

Protecting Our Interests

It was recently announced that federal prosecutors are investigating Manhattan Surrogate Marie Lambert, who, it is alleged, inappropriately assigned cases to favored lawyers and allowed fees running up to \$1 million. Other improprieties have also been charged.

On June 12, the New York Law Journal published a front page article on Suffolk's Chief Surrogate, Ernest Signorelli. Signorelli made headlines by cutting, by more than a half-million dollars, the fees charged by a lawyer. The estate involved was a large one, \$46 million. It was a simple case

to handle, however, because the deceased, a 98-year-old woman, left the entire estate to the American Cancer Society and Memorial Hospital for Cancer and Allied Diseases in New York. There were no heirs to fight over the distribution, or to contest the will. There were no tax matters that required extensive litigation or the testimony of experts. The attorney for the law firm not only billed the estate for legal fees, but also as an executor, even though the bank was also an executor, which doubled the commission.

Judge Signorelli cut the fees as he

objected to a percentage being taken from the estate regardless of the value of the estate. He said, "Fees often bear no relation to the actual work performed." Signorelli, in his opinion, concluded that since there were no complex legal issues or litigation involved, the fee charged was excessive. He also disallowed several charges by the attorney on the grounds that many of these services had been performed by others, and were merely reviewed by the law firm. The law firm has engaged other high powered legal firms to appeal Judge Signorelli's ruling.

We have heard that the big firms

in New York are very upset with Signorelli, and are pulling out all the stops to prevent him from protecting the public which he was elected to serve. The probate of wills is a very lucrative business for attorneys. Although a will may be the most important document we will sign, few of us give much thought to it because it forces us to face the reality of death. Once we have gotten past assigning benefits to those we deem worthy, we leave the rest up to attorneys.

We generally have an attorney we trust, sometimes blindly, and that's a big mistake. It's a common practice for attorneys to suggest, directly or indirectly, that they be named the executor. This, on its face, is double dipping, for the attorney probating the estate will receive a fee for legal services. As an executor, the attorney can receive up to five percent of the value of the estate for the fiduciary responsibility in seeing that the estate is settled properly. It's not unheard of for attorneys also to be the beneficiary of the estate.

Signorelli has issued an edict from his bench that has further upset the attorneys. He insists that all wills that come before his court authored by an attorney, who has also been named as executor, that an accompanying document be presented, signed by the deceased, asserting that the attorney has spelled out the fees and commissions he or she will receive as the executor.

Attorneys are upset because they don't like being placed in a position of having a client realize by how much their estate can be reduced, and not be able to have anything to say about it.

Suffolk County is very fortunate to have a surrogate who takes his obligations as a protector of the public seriously. He has subjected himself to severe criticism by his peers for trying to administrate the law in a fair, honest and ethical manner.

Our appreciation to you, Judge Signorelli.

And why not?

Pure fiscal Insanity

The residents of Suffolk County voted to dedicate one-quarter percent of sales tax revenues to the preservation and acquisition of land. The proposition we voted for was to be a "tax and buy as you go program." As the sales taxes were accumulated, we would purchase lands.

County Executive Patrick Halpin put forth a proposal to borrow \$100 million to purchase lands during 1991. This borrowing is against future sales taxes which still have to be collected. The cost of this maneuver will be at least an additional \$40 million in interest costs. This money will go to investors instead of towards the purchase of environmentally sensitive land. A great day for Wall Street, a bad day for Suffolk taxpayers. This is pure fiscal and environmental insanity, paralleled only by the purchase of the Hampton Hills property which we could have had free of charge.

The county legislature voted to kill this proposal, but Halpin then vetoed that action. In a special legislative

session last week, the legislators failed to override that veto, and the interest give-away is now in effect. The vote came down to party lines, with two exceptions. Six Democrats wanted to squander the money on interest, but Democrat Steve Levy, who has shown fiscal common sense in the past, voted to override the veto. The Republicans wanted to buy the land as they went. But Fred Thiele of Sag Harbor, a Republican, jumped from the Republican ship and joined the Democrats. The override vote was 11 to 7, but since 12 votes were needed the effort failed.

