

Why should schools be targeted?

The educational establishment is asking why taxpayers and the taxpayer organizations are targeting schools? It's a reasonable question, one that deserves a reasonable response.

The most obvious response is timing. School budgets are the first to be presented in the year. They are where voters can make their voices heard. It is one of the only budgets that taxpayers and voters can say "yes" or "no" to.

This year, there was little time for taxpayer organizations to prepare before the budgets were presented by the school boards. In future years, Suffolk County Tax PAC, Inc. and other taxpayer groups will have ample opportunity to study the various budgets, regularly attend meetings and make reasonable requests of the boards. Budgets developed in the fu-

ture that respond to the taxpayers' ability to finance should have little problem passing.

School budgets are an emotional issue. On one side we have the education of our children, the children themselves, the educational bloc of those who make a living in education both directly and indirectly. On the other side of the coin are the taxpayers who have their income taxed for education, and their real estate taxed for education as well.

Schools here in Suffolk County are responsible for 60 to 70 percent of the real estate tax bill. The cost of educating students in Suffolk County is, on an average, 131 percent higher than it is in the nation. Standard achievement tests do not indicate that Suffolk students are being educated far better than those who are having much less

spent on them. An easy target is teachers' salaries that average over \$45,000 for 180 days work per year, and a contract day ranging between three and one-half to four hours. Put the salaries aside, they are a culprit but not the main culprit.

When most of the adult population in Suffolk County went to school they attended classes with 25 to 50 other students. There were no aides. There were no assistants. A principal, with an assistant or two, ran the whole show. There were no specialists and there was no huge bureaucracy of administrators and other executives within the district.

School costs in many districts could be cut substantially by increasing current teacher to student ratio from 11 to 14 students per class to 25 to 30 students per teacher. This consolidation would eliminate numerous classrooms and could allow for reduction in the number of schools and administration needs.

Courses in specialized instruction which are being given to as few as two and three students should be eliminated. It is within the school board's power to establish this kind of policy for each district. Moves such as these which would not impact on a student's education are reasonable and prudent. These, of course, will be fought every step of the way by the educational bloc and its unions. Refusing to address the cost of education reasonably, and resorting to psychological blackmail as administrators and school boards are prone to do, only hurts kids.

Despite the hue and cry from the educational bloc that their primary interest is the education of the kids, reality tells us otherwise. An interesting case in point came recently in the Center Moriches School District. That district had two snow days left, days that were not needed this past winter. The school board wanted to schedule school days or conference days so that educational value would be gained from these days. The teachers wanted the days off, on each side of the Memorial Day weekend holiday. They bantered back and forth without agreement until a resident suggested one day off and the other as a school day to help kids review for the coming

year-end tests. At first the teacher union representative opposed the compromise, but after a brief conference of the teachers present, the compromise was agreed to. If the kids and their education is, indeed, top priority, why weren't both days utilized for educational purposes. Wouldn't that have more educational value for their kids than a day off for the teachers?

Schools boards that have or will attempt to put the exact same budget-back up for a re-vote are arrogant, and are only adding to the combative hostile climate between taxpayers and the funding of schools. We know of few budgets that have ever been made that do not contain at least tenpercent fat. School budgets are not exempt. In school districts wherethe exact same budget is being put up again, all taxpayers should turnout and vote "no" resoundingly. It's this kind of arrogance that has bred the hostility toward the schools, and it must come to an end onceand for all.

Taking away interscholastic sports, band and other people sensitive programs is a time honored tradition of administrators and school boards. They use this weapon to blackmail people into voting "yes" on budgets. It's wrong. It's disgraceful.

School boards must refrain from using these tactics and go to the heart and meat of the budget, which requires reduction through consolidation and maximum utilization of the manpower available.

As much scrutiny as school budgets have come under, every other taxing and spending entity in our towns and county will face the same. Taxpayers, through their taxpayer organizations, are beginning to realize that all taxing authorities are responsible for the mess we are in. They are fighting mad, they are not going to stop until those with the power to reduce spending act prudently.

If educators and public officials think the current tax revolt is a flash in the pan, that it will soon go away, they are wrong. Suffolk County Tax PAC, Inc., and other tax organizations, are in this fight for the long haul. Until taxes are cut, productivity is increased, and the educational end result improves dramatically..

And why not?

PSC welfare system

During the long controversy over the Shoreham nuclear power plant, the members of the New York State Public Service Commission have become the best friends LILCO has ever had. Time and again the PSC gave LILCO gifts of rate increases, construction work in progress funds, and "financial stability" adjustments, all designed to keep the mismanaged utility alive.

