

You can't have it both ways

As 1995 dawns, America is witnessing a revolution in Washington. The Republicans are taking control of the House of Representatives and the United States Senate.

The Congressional Republicans authored and signed a Contract with America that calls for dramatic changes in government during the first 100 days. When this contract was first announced, we felt it could be a campaign gimmick; we are now convinced that the Republicans plan on turning Washington upside down. Already, Clinton and Congress are in a bidding war for tax cuts.

The Washington bureaucracy is being downsized. The Republicans intend to return powers, funding and responsibilities to the states.

Albany, under Governor-elect Pataki, has gotten the message and is

doing the same. We expect that the municipalities will have far fewer mandates, but substantially less state and federal aid. Our local elected officials are going to have to catch the fever or be caught with their pants down.

Suffolk County officials seem to be ignoring the whole movement and continue on with business as usual. In the closing hours of the 1994 session, they have appropriated \$70 million in new capital construction that will cost at least \$140 million with interest to pay back. They have increased salaries across the board for governmental workers.

The legislature and the county executive are faced with the sunset of the 1% sales tax penalty at the end of 1995. County Executive Gaffney is already talking about extending it. Taxpayers were told that this was only a

temporary sales tax measure to get the county out of its financial predicament. They are not going to be in any mood for an extension. "Enough is enough" should be bellowing in the ears of the legislator and county executive.

Americans across the land threw out long-term incumbents and dramatically changed the political landscape of the nation. We are capable of doing the same thing here in Suffolk County, and the mood is right.

From January to April, the legislature should concentrate on cutting back Suffolk government enough to eliminate the 1% temporary sales tax penalty. That means that they will have to cut up to \$140 million in expenditures. To do anything less is to signify

failure, and failure, a lot of congressmen found out, is rejection.

The legislature should rescind the pie-in-the-sky capital projects, particularly the expansion of the Suffolk County Community College. You don't build a Taj Mahal when your financial footings are so weak that this kind of additional expenditure could cause financial collapse.

Long Island's economy has not improved. We are still deep in the recession and there is a daily exodus of Suffolk County businesses and residents moving because they can't afford to live here any longer. Now is the time for bold new action, or at least come to grips with reality.

And why not?

Point of view:

Seek state reform

By Assemblyman James D. Conte
10th District

Dear Editor:

Now that the Republican-led Congress is set to institute a set of government reforms that will make Capitol Hill more efficient and accountable to the people, it's time the New York State Legislature follows suit by demanding reforms of its own.

Initiatives by Republicans in the House of Representatives to streamline government—beginning with an overhaul the House itself—are initiatives that have been echoed in the State Assembly for several years.

My Assembly Republican colleagues and I have sponsored measures that would open up the lawmaking process in Albany, making it more responsible to the concerns and interests of the people of New York. Some of the reforms we continue to support would allow voters to enact laws and amendments to the state Constitution through initiative and referendum and establish a Joint Budget Conference Committee to develop timely, compromised budget bills with

input of legislators from both parties and both houses and open these meetings to the public.

Others would provide for revenue consensus forecasting to speed adoption of the budget; eliminate unnecessary or duplicate committees, subcommittees and caucuses; require an itemized legislative budget to make the public fully aware of how the Legislature spends its annual allotment.

Governor-elect George Pataki has indicated that he will support these sweeping reforms as part of his agenda for change. Together, our plan would open up the lawmaking process and help avert budget delays we have been forced to endure year after year.

For the people of New York, reforms undertaken at the state Capitol would once and for all restore a true sense of responsibility and accountability to the actions of government. Passage of these measures should be the first order of business when the Legislature convenes in the new year.

Point of view:

Banks obeying consumer laws?

By Bernard E. Duhaime
President of the Suffolk County Life Underwriters Association

Dear Editor:

It seems a simple enough concept: If you sell insurance, you must obey state insurance laws. And yet, if the Comptroller of the Currency has his way, national banks that sell insurance in New York State won't have to comply with the same licensing and consumer protection requirements that insurance agents and companies must now meet.

Incredible as it seems, the Comptroller—who regulates national banks and has become one of the biggest cheerleaders of expanded banking powers—says that state insurance laws are pre-empted by federal banking law. Fact is, insurance is a state-regulated business.

