

Transferring the property tax burden

We have a moral obligation to help those less fortunate than ourselves. Everything, however, must be in relation to reality.

We are just coming off a round of battles over school budgets. What has emerged is a pattern fostered by the state, developed by schools boards, but with little awareness by the taxpayers. This has resulted in schools going way beyond offering a normal education.

The state has mandated that schools provide a variety of special education classes for handicapped and impaired. The cost of providing these classes is far more costly than the normal educational curriculum offered by the districts because of the required lower pupil to teacher ratio. The cost to the district of such programs is greater than the state aid provided, and thus is a cause of higher operational costs and increased tax load.

To provide educational opportunities for specialized education, without adequate funding by the state, which mandates the programs, impacts on the entire educational program.

And it never seems to stop. To further complicate this situation, the state has forced the county into pre-kindergarten programs addressing the needs of handicapped youngsters of pre-school ages. According to County Executive Patrick Halpin, during 1989 the county will spend \$70 million on such programs, almost five percent of the county budget.

While the state mandates without adequate funding to finance the full costs of the programs, expecting the county to pick up half the costs, the county is hampered in efforts to audit the programs to insure the taxpayers' dollars are being efficiently spent by the private suppliers who handle such programs. On the basis of investigations which were conducted, questionable expenditures and levels of administrative staffing have been uncovered and the district attorney has been asked to investigate further.

And now there is a bill in the state legislature that will expand the definition of "handicapped" to include children from broken marriages. If this is enacted, it can cause our real estate taxes to escalate even further.

It is one thing if the state recommends specialized educational programs, leaving the choice of implementation or not up to the school boards or county governments. It is a totally different story if the local boards are forced to offer these pre-educational opportunities without receiving 100 percent direct financing from the state.

Where the state is mandating special education for the impaired and the handicapped, it would seem appropriate for the state to set up individual regional schools that would be devoted 100 percent toward working

with these specialized needs. This would be more cost effective and productive for those in need. The schools should be funded totally by the state. If the state deems that this is improper, then they should provide to the school districts 100 percent of the cost for the education of these students.

Taxes on real estate have reached the level of confiscation. There is no room to add more burden. There is a crying humanistic need for reduction.

There is No Shouting

It might be said that as far as Shoreham goes, it's all over but the shouting. But we do not see any celebration in the streets nor smiles of accomplishment.

The citizens of Suffolk County took on not only the Long Island Lighting Company and the federal government, but the nuclear industry and their financial backers, who are the real power behind America. At the time this editorial was written, the Long Island Lighting Company's stockholders had just ratified the sweetheart deal negotiated by Governor Cuomo. That comes as no surprise, for in our way of calculating the deal, LILCO gets paid twice for the mistakes they have made. They have already been paid construction work in progress (CWIP) funds. They have been paid financial stability allowances which, in effect, were loans from the ratepayers to assist in the financing of the construction. These funds were supposed to be paid back after completion. The total of these items,

Point of View:

Malpractice in the schools

Editor's note: The quality and cost of education has been focused in the news in this year of a taxpayers' revolt. Lee A. Iacocca, chairman of the Board of the Chrysler Corporation, also targeted that subject in a speech earlier this year before the National Association of Manufacturers in Washington, D.C. Iacocca's full comments, entitled "What Does America Have to Do to Compete?" involved a number of subjects. That portion dealing with his thoughts on the quality of education follows:
By Lee A. Iacocca

The budget...trade...the tax code...all the rest of them--these are competitiveness problems we could solve, and solve fast, if we just had the political will to do it, and, of course, some coherent policies and good, dedicated people to carry them out.

But let me tell you about our biggest problem of all. And this one can't be solved overnight. It's going to take a long time, but I guarantee you, without solving it, forget ever being able to compete. (Nothing else will matter). What I'm referring to is the absolutely crummy job that we're doing in this country in education. We're just not giving our kids the tools they'll need to com-

We have numerous documentation from older folks attempting to live on fixed incomes, cutting back on nutritious food in an attempt to pay their tax bills.