Governor Mario Cuomo sat back while much of this was going on, ignoring pleas to appoint a new PSC chairman to bring sanity back to this supposedly regulatory agency. Finally, the governor did act, naming a new chairman and proclaiming the agency was now one that would be responsive to the plight of the people.

That claim now turns out to be nothing more than rhetoric. When Gov. Cuomo's men sat down to negotiate a deal with LILCO, they had help from the Public Service Commission which formulated the financial terms of the settlement. And it now turns out, as we have been saying all along, the claims of the governor and his men that this is the best deal we could expect to get, that LILCO had to be assured of recouping its costs to construct the plant or it wouldn't accept the deal, was talk, with little substance. It turns out that LILCO got more--much more--than the costs of the plant. In the latest display of generosity included in the PSC's welfare system for LILCO, the state agency created some sort of hypothetical value of the plant to assure LILCO of not only recovering construction costs, but to guarantee a rate structure to keep the mismanaged utility financially healthy and a viable investment grade utility. "The PSC is not basing its rates for LILCO on the value of Shoreham at all," according to none other than Joseph McDonnell, LILCO's chief spokesman. We've been had again!

McDonnell's comments came in the wake of a Brookhaven Town ac-

tion to raise the plant's assessment by \$10.4 million. McDonnell complained, "To increase the assessment on that plant at a time when governments have rendered it useless is grossly unfair."

Brookhaven Town Deputy Supervisor Peter Scully responded that the numbers in the assessment "are tied directly to the settlement. They can't have it both ways. They can't argue to the state that the plant is worth one amount and then argue to the town that it is worth something else." And he's right.

In the hard sell efforts the governor and his men put forth to justify the giveaway to LILCO, we were told LILCO was biting the bullet, that each side had to sacrifice to reach the agreement. McDonnell's recent comments bear proof, as we suspected all along, that the people were giving while LILCO was doing all the taking.

In going beyond the actual costs of Shoreham in their zeal to give LILCO the funds necessary to overcome years of fiscal mismanagement, the PSC doctored the figures and the governor's men didn't tell the truth. It's time they did. It's time the PSC give a full accounting for the figures they put together to make the deal viable for LILCO. How much is for the costs, how much is to keep LILCO alive, and how much to keep it at investment grade?

LILCO has been in the courts against Brookhaven Town for years over the assessment of the plant. They claim the assessment has been too high. Perhaps the town should consider calling PSC members as "expert" witnesses, putting them on the stand, under oath, and perhaps then we can get some truth. So far, we have been getting very little of that from the PSC and state officials. It's time we did.

And why not?

Big Spender Awards

Despite all of the visible effort on the part of public officials to come up with tax cutting proposals to mollify the anger of the taxpayers, there's still some big spending going on. Suffolk Life is embarking on a dedicated effort to scrutinize the spending habits of public officials at all levels of government and other taxing entities. From time to time we will give due recognition to those who take action, propose, or vote to significantly add to the budget burden faced by the taxpayers. We welcome nominations for the Big Spender Awards, to ensure proper recognition is given to those who succumb to the demands of pressure groups to add to spending.

A message to federal officials

We Are Not Changing Our Minds

President Bush and his henchmen from the Department of Energy would read Suffolk County's residents' lips. We are not changing our mind on Shoreham. We don't trust the company that built the plant. We don't trust the design or the construction of the plant. We don't trust the N.R.C. which only inspected less than one percent of the plant. We don't trust F.E.M.A., who ignored reality and developed a paper plan that will only be tested when our lives are at stake and there is an accident at the plant. We trust our instincts.

Shoreham was built out of greed, not out of concern for our health and welfare. Shoreham was built at the wrong place without any forethought about how to get off Long Island when there is an accident. Those of us who live on Long Island know we will be trapped here, our lives endangered by a government in Washington we have learned to distrust.

Deputy U.S. Energy Secretary W. Henson Moore came to Long Island last week in a desperate, last ditch effort to salvage the Shoreham nuclear power plant. He came without new or convincing information, just the same, tired old rhetoric we have been hearing from Washington on this matter for quite some time.

He made a pitch for nuclear plants, warned of brownouts, blackouts, and dire oil problems in the future. He declared Shoreham is "...state-of-the-art in safety as well as operating features."

What about evacuation? No problem, Moore insisted. "Long Island would not require evacuation...people might be moved away from the plant site, but not off the island." Where to? How far? What if the wind switches around? What then? No answers, but then Moore doesn't really care, because he will be safe and secure, as

will his family, in Washington. If he thinks Shoreham is so safe, let him build a house on the grounds of the plant, move his family in, and then commute to his office. Let him put the safety of his loved ones where his mouth is!