The Comptroller's logic is akin to saying that doctors in private practice must be licensed by their state medical board before they can practice medicine; but if they work for a large, multi-state Health Maintenance Organization (HMO), they don't have to meet these same licensing requirements.

So unfair and anti-consumer is the Comptroller's position that U.S. Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) recently introduced legislation requiring that all national banks abide by state insurance regulations.

In his floor statement, Congressman Dingell said, "If you enter the insurance business, you must follow state insurance laws. These state laws are the minimums needed to ensure that consumers are protected and that those underwrit-

ing insurance are adequately and safely financed and invested."

Dingell, other members of Congress and consumer groups are also concerned about bank-sold financial products that aren't FDIC-insured.

Although savings accounts and certificates of deposit carry FDIC protection, other products, such as mutual funds and annuities, are not backed by the government. This is not always apparent to bank customers, who too often assume that if it's sold by a bank it must be FDIC-insured.

In fact, a study sponsored by the AARP and the North American Securities Administration Association found that the vast majority (86%) of bank customers didn't understand that annuities are not protected by FDIC.

And a recent investigation by the Senate Special Committee on Aging found that some banks engage in potentially deceptive sales practices by guiding customers toward the purchase of uninsured products that offer higher interest rates.

This pattern of confusion and misunderstanding about bank-sold products underscores the very real danger to consumers when banks enter other lines of business such as insurance. It also points to the wisdom of our nation's policy of separating commerce from banking.

For over a century, Congress has consistently voted to keep banks out of insurance and other risky ventures. Today, more than ever, we need to reaffirm this basic policy of separation—and make it clear that banks are subject to all applicable consumer laws.



A two-tier school system

Local school systems are facing financial collapse because of overspending and unfair, unworkable state aid formulas. The new administration of Governor George Pataki is under conflicting pressure to cut the cost of state government while increasing state aid to local school districts.

The quality of education throughout New York State has not improved in proportion to the investment made by the taxpayers. Real estate taxes to fund school operations now consume close to 70 cents of every real estate tax dollar collected.

Counties, towns and special districts operate on the other 30 cents, providing police, courts, recreation, senior citizen programs, welfare, roads and transportation. Something is wrong with this picture.

It's time for a radical change. It's time to realistically look at education, its value, its worth, and its fairness. The state reimburses most districts between 38% and 42% of its budget in state aid. The state mandates between 44% and 48% of the cost of education. This is beyond the control of the school boards. The state mandates must be offered by every district and cover the base core curriculum from kindergarten through 12th grade, which provides the opportunity for every student to obtain a Regents diploma. These are the true mandates that the school districts must provide under educational law.

The balance of the budget is comprised of electives chosen to be offered by the local school boards over and above the requirements of the state.

The curriculum may include such enhancements as four or five languages, advanced mathematics or science courses that go beyond state mandates and are similar to college level curriculum. It also could be curriculum covering sailboating on Great South Bay or wood carving of duck decoys. Once this curriculum is established by the school board, and offered as part of the educational package, how and under what circumstances the course is given falls under the mandates of the State Education Department.

When voters are asked to approve a school budget, they are not only being asked to approve the mandates by the state, but all the frills, extras and enhancements that have been built into the budget by the school board.

We advocate a two-tier system of education in New York. The first tier would be a statewide school system exclusively providing those items mandated by the state, covering the true mandates by the education department providing the curriculum that will give each child the opportunity to acquire a Regents diploma.

The state would run this segment of the educational program. They would own and maintain the school buildings; they would provide the administrative and educational staffs. These items would be funded by general taxes raised from throughout the state. The exact same curriculum would be offered in every district under the same circumstances, from Niagara to Montauk. Every child would receive the same quality of education.

The second tier of the system

would be controlled by local school boards. They would develop the extras, the frills that would be provided by the local taxpayers. These packages would be offered for voter approval on school budget day—the day that the taxpayers and the residents throughout the state select their members of the local boards of education and which programs they choose to support for the coming year. The voters would have the choice of selecting what they could afford and how much in taxes they are willing to pay for it.

Districts that are more sensitive to the additional requirements of children could vote the enhancements in. Districts more sensitive to the needs of the taxpayer could curtail the additional expenditures. It would be the people's choice and each side would have an opportunity to build the educational establishment it could afford.

This is a serious proposal, worthy of debate and it may be the answer to the educational problems here in New York.

And why not?