We have documentation from middle-income homeowners who planned their personal budgets carefully, being forced to put their houses up for sale because they do not have enough income to pay the increased taxes. Young people are being forced to leave the area, their jobs, their ca-

reers and their families because they cannot afford the rents, and there is no hope of tax stability on real estate taxes in the future.

A solution must be found. Cooperation is needed between the state government and our local entities. The state cannot mandate programs, no matter how well intended, without providing the funding. Property owners just plain can't absorb any more. The end has come.

And why not?

with the prudence payments, amounts to well over \$300 million.

Under the Governor's deal, LILCO will be paid every cent it would have earned if the plant had been allowed to operate, plus they have been offered bonuses and tax writeoffs and other sweetheart provisions.

The chilling effect of the financial future of Long Island may be the reason for the silence. We voiced our concern when the deal was announced that the NRC was not a subscriber to the scenario. In effect, we, the ratepayers, have purchased Shoreham through the terms of the Cuomo deal. The company is in the process of receiving compensation for it, but Shoreham is still not dead. The Reagan administration, and now the Bush administration, subscribe to the theory of "nuclear power at all risk."

The Department of Energy has already gone on record as saying they will put up every roadblock they can find. They will use all the influence they can muster to prevent the license

for Shoreham being transferred from LILCO to LIPA, or any another state agency.

Shoreham may seem dead but, unfortunately, it is still cooking. It is radioactively alive, and the proponents of nuclear power, including business organizations on Long Island, are still scheming to find ways of totally activating it.

The battle over Shoreham has been one of the most frustrating experiences we have ever been involved in. For close to 20 years we have not only been an observer, and a reporter, but an activist in the pro-safety movement. We chose safety over profit. We preferred to err on the side of safety, rather than on the side of greed. We do not feel relief. We do not feel elation. Whether it be the financial consequences, our distrust of our government in Washington, today is not the day to celebrate. We'll wait until the plant is fully decommissioned, if that day ever comes, before we breathe any sigh of relief.

And why not?

pete, and we'll pay a stiff competitive price for that for a lot of years to come.

We're turning out high school graduates who will have a hard time even understanding the problems, let alone tackling them. Somebody did a study (oh, hell, we're always doing studies). Seventy-five percent of our high school students don't know what inflation is...66 percent don't know what profits are...and 55 percent don't have a clue as to what a government budget deficit is. (So the size has no meaning to them).

Hell, 600,000 of our graduates last year could barely read their diplomas. (I couldn't read mine either, but it was in Latin. Theirs were in English).

Sure, we have some great schools...and plenty of dedicated teachers. Many of our high school graduates are as well prepared as you'll find anywhere. But when you talk about competing as a nation, you compete on the basis of your averages. How does the average U.S. student stack up? That's what determines how competitive we'll be.

Well, ours are now dead last among industrialized countries in math and science. Is there any doubt that we'll fall flat on our faces trying to compete in a high-tech world when we're turning out students who are

dead last in math and science? And they're near the bottom in reading, too.

I'll bet you didn't know this--you and I and all the rest of American industry are spending more money teaching remedial math to our employees than all the grade schools, high schools and colleges in this country spend on math education--combined!

Hell, I'm in the business of building cars, not teaching remedial math!

We spend \$117 million a year at Chrysler on training, and almost 10 percent of it goes to teaching people the three R's they didn't learn in school.

At Motorola, they found that it costs \$200 to train an American worker in statistical process control. Teaching the same technique to a Japanese worker costs 47 cents. Basically, all they have to do over there is hand the guy a book. We can't do that here because there's a good chance our guy can't read it.

Functional illiteracy in Japan runs at about five percent. Here it's between 20 and 30 percent, depending on whose figures you use.

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July 4th: a celebration, not a war

We normally close our phone lines at 5:30 p.m. They ring, but are not picked up through the main switchboard. I was on my way out of the building about 7 p.m. last Wednesday when one of the lines continued to ring persistently. I picked it up. A woman on the other end announced that she was Anita Benson. She wanted to speak to me.