It is interesting to note that Thiele was just recently nominated as the Republican candidate for congress to oppose George Hockbrueckner. Mr. Thiele may have made the Democrats happy by his vote last week, but by his actions he gave up one very important campaign issue he might have had against Hockbrueckner, fiscal integrity. He can explain all he wants, but the fact of the matter is he has proved

he does not understand the cost of interest, and that borrowing reduces your purchasing power.

To further complicate this political insanity, we still are waiting for, as we have been for the last five years, a priority list based upon hydrological and scientific studies that would indicate which lands are the most important to preserve.

We have been buying a ton of land in Suffolk County, some valuable for conservation and water purposes, some very valuable to the adjacent land owners who end up with a preserve in their backyard.

Folks, this is our money they are spending, squandering. They are not spending current dollars; they are mortgaging our children's ability to remain here in Suffolk County. Many in the current crop of legislators are proving to be as much of a disservice to the public as their predecessors, and give added emphasis for the elimination of this out-of-control body of government.

And why not?

Point of view

Very proud moment in Suffolk history

By Lou Grasso

The lengthy controversy over the Shoreham nuclear power plant moved one step closer to its final conclusion last week with the filing of a formal application for a transfer of the operating license from Long Island Lighting Co. to the Long Island Power Authority.

Legislation creating the authority specifically restricts its operation of Shoreham as a nuclear facility, thus the nuclear issue would finally be over upon Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) approval of the application.

Although the final action is in the hands of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, last week's action marked a very proud moment in history for the people, the realization of a dream that not many ever thought could possibly be realized. And there was ample reason for the pessimism. The battle over Shoreham contained many moments of joy, and many of despair.

Despite the fact the majority of people on Long Island opposed the operation of the plant, the nuclear industry appeared to have a good friend in the regulatory process. A

decision which gave the appearance the people were winning, was closely followed by another which favored LILCO in its quest to operate the plant.

Staunch anti-nuclear and anti-Shoreham forces grew, particularly following the Three Mile Island accident. Two particular events fanned the fires of opposition. First, LILCO began installing evacuation sirens throughout the evacuation zone. The sight of warning devices, and the realization they may one day go off and force the public from their homes, not knowing when, or if, they could return, brought forth a flood of anger from the public. The sirens were the first visual signs of evidence that disaster could lie ahead.

And the TMI accident, which nuclear "experts" said would never happen, reinforced that concern. Later, the Chernobyl catastrophe in Russia provided chilling evidence about the impact a nuclear accident can produce. The devastation of that area, with the forced evacuation, which continues even today, of people from their homes, and a growing health impact, brought renewed realization of the real threat Shoreham could one day pose.

Another important happening: Governor Mario Cuomo created a Shoreham Commission. Initially, the majority of

the appointed members of the commission leaned toward the operation of Shoreham.

Following hours upon hours of hearings, written and vocal testimony, and scientific and financial reports, a straw poll of commission members indicated the majority believed Shoreham should not open. Its final report, not intended to reach a final decision on the matter, contained viewpoints by various members, several in favor of the plant, others in strong opposition.

A section of the report submitted by commission members Dave Willmott and Marge Harrison included a review of the WASH 740 Report, which detailed staggering statistics about the potential impact of a core meltdown at Shoreham. The report noted: "The statistics generated for a worst-case Shoreham accident specifically are as follows: early deaths, 40,000; injuries, 75,000; latent cancer deaths, 35,000; fatal radius, 17.5 miles in Suffolk County, including part of the state of Connecticut; peak injury radius, 50 miles, including Suffolk, eastern Nassau County, portions of the state of Connecticut; property damage, \$157 billion, calculated in 1982 dollars."

The Cuomo Commission Report found itself in the
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Let's have some truth in politics

We have received several calls from readers who recently followed our advice to call Senator Owen Johnson (R-West Babylon) to voice concern about a bill he sponsored in the senate which would give the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) broad powers to regulate marine fisheries. They were told, they said, by Johnson staff members that the editorial that raised concerns about this action was in error, that the bill was killed in committee "in March." One staffer told one caller, "Willmott is off the wall" on the matter.