Dollars for talent

Pay for production

Sports fans are fed up. The professional baseball season was abruptly halted when the players struck and the team owners refused to capitulate.

The hockey season never got off the ground. The players and the owners could not agree on terms.

We are not a sports fan, so you could say we don't give a damn. But, millions of Americans are and, for that reason, we would like to see this sorry state of affairs come to a settlement. We do know that the players are well compensated. Million-dollar contracts are the norm. Team owners have a mini-monopoly. They may have competition from other sporting events,

even competition from within their own sport with minor league teams. We have often wondered why players and owners cannot come to an agreement on pay for production.

Under this plan, all players would receive a regular, guaranteed salary for the season. They would then be paid for their accomplishments and penalized for their flubs. Each segment of the game could be broken down on a point system, with weight being given for both the accomplishment and the support in making that accomplishment.

Using baseball as an example, a pitched strike might be worth 10 points. A pitched ball could cost the pitcher points. A batter would be penalized for strike balls he did not swing at, swings at pitches made but missed, and receive bonus points for swings that connected. The result of the hit could also be weighted, such as a home run, a single base hit, extra bases. Each player could have his own criteria for performance. The better the performance, the higher the bonus; the poorer the performance, the more the penalty. High priced talent would require quality performance. Since salaries are negotiated at contract time based on the performance of a player, why shouldn't the player be paid based on actual performance?

A system like this would encourage outstanding performance. It would add more excitement to the game, a whole new dimension as the fans calculate the earnings of their favorite players, play-by-play.

It seems ludicrous to us to see a sport come to a screeching halt because the players and the owners act like children who can't agree. Pay for performance would put pure capitalism into the game and reward quality rather than press agents.

Fans would quickly learn to identify with winners and with the cash register and bells going off during each play. Las Vegas-type excitement would be injected into the game.

And why not?

Freedom has its price

Restaurant owners have complained about the drop in customers since the first of the year. That's when those little signs went up saying that it is illegal to smoke in this establishment.

Former customers are reacting with their feet. They just will not eat there or at other establishments anymore. They are eating out in delis and fast-food restaurants rather than be encumbered, insulted by the health department.

To many people, an enjoyable meal is accompanied by a cigarette. In the past, smoking patrons might have been annoyed that they were banished to separate sections of a restaurant, often the least comfortable in the establishment, but, at least, they had their place.

One owner of an establishment that we patronized had set aside part of the restaurant for smoking. It was separated from the non-smoking section by a large vestibule, a bar and the kitchen. Both sides were well separated, but they were told this was not good enough. They had to have two completely separate ventilating systems. To meet this requirement, \$60,000 had to be invested. They could not afford it, nor can they afford the loss of patronage that has taken place. It is a Catch-22 situation that allows no winners.

One entrepreneur in the tourist

trade recently remarked he fears the impact on summer. He pondered what will be the reaction of people coming out here, dropping a grand for the weekend and being hassled when they light up? The Jersey shore, the Catskills and even Connecticut have as much to offer as we do and do not insult their guests.

Why does it have to be all or nothing? Couldn't an establishment announce that it is either smoking or

non-smoking and be allowed to operate? Patrons, according to their likes or dislikes, would make their decision in a free market society. If restaurants could have two completely separate dining areas, why should they be penalized?

Hasn't the Suffolk County Legislature once again gone too far without thought to the consequences? We think so.

And why not?

More bucks for Bill

Long Island's high cost of energy, which has driven businesses, jobs and people to other states, took another jolt last week with the news that Long Island Lighting Company (LILCO) Chairman William Catacosinos has received a generous New Year's gift from his board of directors: a 9.5% salary increase, \$55,000, boosting his annual salary to \$633,809.

Cries of outrage are beginning to be heard. The arrogance of the action, considering the desperate search for energy cost relief which includes calls for a takeover of the utility, the search for competitive power sources and the wheeling of power over LILCO's transmission lines, makes one point perfectly clear: as long as LILCO is the monopolistic source of our energy, the highest rates in the nation will continue to doom our economy.

For too long, politics has wrapped itself around this subject. Rhetoric simply

doesn't cut it anymore. Governor George Pataki must revamp the Public Service Commission (PSC). Last week he named Harold Jerry, who has been a PSC commissioner since 1973, as the acting PSC chairman. Bad choice. Jerry has been part and parcel of the skyrocketing LILCO rates. He has been part of the problem; he offers little hope for a solution. Pataki must do better, he must come up with a better choice.

