

Halpin refusal abandons kids

County Executive Patrick Halpin has refused to intervene in a decision by his Department of Social Services to discontinue doing home evaluations for children about to be placed in the Surrogate's Court. Spokespersons for Halpin and the Social Services Department claim recent court decisions have upheld their position, but in hiding behind the law they are walking away from a moral responsibility they have for the welfare of children.

Suffolk County Surrogate Ernest Signorelli calls Halpin's refusal to cooperate "incomprehensible." Without this cooperation, he adds, it is impossible for him to make an adequate assessment of a guardian's fitness. Naming someone as a guardian without full information concerning the individual would be reckless; with the child's welfare at stake.

The Surrogate's Court handles approximately 15 to 20 cases a year in which parents have passed away, leaving dependent children as survivors. Or the mother may be deceased and the father in jail, leaving the child without parental care. The court is responsible for placing the children in homes of a designated custodian, designated as a guardian of that child or children. The Surrogate's Court does not have social workers or a trained staff available to investigate and ensure that the homes the children are being placed in are suitable, and the people the children will be raised by are good custodians.

The Social Services Department, which is equipped to conduct these investigations, by virtue of an agreement resulting from a meeting with Signorelli, Halpin, County Attorney Thomas Boyle and others in August of 1988, has conducted those investigations. But the Halpin spokesperson and a representative of the county attorney's office insist that agreement was only temporary until the court cases were settled. Now, Boyle has notified the Surrogate's Court the department will no longer conduct the investigations. For the Surrogate's Court to have to set up a structure to conduct such a limited number of investigations would be a duplication of government and a waste of taxpayers' money.

Signorelli rhetorically asks, "How in good conscience can I place children in homes that I know nothing about? Our newspapers have been filled with stories of child abuse and sexual assault. Would I not be responsible if one of these charges became a victim? Would I not be derelict in my responsibilities to my office?"

Signorelli is right. He must have proper information to make the proper judgement. The Social Services Department is equipped to make these investigations. They have the staff with the training. They should be responsible for this service to the people. And, during the August 30 conference with Signorelli, Social Services officials indicated they could perform this service within their budget.

The issue upon which the court made its decision upholding the position of the Social Services Department was based on whether or not Signorelli has the "authority" to order the department to perform the investigations. The court said he does not. But the court did not address the moral issue of whether or not the county has a responsibility to ensure the welfare of a child. We think they do. And, if the creation of a special Office for Children by Halpin is an indication, apparently he feels so too. Or is that office only a tool of politics, giving the impression that he really does care?

Why is Halpin now refusing to protect the children in need of a guardian? Why is he insisting that Signorelli make judgements of such an important nature without proper

information that could prevent the possibility of child abuse?

The spokespersons for Halpin and Social Services expressed great concern about "invasion of privacy," indicating they felt that investigation of a relative of a child would not be proper. But what if the home environment of that relative is not sound, or a new boyfriend is on the scene? Doesn't that matter? Where is it written that relatives never abuse or neglect children? Nowhere, because most instances of child abuse or neglect involve relatives.

Both spokespersons talked of "these hard times" and budgetary woes resulting in lack of staffing. That can be solved very easily, just take a look around in Halpin's office, and count the number of administrators in

Social Services. Surely enough money could be saved by paring some of these positions, funds which could be put to good use protecting the welfare of the children.

We do not pretend to understand the logic and reasoning of Halpin and his administration. We do understand, however, that if we do not do all that is possible to protect these children from future potential harm, we are being negligent and derelict in our responsibility as citizens.

Signorelli has legitimate concerns. We seriously recommend that the county executive reverse himself and order the Social Services Department to conduct these investigations. He has the power to do so. But does he have the concern for the children?

And why not?

Message to taxpayers:

Speak up now or pay later

Efforts are underway on the county level to cut costs to bring the county budget into line, to offset the financial impact of an expected deficit that looms ahead. With the economy on a downturn, and sales tax receipts and other revenues declining, something drastic has to be done to offset large tax increases next year.

Hue and cry

That "something," very obviously, is a slashing of the cost of running county government. But cuts are not going to come easily because each proposed cutback of abolition of any department is going to foster a hue and cry from special interest groups determined to protect their piece of the pie.