The Johnson staff has asked for the names and addresses of those who

called because, one caller was told the senator is putting out a mailing on the subject. Hopefully the mailing will contain a whole lot more truth than Johnson's office has offered thus far.

If, we wondered during a recent call to that office, the bill "died in committee in March," why is it that a Minority Staff Legal Office memorandum on the proposed legislation, which was requested by the DEC, was dated June 15, 1990? Why is it the assembly bill was dated June 4?

Here's the truth: The bill is still alive, although it did not reach the assembly or senate floor for a full vote. It was in the senate's Environmental Committee, chaired by

Johnson, and was passed along to the Rules Committee.

According to Johnson, the proposal "died when we left Albany" at the end of the recently ended session. The bill will be alive until December 31, he said, but since the legislature is not expected to go back in session this year, it is effectively dead, he claimed.

We have heard from other sources, and Johnson conceded, the bill was being pushed by the Conservation Committee staff, which "works closely with their (DEC) staff." Johnson said he had "no intention of moving that bill." The primary reason he sponsored the bill, he said, was to be able to control its future. His participation was intended more to keep the lines of communication open with the DEC, he said, "so when calls come he (DEC Commissioner Thomas Jorling) talks to us."

Albany may well operate in that fashion, but we much prefer a more direct, more truthful stance. Political give and take may have some merit in some instances, but one would have to live in a vacuum not to know the DEC doesn't give, it just takes, in its regulatory activities. Talk to town and county officials who have run afoul of DEC edicts. Virtually every town official has at one time or another complained that the DEC is arrogant, obstinate and uncompromising in its actions.

The current garbage crisis is a prime example. Towns are being pushed into spending millions of dollars to put incinerators on line, composting in place, liners under landfills and when they don't do the job, caps on top. Their standard line is, "You will have the kind of facility that we want in place when we want it or you will have to truck your garbage off the island." At what cost? The DEC

doesn't really care. But you, the taxpayers who have to foot the entire bill, should. The costs for this uncompromising stance is going to take a bigger chunk of your future dollars than you can now imagine.

No, we don't think bills should be put forth to placate the desires of the DEC, or to keep the lines of communication open. Senator Johnson was elected by the people of his senatorial district to represent their best interests, not those of the DEC. We would much prefer that Johnson tell them: "I will do nothing to help you enhance your powers until you act properly with the powers you already have." Surely Johnson knows the problems local officials have had with that agency, and if he doesn't he should. His own constituents will feel the brunt of future garbage costs because of the DEC's arbitrary decisions.

The chairmanship of the senate Environmental Committee is a powerful position with the ability to resolve problems. Since the DEC runs to that committee to get the budget dollars, powers, and other goodies it wants, the chairman should be in a position to issue a few demands of his own. For example: A letter to the commissioner of the DEC, demanding his presence here at a meeting of all town and county officials, to detail all the problems that exist and ways these problems can be resolved. Once and for all, clear guidelines as to what happens when the landfill ban goes into place; what is acceptable, what isn't. A full scale public hearing in order to clear the air.

And certainly when a bill of this magnitude, one that would give the DEC broad regulatory powers over marine fisheries, is proposed, it should be subjected to local hearings so that everyone has an opportunity for input before it begins its lobby-fueled journey through the Albany legislative process.

The DEC is, you may remember, the same agency that closed vast acreages of shellfish lands not because the waters were polluted, but because the DEC "doesn't have enough manpower to test the waters." The DEC had no concerns about putting baymen out of business. It was more concerned about getting the funds for an environmental camp for youth and a ranger station/environmental center at the Oak Brush Plains State Preserve. The state budget, which imposed numerous new taxes because of a state fiscal deficit, managed to include funds for those DEC proposals. Why not use those dollars to add the staff necessary to test the waters, to protect the public, to determine what areas are polluted and those that are not?

