

We've nothing to personally gain

In their anger, the Suffolk County Faculty Association's boycott of Suffolk Life has overlooked one very important fact. Neither I, David J. Willmott as the editor and publisher of Suffolk Life, nor Suffolk Life have anything to personally gain from our involvement in their negotiations with the county.

On the other hand, the Faculty Association has a very selfish interest, their own personal gain through increased salaries and benefits. Suffolk Life gains nothing whether this contract goes through or not. The readers of Suffolk Life, however, will be affected, and that's why we're involved.

As outlined in last week's editorial, the impact of the settlement on the other unions could lead to a shortfall of an estimated \$186 million in county funds. This would have to be made up through an increase in sales taxes of up to one-and-a-half cents, or a 50% increase in the county portion of our real estate taxes.

The residents of this county have been pressed to the wall, they just cannot afford any more. Increases in wages normally are preceded by increases in the county's revenues. Suffolk County's economy has been in the soup since the late '80s. The back-

bone of our economy, the defense industry, has deteriorated rapidly. A spillover effect of the recession has affected both large and small businesses. This has caused job terminations, temporary layoffs, reductions in overtime and the elimination of a lot of part-time work. During these cruel economic times, energy costs have accelerated along with taxes.

Many lifelong residents of Suffolk County have been forced to place their homes up for sale. This is a desperation move of survival. Numerous businesses have closed up shop and have moved to more competitive parts of the country.

Although most elected officials have been well aware of this situation, they have lacked the fortitude to stand up to demands being made by the various bargaining units that are involved in government. They have heard the hurt, the anger and the frustration of the voters. But they have opted, instead, to bend to the political lobbying efforts brought to bear by the unions.

The Suffolk County Legislature has been particularly prone to giving away the store. Every time a contract has come up for ratification, or an issue that would require a disproportionate amount of spending, the unions have turned out with overflow crowds and the legislators gave in. The legislators, as a whole, have been blamed for our ills, but the individual members who have voted against the ability of the residents to financially survive, have, for the most part, escaped individual attention or responsibility.

Suffolk Life has drawn the attention of the taxpayers to the individuals who have been responsible and this has caused much discomfort. In the normal process of things, leading newspapers, both daily and weekly, and the electronic media usually live up to their responsibilities and point out both sides in news stories, and the pros and cons of government in editorials. In Suffolk County, few have faced this responsibility. We could have joined our peers, succumbed to pressure and kept our mouth shut. Through our silence, we could keep you in the dark and then bemoan the fact that the taxes are eating you alive without identifying the causes. This is the path the unions want us to take. They want to deny the residents of Suffolk County a strong, vibrant voice of reason. It's a classic case of "what's in it for me and the hell with everyone else."

We personally have nothing to gain by being in the middle of this fight. But as citizens and journalists, we do care about our fellow human beings. We hear every day from readers who are leaving and moving. We are deeply touched by the sadness in their voices. We know the hurt and the sacrifices that have already been made. We know the limit of their burden and their ability to continue to fund government out of control.

Until we have used our last drop of ink, we will not stop fighting on your behalf.

And why not?

Convoluting logic

If the same logic had been applied to the presidential election as Hauppague School District officials used to decide the fate of a building improvement bond issue during its recent elections, President Bill Clinton would not be the President of the United States today.

During the presidential elections, Clinton received 42% of the votes, former President George Bush got 37%, while Ross Perot earned 20% of the ballots cast. Using the logic applied by the Hauppague school officials, Perot was the winner!

The district had put forward a capital improvement bond issue broken down into four options, three for varying amounts of spending. A vote for the fourth option rejected authorization for funding any of the proposed capital improvements.

The voting broke down as follows: Option 1 received 379 votes. Option 2, which called for \$6.1 million in improvements, including the work provided for in Option 1, received 261 votes. Option 3, included all of the work in the first two selections and an additional \$1.4 million in capital improvements, for a total of \$7.5 million. Voters cast 492 votes for Option 3. The last option, for no spending, received 1,047 votes, a better than two-to-one majority of 555 votes over the second place option.

But school district officials claimed victory for Option 1, which actually came in third in the balloting out of the four choices. "We needed to count all of the votes to counter the total number of 'no' votes. We counted the others as favoring Option 1," District Superintendent Robert Parry said, "since that money was included in the other options. We had hoped to have enough 'yes' votes to get number two or number three adopted, but the votes weren't there."

Parry said that ballot wording was put together by the district's bonding attorneys and that a similar type of

ballot was used successfully in a bond issue vote in the Huntington School District about a year ago. Sure sounds as if the Hauppague plotted a way to win if they lost, making the vote meaningless and an insult to the taxpayers.