If each cost-cutting proposal were to be weighed on its merits, and approved or rejected based on its own individual value, efficiency of government might result. But that's not the way it works. The special interest folks turn out, sometimes en masse and other times in small but very vocal numbers, and the legislators turn tail. It has often been said that two angry mothers with baby carriages can cause the legislators to switch their votes on any issue, and there is, unfortunately, more than a little truth in that statement.

Recently, four legislators put forth a proposal to eliminate the county's Human Rights Commission. The action, they said, would result in a sav-

ings of some \$400,000, and was warranted because of the duplication of the same services elsewhere. Approximately 30 people representing human rights oriented groups turned out to complain and speak out against the proposal. And, from informed sources we hear that legislators are beginning to buckle. The proposal should be based on its own merit, on the documented information concerning what duplications exist and the actual impact of the proposal on the health and welfare of people, rather than cries of protest.

The opposition

The problem is, and has always been, the special interest groups will turn out on virtually every proposal that dares to cut financial funding for any favored program. The comments of such groups will sway legislative minds much more than documentation which supports the cuts. Unfortunately, however, the people who must pay the bills—the rank and file of the taxpayers—do not turn out, do not speak up, or support those legislators with the courage to stand firm against pressure groups to bring cost-efficiency to county government.

'Good to see you'

When a huge crowd of angry taxpayers protesting tax increases jammed a legislative meeting last year, spilling out into the hallway and locked from the building because of capacity limita-

tion, Legislator Steve Levy made an interesting comment. "It's good to see you people here," he said, noting that all too often the pressure groups are the only people who come before the legislature to speak up on issues. And he's right! Every spending bill passed because of the actions of a pressure group, and every budget cut that is rejected because of pressure from affected groups has an impact on the tax rate.

Make a difference

The message is quite simple: unless you are a part of the solution, don't complain about the problem. You can make a difference, but you have to take action. You can by attending legislative meetings, or by contacting your legislator with this message:

"Stand firm. Decide each issue on the merits. Make sure our tax dollars are being spent efficiently and wisely. Audit those groups which receive our tax dollars, make sure they are actually performing the services, that they are not administratively over-staffed, that the services they offer are not available elsewhere, and are needed, not simply 'nice to have.' We, the taxpayers, are not turning our backs on the legitimate needs of others, but we do not want one penny of our money wasted. Stand firm, and we will support you. Bow to pressure, and we will apply our own pressure in the voting booth."

And why not?

What if we dared to be different?

Unless someone has spent the last year or so on Mars, all should be aware of the fact that the taxpayers are in a rebellious mood. The tax burden has become too great, and changes are to be made!

Those changes may well have to be in the way we do things on all levels of government, and in our school districts as well. The school districts have become prime targets in the war against taxes, but this fact has created another kind of war, pitting residents against residents in some areas. This second "war" is no accident, it is part of a "divide and conquer" philosophy adopted by many in the educational ranks and is designed to quell the efforts of those who are demanding cuts in educational costs.

If everyone worked to bring about changes in the way things are done and money is spent, much could be accomplished. If everyone demanded

that they get the best out of every tax dollar spent, some accountability might come into existence.

The long-standing cry from the educational ranks is we need to get more money to fund education, we need to pay our teachers and our administrators more to get good people, we need more and more programs to expand the educational opportunities of our kids. The costs go up and up, as does the tax burden upon the people. Meanwhile, report after report indicates many of our students lack the basic skills necessary to go further in life, be it higher education or job opportunities.

What if: more money for higher salaries was conditional upon proven educational achievement? What if administrators got a flat salary, and a bonus each year for improvement in the education the kids receive. No improvement, no bonus, and the sal-

ary stays the same. And if the good teachers who can really make a difference in the lives of their students were financially rewarded for those efforts, while the mediocre teachers, and everyone agrees they exist, made less?

What if: every mandated program carried a detailed financial and educational impact review? What will the program achieve in terms of improved education, and what will it cost?

What if the people at the state Education Department got their heads out of the clouds and had to spend some time in the classrooms to see the full impact of the educational edicts they hand down?