Anita Benson turned out to be the mother of the young man killed on July 4 in a north shore fireworks explosion. Her message was clear, it was simple. The Fourth of July should be a celebration, not a war.

Mrs. Benson is a 911 emergency operator with the Suffolk County Police. She was working the night that her son was tragically killed. She said from the time that she came on her shift the phones had been ringing off the hook with pleas from Suffolk County residents, pleading with the police to stop the barrage they were being subjected to. She said, "My son just celebrated his twentieth birthday last week. I will bury him on my birthday tomorrow because someone decided to be above the law and celebrate the birthday of our country by committing an illegal act. Parents must teach their kids that there is a world of difference between sparklers, Chinese firecrackers, bottle rockets and the dangerous big stuff they are selling to the unsuspecting public as fireworks. When you have fireworks that have the capability of killing people, sellers and pushers should be charged with committing felonies rather than misdemeanors, which allows them to get off with slaps on the wrist." She ended our conversation by saying, "Nothing can bring back my son. If I

can just warn other parents about the dangerous garbage they are selling on the streets today, my son's life may not have been given in vain."

Our heart goes out to Mrs. Benson as we send forth her message. Last night, I had trouble sleeping. Mrs. Benson's conversation haunted me. I remember back as a young man how I reenacted my youth through my children. I gave them sparklers and Chinese firecrackers. We set them off together. I told them of the more powerful stuff and stressed that this was for the pros. I kept thinking as I lay there awake, did I, as so many parents, do wrong?

Fireworks of all sizes are readily

available. It seems like just about everybody knows somebody who has access to them. Laws forbidding their sale are ignored. In our travels through southern states we noted that the regular retail stores in this region have eliminated the sale of what Mrs. Benson calls "the big stuff." They sell the small stuff that traditionally had been used for backyard displays. A clerk in one of the stores said, "there is enough in this stuff to have a celebration, but not enough explosives to severely hurt someone." Their legislature had debated a complete ban on fireworks, but faced the reality that some things cannot be totally legislated and decided to allow the so-

called "safe" fireworks to be sold, with some regulation, through licensed dealers. The wisdom of this action is, we're sure, a subject for much debate.

One thing is sure, however, fireworks of any description can be dangerous if used without precautions. Some of the fireworks today have reached the proportion that they can be construed as weapons or bombs. They must be stopped before any other tragedies occur. A young man's life has been snuffed out, his loved ones are left to suffer. It's time to get very serious about this very serious problem.

And why not?

Use Recycled Paper

Many New York newspapers have been on the leading edge of the environmental movement. They have advocated clean air, clean water and supported recycling programs. Unfortunately, they have not practiced what they have preached.

For almost 20 years, Suffolk Life Newspapers have been printed almost exclusively on recycled newsprint. In the early days there were problems with linting, web breaks and brightness. As technology has improved, most shortfalls that recycled newsprint had have been overcome, but not the prejudice towards it.

Many publishers have refused to use or consider using even a mix of virgin and recycled paper. They have advocated environmental concerns and conservation for everyone else, but not themselves. This "head in the sand" attitude is about to come back and bite them in their pocketbooks. Some states

have already passed legislation taxing virgin newsprint. New York is considering such legislation.

Printed material is one of the biggest components of our landfill problems from a volume standpoint. There currently are four major newsprint recyclers in the nation. They have the capacity to serve more of the market than they currently are doing. They have the capacity to recycle more newsprint than they are utilizing. They must have a market for the finished product, and that market is America's newspapers and commercial printing houses.

Garden State Paper, Suffolk Life's major supplier, recently announced their intention to build a new plant if the market warrants the investment. This plant would take thousands of tons of newsprint out of the waste stream, solving multiple problems. Acres of trees could be saved. Solid waste would be reduced, our balance of payments would

be reduced as the product is American-made and not imported from Canada or Finland. The runability of a recycled sheet from a printer's standpoint is excellent. The only drawback is the brightness of the sheet which, to the layman's eye, is not even detectable. See for yourself. This is recycled newsprint.