While Hauppague officials were able to snatch victory out of the jaws of defeat through the use of a devious bonding resolution and a convoluted vote counting method, they lost a lot more than they won. Their scheming ways cost them the trust of the taxpayers in the community, who will never again be able to trust their school officials. Shame!

And why not?

A trial balloon

Gaffney for governor???

Gaffney for governor? Be serious!

That's our reaction to the trial balloon sent aloft at the Suffolk County Republican Party's designating convention held last week in Patchogue.

Believe it or not, there are some within the ranks of the GOP who are not kidding with a "Gaffney for governor" wild-eyed dream of elevating Suffolk County Executive Robert Gaffney to the state's top elected post. Armed with bumper stickers extolling their man for state office, those behind this move, "favorite son" or otherwise, are seeking to find out how their idea flies.

In our neighborhood, the idea didn't fly. It crashed. Our immediate reaction was to laugh, as did many who learned of the "campaign."

What would be Gaffney's track record of accomplishment on the county level that could earn him votes statewide? Two sales tax increases, broken promises of a tax increase that would die at the end of 1993, staggering property tax hikes, empty vows of "cuts so drastic" that he would surely be a one-term county executive? Or a

giveaway contract for college faculty, an agreement that could become a precedent for all other county union contracts? Should that fear become reality, the sales and property tax increases of the past will pale by comparison to what will be needed to fund the county's payroll increases.

Gaffney for governor? From where we sit, Gaffney is going to have a hard time being re-elected to the seat he currently holds. In fact, if the contest between Gaffney and former County Executive Patrick Halpin were held today, the outcome might very well be different than the results of their 1991 encounter.

We offer the following suggestion: If Bob Gaffney has a sliver of interest in running for higher office, he had better begin the "good government" he promised in his campaign here in Suffolk County. In that campaign Gaffney claimed that the dire actions he would have to take to put the county back on the road of fiscal solvency would surely foreclose any hope of re-election. That philosophy projected a "get tough" stance with the county's

work force to curb the skyrocketing cost of county government, and weeding out the waste in county government. If his record in this regard during the past year-and-a-half is an indication of how tough he can be, we're in a whale of a lot of trouble.

Thus far, Gaffney has left a trail of broken promises and unrealized dreams in his wake. He hasn't been tough, he hasn't been imaginative. He hasn't cut the payroll, he's added to it in the form of appointments in the administrative area. He has used the power of the county's Republican leader, Howard DeMartini, to muscle legislators to vote his way. He has not provided the leadership he vowed, the courage he promised, and has killed the hope we all had.

Gaffney for governor? Sure, right after he puts the county back on an even keel, wipes out the sales tax increases as promised, and brings much-needed tax relief to our taxpayers. Until he does the job he was elected to do, he should put aside dreams of another office and take care of the problems of the position he now has. And why not?

George Hochbrueckner did it

As a loyal Democrat, we would expect Congressman George Hochbrueckner to support, within reason, his President. His first priority, however, should be the people who sent him to Washington, his constituents.

President Clinton's tax hike bill, commonly being called the BTU (British Thermal Unit) Legislation, has altruistic aspects. It is supposed to reduce the national debt by increasing taxes on the people, not only through direct tax hikes but by taxes on energy as well.

By comparison with the rest of the nation, the First Congressional District is considered rich. In fact, the vast majority of residents under Clinton's proposal are considered wealthy, and therefore will pay additional taxes.

Long Island is a slave to oil. As a

sprawling suburbia, without adequate mass transportation, its residents must rely on cars as their basic form of transportation.

Our electricity is almost totally generated from oil. Our utility rates are the highest in the nation. Because of the high utility rates and disproportionately high local taxes, small businesses have been abandoning Long Island in droves. Over 30,000 jobs have been lost in the last couple of years.

Grumman, the major private employer, has cut its Long Island operation by over 50%. Many of its operations are now located in Texas, Florida, Georgia, and Louisiana, states with lower taxes, more affordable wage scales and utility rates that are half those imposed by LILCO.

The cornerstone of Clinton's tax hike is a BTU tax. This will add 5% to 20% to the cost of doing business here on Long Island. Companies that have stayed will find themselves less competitive in the future. Some of them will pick up and move to more economical, business-friendly locations. Others will simply shutter their doors, and "Help Wanted" signs will be replaced by "For Lease" signs.

The BTU tax does not affect the entire country evenly. Long Island has been pinpointed as one of the localities that will be hurt the most. This, coupled with the relatively high salaries paid on Long Island to keep up with the costs, doubly affects the region.