What if the parents became more involved in the educational lives of their children? If parents took more responsibility, applying the necessary discipline to ensure children do their work, encourage them when necessary, work with the teachers to learn what problems there may be, and then work cooperatively to overcome them?

What if we dared to be different? If we evaluated each dollar spent to determine what educational value it offers to the students? And weeded out those programs that are designed more to keep a student "busy" but offer little in the way of actual educational enhancements? If we really tried to bring educational costs into the realm of the taxpayers' ability to pay? Without the current efforts to split the community?

What if we dared to be different at our town, county and state levels? Stop using government as a tool to

enhance our political system. Seek out the best quality, regardless of political affiliation, instead of creating positions to satisfy patronage needs.

What if we created priority lists to protect the most valuable lands, work to develop a compromise between the "no more development" proponents and the need to construct affordable homes, to strengthen our tax base in sensible ways?

What if we dared say to the state or federal level, "no more mandates until you provide the dollars to accomplish them, or at least the leadership and guidance to bring them about with the public's ability to pay?" Not just complain as we have done in the past, but to say "no," and mean it enough to support our officials who have the guts to do it.

What if we stopped creating "commissions" or "task force" groups made up of the same old tired political names, the very same people who helped push taxes up to the current levels? What if we utilized the talents of folks who have not been selected before, people with as much talent as those with familiar names?

What if we utilized the wisdom of our seniors and put their "grey power" to work investigating the problems faced by their peers and others and find solutions, in partnership with government, to resolve those problems?

What if we dared to be different, to make life easier and financially possible for all, the needy, the seniors, and the average taxpayer?

And why not?

It's about time!

The New York State Public Service Commission has decided to move ahead with an independent audit of the actions of the Long Island Lighting Company's Board of Directors. That audit, which was killed as part of the Cuomo-LILCO agreement on Shoreham, is long overdue, and should entail much more than a look at the directors. It must focus on all of LILCO's financial affairs, including the expenses included in its cost of operation which become part of the rate-making process.

There are a host of questions that need to be answered in order to protect Long Island's economic future. The increases in electric rates guaranteed in Cuomo's Shoreham agreement will virtually double the cost of energy on Long Island in the next ten years. The financial impact of those rates will not only seriously impact the public sector, businesses will continue, as they have in recent years, to look elsewhere to build or expand. The combination of those two factors alone will spell economic disaster for Long Island.

Recent revelations about the increases in the Golden Parachutes for top company officials and the creation of a pension plan for LILCO directors give clear evidence that LILCO officials are operating with a self-serving attitude. They are more concerned about their own financial welfare than they are about the financial ruin they will bring to Long Island unless serious changes are made in the way this utility operates.

Reductions in special franchise taxes through legislation passed in Albany have already had an effect upon the tax rates of governments and school districts. We are told that those reductions are slated to come back to

the ratepayers, since LILCO is merely a pass through conduit for taxes from ratepayers to the taxing entities. But, LILCO notes, these savings will come back to the ratepayers in the form of lower increases in the future. But who checks? Who tabulates the savings? How do we know LILCO simply doesn't ask for more in the way of rate increases, then makes a show of deducting the special franchise tax savings? Do we trust them? Do you trust them?

The Public Service Commission was created to safeguard that the ratepayers were not being taken for a financial ride. But it hasn't worked out that way. The PSC has become the protector of the utility, not the regulator to protect the public. The PSC's participation in Cuomo's Shoreham deal, it was the PSC which came up with the dollar figures that healed the financial health of LILCO at the expense of the ratepayers. Do we trust them?

The other "protector of the people," the State Consumer Board, is headed by Richard Kessel, who was also part and parcel of Cuomo's deal and was, in fact, its chief salesman. Can we honestly believe that Kessel is more concerned about the people than he is about the utility? Do you?

An independent audit of LILCO is a start, a step in the right direction. But it must be an in-depth audit, designed to weed out the true facts of how ratepayers' money is being spent, and a thorough look at the expenses of its officials, all expenses billed against the company. It's time to put the ratepayer at the top of the priority list rather than the utility.

And why not?

Why not bidding?