American publishers have a choice. They can voluntarily use recycled newsprint now, or wait for legislation to be passed that will impose a new and expensive cost of doing business to their bottom line.

We encourage our readers who read other newspapers to write to the editors and publishers of those newspapers, urging them to use recycled newsprint now. Let the publishers create the market for waste newsprint by purchasing totally recycled or a blend of recycled and virgin newsprint instead of pure virgin pulp. Everybody is a winner.

And why not?

Point of View

School mandates: the real story

By Senator Caesar Trunzo

School taxes are the largest part of your property tax bill, and they have been climbing out of sight. In most districts, school spending and school taxes increase every year, with no end in sight.

For years school district officials have defended their uncontrolled spending by claiming they have no choice, that 80 to 90 percent of the school budget is mandated by the state. That excuse is...well, let me be diplomatic: that excuse is "a convenient misstatement of the truth"—convenient for them, expensive for you. They avoid the blame; you pay the bill.

Here's the real story about state mandates: The New York State Board of Regents, which sets education policy in our state, requires all schools in New York to follow a basic curriculum: English, math, science, social studies, etc. Completing this course of study, from kindergarten to grade 12, allows students to receive their high school diplomas. These requirements are true unavoidable state mandates. School districts must provide these basic requirements. The cost of these mandates totals about 40 to 50 percent of the average school district budget. The state education aid I obtain for the school districts I represent is also roughly 40 to 50 percent of their budgets, depending

on the district—enough school aid to cover these "required" state mandates.

What about the other half of your school district's budget? Some of it is made up of electives that the school board had chosen to offer: extra courses and additional classes above and beyond what the Board of Regents requires. Some of these extras are worthwhile; many are not. Now here's the trick: the Regents requires that if a school district decides to offer these courses, then the district must follow certain mandates regarding instruction and cost. These can be called "voluntary" mandates. These mandates are required only if your school district chooses to add these programs. Adding these extra programs is completely up to the district, but since these programs carry mandates with them, the school district can get away with saying that almost all of the budget (both required and voluntary) is mandated by the state, while conveniently forgetting to mention that the school district itself is responsible for placing about half of these mandates in the budget. Most of these costs go to pay the salaries of teachers, administrators and other staff to provide these programs.

Let me emphasize again that these mandates are required only if your school district chooses to offer these programs in the first place.

The second half of the budget also includes funding for sports, extra transportation services, extracurricular activities, and other popular programs. If your school budget is defeated, it's these popular programs that the school district threatens to cut. This is cruel, because those who are most hurt by these cuts are the school children. There are many other areas where a school district can tighten its belt.

That's the real story on state mandates. Approximately half your school's budget is under the control of the school district itself. Your local board of education decides to add the extra programs (and the popular extras) and negotiates the contracts to pay teachers, administrators and staff. Most of these costs are paid by your property taxes. There is nothing wrong with the enhanced programs, and Long Island's high cost of living forces school districts to pay higher salaries for quality teachers. But school districts must realize that we can no longer afford all the extra luxuries.

Despite what anyone says, you have control over the amount of school taxes you pay. You vote for the members of your school district's board of education. You vote on your district's budget. If you do not vote in these elections or pay attention to the issues and candidates, you are letting them spend your money as they please.

Give LIPA back to the people

The Long Island Power Authority, created to explore the possibility of bringing public power to Long Island to ensure the continuance of sufficient and affordable electrical power, is undergoing a change. The change could be for the good of the public, or another example of Governor Cuomo's efforts to mold this agency to suit his own particular desires.

Two members of the authority's board, Chairman William Mack and Vincent Tese, have submitted their resignations. Both were originally appointed by Cuomo, and swiftly became known as members of the ranks of the Governor's Men. They, along with state Consumer Affairs head Richard Kessel and others placed by the governor on the LIPA board, formed a majority that catered to the governor's wishes. They were instrumental in thwarting any effort to move toward public power, and in approving the Cuomo deal with LILCO to take over the Shoreham facility.