The increased taxation on Social Security checks, included in Clinton's pro-

posal, will further erode the financial ability of our senior citizens to survive in this area. Our large senior citizen population is already overburdened with soaring tax rates, virtually the highest in the nation. Adding to that burden by increasing the tax burden on Social Security benefits is shameful.

It was disappointing to see Congressman Hochbrueckner vote in favor of Clinton's proposal. He knew the impact would be more severe on his constituents than on others in the country. This was reason enough for him to say "No, I've got to put the good of my constituents ahead of the wishes of my Democratic President. This is not an even playing field. This is not fairness."

Suffolk County residents will be paying more than their fair share. Congressman Hochbrueckner could not find it in his heart to vote for his constituents. He told Suffolk Life, "I have got to support the President. I have to look at the good of the nation over our self-interest." He told us he believed that the money would be used for deficit reduction rather than to expand programs and enact new programs the President has proposed. Boy, is he gullible! Does George still believe in Santa Claus too? He felt that when the bill gets to the Senate, it will be renegotiated and somehow, mysteriously, Long Island will come out whole, that the Senate would save Long Island by negotiating a better deal than he could.

If he really believes this in his heart, he could have fought for the changes as other congressmen are doing for their districts. Hochbrueckner could have gotten away with this line of illogical reasoning when he was a Democrat and the President was a Republican, but now that Congress, the Senate and the Presidency are all Democratic, it is up to the individuals to stand up and fight and win for their own constituents.

Hochbrueckner could have led the charge, but he chose the easy way out. We fear we all will pay for his misdeeds, partisan politics and personal incompetence. He owes his constituents an honest explanation as to why he put political expedience before the best interests of his constituents. At the very least, he owes them an apology.

And why not?

Fight now, or pay later.
And why not?

Gotta go buy a wig!

If you have health insurance in New York State, you are about to be scalped by the New York State Legislature. Don't worry, your benevolent assemblymen and senators are considering mandating that health insurance firms be required to add wigs or hairpieces to its mandated coverage.

Wigs are only one of some 20 odd items that health insurance companies are being required to cover everyone for, if all bills are enacted in Albany.

Somehow, the legislature has not gotten the message or seen the statistics that indicate residents are opting out of health care plans because of the oppressive costs. Costs which are driven up as the insurers are required to cover additional benefits. The concept of basic hospitalization has been lost as the goody two-shoes in Albany have ordered the insurers to make its policies all inclusive. What was once affordable health coverage for all, is now becoming a luxury for many.

We have some very vivid memories of being without catastrophic health care. During the late '30s, my grandmother suffered a massive stroke. She required not only initial hospitalization, but constant doctor care and around-the-clock nursing care at home for the next seven years. My father was saddled with the bills. He went from relative comfort to being deeply in debt at the

time of her demise. This was followed by a series of accidents his own children suffered that wiped him out financially each time he got back on his feet.

When I first started in business, I instituted this community's first independent business health care program for my employees. It was basic hospitalization that protected the employees from losing their homes if they met with any catastrophic accident or illness. Deductibles were high, the everyday visit to the local general practitioner was not covered. The core was there to cover what the individual couldn't cover. The policy at its inception was \$5 per month for an individual, \$15 per month for a family.

Today, individual insurance is \$150 to \$300 per month and group policies can run upwards of \$700 per month. Employers routinely paid up to 100% of the cost during the '70s. As premiums accelerated during the '80s, the costs were shared in most private plans between the employer and the employee. Many employees, because of the huge cost of these plans, even though part of the premiums are paid by the employer, cannot afford the cost and gamble on not having to be hospitalized.

Numerous small- to large-size businesses have increased its deductibles and have taken other measures to contain costs. Some companies have even

gone as far as to move out of New York State because the medical cost is the nail in the coffin of its ability to do business here. Adding new mandates to existing coverage will only drive the cost up that much higher.

For Pete's sake, just think of it, is a wig a medical necessity? What the legislature should be doing is developing a very basic package of medical care, a foundation package if you will, that will cover the catastrophic elements of health care. This basic package, stripped of the whistles and bells, the high-priced cosmetic luxuries, the feel-good medicine, might be affordable for all.

On top of this very basic package, which would be self-insurance for the everyday ailments and complete coverage for the catastrophic, health insurance purchasers could add the luxuries.

We urge you to contact your legislator, even if he is old and bald. He should see the logic in opposing these wasteful expenditures. You may contact your assemblymen or senators by writing to the New York State Assembly, Albany, New York 12248. The New York State Senate has the same address. The Assembly's phone number is 518-455-4100 and the Senate's phone number is 518-455-2800.

Why not extend the school year?

