willing to make the sacrifice to get this county back on its feet. That they personally will hurt as they are asking everyone else to hurt. That they are not arrogant, greedy gods who have placed themselves above the human misery they have created.

County Executive Robert Gaffney should issue a Certificate of Necessity (CN) for an emergency resolution of the legislature to eliminate all automatic pay increases. It should be voted on at the next session of the legislature, and unanimously passed.

Gaffney said he was a leader. He said he understood the plight of the average resident. Let him prove it.

And why not?

Should the state fund schools?

The provision for education, constitutionally, is a state obligation. In some states, the entire cost of education is funded by the state. In other states, like New York, it historically has been a joint endeavor by local municipalities and the state, with some minor infusion by the federal government.

The type and quality of education provided has traditionally been defined by the local community. The state developed basic formulas that covered the minimum requirements. They provided state aid to assist in these basic offerings. Locally elected school boards were then empowered to create an educational system and

levy taxes on real estate to fund these endeavors. Each community was given the latitude to develop a program that fit both the expectations of its residents, and its ability to fund.

Residents of school districts were given the opportunity to be members of the board of education, to elect those members and to give approval to the proposed budget for the coming year's funding. This system worked relatively well up until the 60s. During the 60s, parents demanded better education for their children. Educators unionized and became a powerful voting and political force. They developed the most extensive lobbying effort in the state. They demanded Utopia and got it here on Long Island.

The New York State Legislature and the State Education Department developed new rules, regulations and mandates. The state enforced these mandates without providing funding to cover the costs. The schools' mission was transformed from being exclusively educational establishments into sociological centers. Taxes accelerated to fund these grandiose schemes.

Women who traditionally stayed at home and took care of the children were forced into the work place as two-family incomes were needed to provide the necessities and pay the increasing tax burden. This presented a whole host of new and additional demands on the schools. Kids were not

as stable as they once were. The emotional scars of mom not being home, as well as the latchkey syndrome, developed. As husbands and wives found themselves working additional hours to make ends meet, and because they developed new and different interests at work, they grew further apart and divorce became the norm in one out of two families. The financial burden of two people separated, rather than under one roof, added additional fuel to the problem.

Schools tried to become what families had been. Money was invested in sociological programs in huge amounts. The state, although it increased its share of aid, did not keep up with the cost of running the schools. When state aid was increased, it was not applied to leveling the real estate tax burden but, in too many cases, was invested in enriching those who were part of the establishment.

School taxes today are no longer affordable. Today, most Long Island families pay 65% to 70% of their real estates taxes for funding education. Tax bills that once were considered high at \$1,000 are, today, breaking the backs of the middle-class at \$5,000 and \$6,000 levels. Real estate taxes cannot carry the burden of what our schools have become.

School districts which once considered home rule sacred are today wisely looking at consolidation. Legislator Bob Sweeney has a bill in the hopper that should be given serious consideration. It calls for the state to assume all costs of education that leads to a basic Regents diploma. Only the enhancements and those items considered beyond the mandates of the state that are approved by the local school board will be funded through real estate taxes. Voters would have the opportunity of determining the additional entitlements that are to be given in their district.

A statewide tax on either income or sales would be used to fund the basic cost of education, statewide. A single formula would be used statewide with the exception of adjustments for the cost of living in different parts of the state. Every child would be given the same basic quality of education, from Niagara Falls to Montauk Point. The children would be taught the same basic curriculum, and have the same amount of money available for their basic educational needs.

School boards would only be able to grant or enhance the educational package with programs that had the support of the majority of its taxpayers. Statewide-run, universal school systems could put a clamp on runaway administrative costs and bring about meaningful consolidation.

The cost of education must be brought under control, and it is going to take an innovative statewide movement to do it. The Sweeney approach looks interesting.

And why not?

Annual attack on Long Island

Mario does it again

If it's budget time, it must be the season for another attack against Long Island residents by New York State Governor Mario Cuomo.

Year, after year, after year, Cuomo sharpens his ax and takes aim on local school districts and area programs, slashing away. This year is no different. In his latest budget regurgitation, our school districts, with several exceptions, are targeted for new cuts in Cuomo's recent proposal. These are cuts on top of the cuts of last year, the middle of the year before, and the year before that. Cuomo thinks we're rich. And, he wants to take dollars from "rich districts" to aid the poor, the New York City folks.

Cuomo also wants to speed up the closing of state mental institutions in Suffolk County, as part of the state's "deinstitutional" campaign. Simply put, that means opening the door, pushing the patients out, and letting the local communities that they decide to settle in face the problems and foot the bills.

Senate Majority Leader Ralph Marino has an opportunity this year to become the leader he has the capability of being. As Senate majority leader, he has the power to restore integrity in the state of New York.

During the last couple of years, Marino has fought a good fight, won some gains, but caved in at the last moment when it came to standing firm. As a result, he has been perceived as being weak, a manipulated tool of Cuomo. Taxpayers across the state have been disappointed by his failure to stop the governor from imposing additional taxes, fees and regulatory requirements. His failure has driven numerous businesses out of the state, creating lost jobs, and he has helped create part of the image that stops businesses from considering New York as a good place to be.

Marino's control of the Senate

gives him the ability to say "no!" Without his approval, nothing can be done. Marino should dig in his heels and inform the governor that under no circumstances will the Senate consider any increase in taxes or fees in 1993. Taxpayers want the entire structure of New York State reformed. They want a goal established which reduces state spending to the national average. They want our medical and social service costs reduced to at least the level of California, another progressive state.

Cuomo talks of revising the educational aid formulas, a start, perhaps, but only the tip of the iceberg. He should be aiming at a revision of the entire New York State Education Department, where many of the prob-

lems have their start. Educational costs must be assumed by the state for those subjects and programs that lead to a Regents diploma and are mandated on the schools by the state. School districts that opt to increase their programs can then pay for the added curriculum. Marino should make it clear that only when the governor can come up with a budget and a financial plan that will meet these objectives will the budget be passed.

This may well be the year that New York State government does not have a budget in place and that the state funding and operations cease. Tough talk, tough measures? These are tough times! The question is, is Marino the tough leader who can stand his ground?

And why not?

Gaffney leads way

Last week we expressed a critical view about the automatic raises which county officials were slated to receive because a resolution which would have killed these raises has been stalled in committee. To his credit, County Executive Bob Gaffney has announced he is turning back the backdoor pay raise that he was to receive as a result of legislature's failure to address this matter.

Gaffney correctly stated that Suffolk could not afford to hand out even cost of living increases to its top elected officials. The rank and file staff of Suffolk County have been working under a salary freeze for the last year-and-a-half. For the top elected officials to take a raise at this time sends the wrong signal.

We congratulate Gaffney on refusing this pay increase, and we're anxiously waiting to see if the legislature will follow suit. We are also waiting to see what legislators will think of themselves first, and what legislators will put the taxpayers first.

The legislators should not only individually turn back the raises, but they must enact a law that rescinds these automatic pay raises for the future.

The whole crew of the legislature is up for re-election this November. The pay raise issue is an easy one to identify. Are the legislators for us, or are they against us? How they vote will give you the answer on how you should cast your vote. Keep tuned!

And why not?