We're waiting to get the letter we were promised to clarify the status of the marine fisheries bill we cautioned our readers about. It should be interesting to see if that letter contains some truth, or just more of the "off the wall" rhetoric Johnson's staff members have been dishing out.

And why not?

Caution is urged!

New disease hits

Dr. Bernard Berger, a noted dermatologist and leading authority on Lyme disease, has revealed a new disease that is sweeping the Hamptons. It's called "invisibleitis."

He has had a number of patients who claim they must be invisible. Their presence cannot be seen, heard or felt, particularly when they are in an automobile smaller than a Sherman tank.

Berger said he has experienced this phenomenon himself. It has become particularly severe since Memorial Day. He noted that on a number of occasions he has been driving along when cars just swerved in front of him as if he wasn't there. He made note of one driver who blew through a red light, missing him by inches. He said,

"I'm sure the driver could not see or sense my presence; why else would they take such a chance of causing an accident or being a victim."

Berger stated he is not sure whether eastern Long Islanders are invisible to the visitors or the visitors are suffering a post-city syndrome and they are not accustomed to having open space, relaxation and providing normal courtesies most East Enders take for granted.

Berger's prescription is to slow down, treat your fellow driver as you would like to be treated yourself. He added the year-rounders should take extra precautions and drive like an accident is waiting to happen.

And why not?

Splitting a community apart

The Lindenhurst school district, like many others, has faced the wrath of the taxpayers. They have had budgets turned down. They have had to corral runaway expenses.

In recent voting, three members of the school board were replaced. Their replacements were pledged to offer a balance between the quest for a quality education, and the inability of the taxpayers to shoulder the burden of increased taxes. The victors are to take office July 1.

The members who were departing, and the remaining members of the school board, have now signed an unprecedented four year contract with the teachers. This contract is a pure give away. It calls for increases of 6.5 percent, 6.5 percent, 7 percent and a still undetermined amount in the fourth year. These increases are in addition to step raises of 1.5 percent which the teachers get every year. The

cummulative total of the contract will be approximately a 40 percent increase over the next four years. The average teacher will go from \$49,000 to \$75,000.

The voters in Lindenhurst had spoken. They were dissatisfied with the board and had replaced those with whom were dissatisfied. They elected people they believe would give them representation. The signing of this contract at the last meeting, before the new board members were to be seated, is absolutely unethical, it's immoral and it is a living testament to the lack of character of those who took part.

The teachers may be gloating that they pulled a fast one on the taxpayers, but we fear they may be the ones, along with the children, who will end up getting the short end of the stick. The residents just can't afford increases beyond inflation. Current taxes have broken their backs.

The new board will have to cut.

These cuts will cause layoffs. To bring the budget back into balance, as many as 140 out of the 450 may well have to be eliminated. The ones that are going to be hurt are the children.

We have heard a lot of emotionalism directed at Tax PAC and other groups that have been pleading for reasonableness and responsibility from school boards and the administrators. They have been labeled anti-education. Moves like this should dispel those statements. There is nothing more anti-education than increasing the costs beyond what can be funded by the taxpayers, expenditures which, by their own weight, will mandate a cutback in the entire school operation.

We have seen many low-life situations in politics, but none that quite reached the gutter as this one. Those who participated may have snuck one over on the electorate, but they should hang their heads in shame.

And why not?

Was justice really served?

Most of us have a simplistic view of justice. It's based on honesty, right, wrong and fairness. According to the daily newspapers, they held a celebration in the executive suite of LILCO when it was announced that the Appeals Court had upheld Judge Weinstein's ruling on the LILCO racketeering suit.

This suit, brought by Suffolk

County, contended that LILCO, through deliberate lies, deception and fraud had gained illegal rate increases that led to LILCO ratepayers being overcharged systematically for power. The suit was brought under Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) statutes which were intended for the prosecution of organized crime.

The jury was impaneled, the case

was heard, LILCO was found guilty. LILCO faced billions of dollars in damages, damages that probably would have bankrupted the company.