It's rare that we find ourselves in agreement with Governor Mario Cuomo. But, we totally support his proposal to extend the school year.

Most school days are comprised of four hours and 42 minutes of classroom time. The school year is 180 days. Into this compressed time, students are to be taught not only the basics, but a host of other subjects mandated by the state.

According to many dedicated teachers, there just is not enough time in a given year to teach students properly. It is blatantly apparent that what has suffered are the basics. The average student on Long Island is graduating with barely an eighth grade level in reading comprehension and a seventh grade ability in math. Our students are four to five years behind in their minimal educational re-

quirements. Most foreign schools, where the students are surpassing ours, have a school year that ranges up through 240 days. Many are on a tri-semester system of education.

The school year we operate under in 1993 is a relic left over from the 1800s. Children were needed on the farms to help during the busiest time of year. In the spring, they were given a long vacation which coincided with Easter. This was the time of year when planting was performed. School ended in June when the tasks around the farm picked up. The summer recess, which was anything but a vacation for those students, lasted through harvest and early fall. Christmas time was an ideal break time. The first semester was completed or, in some instances, almost finished. Schools

closed down for the holidays not only in observance of religious significance, but as winter set in, the schools would be closed to conserve heat.

Today, our schools are centrally-heated, some are air conditioned. The kids are no longer needed on the farms. Teachers and administrators are paid annual salaries that, on Long Island, average over \$60,000. The teachers are not required to work on holidays or during the summer to make ends meet. The students' needs are crying out for attention. A full school year should be not only studied by the local boards, but ordered by the state.

A 240-day school year would go a long way toward improving the productivity of the students. It would allow almost 300 hours of additional classroom

time. Time that would be well spent teaching kids to read, to understand math and its logic, to broaden their horizons by teaching them about history, particularly history of the 1900s which is so often neglected.

Our children are in trouble. They are being cheated out of both the quality and the quantity of education. The downtime that they are presently granted creates problems for their working parents who must leave them on their own during the extended vacations.

How about Long Island leading the nation once again by putting emphasis on the quality and quantity rather than just the cost of education? Let's really do it for the kids.
And why not?

This fight is for you

Please support our advertisers

The effort to stifle the effectiveness of Suffolk Life to bring about fiscal sanity to the governments and school districts of Suffolk County, and much-needed relief for taxpayers, has taken a new twist. The boycott initiated by the Suffolk County Community College Faculty Association has been joined by the leaders of other county employee unions pressuring advertisers to cease advertising in this publication.

The union leaders are angered at Suffolk Life for pinpointing those politicians they cowed into submission. In the past, the unions have successfully pressured and bullied the elected officials into giving in to their demands. Suffolk Life recently pinpointed these individuals.

The union knows that once the voters identify these elected officials they will be defeated. If they can eliminate Suffolk Life they can force their will without exposure, and successfully keep the ramifications to the taxpayers from being made public.

Assault on pocketbooks

This fight is against the messenger, Suffolk Life, but is really an assault on the taxpayers' pocketbooks.

The letter sent to advertisers states, "We, the municipal employee union leaders, have come to the conclusion that Suffolk Life has crossed over the line of responsible journalism and become a tool of an unreasonable zealot who has a very limited, single-minded agenda. That agenda we feel, is one of heaping blame on the backs of the hard-working public servants of this county. His method of attack provides nothing constructive in its place..." The letter carries no signature, signed only "Suffolk County Organization of Public Employees," a title different from "Suffolk Coalition of Public Employees," which appears on the letterhead of the stationery.

The statement quoted above is both right and wrong. Suffolk Life does have an agenda. But that agenda is not to target public workers. It is to protect the taxpayers. That has always been the top

priority of our editorials, and it will continue to be.

Suffolk Life has been in the forefront of every battle that was important to our readers, the taxpayers of Suffolk County. The safety and well being of county residents was the heart and soul of our long, arduous and costly battle against the threat of the Shoreham nuclear power facility. The infamous agreement between Governor Mario Cuomo and LILCO, which has driven our electrical rates to being the highest in the nation, made LILCO rich and the ratepayers poor, was also fought because of its impact on the ratepayers.

Suffolk Life has dedicated itself to helping those who suffer from breast cancer, in helping seek out the reasons why our county has such a high breast cancer incidence rate, and fighting for more accurate record keeping of the number of cases reported.

Our coverage of the election campaigns, the detailed questionnaires which are dreaded by politicians but appreciated by readers, our strong editorial stands against patronage, waste in government and in schools, our campaign for Power for the People, to secure low cost power for the public are but a few examples of Suffolk Life's commitment to fight for the protection of taxpayers.