When Catacosinos took over as LILCO chairman 10 years ago, his salary was \$220,000 a year. He has served his stockholders well, but has done so at the expense of the ratepayers and our area's economy. We can't afford him any longer, and we can't afford LILCO. The leaders of our governments must unite to eliminate this sickness from our area.

And why not?

Shoreham fallout gets worse

Former-Governor Mario Cuomo's administration crafted the deal that closed Shoreham as a nuclear power plant. The deal was categorized by the Wall Street Journal as the "sweetheart deal of the century." During the making of the deal, details were scarce. Cuomo and Company said, "Trust us."

In the height of last November's gubernatorial campaign, Cuomo an-

nounced that he was seriously looking at a Shoreham takeover of LILCO (Long Island Lighting Company), using the New York State Power Authority and the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA) in the takeover process. He tentatively floated an offer of \$21 a share for LILCO's stock, a premium of almost 40%.

During this uproar, a bit of information came out that shocked even us, one of LILCO's biggest critics. The

deal that Cuomo cut basically paid LILCO three times for the plant. They were given huge rate increases that we all believed would be used to pay down the debt that had been incurred in building the power plant. LILCO's huge debt is one of the key reasons the rates are as high as they are. Payment of interest on the debt is built directly into the rate base, and helps determine the cost of electricity.

LILCO has not used any of the windfall rate increases to pay down the Shoreham debt. Instead, they have taken these monies and used them to increase stock dividends in an attempt to raise the value of the stock. It appears that the deal never had a provision that mandated that the excessive rates charged by LILCO be used to reduce its debt. With oil prices and interest rates down, LILCO has enjoyed a windfall above that offered in the deal because that agreement offered no provisions for changing times or conditions. That windfall should have been used to ease rates. Instead, it served only to enrich LILCO even more than the generous Cuomo deal.

The deal supposedly guaranteed rate hikes for only a three-year period, to be followed by a plan or an outline of increases for the next seven years, based on the utility's financial need. The three years have come and gone, yet, the Public Service Commission (PSC) continues to mandate that the consumers pay LILCO unjustifiably high rates. Why hasn't the PSC compelled LILCO to use these funds from the excessive rates to pare down their debt? This was the reason for the high rates to begin with.

Pataki's challenge

Governor George Pataki can contribute a substantial portion of his overwhelming Long Island support to the anger voters felt against Cuomo because of the LILCO deal. Pataki should realize that his tenure in Albany can be short-lived if he does not find a solution to the LILCO problem.

We are not all that enthused about his appointment of a new chairman to the PSC. Instead of going out and finding someone who would have been consumer friendly, he chose PSC Commissioner Harold Jerry as acting chairman. This gentleman has been a PSC member since 1973. As a member of the PSC, he was part of the problem and we fail to see how he is going to be part of the solution.

The choice of the new head of the PSC is one of the most important appointments Pataki will make for Long Island. The chairman sets the tone for the operation of that regulatory agency, which is supposed to protect the consumers. For far too long, the PSC has fed the greed of LILCO. During the ill-advised Shoreham construction process, the PSC granted millions in construction funds which kept the project alive. In other states, such funds were not approved by the regulatory agencies. The Shoreham saga would have come to an end far sooner, and under different terms, had the PSC acted responsibly as did PSCs in other states.

Sins of the past

The state PSC played a large role in the creation of the infamous Cuomo deal, and bears a major responsibility for the impact it has had on ratepayers. Then, when conditions changed and LILCO was reaping a windfall because of lower oil prices and interest rates, the PSC did nothing. It could have—indeed should have—taken steps to ensure that profits over and above those included in the sweetheart Cuomo deal went back to the ratepayers in the form of reduced rates. They didn't. Instead, LILCO gained a windfall in excess of \$530 million.

Suffolk County Executive Robert Gaffney held a press conference in Mineola last week—in Mineola because the television networks wouldn't come to Suffolk County—to proposed LILCO cut dividends, its work force, and rates. That effort was nothing more than public relations, an effort to get some publicity. It's simple to tell others what to do, but Gaffney's words and proposal would have carried more weight if he had shown how he had accomplished the same for county government.