Tese, in fact, was the chief negotiator for Cuomo in putting together the deal which will, if federal efforts to block the move fail, put ownership of the plant in the hands of LIPA. But the terms of that deal, in the form of financial giveaways to LILCO in future rate increases, tax write-offs and other incentives, will drive future electric rates to astronomical heights.

The future of LIPA now depends upon the selections Cuomo makes to replace Mack and Tese. If he goes the route he did before, and names people

who will do his bidding, LIPA will go down the same path. It will continue to be Cuomo's political plaything, to be used as he sees fit, when he sees fit.

Or, LIPA could become an entity working for the people's benefit, striving to bring under control the financial gifts the state Public Service Commission has continually given to LILCO and other utilities. LIPA could be the overseeing agency that would prevent LILCO from ever again becoming the arrogant monopolistic utility that cared little about its customers, driven by financial motives and little regard for the people it served.

For the longest time, when the state's PSC was giving LILCO financial stability adjustments, construction work in progress funds to keep building Shoreham, and rate increase after rate increase, Cuomo took no steps to replace Paul Gioia, the PSC chairman who worked as an ally with LILCO. He claimed there was no one qualified to name to the chairmanship. He was wrong. For a short period of time, during which the PSC truly represented the people, not the utilities, a Suffolk resident, Anne Mead, served as acting chairman. And she did a very good job.

Anne Mead would make an excellent replacement for Mack as LIPA chairman. She would bring to that post a willingness to serve the people, the experience of her service on the PSC, and knowledge that would help LIPA become a meaningful agency rather than a political entity.

Murray Barbash, who took on the Shoreham challenge and spent endless energy and countless hours to battle the threat it posed to the people of Long Island, would also make an excellent choice for the board. A successful businessman who was instrumental in bringing about the creation of the Fire Island National Seashore, a man with a tremendous amount of common sense and dedication to the future of Long Island, Barbash would serve the people, not future political ambitions.

Unfortunately, the choice is up to the governor. He stipulated the time

frame before the public would have the right to elect the board members. And efforts to move that election to an earlier date have gone nowhere. Thus, the governor, who originally wanted no part of the Long Island Power Authority, can continue to mold it to his desires. Or, he could give it back to the people it was designed to serve by naming new board members of the caliber of those mentioned here.

We think it's time the governor stops using LIPA for his own benefit, and gives it back to the people.

And why not?

Honor Volunteers

Several thousand Suffolk residents belong to volunteer fire and ambulance corps. These Suffolk citizens are what makes country living great. They put others before their own selfish needs. They have a sense of community. They realize that by banding together and putting hundreds of hours into schooling and training, they can help protect the lives and the safety of others in their community. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, they are on call. They are ready, willing and able to serve.

Once a year these volunteer departments conduct fund-raising drives. They ask their friends and their neighbors and the community they serve to contribute. The drives take place in the form of direct mail solicitation, home-to-home walking tours, carnivals, cook-outs and raffles.

Whatever form of fund-raising your volunteer fire department and

ambulance corps chooses, we encourage you to support their efforts. If they are running functions, attend them. Tell the men and women that you appreciate their efforts, and dig deep to show it. If you are not sure of the type of fund-raising drive your local fire department or ambulance corps is running, sit down and write out a check. Send it to them with a note of appreciation whether you have needed their services in the past or not. You may need them in the future.

The difference between your life and your death can well be your neighbor's response. These people are volunteers, they do not ask anything in return for their services, but they sure do appreciate it when the community turns out with a roar and says, "Hey guys! we love you and here is a contribution to help show you that we care."

And why not?

Point of View

Take a stand for quality television

By S. Dorothy Sconzo, O.P.

"God is all-knowing and all-powerful...God is always with us because He is everywhere. He is a spirit, not a body...He works in mysterious ways." This also describes electronic media, the second god, which man has created." So begins a book by Tony Schwartz, entitled "Media the Second God."