Suffolk Life's efforts have caused us to be boycotted before by county employees when then County Executive Peter Cohalan agreed to a lucrative settlement with county employees, a settlement that drove salaries up an average of over 40%, but went as high in some instances over 70%, and is the foundation of the fiscal problems the county endures today. And again when we spoke out strongly about withholding services to children by teachers embroiled in stalled negotiations in their district. We do what we believe is right.

The issue is cost

The current boycott was launched because we urged county legislators to reject an agreement reached by County Executive Robert Gaffney with the Suffolk

Community College faculty. That agreement froze salaries in the first year of the five-year term, but gave a \$1,250 one-time bonus in the second, and called for increases of 4%, 4.5%, and 5% in the following three years. In addition to these amounts, however, the agreement also provided for step increments of 4.4% in addition to the percentage increases for all those not on the top step of the salary schedule. According to an analysis done by the legislature's Budget Review Office, the increases will range from a minimum of 24.5% to a maximum of 41.2%, compounded.

The costly facts

Suffolk Life has obtained a list of all college faculty members, their current step level and their base salaries. The information contained is very revealing and will be shared with readers in weeks to come. While it has not been our policy to publicize names and salaries of public employees who do not, as do elected officials, have the authority to raise their own salaries, we believe it is important for the public, to fully understand this issue, to be offered the facts involved. For example, the president of the Suffolk County Community College Faculty Association, Ellen Schuler Mauk, who launched the boycott, has been a professor at SCC since September of 1970, whose salary is listed as \$54,701. Under the terms of the contract proposal, she would get a \$1,250 one-time bonus and a \$1,500 longevity bonus in 1992-93, boosting her salary to \$57,451. In 1993-94, she will receive a 4% salary increase, 4.4% step increment, and a \$1,500 longevity bonus, for a new total of \$60,914.

In the 1994-95 school year, Mauk will receive a 4.5% salary increase, a 4.4% step increment and another \$1,500 longevity bonus, boosting her salary to \$66,344. A 5% salary hike, 4.4% step increment, and \$1,500 longevity payment will boost her salary to \$72,608 at the end of the 1995-96 year. Her yearly salary will jump \$17,907 in four years, a 33% increase.

How many taxpayers will receive a 33% increase in their salaries over the next four years? Is she justified in her demands for a \$20,000 raise, especially during these tight fiscal times? We think not. Are we wrong? If so, tell us.

Our concern at the time we urged the "no" vote was that this agreement could become the precedent for settlements by all of the other county unions. We can see no reason why one union could, or even should, accept less than another union has to settle for. If that should come to pass, the additional burden on taxpayers for these salary increases alone will be intolerable, more than they can bear. County real estate taxes would be increased 50%, or another one-and-one-half cents would have to be added to the already onerous 8 1/2% sales tax paid in Suffolk County.

Union pressure

We sincerely regret that our dedication to the taxpayers of this county is being used as an excuse to harass our advertisers. While we appreciate the words of encouragement and support we have received from those who use this newspaper to deliver their advertising message, we regret they are being pressured in an effort to stifle the voice of Suffolk Life on behalf of its readers.

The advertisers whose messages appear in this publication despite the threats of the unions are showing their support for you, the taxpayer. They are standing up for freedom of speech, and freedom of the press. They deserve your support not only because they are reputable business firms who offer value, but because they realize a free society depends upon a free press.

You can help

We urge our readers to voice their support of these advertisers, both in words, letters, and in patronizing their establishments. Tell the owners, the managers and yes, the clerks, that you support Suffolk Life's fight on behalf of the taxpayers. Let them know you appreciate their advertising in Suffolk Life, and the statement they are making.

Suffolk Life has become known as a publication that fights for its readers with strong editorials. We have been in the forefront of each and every fight that was important to our readers, and vow to continue to do so. If our efforts are important to you, if you believe that it is necessary to have a strong press that will fight on your behalf, we ask for your support. We do not underestimate the fight we are involved in. If the unions could drive advertisers out of this newspaper with their threats and harassment, they will have been more successful in opening the vaults of government and educational facilities. If they can apply sufficient pressure to stifle the voice of Suffolk Life, just imagine what they will do with the politicians who are already ruled by pressure groups of all kinds.

We urge you to join this battle. Together we can stand firm against the pressure of organized coercion. Your support of advertisers in this publication is a vote against the efforts of the union leaders force their will against anyone who would dare stand in the way of their efforts of self-interest, without regard to the impact on anyone else.

And why not?

There must be a better way

Last Wednesday morning at 5 a.m., a meeting of the Suffolk County Legislature, which had started at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, came to an end. This was not the first all-night marathon nor will it be the last, unless the format the legislature uses is changed.

