

Health care is already available

Go into any emergency room in the United States and you will see conspicuously-posted a federal notice printed in both English and Spanish specifically informing you that you are entitled to health care at that facility, regardless of whether you can pay for it or not.

By law you must receive the same identical health care as is provided by paying customers. This notice pertains to everyone, regardless of whether they have insurance or not, whether they have money to pay for the services or not.

No, this policy does not cover elective services. But, it does cover people who have stomachaches, common colds, as well as needed operations, hospital stays and even long-term catastrophic illnesses such as cancer and AIDS. In effect, we have 100% health care for everyone in the United States. It is paid through our taxes and by the fees charged by the hospital to their paying customers.

We are sick and tired of hearing Hillary Clinton and the liberals in Washington stating as fact that 30 or more million people in the United States do not have health care. That is a blatant lie. No, some people do not have the depth and the breadth of health care that others do. Those who

are on welfare here in New York State are entitled to benefits that are considered the Cadillac of the industry, benefits above and beyond those that are provided by paid health plans. These benefits are paid through the tax dollars that are taken from those who work, or those who have earned profits from their investments in the American dream.

Although Hillary and Company have done their damndest to confuse the issue, the crisis is not the availability of health care but the outrageous cost associated with it.

Clinton is absolutely right, the drug companies have been ripping off the American public with their incessant increases in the price of drugs that were researched and developed and put into production years ago.

I have personally watched an asthmatic drug I use go from under \$3 a tube to over \$15. The increase in cost has been doubling and tripling that of inflation. We know of others who have been on similar types of maintenance drugs who have experienced the same outrage.

Doctors' fees can be outrageous. We know of a number of instances where surgeons are pulling down \$20,000 and more a day for performing

specialized surgery. One physician we are aware of was performing operations four days a week. His gross, for three of those days was over \$100,000 per day. On the fourth day he did pro bono work, donating his skills to those who could not afford the cost of his fees.

There is no question that hospitals go overboard on tests. Much of this is the result of covering their butts, avoiding malpractice lawsuits rather than practicing good medicine.

The cost of running hospitals today is enormous. Common, entry-level labor jobs pay \$10 to \$15 per hour, plus benefits. It's hard for a hospital board to deny a wage earner a living wage even for the most menial work when they are in the business of saving lives. Of course, these high labor costs must be built into the prices patients are charged for their services.

Recently, the State of New York even had the audacity to tag onto hospital bills what amounted to a sales tax of 25%. Thank God, the courts threw this obnoxious and offensive "sick tax" out.

What this country needs is good, basic health care that takes care of everyone for emergencies and realistic health needs. That we already have in

existence. A universal health care system, such as we provide our welfare recipients, will skyrocket the cost of medical coverage to a point that it will eat up 10% to 15% of the earned income of both individual and corporate America. The focus should be on driving the cost down, not driving the cost up.

We know that price fixing does not work. We know that we can't say to doctors and other health professionals, invest three-quarters of a million dollars in your education, spend 12 to 18 years in studying to become a doctor or a specialist but do not expect to be reimbursed for your investment or your time. No one is willing to say to a janitor you are only worth \$5 or \$6 per hour when the person is trying to support a family.

Regressive tax laws discourage investment and competition. Putting a limit on what pharmaceutical companies can earn will discourage competition which will not drive prices down. Why compete if you can't make a profit?

Maybe it's time to take the bull by the horns and have the government fund and do the research and development on new drugs. Once developed and approved, the drugs would become public domain and any company who wished to manufacture them could, and this competition would allow the market to set the price.

Likewise, if we want to gain control of the hospitals, why not nationalize all of them? Hospital care would become the burden of society. The government could put limits on the testing done, the procedures provided and the lengths of stay. They could pay wages as they do for other federal agencies based upon national standards. Possibly, even compulsory service would be required for those who are receiving the benefits of public assistance through welfare, unemployment and other aid programs.

Hospitals could be built to national standards, rather than each a customized structure that drives up the costs. Specialized equipment could be regionalized, eliminating the duplication that is so prevalent that adds to the burden of medical costs.

Where it is so financially difficult for doctors and nurses to be educated, possibly a plan could be worked out for tuition free medical schools operated under federal funding and control. That would ensure an adequate supply of medical professionals. These professionals could be required to work in their chosen field for minimum compensation for a number of years and then provide a day or two a week of pro bono service to fulfill their obligations.

There is no question that the high cost of medical care must be addressed. Radical changes must be made, but changes that make sense and that do not add to the economic sickness that is paralyzing this country.

And why not?

What's imputed rental value?

Hold onto your pants, folks, slick Willie has a "gotcha." It's called "imputed rental value." Don't know what it is? You had better learn quick. It's a new buzz word floating around Washington that makes you look rich and more taxable.

The ripoff works like this. Your home, your castle, the one you own and live in, will be treated under federal tax codes as a rental unit, and for tax purposes, your home will be treated as a rental unit. Big Brother Clinton and his honchos in Washington will assign a rental value to your home. This will be added to your income, and according to some published reports, you will pay taxes on this even though it is only a phantom rental.

Confused? So were we. We called Washington and, yes, this is being considered under the Clinton plan. Basically, all housing units, whether owner-occupied or not, will be treated as rental units. The value of the rental, even on the owner-occupied homes, will be considered as income. Expenses will be deducted from the rental value and owners will pay income tax on the difference, according to some of the published reports.

As preposterous as it may seem, now let's look at what they are going to allow as expenses, and what they will not. We receive a credit on our real estate taxes against our state taxes. You can't have two deductions for the same expense. So, real estate taxes cannot be deducted. Interest on

your mortgage is already a deductible item, so you will not be able to deduct interest as a legitimate deduction as this would be double-dipping. There is grave question as to whether upkeep will be allowed because of the lack of definition between maintenance and improvements.