I've been wondering if we've allowed electronic media, specifically television, to become an even more powerful force in our lives than our traditional, religious god. We are quick to assume that viewers perceive television only as a form of entertainment, not actually relevant to family life and values. I wonder. Millions of dollars are spent by business advertisers each year, who seem to feel they can influence our buying habits and our very lifestyle through the medium of television. Can all these sponsors be wrong?

As human beings, we are continually learning from our environment; and whether we acknowledge it or not, TV is a major factor; like God, it is always with us. What are we learning? Is "Roseanne" teaching us dignity and respect for each other? Is "Wiseguy" increasing our appreciation of human life? It is very common for children, especially in the summer, to spend five hours a day in front of a TV set (according to Dr. J. L. Singer, Yale University). Quality conversation with parents, during the course of the day, seldom

surpasses fifteen minutes. Does "Don't tease your sister," and "Do I have to?" sound all too familiar?

This god we've created and welcomed into the heart-center of our homes is controlled and regulated primarily by three major networks. Through a system of measurement known as the Nielsen ratings, CBS, ABC and NBC dictate to us what we will view or what we will not. The Nielsen people have been mentioned by the press lately, due to a new gadget that will actually allow them to watch us as we watch TV. Right now, there are 4,000 Nielsen meters in homes around the country, supposedly representing 90 million U.S. households with TV sets. These are homes where television is in operation a great deal of the time; in other words, indiscriminate viewers who watch whatever happens to be aired.

Viewers for Quality Television is a grassroots organization intent on supporting programs of value. In its latest newsletter, VQT quotes Terry Sison, a Nielsen representative, as saying, "The Nielsen rating is a statistical estimate...it has nothing to do with quality." Yet, sponsors determine the amount of money a network receives by its programs' ratings. So it seems unlike our traditional God, this god is a mercenary one.

A case in point is "Beauty and the Beast," the most highly honored CBS show on the air. "Murder She Wrote," the only other CBS program that surpassed it, is in an 8 p.m. time slot. The "Beauty and the Beast" video had long ago

sold over 100,000 cassettes, and the album more than 125,000 copies in its first two weeks on the market. Last August, the series won 12 Emmy nominations. Ron Feriman had earned other awards as best actor of the year for his sensitive and moving portrayal of Vincent. In fact, VQT not only proclaimed Feriman "Best Actor," they nominated "Beauty and the Beast" as one of the highest quality shows in 1989.

This May, CBS reacted in a manner befitting the lowest-rated major network: they cancelled the show. Within 12 hours its devoted audience sent 2,900 telegrams to CBS in New York, closing the Western Union office there. To save face, CBS then announced they would bring "B&B" back as a "mid-season replacement," after it has been "retooled." What CBS is actually saying is, the ratings of the show are low, so maybe if we make it look more like the "Incredible Hulk," or "Cops 'n Robbers," the numbers will improve.

I am not as angry at CBS as I may sound. I am actually grateful to the network for giving us an extraordinary program that's forced its viewers to use their minds, as well as their hearts. And if they can return it to us by January without sacrificing its integrity, its intelligent use of literature, music and sublime acting, I will be the first to sing CBS' praises.

If you would like to take a stand for quality TV and "Beauty and the Beast," write: CBS Programming, 51 West 52nd Street, New York, NY 10019; Viewers for Quality TV, P.O. Box 195, Fairfax Station, VA 22039.

Who Is Getting Rich on land buys?

Suffolk County and the Suffolk County Water Authority have been on a buying binge with your money. The zealous environmentalists have been purchasing land at an alarming rate. The funding for this, in the case of the county, comes out of sales taxes that we overwhelmingly agreed to pay for the preservation of our water. In the case of the water authority, it is coming from increased rates on water charged by the water authority.