In the current wave of "cutting costs" to meet an anticipated deficit in the county budget next year, a proposal has resurfaced that would eliminate some East End bus routes. There could well be an alternative to this action, however, if the legislators were really interested in providing services at the least possible costs.

The answer could be competitive bidding, something that is sorely lacking in awarding current county bus routes. Instead, the county has been awarding the routes through contracts which provide the buses, pay the expenses, and guarantee a profit to the busing companies.

A proposal has been advanced by Legislator Fred Thiele, Jr., which would open the process to competitive bidding in order to provide the service at competitive costs. That proposal died in committee recently, with legislators expressing an "If it ain't broke, don't mess with it" attitude. They based that viewpoint on the "lack of complaints" they have received from bus riders, rather than the costs of the operations. That attitude, however, breeds the "cut out the East End routes, they cost too much," and cur-

tailment of service in other areas to cut costs actions that all too often prevail. Cutting service is the last thing that should be considered. Cutting costs should be first.

Why not competitive bidding? Would it bring about a savings so that service could be continued where it is needed? According to an article by the Competitive Services Board in the June 1989 National School Bus Report, "Using competitive contracting to deliver public transportation services often can enhance mobility and expand ridership, reduce service costs and improve performance."

If there is truth in those words, the matter of competitive bidding for county bus routes is not one that should be killed in committee, as it has been in the past, or cast aside without careful study. If Suffolk County legislators are really serious about cutting the cost of government, they must look at every opportunity that may exist to accomplish that goal. Competitive bidding is a good place to start.

And why not?

But ratepayers pay the bills

PSC and utilities, still sweethearts

The Public Service Commission has been the target of recent requests for audits be conducted of the affairs of the Long Island Lighting Company's Board of Directors. Those requests were motivated by anger over financial gifts in the form of increased retirement benefits given to Board Chairman William Catacosinos, and to the board members themselves. The audit requests are legitimate. The audits should be conducted.

The Long Island Association has also raised its voice asking the PSC to examine a clause in the Cuomo-LILCO Shoreham agreement that permits an increase in rates when oil prices go up, but no equal decrease when they go down. "The provision allows the utility to fully pass along fuel cost increases to its customers as fuel prices rise without lowering bills to the same full extent when fuel costs drop. This could result in a windfall for LILCO at the expense of ratepayers when oil prices go below the base rate," the LIA declared last week.

LILCO hardly needs a windfall. Since the settlement was reached in March of last year, the LIA points out, "LILCO's electric rates have increased by 17.8 percent, a figure which includes two Public Service Commission approved rate hikes totaling 10.4 percent and a 7.4 percent jump in fuel costs. An additional 5 percent increase is scheduled later this year." And that's only the beginning of a long line of rate increases coming in the years ahead.

In a letter to Peter Bradford, chairman of the PSC, the LIA called on the regulatory agency to conduct an immediate review and determine what steps the commission will take to prevent LILCO from reaping long-term windfalls should fuel prices drop below December 1989 levels.

The LIA is entirely correct in its

call for a review to prevent LILCO from raising fuel adjustment billing, but not decreasing that adjustment when prices fall. With electric rates on Long Island going through the roof, driving businesses and jobs away and seriously impacting on the area's economy, ratepayers should not be forced to pay one penny extra to enhance LILCO's financial health.

Not surprisingly, the only voice raised against doing an audit of LILCO's financial actions came from Newsday last week. Sure, Newsday said, LILCO board members "seem willing to hand Catacosinos the key to the strongbox." But, LILCO's long-time chief ally declared, the PSC can keep the impact out of the rates. Newsday bragged about LILCO's financial health these days, and claimed the requests for a PSC audit is "overkill." If it ain't broke, don't fix it, Newsday said in voicing a vote of confidence in the utility.

The fact is, however, that it is broke. LILCO's management blunders have taken the company to the brink of financial disaster, and only the PSC with its rate increase giveaways and the overly-generous terms of the Cuomo deal have prevented LILCO from going belly up. Meanwhile, the ratepayers are getting broker and broker.