Begin the battle

It's time to end the rhetoric and begin the battle. It's time for Gaffney, and other elected leaders in Suffolk and Nassau counties to demand a meeting with Pataki to discuss this important issue. It's time to learn what Pataki has in mind about a plan for revamping the PSC and how he plans to make it consumer friendly, rather than utility friendly. The Cuomo deal must be revisited, revised, and killed if need be to bring relief to the problems we face because of the highest electric rates in the nation.

We wish Pataki well, the problems facing New York are enormous. LILCO is Long Island's Achilles heel, and it deserves to be a high priority of his administration. Local officials have a responsibility to their constituents to insure that it is.

And why not?

Who is being hit?

We were watching a news program and a Washington insider was saying, "We can't afford to take a \$900 billion hit." He was referring to a possible reduction in federal monies that would be brought about by the Republican Contract with America and the enactment of all 10 pledges.

Yes, \$900 billion is a lot of money. At first blush, we tended to agree with him, but then we realized that this was a 10-year impact, not a one-year deal. The \$900 billion number may or may not be accurate, probably skewed to make a case for his agenda. But what difference does it make? In reality, what he is talking about is not only the government being denied \$900 billion in tax revenues, but \$900 billion being left with their source, the taxpayers and citizens of the United States. Is that so bad? Why the hysteria?

Let your imagination run wild. What could the citizens, the businesses and the industries do with a \$900 billion windfall? Would they stuff the money in a mattress, or would they invest it and try to make it grow?

Would they spend it on a new home, new cars, new appliances?

Would people invest in new businesses to try to meet the demands of people with money? Would factories have to be built to manufacture products and the machinery that the economy is demanding to fill in needs created by the money?

Would millions of new jobs be developed offering opportunities for even the uneducated and unskilled to be able to find employment? Would jobs be waiting for immigrants who came to this country wanting to work? Wouldn't all of this economic expansion created by giving back tax money to taxpayers create new wages and jobs that would be taxed to create even more growth? Are we missing the point? Is growth bad? Is it wrong for the businesses and industries who make money, by working and investing, to keep more of it for themselves? Hey, this is America!

A \$900 billion hit or a \$900 billion opportunity to grow America? God, isn't it wonderful that people are looking at America as a glass half-full rather than as a glass half-empty?

And why not?

Chechnya and gun control

Chechnya, a breakaway republic in Russia, is fighting for its very life and existence. The war that everybody expected to be over in a matter of hours has dragged on for weeks. Russia has thrown the might of its armed forces, tanks, gunships, jets and regular army troops at the Chechen civilians. Russia has not been able to win.

There are only two explanations why. The Chechens are fighting on principle. They believe in what they are doing. They are willing to die for their beliefs. The soldiers of the Russian army don't know why they are there or why they are fighting their own people. Their hearts and spirit are not in this battle.

The second reason is one that all Americans should heed. The Chechen civilians have been able to hold out as long as they have because they possess guns. The citizens are armed and are able to protect themselves.

During the rancorous debate over gun control in the United States, people have been persistently saying the Constitution gives the citizens the right

to be armed, to have weapons capable of defending themselves from the criminal element and from the government itself.

It is unthinkable in the United States that citizens could rise up and be willing to die for their rights and their belief in the Constitution. We have the judicial system and a democratic form of government that allows us to petition our government.

Rest not on your laurels, for there are those in the United States government who do not think as we do. As painful as it is, look at the Waco extermination of United States citizens' lives. The Waco massacre was the killing of United States citizens by the United States government. Were those in the Waco compound a fanatical group? Probably. Were they armed? Undoubtedly, yes. Had they gone outside of the compound and attacked civilians or the government? Absolutely not. Did the United States government slaughter these individuals? No. Testimony is now coming out that they broke numerous rules and regulations,

laws, to make the end justify the means.

Can an argument be made that the citizens have a right to arm themselves against perpetrators, including the government? We think the Chechen example is proof that not only do we have a right, but we have a responsibility.

All those weapons that good citizens pictured as assault weapons are the exact same weapons the Chechens are using to fight for their freedom. What would our reaction be if whole areas of the country came under attack by our military forces, as is happening in Russia, and we did not have the ability to protect ourselves?

Don't get us wrong, we were among those who questioned the need for citizens to possess assault weapons. We thought it was overkill and there was little justification for citizens to own such weapons. But after Waco and Chechnya, we are rethinking our position.

And why not?