In concept, we agree that productive watersheds should be preserved. We question, however, the methods being used by the county and the water authority. Both claim that every piece is highly sensitive, is vitally critical, but neither they nor the environmentalists who support their efforts, offer any substantiation of their statements. There is no list of priori-

ties as to what land is the most valuable to preserve our water. To our knowledge, there is no master plan that either the county or the Suffolk County Water Authority is following. It seems to be catch as catch can. That's no way to spend millions of our dollars.

We would think, if our goal is pure water, the most desired pieces of land would be prioritized and these lands would be purchased first. Less desirable but still important parcels would be purchased at a later date if there is money available.

Joseph Caputo, comptroller of Suffolk County, issued a report questioning not only the amounts that we are paying, but the methods of acquisition. His report indicates that owners had been paid several million dollars more than the lands have been appraised for. In some cases, such as

the Havens estate, which was recently purchased, the public acquisition could have been limited to a fraction of the property, allowing the balance to remain on the tax rolls. Instead, the county purchased not only environmentally sensitive land, but additional land for which there is no absolute justification for water preservation. The same type of scenario is being considered for the Hampton Hills property.

Suffolk County has for years suffered from land scandals. Our current system of acquisition could lead to further scandals in the future.

For a number of years, Suffolk Life has demanded that the true owners of the land be revealed. Although the county executive recently proposed full disclosure, the legislature has yet to act on that proposal. Who is getting rich? That information is hidden behind corporate shells and, if

revealed, might make the best seller list of the heavy political contributors.

Laws must be developed that provide for full disclosure. As Caputo indicates, a system of checks and balances must be developed that absolutely guarantees that the taxpayers are paying no more for the land than is absolutely necessary. Of equal importance is the need for a complete list of all lands considered for acquisition, and the value of these lands based on hydrological studies, not mere opinion by the environmentalists.

There is a bottom to the barrel that taxpayers are willing to fund even for pure water. They should be getting top value for their hard earned dollars. And should be guaranteed that the land is vital for water preservation.

And why not?

Water Authority Restructuring needed

The Association for a Better Long Island, in cooperation with Assemblyman John Cochrane, has vowed to hold public hearings on the possibility of a major restructuring of the Suffolk County Water Authority. The ABLI cites a recent 50 percent increase as the motivation for the actions. The proposal has much merit for many more reasons than the recent water rate hike.

The Suffolk County Water Authority is an entity all to itself. It is untouchable, governed only by its board of directors, answerable to no one. When it wants to charge higher rates for water, deserved or not, it can simply come up with the desired rate increase, hold public hearings, and then decide the issue all by itself. There is no other recourse, such as the state Public Service Commission, which governs the operations of the private water companies. The Suffolk County Water Authority has the ultimate say, it is the prosecutor, the judge, the jury, the whole works.

Suffolk County legislators pride themselves on having made major revisions in the water authority, in fact, brag that this restructuring is one of the legislature's major accomplishments. With everything that's been happening as a result of the new regime at the Water Authority, the legislators' lack of shame for having wrought this upon the residents of Suffolk County is appalling.

The rate increase impact upon the users is just one part of the overall picture. Water Authority officials have also eliminated a large user discount that will have another impact in the tax rates for county, town, and school district budgets. And where is all this money going? Well, the Authority, for one thing, is now involved in spending millions of dollars for the purchase of land "to protect and preserve the water supply." Despite the fact that the county is involved in its own land preservation program, for the same "protect and preserve" reasons, and future Water Authority wells could be placed on the land the county buys to protect water, Water Authority

officials insist only they can be counted upon to do the right thing.

This is the same Water Authority whose chairman, Leon Campo, used his Authority car to take a woman friend to the home of her husband, from whom she is separated, and became embroiled in an altercation that has resulted in charges against Campo and his lady friend. He used the Authority phone in his Authority car to call police after the altercation started. And then he used Water Authority stationery, equipment and employee to prepare a press release to give his side of that altercation. Had this been a county official, the use of the car alone, after hours and for a private use, would have been subject for action. But Campo answers to no one.