In a very strange and unusual move, Weinstein announced that he was overturning the jury's verdict. After the fact, he decided that the RICO provisions could not be applied to a utility. We were all left to wonder how a competent judge could allow a case

to be heard, a jury to reach a verdict, and then decide after the fact that, "Hey guys. You were in the wrong ball park."

One must ask what influenced the judge to make this decision. How was justice served after the verdict had been reached and the rules had been changed? The case was proved, the fraud was there.

The only thing in most people's minds was the penalty to be assessed. Was the judge wrong if he felt the wrong statutes were being applied in allowing the case to go forth? We never heard him say this before or after the fact. This case leaves us with a very empty feeling that law and justice are not equal.

It reminds us of a conversation we had in the early days of our career with a very prominent New York attorney. He explained to us that justice was not blind and fair, it was by checkbook. He who had the biggest checkbook won. He had been involved in the Howard Hughes vs. the United States of America case. Hughes would determine how much money the federal government had allocated to prosecute him. He allocated more and kept the government tied up in circles. With judges like Weinstein it appears that the little guy doesn't have a chance against the robber barons.

And why not?

Never Give Up Control

In the rush to meet state mandates which will close all landfills by the end of the year, municipalities are in heavy negotiations with organizations to build incinerators and recycling plants to dispose of future waste.

The cost of these plants is between \$30 and \$100 million. To pay for these plants, the organizations are demanding long-term contracts with municipalities. Some are looking for contributions from the municipalities in the form of land and possible bonding for the construction costs.

Up to this point, it is reasonable. These organizations, however, want a

guaranteed monopoly on all garbage generated by the municipality and control over the fees charged for disposal of this garbage. They want the same authority our utilities have, a guarantee of the garbage with no competition, the right to set the rates without justification or governmental control.

Haven't our government officials learned a lesson from LILCO, New York Telephone and Cablevision, which all have a monopoly on essential services? LILCO and the New York Telephone at least have pseudo regulations through the state Public Service Commission. There is some

control, as weak as it is, over their rates.

We all have experienced Cablevision's rip-off once regulations were removed from this industry. The cost of basic service has escalated.

Creation of another monopoly without the ability to control the rates is financial suicide for the taxpayers and residents of Long Island.

No municipality should enter into a contract whereby it gives monopoly status and gives up control over the tipping fees or the rates to be charged for this service.

And why not?

It's affecting us and our economy

We all are in favor of planned growth, open space, clean water and a pleasant environment. Some of us are more active than others in this pursuit. Some of us are even zealots and will stop at nothing in our quest to keep Long Island as it is.

We will go so far as to demand that all growth stop now. We care little whether our quest interferes with the rights of others. We hold in disdain those who have invested in raw land in the past.

Although we look to our constitution for protection, we are willing to put aside the 14th Amendment which guarantees our right to have and to hold and to use and to profit from property.

We are comfortable in our jobs. Our boss is paying our salary. We care little for the discomfort we are causing men and women in the trades who by the sweat of their brow and the skill of their hands build homes and dreams.

The work that once was plentiful is

now scarce, for building has all but stopped. As the tradesmen find employment opportunities diminished, their need for clothing, automobiles and homes of their own are postponed.

The retail stores feel the pinch. The extras that they have employed traditionally are eliminated, their staffs are cut back likewise. Outside of emergencies, visits to the doctor and dentist are put off. Risks are taken that could lead to suffering and death.

As the economy falters, the government feels the pinch as it is supported by sales taxes. Services that have been traditional have to be eliminated. More dependency is placed on real estate taxes for funding the government that was built during prosperity.

Open space programs which are our goal, find themselves in jeopardy because government officials must choose between preserving land and serving people. The need for taxes de-

preciates the value of homes and forces more residents to leave.

Those of us who have so enthusiastically and blindly supported the environment find that the cost of owning our castle increases, while the value decreases. When will this vicious cycle come full circle and affect us?

If we had been smart, could we have prevented it? Instead of blindly saying, "Let's stop all building," that has brought this condition upon us, could we not have approached our goal sensibly, preserving what was important without ruining the economy?

And why not?