Under the current structure, mundane business, controversial public hearings and an open forum take place during the meeting. The result is chaos. It is a wonder anything gets accomplished. A good reason for the decisions which have led this county into near bankruptcy.

The legislative meetings are so disorganized, oftentimes only a few legislators are actually at their seats. The rest are in the boys' and girls' rooms, having a cup of coffee, chatting or perhaps even hiding. This is rude and discourteous to

both the audience and the conscientious legislators who endure the process without taking an unscheduled break.

For several years we have suggested that public hearings be held on another day or night other than that of the bi-weekly legislative meetings. The public hearing portion generally brings out the largest crowds. Once the audience's particular interest has been debated, the audience thins out noticeably. It makes good common sense to hold these special hearings on an alternate date to the regular legislative meeting, particularly those that are known beforehand to be controversial and which will draw large public participation.

The idea has support from some legislators, but they claim the majority simply do not wish to devote another night to the county's business. To that

we say, "If you don't want to do the job you have in the most efficient manner, then get another." There are some who think the marathon sessions do not come by accident, they are deliberately stacked with controversial issues as a time-consuming measure. By the time the legislators get to the business of voting on issues, most of the audience has been long gone. Therefore, the legislators can escape the scrutiny of the public as they cast their votes on sensitive issues.

Anything would be better than the current system that allows meetings to drag on into the wee hours of the morning. If they are really interested in better government and serving the people, rather than themselves, legislators will make the changes necessary to put a stop to the marathon session nonsense.

And why not?

Gaffney is facing a critical choice

Social services, better known as welfare, is the single most costly item in the county budget. Dr. Ruth Brandwein, the current commissioner, has announced her resignation effective the end of July. The current administration, headed by Robert Gaffney, had let it be known that it was dissatisfied with this commissioner and the direction the department was headed.

When Gaffney ran for county executive, he promised to bring aboard the best managers and executive staff he could find. Many of his appointments have been a disappointment. Some of the better ones he had made have already left the administration.

The appointment of the next commissioner to head the Department

of Social Services is the most critical one he will make. Suffolk County's social services agency is mammoth. It is growing by leaps and bounds. Many of the programs the Department of Social Services is involved in are mandatory. In others, the commissioner and the county have some latitude in both accepting and promoting. As is the case with school boards, some programs are elective but once implemented, they are covered by the mandates from the state and the federal government. It is some of these programs that have led to the skyrocketing expenditures by the county.

As an example, the preschool handicapped program is covered by a state mandate. You would expect it to be evenly applied throughout the

state. It isn't. Suffolk has taken a vigorous role in developing this program. The costs have gone from \$6 million per year to a budgeted \$126 million per year.

Suffolk County has a disproportionate share of students identified as handicapped as compared to the rest of the state. The costs, on average, are \$22,000 per year to service these children on a half-day basis. The same people who do the testing and the evaluations for the services provide the services the children are alleged to need, an obvious potential for conflict of interest.

Some legislators have made the charge that kids are being enrolled in these programs because they speak "Brooklynese" rather than a language

that is germane to Suffolk County. Although there is some truth to these statements, it is also true that some of the programs do help children who have definite handicaps.

There are residents throughout Suffolk County who are legitimately in need of social services. Their needs should be met, but the fraud and the corruption should be weeded out with equal vigor.

We now have a workfare program in New York State, a program where all eligible welfare recipients must take part in legitimate work in order to be eligible to continue to receive welfare grants. In Suffolk County, less than 5% of the identified able-bodied individuals are required to work. In Westchester County, over 55% are working at meaningful endeavors.

Fingerprinting of all welfare recipients has been recommended as a method of cutting down on fraud and abuse. A strong welfare commissioner could push for the implementation of such a system, without waiting for state approval. If the state opposes efforts to weed out corruption, take the matter to court. Let's see state officials defend a system than invites abuse.

These are only a few examples of the kinds of programs that a prudent, tough welfare commissioner could implement, programs that could result in controlling this runaway segment of government. Who is at the head of the welfare department, combined with that person's philosophies and management style, will determine whether this county will take control of its future.

Gaffney and his team should make every effort to find a fiscally responsible, tough regulator who realizes that the taxpayers have a limit, and funds are limited also. To serve the needy is an honorable mission, but it is just as honorable to weed out the abuses and to make every dollar work honestly.

Gaffney's entire political career could well be riding on the person he selects and the job that person does. We encourage him to find the best, to put aside politics and the pressures he will receive from the goody-two-shoes social services agencies who are motivated by self, not taxpayer, interests.

And why not?