Sure, the financial affairs of LILCO should be audited. But is the PSC the one to do it? Consider this: A secret agreement between the PSC staff and the telephone company was all set to give the phone company a \$445 million rate increase. But New York State's Attorney General Robert Abrams stepped into the picture, fought against the increase, and the PSC commissioners rejected the secret pact.

Abrams, in a recent visit to Suffolk Life Newspapers, revealed that an

investigation by his office showed instances of overcharging by companies associated with the phone company's parent company. The overcharging drove up the cost of doing business, and showed as inflated business costs in the rate increase application.

This matter is still under investigation, but the phone company, in a display of total arrogance, has put forth a new, and larger, rate increase request.

The PSC and the utilities have had

a sweetheart relationship for too long. The PSC has displayed great concern for the financial health of the utilities and total disdain for the ratepayers they are supposed to protect.

What is urgently needed is an independent audit of the spending habits of LILCO and the phone company, and an investigation into the relationship between these utilities and the PSC. What we really need is someone to be on the side of the ratepayers for a change.

And why not?

A time for change

The Suffolk County Legislature has long been the target of barbs for the zany happenings that often occur. The political posturing, the shouting matches, the marathon sessions that last until the wee hours of the morning. Some things won't change because of the political makeup and the personalities involved. But some changes could be made to improve its operation. All it takes is the will, and a bit of common sense.

A case in point: The legislature meeting last week went from about 9:30 a.m. to sometime after 11 p.m. One of the reasons for this extended session is the fact that 13 public hearings were held during the meeting, including a controversial proposal which would abolish the Human Rights Commission. There were scores of speakers on hand to discuss the proposal and the hearing on this subject alone lasted some four hours.

It would be an application of common sense to schedule public hearings on one day, and hold the legislative meeting on another. This would eliminate to some degree the marathon sessions that have often occurred. It

would provide the public an opportunity to speak its mind at a sensible hour. And give the legislators more time to deal with the important issues that come before them, within a reasonable time frame.

This is not a new suggestion. It has been expressed many times in the past, but former presiding officers have failed to implement such a move, although we have yet to hear a plausible reason why such a change should not be made.

As the hour gets late, and a long line of speakers still remain, many members of the public give up in disgust and leave before expressing their view. We have often suspected that fact alone is one motivation to keep things as they are, to cut down on the number of speakers on any issue.

There are several proposals afoot to abolish the legislature, proposals motivated by legislative actions of the past. It would be in the best interest of the legislators to shape up their operation, to make it easier for the public to be heard, not harder.

And why not?

In 1990 census

Make sure you count in getting aid \$\$

The 1990 federal census, which gets underway on April 1, is already the target of controversy because of claims that the final count will not include an accurate number of blacks, Hispanics and the poor. And the track record of previous census counts is replete with charges that large segments of our population and areas were missed. The census is more than an update of our population; any inaccuracy in the final figures will have a financial impact on us all.

In 1980, inaccurate figures contained in the final census count cost

local government millions of dollars in federal and state aid revenues. Since aid is based on a per capita (per individual) basis, the higher the population, the more aid that municipality will receive. If the population is high, but the count is low and does not accurately reflect the number of people in the town or the county, vital dollars which could help ease the tax burden are lost. The impact is also felt in local school districts where increases in budgets are causing financial havoc with the taxpayers.

These same taxpayers have been

demanding tax relief. Many have banded together in a tax revolt movement that has targeted government and school districts, with protests against spending measures. Others have voiced complaints, but have taken no active part in bringing about solutions. Making sure they are a part of the 1990 census is one way the public has of ensuring we get our fair share of dollars to help meet our government and education costs. Participation in the census effort will not invade privacy, information is confidential. It won't take a lot of time, but it is vitally important.

If you have complained before about the ever-increasing tax burden that is forcing many residents out of their homes, but have not actively participated in any effort to bring about lower taxes, now is the time to be a part of the effort to get our fair share of aid dollars. If you are not counted, or know of others who have been missed, contact your local town officials so that they may be aware of any census problem that is robbing us of needed aid dollars.

And why not?

Anthony J. Prudenti - He Did It His Way

Suffolk County lost one of its great citizens this past Thursday night. Tony Prudenti, a successful businessman, citizen activist, politician and benefactor of many, died in his sleep.