Is teacher tenure justified today?

One of the most emotional issues surrounding education is the antiquated tradition of tenure. Teachers of yesteryear were paid small salaries but had good benefits. One of the benefits was lifetime employment guaranteed by tenure.

Tenure is a system that gives permanent employment to teachers after three years of on-the-job evaluation, if they are considered qualified. It does not take into consideration changes that can take place in teachers that may weaken their ability to perform.

Sweet teachers may burn out or develop an indifferent attitude. They may become affected by alcohol or drugs. Teachers can become emotionally, physically or sexually abusive. The procedure for removing a teacher charged with incompetence or a violation of law is long and tedious. The procedure is expensive and it is often easier to shuffle the offender to other duties within the bureaucracy.

At one time, teachers feared for their positions and felt jeopardized if they opened their mouths and uttered statements that might not have been politically correct. Today teachers are protected by their unions. Their earlier fears might have been true then, and tenure was a small price to pay for the low wages the teachers received. Today's compensation for educators is extremely high. There are thousands of certified teachers without jobs who cannot find employment. The school systems are locked into mediocrity because they cannot change the staff because of tenure.

The Patchogue-Medford school board was taken over by citizens from outside the educational community. After a huge increase in school taxes, the citizens put in place a new board with a mandate to correct the imbalance between the cost of education and the ability of the residents to fund it.

The school board has begun to take a look at tenure. They have denied two teachers the lifetime contract of tenure. The educational establishment is up in arms. They do not want to give up this sacred privilege.

Assemblyman Paul Harenberg (D-Oakdale), a former teacher, who had always strongly supported tenure, said last year he was rethinking his position. He felt that all teachers should be reviewed every three to five years before their contracts were renewed. That's a common sense approach and it may be a middle ground that good teachers could subscribe to.

Most workers in the private sector do not have lifetime contracts. Their performance and their productivity comes under scrutiny during a regular review process. If they do their jobs well and the business is profitable, they rarely have to worry about being excessed. If the economy falters or

they do not keep up with technology, they may be in trouble. The incentive is there to be good, to grow and to progress. The incentive is there to be productive and help the organization to be profitable.

What incentive is there for teachers to be the best that they can be when their unions discourage outstanding performance, and by being just mediocre, can receive large increases in salary and benefits, granted by school boards that go along to get along?

While we think the Patchogue-Medford school board is correct, and courageous, for taking on this fight, we have strong reservations about the method they have chosen to make tenure an issue. While denying tenure to the two teachers, they have, at the same time, pronounced them to be qualified. This poses a serious legal problem which threatens to result in large legal bills, funds which should be put to use to improve the quality of education rather than float a trial balloon for a solution that must come from the legislative branch. An element of fairness must be implemented.

Despite a growing hue and cry for a change in the tenure system, our state legislators have done nothing. The reason is simple: the power of the teachers' unions have been brought to bear, and the politicians have bowed to the pressure. From the standpoint of the unions, the preservation of the tenure benefit takes precedence over the quality of education offered to students. That is wrong.

If the quality of education is the top priority, as it should be, all school board members, and Parent-Teacher Association members, parents, and everyone who is interested in good education, should combine forces to call attention to the need for tenure reform, and hold the politicians' feet to the fire until it comes. Board members from Patchogue-Medford, and other areas who have focused on the tenure problem, can provide the leadership to make it happen. It won't be easy and the lobbying efforts by the teachers' unions will be strong, but it's a goal worth fighting for.

And why not?

Did earthquake save L.I.?

Last Tuesday's earthquake in Kobe, Japan, could have a direct financial impact on Long Island.

Three firms are in a bidding war to build double-decker cars for the Long Island Rail Road. Mitsui, a Japanese-American firm was about to be awarded the \$180 million contract. They planned on building the cars in Yonkers, but most of the components for the cars would be manufactured in Japan and assembled here.

The American Coach and Car Company, another bidder, intended to build the cars at the Grumman/Calverton

plant. They would engage several hundred Long Island engineers, supervisors and workers from the area. Although they would not replace Grumman in size, the creation of these jobs would be very important to the economy.

It is now questionable whether Mitsui will be able to have the necessary parts made in Kobe. No one knows how long it will take to rebuild this city, its infrastructure and its factories.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), which owns the Long Island Rail Road, is reconsidering awarding the bid to Mitsui and may take

another look at American Coach and Car. We would hope when they do that they realize that by buying American, they are buying "right" and they can help end the shipment of American manufacturing jobs overseas.