Deeply appreciated honor

Suffolk Life was recognized last week by the Long Island Press Club with the presentation of a very special honor, an award for public service.

Last year we were approached by an official from Good Samaritan Hospital on behalf of a group of women from the West Islip community about purchasing space to conduct a study on breast cancer in the West Islip area. An unusually large number of women from this region had discovered they had breast cancer and were seeking answers to a host of questions. Was it coincidence, a pattern, a possible affect of living in the area? The women wanted to know and so did we.

This issue was more important

than money. We volunteered the front page of our paper for this survey. On the initial publication almost one out of every 10 families responded. Follow-up mailings by Good Samaritan brought in more responses, and the dedicated group of women, members of the West Islip Breast Cancer Coalition, began mapping the responses. It soon showed clusters in the community as reports came back positive.

When the award presentation was made, we remembered that the focus of attention on the problem had some very bittersweet results. Currently, more than 20 women, who had been tested previously but returned for another mammography test because of the publicity on the

subject, have discovered they now have this insidious disease. However, that discovery at an early stage could well save their lives. We took a chill because of our realization of the importance of an involved community newspaper.

The subsequent articles by Liz Tonis and the personal arm twisting by Lou Grasso have brought about involvement by both the state and the federal governments. New research will be conducted and, hopefully, answers found.

We salute those members of our staff who worked long and hard on these stories that went beyond the norm for reporting and editing. This is your award, you earned it and you deserve it.

And why not?

Invitation to present case

Suffolk Life has offered the Suffolk County Community College Faculty Association an opportunity to present its case concerning the proposed salary increases, currently being considered, to the residents of Suffolk County. We have offered to provide space at no charge. If they submit copy, it will not be edited.

We suggested a point, counterpoint format where the facts can

be discussed without rhetoric or finger pointing. We hope the faculty takes us up on this offer so the air can be cleared once and for all. Let them make their best case and then you, the residents of the county, can make your judgement.

The purpose of a newspaper is to present both sides in its news stories, to inform and to offer opinions in an editorial format.

We have expressed our concerns about the agreement and its impact on the taxpayers. We offer the Faculty Association the opportunity to counter with its side of the issue.

We believe the format we have suggested is fair. It will give the Faculty Association the same exposure to the same people who receive our newspaper.

And why not?

Sharing services, step in right direction

The Brookhaven Town Board and the Patchogue-Medford School District have joined in a pilot program that will have the town's Code Enforcement Division patrolling eight of the district's schools during their routine activities.

The shared services agreement has been lauded by both as a major step in the elimination of a duplication of services. We agree, and applaud the action.

According to the recently-approved pilot contract, the district's eight schools, located in the Patchogue and Medford communities, will be pa-

trolled seven days a week by existing town code enforcement units. Town personnel are being directed to prevent loitering on school grounds, and in the case of an emergency or break-in, contact the Fifth Precinct and an official of the school district. The pilot program is effective between July 1, 1993 and September 30, 1993. The cost of the program to the school district is \$7,500.

This working together relationship on the part of both the town and the school district is a major step in the right direction, and, hopefully, could

be the start of a cooperative effort in other school districts as well to combine resources to cut costs. While some town recreational programs are currently held in school buildings, we believe much more sharing of facilities and programs could be accomplished, at a significant savings to taxpayers.

We would like to see a county-town-school district summit held to discuss how shared services could be expanded to make the most efficient use of the talents, equipment and facilities of all three. An end to duplication of services and facilities is, in these dire fiscal times, an absolute necessity

if the taxpayers, who support all three levels, are to receive the tax relief they absolutely need.

We applaud Brookhaven Town and Patchogue-Medford officials for taking the shared services concept into this new area. Now, if only someone will provide the leadership necessary to bring officials of all levels together to pursue an expansion of shared services into other areas as well, we could be taking that important first step in the long journey toward cost-cutting and more efficient governmental operations.

And why not?

Independence Day:

Does it mean anything to you?

Sunday is the Fourth of July, Independence Day. What does this day mean to you? Another holiday? An excuse for a barbecue? The sound of noisy firecrackers? The sky lit with illegal fireworks? Will you give a thought to the real meaning of this holiday, what we are commemorating?

Let's go back more than two centuries and place ourselves in the shoes of our forefathers. How would you like to be told not only what religion to practice, but that you will practice? How would you like to live in tyranny where you could not own property and, in reality, because of the assessments upon you, you could never break free of the bondage? What kind of fear would you feel if you knew you could be hanged for speaking out against this injustice?

How would you feel about being governed by those who you had no part in choosing? What if there were no newspapers or voices who could express indignation or warn you about government and what it was doing to you?