Tony Prudenti lived life to its fullest, always considerate of others, never compromising his integrity, or being in doing it the right way. He was always mindful of where he came from, grateful for his success, and compassionate enough to turn back and reach out and help others go forward.

He had a fire in his belly that demanded the best of himself and of those who surrounded him. He believed no matter how poor or humble your beginnings, you could reach for the stars and touch them by persistent hard work, honest dealings, and a true desire to be the best you are capable of being.

Tony had been born into humble surroundings, the son of a common laborer. He distinguished himself in World War II, coming out of the European campaign as a Sergeant First Class.

Tony came to Suffolk in the mid-fifties and he, himself, worked in the construction trades. His father had en-

couraged him to "go for it" and "to be the best." Although it only seemed a dream when he started, he became a successful builder, completing over 5,000 homes in Suffolk County.

When I first met Tony I was awed by his reverence for his parents and for his family. Rarely had I seen such love, care and respect. This is the legacy he has given to his own children, Gail, John and Tony.

Tony, for years, has been involved in politics. He served with distinction as the Suffolk County Republican leader. Upon taking office, he found the files stripped, the office in disarray and the county organization \$1.7 million in debt. He paid off the debt, vitalized the Republican organization in Suffolk. He was responsible for the election of Peter F. Cohalan as county executive. Senator Alphonse D'Amato owes his office to Tony's early support and intervention.

After his term as county chairman, he was the brains and the work behind many other notable elected officials and campaigns - Chief Surrogate Ernest Signorelli, former Assemblyman and now Brookhaven Town Councilman John Powell, and the recent election of Patrick Mahoney as Suffolk County Sheriff.

The one thing that distinguished Tony from the other politicians was his personal integrity and his demand for honesty. Upon taking over the chairmanship of the Republican party, one of the old-timers said to him, "you are sitting in a seat worth \$500,000." Tony's reaction was to call a meeting of the Executive Committee of the county. He emphatically told the town leaders and their co-chairs, "Suffolk is no longer for sale." He warned any hint he had of any wrongdoing would result in his calling upon the district attorney to investigate fully, and prosecute if necessary. The Republican party would be a party of honesty and integrity under his leadership, he declared. And it was.

Tony considered politics his hobby. He is one of the few men of today's age that truly looked at politics or government service as a give-back to the community. He confided to me once that during his tenure as county leader, he spent a quarter of a million dollars of his own money to rebuild the party and pay off its debts. How many other politicians do we know that gave instead of took?

After Tony delivered Suffolk County as the most Republican

county in the nation for Ronald Reagan, the President invited him to Washington for lunch. Tony said to me, "Can you imagine me, the son of an Italian laborer having lunch with the President, and him asking me for my advice and counsel on the issues of the nation?" It was a proud moment for Tony, one that I was happy to share with him.

Tony was extremely proud of his Italian heritage. He grew up in an era of bigotry towards Italians. A time when anyone with an Italian name was assumed to be a laborer, a dock hand or a member of the mob. As Tony achieved and became a respected businessman and community leader, he threw himself into creating the proper image and pride within the Italian community.

Tony founded the John A. Prudenti Lodge of the Sons of Italy in Patchogue, and he was involved in the creation of others. He was a staunch advocate of Italian-Americans, encouraging them to try to reach as high as possible and achieve. He encouraged the establishment of scholarship funds, believing that further education was the way to win success and respect.

Tony was not only involved with Italian causes. He was one of the original supporters of "The Group," each year increasing his contribution. Tony founded the Mastic Kiwanis Club, and served in various capacities on local, county and international Kiwanis affairs.

There were a whole host of other organizations that he was involved with, always encouraging the best from everyone. There are hundreds of people over his lifetime he personally reached out and helped. Kids have gone through college because of Tony. Mortgages have been saved from foreclosure. Many people owe their jobs and livelihoods to him. When someone was in need, his pockets were never empty and his words of encouragement will not be forgotten.

The loss of Tony is a personal one for me. He was one of my closest friends, a person I admired. He was one of those guys I could call up and speak to about nothing or everything. He was a great listener, and his advice was sound.