Our right to choose

The Suffolk County Legislature has passed a measure that will give you the right to choose the form of county government you wish to have as your legislative body. The question will be on the ballot this coming November if County Executive Halpin approves the bill.

The right to vote, to choose, is a sacred tradition that democracy is based upon. It is only right that the residents of Suffolk County be allowed to choose their form of legislative government. The choice, if Halpin approves, will be between a continuation of the present form, the county legislature, or the reinstatement of a board of supervisors who will vote on issues in accordance with the representative population of the towns.

The question now is not which form of government would be better

but whether the county executive believes in the democratic system of government. He will signify his faith in the people to make the right decision by allowing this measure to stand. If he acts against the people and vetoes this measure, it will be up to the legislature to override his veto.

This measure is critical for the future of this county. This is the right to choose, under no circumstances should you be denied this. We highly recommend you contact County Executive Halpin's office at 360-4000 and let him know you want the measure to stand. That you will vote against him if he vetoes the measure which is a vote against you.

And why not?

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Taxpayers being abused again

In the wee hours of the morning on the last day of the current session of the New York State Legislature, legislation was passed that is going to cost us, the taxpayers, \$50 million a year unless we stop it now.

This legislation, Assembly bill A 12131 and Senate bill S 9084, will amend the Civil Service Law by adding a new section which will enable retired public employees of the educational communities to receive health benefits paid for by the local school districts, not only for themselves but for their families, until they die.

This is a mandate from the New York State Legislature. It is not a negotiated item between the school districts and their employees. The cost will add substantially to your real estate taxes. The state, in being gener-

ous to the past school employees, is not providing one cent of compensation to the districts and the taxpayers who will be forced to pick up this tab.

The New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) vigorously opposed the legislation after conducting an extensive survey to determine the impact. "In order to secure information on the potential cost of this proposal," a recent NYSSBA Legislative Bulletin noted, "the association developed a survey on school health insurance costs and contribution rates. The association, in conjunction with the Council of School Superintendents, faxed this survey to all BOCES superintendents, who solicited the necessary information from their component districts on June 6. Over 400 school districts from all

around the state responded to this survey. The data derived from this survey indicates that this bill will collectively cost those school districts which currently pay a lower percentage of the cost of health insurance for their retirees than they presently pay for their active employees in excess of \$50 million when fully implemented."

We understand the benefits are retroactive and will cover anyone who has worked ten years in the school system. It was not part of the contract these people originally negotiated, nor was it part of the already lucrative retirement package employees receive.

Why did the state legislators legislate what should have been a matter for negotiations? The answer might be found in the fact New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) initiated

the move to mandate these health insurance benefits, and lobbied heavily for the legislation. NYSUT is a powerful political action committee, and contributes big dollars to campaigns funding hungry politicians. This is, remember, the year state legislators run for re-election.

The only way you can stop this robbery is to notify the governor you are opposed and are depending upon him to veto the bill. Let him know that if he is a hero for those affected, he will be your enemy and you will remember him in November.

The governor's Albany telephone number is 518-474-8390, his New York City number is 212-587-2100. His Albany address is The State Capitol, Executive Chamber, Albany, NY, 12224. Send a telegram or write today. It's urgent!

And why not?

Deserve our support

Typical of humanity, we the residents of Suffolk County take for granted things that are free.

Fire protection in Suffolk County is basically free. It's free because our neighbors volunteer their time to be firefighters. They go through hundreds of hours of training, are on call seven days and nights a week, year-round. Through our taxes, we pay for the equipment, but these men and women donate their time and serve at our call. They are there when we need them the most.

Once a year, most fire departments hold a fund-raiser. They reach out to the communities they serve so well. The fund-raisers are in the form of door-to-door solicitation, direct mail campaigns, carnivals and barbecues. The monies raised by these activities are used for the activities of

the fire department. The coffee and cake at a fire, a cold beer after the company has returned to the firehouse, the dress uniforms for parades, the athletic teams that compete in the drills. Without the communities' support, these activities that make up the community of the fire department could not be offered.