If the MTA fails to take a good, second look at an American company, who wants to build in America, then the towns, county and the state should take a good hard look at not continuing the subsidization of the MTA through the taxes raised on the backs of American, taxpaying citizens, particularly those from Long Island and New York State.

And why not?

Elect LIPA trustees, don't appoint

The board of directors of the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA) was supposed to be elected within three years of its creation in 1985. Those elections are still to be held.

LIPA was the creation of frustrated citizens who felt they did not have the means to control the Long Island Lighting Company's (LILCO) incessant rate increases.

The idea for a public power agency exclusively serving Long Island was developed here at Suffolk Life. We had hosted a meeting for the leaders in the public power movement on the Island. The time was right. The management of LILCO had screwed up royally on the Shoreham fiasco, and again in dealing with Hurricane Gloria. They had let the electrical system deteriorate during the ill-fated Shoreham fiasco. Maintenance had been avoided and preventive maintenance ignored.

The Public Service Commission (PSC) had allowed electrical rates to increase and they were quickly bringing Long Island's cost of electricity close to the highest in the nation.

Leaders from both parties in the Assembly and the Senate worked together to pass the legislation creating the Long Island Power Authority. In the many meetings that were held, it was unanimously agreed to keep politics out of the

selection of board members, and in the election process.

The election date for LIPA board members was set originally for December and then moved to March. Representatives of both parties believed that this election, coming after the November balloting, would preclude the political parties from becoming involved or spending great sums of money on the election of the board members. The measure was passed in both the Senate and the Assembly.

Before the measure reached the governor's desk, he demanded changes, threatening to veto the legislation if the changes were not made. Cuomo didn't want the election to take place for three years. Cuomo wanted the sole authority to appoint the chairman. Cuomo wanted control over the majority of the board. To get the governor to sign the legislation, he got his way. LIPA was used as his private resource, as his toy. Cuomo used the mechanism of LIPA to close Shoreham and for his sweetheart deal with LILCO. The public was precluded from any meaningful representation in the governor's deal or on the board.

The Assembly and the Senate, although empowered, have done nothing to bring about the election of board members. In fact, they acted to stall the balloting. They were willing to go along to get

along. Some say it's a power trip, others claim the politicians are afraid LIPA trustees could become eventual challengers for their seats.

During the 1994 election, a prime mover of LIPA, Assemblyman Paul Harenberg (D-Oakdale), uttered his disgust with LIPA and the failure of the Assembly and the Senate to put maps in place for election districts and to push for the scheduling of elections of the board members.

Harenberg promised that, if re-elected, he would submit election district maps and legislation calling for the election of LIPA directors. His office is working in that direction, but the creation of the actual trustee districts is still stalled in bureaucracy, and politics.

LIPA, as it is structured, is not representative of the public. LIPA, as structured, is charged with being a counteroffensive to LILCO and has it within its prerogative to act on behalf of electrical consumers through intervention in rate cases and, if ultimately necessary to bring much needed rate relief, to take over any part of or the whole of LILCO, if it is to the public's benefit.

Cuomo proposed taking over LILCO during his bid for re-election. This was seen as purely political, an election ploy, particularly because he controlled both the New York State Power Authority and LIPA, as well as the Public Service Com-

mission. Cuomo's gone, Pataki is in charge.

As the law is currently written—the elections are to be held this coming November. If the politicians can stall the creation of the districts, that won't happen. Pataki should take a firm stand on this issue and ensure the elections are held. There are others who say that he should just appoint his own pawns. We know what a mistake it is to have appointed commissioners of the Public Service Commission. They ignore the consumer and have placed the consumer in a perilous financial position in their desire to protect the utility and Wall Street, who finances the utility.

The commissioners have no direct accountability to the voters. This is wrong. In most states, the public service commissioners are elected, not appointed. In these states, electrical rates are lower than Long Island's.

LIPA belongs to the people, not the politicians. The sooner we have elected representatives, and a new chairman, the quicker we may see rate relief. The confidence people have in Pataki is fading as he procrastinates, fails to step forward and take action. LIPA is his. Will he make it his toy or return it to the people through elected board members? Governor, Long Island is waiting, and watching.

And why not?