Unfortunately, we doubt if those in the audience of the Long Island Association meeting, where Moore was guest speaker, asked Moore about the credibility of the D.O.E.'s position. This is the same D.O.E. you should know, that is responsible for the operation of the nation's nuclear weapons plants which are in such a disastrous state of affairs. These plants, under D.O.E. supervision, have polluted the rivers and streams and groundwater in the areas where they are located. They are in such poor condition, so poorly maintained and operated, that some must be shut down, and it is going to cost this coun-

try billions of dollars to correct the criminally negligent situation.

The D.O.E.'s nuclear weapons plant fiasco is just begging for a congressional investigation where the facts should be dragged out. Heads should roll, charges should be levied, and, more importantly, the people who will be impacted by the way the D.O.E. has supervised these plants should know the full story. Unfortunately, our congress seems to be too busy trying to find ethics where none seem to exist.

In another instance, the D.O.E. is currently involved in the siting of a nuclear waste storage facility in New Mexico. Geological studies have revealed a flaw in the terrain which could spell an environmental disaster in the future. But the D.O.E. has taken the position, "Don't worry, trust us, everything's fine." The people there aren't buying this line, and have been picketing with signs which label the D.O.E. the Department of Errors. Right on! Good name. One that is well deserved!

Sorry, Mr. Moore. The general public isn't going to buy your line here anymore than they have in New Mexico. In order to be trusted, you have to earn that trust. The D.O.E., part of a Washington administration that is bending over backwards to bolster the future of a sagging, big money nuclear industry, and co-partners with the NRC in the nuclear power conspiracy, should first put its own house in order before it tries to push a nuclear power plant down the throats of people who don't want it.

Our advice to the Department of Energy and to President Bush is to take their bandwagon elsewhere. Sell your snake oil to those who don't care about their lives. We do, and we're not buying your lies.

And why not?

First Big Spender Award

Legislator Steve Englebright has been selected for Suffolk Life's first "Big Spender Award."

Englebright earned this distinction for proposing that the county spend your tax dollars for what it has been offered free.

There is a parcel of land lying south of Riverhead, north of the community college in the hamlet of Pine Valley, that is commonly referred to as the former "Teamsters" property. The total parcel is approximately 1,641 acres. In the center of the property there is a golf course which covers approximately 260 acres.

The owner of the property has offered to give over 1,028 acres to the county, the town and the state. He wants to build half-million dollar homes on the perimeter of the golf course, utilizing 340 acres, leaving the 260 acres occupied by the golf course as open space. The development of the 340 acres would result in approximately \$1,600,000 million per year in real estate tax revenues, money that is badly needed by the Riverhead school district, the village, the town and the county.

Steve Englebright, an environmentalist zealot, doesn't like this idea. He wants the county to buy all 1,641 acres at an estimated cost of \$35 to \$50 million, plus 70 to 100 million in interest from the debt. During the time that this debt will have to be paid off by the taxpayers, we will lose between \$95 and \$130 million in real estate taxes which would have been raised if the limited development had been allowed.

In total, Englebright's zealotry will cost the taxpayers close to \$275 to

\$300 million. Englebright claims that this land is over another crucial watershed. It appears that all of his special projects are over crucial watersheds. But where is the geological documentation of this claim?

We don't know about you, but we think this is a disgraceful waste of our tax dollars. The homes being proposed to be built are for wealthy second home owners. They will put almost no strain on our schools. As part of the project, they will have their own beach club on the ocean and their own recreational facilities. Most communities of this nature form a homeowners' association. They keep their roads private, picking up the cost themselves and

hire their own security force, eliminating any pressure on the police department.

We ask you, why should we pay for something we are getting free? If open space and preservation of land is the altruistic reason behind Englebright's plan, why not accept the 1,028 acres free, and allow development on the 340 acres? Isn't this just plain common sense?

In case Steve Englebright does not know it, we cannot afford wild-eyed dreamers like him who willfully throw away our tax dollars. Steve Englebright truly deserves Suffolk Life's first "Big Spender" award. Congratulations!

And why not?

Job well done, George

The effort to realize the stabilization of the Shinnecock Inlet, a vital waterway, from bay to sea in the Hampton Bays area, has had a number of ups and downs. Just when it appeared certain that the project would get underway, word came that funds were excluded from the 1990 budget.

But good news came this week. The needed funds to accomplish this vital project have been approved by a House subcommittee.