How secure would you feel if your government forbid you to bear arms or have any kind of weapon to protect yourself against those oppressive forces?

Would you like to live in a society that was based upon classes, knowing that you never would be equal to those who made the rules?

How would you feel about a society that did not allow you to vote on laws that would regulate you or the rulers who would make these laws? Would you care or would you be apathetic and not want to become involved? Would you keep your mouth shut for fear of retaliation? Would you allow organized groups to beat you into submission?

Would you have the guts to be a forefather who would stand up and could be counted upon? Would you place a value on your freedom? Would you freely give up your own life so that your children could be free and stand tall?

Independence Day should be very important to each of us. Unfortunately, too many of us do not appreciate the freedoms we enjoy. Our apathy has lulled us to sleep and, one day, we may wake up and realize that which our forefathers gave their lives for we have let slip away because we didn't care.

And why not?



Another Fourth and still no law

Four years ago, Anita Benson's son, John Connelly, was killed in a fireworks accident. Benson was a 911 operator. Little did she realize that an emergency call she was to receive on that fateful night was about her son.

Connelly had been at a house party, just standing around as a

nearby resident was shooting off fireworks. He was hit by some of the debris from a mortar-type device packed in a pipe. His chest was torn apart.

Mourning the death of her son, a distraught Benson asked, "Why isn't there a law with some teeth that makes it illegal to possess or sell these weapons of destruction. There are laws on the books banning all types of fireworks. They do not make the distinction between the everyday Chinese firecrackers and fireworks that are the equivalent of a half of a stick of dynamite." Possession or sale of any type of fireworks under the worst case scenario is a misdemeanor.

Benson felt there should be tougher legislation, and she set out to have such a law passed in this state. Benson appealed to her assemblyman and her senator. A bill was crafted and was about to be implemented by both houses. The only opposition came from an unknown out-of-the-state fireworks purveyor. Strangely, the bill did not get acted upon.

Benson appeared on talk and television shows. She had appealed to editors across the state. She was a mother calling out not for justice, but for prevention so that other mothers would not have to go through the agony that she had to endure.

Four years ago, the bill had popular support across the state, yet someone had successfully bottled it up and killed it in Albany. Why?

The intent of the Benson Bill was to make it a felony to sell or possess a bomb grade firework, except by li-

censed professionals. She wasn't out to tilt windmills. She wanted teeth in the law so that the purveyors of death would have a permanent record and do hard time. She didn't want to interfere with the kids' firecrackers and bottle rockets. She just wanted to put a limit on the destructive powers of those fireworks that easily can find their way into the hands of children, and yes, adults.

This is the fourth year in a row we have written about this situation. The bill should have passed but instead, it is a forgotten memory. Did John Connelly die in vain? His mother still grieves, not only at the loss of her son but about how government let her

down for no good reason. What do you think she feels about the Constitution, and the way New York State government doesn't work?

How many other children and adults will be maimed and die because the New York State Legislature cannot act responsibly? What will it take, one of their children or loved ones to be blown to pieces to motivate them into action?

This Fourth of July the whole crew in Albany should hang their collective heads in shame. They are part of a system that can't take a good idea, a reasonable proposition and pass a law that will protect the people of the State of New York. Shame!

And why not?

We're wrong

In a recent editorial entitled "Gotta go buy a wig" we generalized in voicing criticism concerning the inclusion of wigs in health care coverage. Our criticism was aimed at providing wigs for reasons of vanity, and did not specifically exclude those who suffered a loss of hair because of chemotherapy, radiation or specific diseases. It should have.

Readers have brought that omission to our attention in no uncertain terms, and they are right in doing so. It was not our intent to add to the suffering of those battling a disease. We sought simply to call attention to changes in health care laws that add, for reasons other than disease, to the already high cost of health care.

We stand corrected.
And why not?

The wrong spot

Of the many people we have come to know in government, Alice Amrhein is a person we have great admiration for. She is not only very intelligent, but she has extraordinary management skills. Having said this, we were disappointed that County Executive Robert Gaffney appointed her as his chief fiscal officer.

Alice has many talents, but high finance is not one of them. Gaffney acknowledged this when he said he will have to appoint someone else to fulfill this function of the job. He said he was appointing Amrhein to bring management to the department and make it function more efficiently.

Gaffney's decision will add another high priced individual to his staff, again misdirecting and misusing our taxes. With the departure of some of his best administrative picks, the Gaffney administration appears to be coming frayed around the collar.

Before Gaffney was elected as county executive, we said that the staff that surrounded him would determine how well he would do. With the recent departures, he has the opportunity to rebuild his staff and he should take this opportunity before it is too late.

And why not?