Tony reminded me a lot of my own dad in his passion for honesty, and in putting his hand behind him to pull up the next guy on the ladder. Few men can go to their rest knowing that they have lived this life positively, compassionately, and through their example, performed as God has asked of all men.

By now he is probably safe in Heaven, organizing one of the angels' campaigns to get close to God.

Tony Prudenti lived his life his way. He gave all he could, and we hope that the people of Suffolk County appreciate the pride, the honor and the honesty he stood for.

We love you, Tony. God speed.

Those on top dump on bottom

One of the major problems in these troubled financial times is the attitude of those in upper levels of government, who have developed a habit of dumping on the lower levels "beneath" them. Forgotten in this mindset, however, is the fact that the taxpayers are shouldering the brunt of the financial crunch such actions cause.

Some examples: State legislators, back in 1983, grabbed onto a motherhood and apple pie issue--the preservation of our precious groundwater--and mandated an end to landfills. "Town officials have been doing nothing but perpetuate these landfills that are polluting our groundwater, and therefore we in the higher level of government must take action," they proclaimed.

That action, the infamous landfill closure law, is going to bankrupt taxpayers. The very same people who put the state legislators in office. All they did was pass a law to mandate the end of landfills, but did not commit any state money, provide any leadership, or create regional markets for recycled material. They have tried to focus the finger of blame at the towns as the garbage crisis began to mount, but they can't escape responsibility for the financial impact they have placed upon the taxpayers. Their own constituents. They will have a heavy burden to carry as they run for re-election this fall.

County officials are little better. They, too, seem to forget that the people who live in the towns, who elected them to office, feel the brunt of the financial manipulations they put into effect. Another case in point: Presid-

ing Officer Donald Blydenburgh released last week a "Plan for Efficient and Responsive Management." There are many facets of that plan which will undergo intense scrutiny in the days and weeks ahead. But one, in particular, illustrates the "dump on those below us" mentality that exists.

Blydenburgh recommends that the county could save \$7,640,787 by eliminating revenue-sharing to the towns, just as "congress eliminated revenue-sharing to municipalities during a federal budget crunch in 1986." According to Blydenburgh, "This action would also force town officials to trim and cut their budgets since 'free' tax revenue would no longer be available." If we had a workable Initiative and Referendum law, we might force a vote on the abolition of the county sales tax. Using Blydenburgh's logic, that might force the county officials to trim and cut their budget since "free" tax revenue would no longer be available.

Guess who will have to come up with the \$7,640,787 that Blydenburgh wants to keep to cover up the county's wasteful spending? The taxpayers in the towns. The money, which was approved by public referendum in the one-quarter percent sales tax bill for water preservation, was to have gone for capping landfills. The landfills have to be capped, thanks to the mandate by state legislators, so the towns are going to have to get the money from somewhere. Blydenburgh suggests withholding the county money would "increase pressure on the state to come up with bond moneys to solve the landfill problem it created with the 1983 landfill law." But don't hold

your breath, folks. With the state's current fiscal crisis, we wouldn't bet on any state money coming our way. Those folks are good at mandating, but awful bad on funding for those mandates.

What our politicians of today must learn--and quickly if we are to survive financially--is that those who serve on the state, or county, level are no better, or smarter, than those in town office. That they represent the same constituents, and when they sock it to the county, or the towns, they sock it to the very same people who put them in office.

As the costs begin to mount in every town here on Long Island in solving the garbage crisis, the taxpayers must realize those who passed the law in Albany, without financial assistance, are the culprits who are responsible for the staggering impact those costs will have on the tax rate. And the taxpayers must know, too, that efforts to solve a county financial crisis--brought about by wanton spending habits and sloppy management--by stealing revenues earmarked to ease the burden of town taxes--is nothing more than a carnival shell game.

Ill-advised mandates, and shifting financial burdens to solve fiscal woes, are not the marks of good government or good governmental officials. If we are to survive the current financial crisis on all levels, we must have responsible people in the higher levels or we, who foot the bills, will be buried in the muck of their actions. Taxpayers must deliver that message in no uncertain terms, or suffer the consequences.

And why not?