There is no question that the inlet is badly in need of work. The current shoaled conditions have been the cause of loss of life and pose a dire threat to the economic survival of the commercial and recreational fishing industries which rely on that inlet.

Plans were prepared and a schedule of stabilization work was put in place that would improve the jetties and channel condi-

tions at the inlet. There were also promises that the funding for the work would be forthcoming.

When President George Bush's budget was unveiled, however, the funds were not there. They had been excluded. Individuals and groups involved in the fight to have the inlet conditions corrected immediately launched an all-out effort to have the funds restored, with Congressman George Hochbrueckner a dedicated, active participant in the campaign. Hochbrueckner pulled out all stops, attended numerous meetings, arranged for local people to appear at Washington budget hearings to plead their case.

And, by golly, it worked. The full \$5.3 million has been included for Shinnecock Inlet dredging and stabilization by the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development. The money

has been included in the fiscal year 1990 appropriation for the Army Corps of Engineers, which means, if ultimately approved by the Senate as is expected, work can begin on schedule in January of 1990. A job very well done, George!

The list of people who have labored to bring this to reality is long, and includes members of various groups, including the Shinnecock Fishermans Cooperative, the Concerned Wives of the Shinnecock Fishermen and the Shinnecock Marlin and Tuna Club. Members of the Concerned Wives offered an impressively strong case, and made a tremendous impact. County and town officials have also lent their support to this effort. And Chief Warrant Officer Richard Schmidt, commanding officer of Station Shinnecock, has been a valuable ally in these efforts. You should all be proud of your accomplishment.

And why not?

Legislators win, taxpayers lose

The craziness goes on. Suffolk County legislators, in their zeal to account for past spending sins and court favor with the voters in this election year, outdid themselves last week. They passed, not one, but two, but three proposed tax cutting measures. Then they rejected another that dared to curb their power to exceed a cap by garnering 14 votes to pass added spending schemes.

At first glance it may seem the legislators did good. They didn't. Lacking the common sense to put politics aside and work together for the good of the taxpayers, they threw up a number of different proposals. One, a "rollback" that wasn't; another, a revised rollback that still wasn't, and the third, a scheme to count savings already achieved, some already planned but presented as brand new, spiced with some additional cuts. While these plans are not bad in and of themselves, they are but a mere beginning of what must be done. Nothing more than a slice, when a loaf is needed.

With all three proposals now approved, the ultimate decision is up to County Executive Patrick Halpin. And the pressure is on for Halpin to veto one plan or another. Even Newsday joined in the game, suggesting Halpin veto all but the one he, with several legislators, put forth. From our perspective, the taxpayers would be

better served if all three were vetoed and they all put aside the silliness and get down to real business.

All three proposals were not approved because the legislators suddenly became fiscal conservatives. The mass approval was based on little more than political expedience. By putting the ultimate decision in Halpin's hands, they hope to achieve some credit and transfer blame to the county executive. They will all now go forth in the campaigns and brag that they voted to bring the taxpayer's much-needed relief. Even if Halpin vetoes the plan they voted for, they'll say they voted for cuts but Halpin vetoed the bill.

They had another motive as well. Last week's meeting was the start of a six-week recess. They want time off and they passed the buck to Halpin rather than face the issue themselves.

With a fiscal crisis facing the taxpayers of this county, it is the height of arrogance for the legislators to take off for six weeks; to simply walk away from the responsibility of bringing fiscal sanity back to Suffolk. The legislators should put aside their desire for time off and get down to work to eliminate their spending sins of the past. They should clear their calendars of anything else but budget reduction matters and concentrate on digging out the waste and reckless spending that has brought us to the current state of affairs.

If the county legislators can bring county government to a halt, as they did in January while they went through the political fiasco of naming a presiding officer, surely they can devote sufficient time to solving the fiscal crisis.

We call upon the legislators to cancel their six-week recess, to hold daily meetings, with Halpin and his staff included, to concentrate on the crisis. We challenge them to put politics aside, to forget about political credit, and work to-

ward a meaningful cut in the spending of this county to bring the tax rate down, not mere pennies, but a meaningful amount.

If the legislators fail to do this, and continue with their plans to take six weeks off in the midst of this crisis, the taxpayers should heed their desire and give them a lot more time off—the rest of their political futures. Call your legislators. Deliver the message: we will remember in November.

And why not?

Justice desecrated

"We do not consecrate the flag by punishing its desecration, for in doing so we dilute the freedom that this cherished emblem represents."