Who audits the bills? Who goes over the expense accounts, the bills from restaurants, for travel? All of these

expenses wind up as operating costs for the Authority, which goes into the creation of the rate structure. But Campo and the Water Authority answer to no one.

Cochrane, who also happens to be Suffolk County Republican leader, and is promising to hold public hearings on the proposed restructuring, noted, "My constituents have already suffered enough from the rapid increases of taxes on the local level. To have them subjected to a sneaky increase like this just so the Authority can build its surplus is unacceptable." Cochrane noted that the "state legislature can restructure the entire authority if it sees fit, and, in light of these rate increases, that's probably what is required." It's not only required. It's imperative!

There's something else required as well. The Republican leader should sit

down with the Republican legislators who created the new regime and lay down some laws. "You people are responsible because you put Campo and his new crew there," he should tell the legislators. "You had better set these people straight. Establish an auditing procedure to ensure they are not ripping off the people. You created the problem, now you share in the blame." And because he is the leader, he shares in the blame as well.

While the new regime at the Water Authority answers to no one, the legislators do, and so does Cochrane. They answer to the voters. And the voters should raise Cain at the polls to bring this runaway authority into line. Those who are proud of what they have created should be turned out of office, replaced by others who would not politicize such an important operation.

And why not?

Point of view

Is county overpaying for land?

By Joseph R. Caputo
Suffolk County Comptroller

The reason I am bringing the audit of the Open Space Program to the attention of the media and public is because, despite the recommendations that we made within the audit report, the contention that was created with the Real Estate Department and the "theoretical" support we received from the County Executive's office, everyone, unfortunately, is still out there with a blank check and buying up property for more than what it was previously appraised for.

One case in point. I was reported the early part of this week that Terrells River or Havens Estate sold for \$2,500,000 to H.K. Associates. That area, in the Town of Brookhaven, was encumbered by the county valued at \$10,025,000 back on February 16, 1988. The spokesman for the entity who sold the property to the county agreed that there is a depressed market and they were willing to accept a lower amount of money at this time in selling off the property. I ask, if we have a depressed market, why has the county paid almost \$2,500,000 more than the 1988 appraisal? I believe the county has erred in going ahead and buying this property because the property previously had duck

farms and ponds, and the duck droppings contaminated the bay and polluted this area in the past. The builders had been willing to develop the land away from the bay with a cluster zoning type development, which would have protected most of the bay and allowed the bay to reconstitute itself over the years naturally.

Now to the audit report. We found that the system used to generate information upon which the purchase price of a parcel of land is based requires stronger controls. We analyzed prices paid for parcels acquired from November, 1986, through November, 1988, for which independent appraisal documentation was adequate. These parcels were acquired at a cost of approximately \$15 million. However, the high range of value determined by the independent appraisers for the same parcels totaled \$2,500,000 less, or \$12,500,000. Therefore, the county paid approximately 20 percent more than the high range value determined by our independent appraisers.

Further, we cannot analyze prices paid for other parcels that were acquired at a cost of approximately \$9 million because the independent appraisal documentation was inadequate. We also found several instances

where the Real Estate Department acquired parcels at prices in excess of appraisals without adequately documenting justification.

[INLET POND] - This two-acre parcel was valued between \$88,000 and \$93,000. One week later, Real Estate's review appraiser valued the property at \$140,000, citing "inadequate comparables and appraisal techniques." The parcel was acquired by the county for \$140,000.

[SAN SOUCI LAKE AREA] - The county did not receive good value in the appraisal reports submitted by the independent appraiser. The reports were insufficient in execution and credibility. We found incorrect sales history, the listed reputed owner had sold the property 12 months prior to the appraisal report. The subject's acreage was misstated. Old comparables were used. The appraisal included a calculation error in the time adjustment. The report included typographical transposition errors. The appraiser stated a value of \$20,000 per acre on March 14, 1986, but on October 1, 1986, stated that the per acre value was now \$42,500 to \$44,000. In fact, this property was purchased and the deal was closed on November 28, 1986, at a cost of \$925,000. When we factor

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