We don't know how you feel about the fire department, but we hold these volunteers and the volunteers in our ambulance corps in the highest regard. They deserve our full support. These volunteers are what a community is all about. They freely give of their time, they offer protection we cannot afford through our taxes. They give up hours they could be spending in earning a living, time with their children and their families. The siren or the plectron can go off any hour of the day or night. They are out of bed

or leave a party or other important event and respond, in most cases, to some stranger's call for help.

We encourage every resident of Suffolk County to sit down tonight and write a check to your local fire department. Why not send along a letter of appreciation, even if you have never had to call upon their services? Knowing that our neighbors are there for us is a wonderful feeling, let's reciprocate and give what we can.

You may find the address of your local fire department in the phone book or by calling town hall to determine what district you live in. Participating in the fund-raising activities is a great way to let these volunteers know that we do not take them for granted, that we truly appreciate their being there when we need them, as well we should.

And why not?

Adopt a highway

A few years ago we noted a practice in Virginia and the Carolinas where local families, clubs and organizations adopted a stretch of highway. A sign is posted notifying the public of this adoption and the sponsoring organizations or, in some cases, the individual family or families involved. These people assume the responsibility of keeping this stretch of street or highway clean and free of litter.

We saw it work and thought it would be a good idea for New York. We are pleased to note that the state legislature passed a law giving us the opportunity of doing it here in New York. It will make a great project for service organizations as well as youth and senior citizen clubs. All should be picking out their adopted streets or sections of highways, as we all are community-minded people.

Let's make Long Island the cleanest place in the nation.
And why not?

Point of View:

For right answers, ask right questions

By Charles M. Richardson, P.E.

Regarding the letter from the Babylon PTA'er who accused Suffolk Life of being "anti-education," and your reply thereto, I respectfully suggest that both of you are focusing excessively on dollars and not enough on what is really happening to children.

There's an old saying that you won't get the right answers unless you ask the right questions. Unfortunately, questions being asked by public, press, and politician alike are so broad as to be answerable in any way the educators choose, either to enlighten or to obfuscate. To get better answers, our questions have to get tougher, more incisive.

Expecting educators, who exist and profit in the system's status quo, to help us with our questions is like consulting the fox on matters affecting the security of the hen house.

Hence we must do our own homework, get our hands dirty, and probe the details of classroom action as we would

the nitty-gritty of a housing scandal, and environmental disaster, or George Steinbrenner's latest management tactic.

In most areas of public trust, if the responsible agency shows signs of incompetence, the public, press, and politician alike readily probe beyond mere costs and into the nitty-gritties of the operation involved, technical though they may be. There seem no reluctances to treading technical turf per se.

But strangely and unfortunately, when it comes to education, they all retreat to the rhetoric of the Tax PACs and just shout at each other over money supplies and demands.

Debate over how dollars are deployed, which strategies are more effective, whether certain programs are really working, seems not allowed. As soon as questions get too close to a sensitive area, educators stonewall and/or the probers back away. Thus the issues of how to get better quality for our present or future taxes are seldom adequately debated.

Children are the best questioners: They keep asking "why?" until everything is perfectly clear. Should we do less

when it's our kids' future on the line? For instance, why has there been no public discussion, or revelation in a newspaper, of a report issued last September that gives chapter-and-verse evidence that education malpractices are the causes of our illiteracy problem? The report is entitled "Illiteracy: An Incurable Disease or Education Malpractice?" from the Senate Republican Policy Committee (202-224-2946), and it gives specifics useful to conscientious educators and school board people. Thousands of copies have been sent out to educators, legislators, and news media. Why no dialogue or publicity? Are they trying to bury it?

And why, if the weight of research favors a phonics-first approach in reading, why does the "establishment" ignore (even harass, instead of replicate) schools that use intensive phonics programs where students score well above national averages? Those schools also find less than one percent "LD" among their students, even with no pre-school programs. Why do our educators let anti-phonics (e.g. "whole language") methods exist in 80 percent of our schools, which continue to spin off 10 to 40 percent student failures

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