So said Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan, speaking for the majority in ruling that burning the American flag is an acceptable action. But in our view, regardless of what five members of the Supreme Court said in their senseless decision, or what Newsday said in a front page headline: "Burning It Is No Crime," any desecration of our flag is a crime, and an insult to those who have served and died for this country. We agree with Chief Justice William Rehnquist, one of four justices who voted against the decision, who angrily declared: "The government may conscript men into the Armed Forces where they fight and perhaps die for the flag, but the government may not prohibit the public burning of the banner under which they fight."

The decision dealt with the arrest and conviction of a member of the

Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade who, during a demonstration, poured kerosene on our flag and burned it. The conviction had been overturned by a lower court, and the Supreme Court decision upheld that reversal. While the flames consumed the symbol of our land, the Communist Youth Brigade members chanted: "America, red, white and blue, we spit on you. You stand for plunder, you will go under."

We don't agree with the Supreme Court decision. The American flag is the property of this country. It belongs to its citizens, not to the revolutionary groups who take advantage of the freedom in this country by living here, but who tarnish all this country stands for. The flag belongs to all loyal Americans. Desecration of the flag is desecration of their property. It is a crime, no matter what five members of the U.S. Supreme Court say, and should be treated accordingly.

And why not?

Point of View:

Civil war brewing over taxes?

By Lou Grasso

The Tax Revolt of 1989 has scored a number of accomplishments in a short period of time. A record number of school and library budgets have gone down to defeat, school officials in some districts have pared budgets in response to demands for reduced spending. County officials have been stumbling all over themselves attempting to come up with a better tax cap or spending reduction plan than those on the other side of the political aisle. In desperation last week, they approved all the plans before them except one, which would have prevented them from piercing the cap by 14 votes.

There is, however, a dark side to the story. With the galvanizing of the anti-tax hike supporters into a strong voice, school districts and special interest groups have been firing back in anger, terming the anti-tax forces as anti-education and anti-kids. In one instance, the president of the Babylon Teachers' Association unleashed a tirade in an "internal" letter to teachers, which didn't stay internal for long, labeling a vocal group at a Babylon meeting as "educational assassins" and likened them to "sharks who smell blood!"

Why is it, we wonder, that those who speak out against the ever-escalating school budgets are termed educational assassins? Why is it necessary, morally, that any cut of any educational budget must hurt the kids? Is there no fat in any budget? Are all salaries, especially those in the administrative ranks, realistic? Aren't some top level administrator's

salaries equal to or higher than those of the governors of some states? Does that make much sense?

In Riverhead, where the anti-tax group, Tax Pac, has been targeted by a pro-budget group, cries of anti-education have been aimed at those who are fighting to keep taxes at affordable levels. "Just help us pass the budget this one more time and we'll work together to cut costs next year," has been the carrot offered by the pro-budget group. How much attention, we wonder, have the pro-budgeters focused on the high cost of providing education in Riverhead. Have they any knowledge, or do they really care, what the superintendent makes? It's \$90,000 a year, he said, not counting benefits which include use of a district car, and all the other plus factors such as hospitalization, insurance, and other benefits.

Who makes what?

We have been contacting school districts to determine the salaries of school superintendents throughout Suffolk, but have been told in many instances we must file Freedom of Information requests to receive these figures. While we wonder why they are so secretive about where the tax dollars are going, we will file the requests and report the results shortly.

A lot of attention has been focused on the salaries of teachers, but the administrators seem to escape notice. That's going to change. Here's an example of where dollars are spent not for the education of kids, but for the benefit of a district's top administrator. The superintendent of the Bel-

port School District is about to cash in unused sick and vacation time he has accrued over the past 35-years with the district. Under the contract agreed to by the board of education, he can cash in 100 percent of those days not used. Teachers on the other hand, can accrue only 210 days and at the time of retirement cash in only 50 percent. The Bellport superintendent will receive about \$151,000 for his accrued time, plus a \$25,000 retirement bonus. He will also receive hospitalization and life insurance for life.

This superintendent will cash in his sick days based on his current salary, not based on the salary earned when the days were accrued. If 20 days were accrued at a time he was making, for example, half his current salary, why aren't they worth only half of the current salary value? Wouldn't that be fairer for the people?

Is this an isolated case? No! It's done in school districts elsewhere, in town, county and state governments. It's caused by school boards and elected officials spending the public's dollars in wasteful fashion. Is it the superintendent's fault? No, if the school board agrees to pay it, why would he refuse?

Where's the protest?

You may remember when former Police Commissioner James Caples applied to cash in unused sick days, he was the target of a deluge of criticism. It became a campaign issue, and legislation was vowed that would eliminate or at least curtail this practice. But where is the storm of protest in

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