What is clear in everyone's mind is that if slick Willie can impose this outrageous new income, he will have found himself billions in new revenues to impose new tax burdens on.

Don't worry though, he is only going to sock it to the rich, those who, by latest calculations, make over \$30,000 a year.

And why not?

Hypocrisy of Richard Kessel

Governor Cuomo's head of the state Consumer Protection Board, and hand-picked chairman of the Long Island Power Authority, Richard Kessel, was on Long Island last week. During an appearance before a Suffolk County legislative committee, he stated that he opposed LILCO's latest rate increase. This is pure hypocrisy and just plain double talk.

Kessel was Governor Cuomo's hired gun and cheerleader in support of the Shoreham deal, which brought about this rate increase. The deal plainly spelled out that LILCO got an opportunity to rape Long Island

through a series of rate increases through the end of this century. The deal allowed LILCO to charge their customers three times for the same plant, Shoreham, which never commercially operated.

Kessel was well aware that the Wall Street Journal categorized the deal as the "sweetheart" of the century. He fully knew of the consequences of this giveaway and yet, he led the governor's charge in twisting arms for support.

Kessel now claims that he opposes this year's Cuomo-guaranteed annual increase, which, if you followed his

logic, means he opposed the deal. That's pure hogwash. He knows it and you should too. If he gets away with this one you can bet your sweet bippy Cuomo will be telling you when he runs for re-election that the deal wasn't his idea, it was yours, you made him do it.

You have to wonder how much protection the citizens have with Richie Kessel as the head of the Consumer Protection Board when he takes so much liberty with the truth. And how much better off we'd be if we had someone in that position who was really concerned about the consumers.

And why not?

The phantom of the pine barrens

What are the pine barrens? Why should we save them? Most people cannot give a scientific description of the pine barrens. This even includes those who are feverish supporters of preserving them.

If you ask Long Islanders why we should save the pine barrens, they will tell you what they have been led to believe to protect our fresh water. In their hearts and souls they believe that the only fresh water left under Long Island is in the areas that have been politically designated as the pine barrens.

Those who have sold the concept

of the pine barrens have neglected to inform their supporters that there are massive sources of fresh water throughout Long Island that we currently draw our water from. They fail to mention that it has long been known that to the south of Islip, under the Great South Bay out into the Atlantic, there is a dome of fresh water so large that it will take care of Long Island's fresh water needs through the year 3000.

If you accepted the concept that the only fresh water available to Long Island is under the pine barrens, then you would have to accept the concept

that in the near future a massive drilling, transportation and piping system would have to be developed, both in the pine barrens and throughout Long Island, to deliver this pristine water to the homes of the consumers from Queens to Montauk. This would be the mother of all public works projects, and would make the Southwest Sewer District pale by comparison.

The reality is there are substantial sources and reserves of fresh water throughout Long Island. The head of the Suffolk County Water Authority, Michael LoGrande, has said that there are many reasons to preserve the pine

barrens, but that water is not one of them.

There are other reasons to consider buying the open space from Port Jefferson to the Shinnecock Canal, that area that has been designated by politicians as the pine barrens. There are tiger salamanders, exotic beetles and birds that make this their habitat. This is the last vestige of undeveloped or moderately developed open space. This area is reflective, from a geological and ecological standpoint, of what Long Island was before man inhabited it.

On the flip side, a substantial portion of the land within the pine barrens is owned by private individuals or corporations. People, over the years, have purchased portions of this land. They have made investments that they gambled would eventually result in a profit. In this country, we have a constitutional guarantee that covers our ownership of property and a right to profit from our investments.

Within the pine barrens, various forms of government have large holdings, ranging from the Navy ownership of the Calverton site occupied by Grumman, federal ownership of land occupied by Brookhaven National Lab, the state owning the RCA properties and the county owning vast tracts of parkland in Yaphank and Manorville. In addition, towns and special interest groups, such as the Nature Conservancy, have large holdings. This land could be kept forever wild or restricted to its current usage.

The economy on Long Island has stagnated and we have run out of sources of public revenue. We no longer have incremental tax opportunities. Taxes raised today must be used for the essential services of government. We must prioritize our spending in order to survive. We must look at our massive spending projects with a jaundiced eye.

Obviously, government cannot afford to acquire the pine barrens. There just isn't the money to do this. What we should do is develop plans for its proper use. Develop what should be developed, preserve those already-owned government lands and stop confusing the issue by raising the flag of pure water, which may not necessarily be the case.

And why not?

Term limits for Brookhaven

One of the few good proposals John LaMura, supervisor of Brookhaven Town, has come up with is term limitations for the future town board officials.

Brookhaven is a classic example of one-party domination and the inability of opposing viewpoints to be heard. It has led to such abuses as steering town insurance for years to the agency owned by a powerful town political figure rather than placing the

insurance out for bid, enabling the potential savings of millions of dollars. Term limitations would allow fresh blood, both from within the party and the outside, to have an opportunity to present their viewpoints through the electorate.

Knowing that term limitations is not a popular idea with incumbents, LaMura proposed that the current officeholders would not be affected. This should have eliminated any opposition, but hasn't.

We think these council people who are opposing term limitations should think again. LaMura is right on this issue. He deserves the support of the citizens.

We encourage Brookhaven Town residents to call or send a message to the members of the town council expressing their support for a local term limitation law, and demand that they bring it to a vote and pass it.

And why not?

Siphoning off the savings

State Senator Owen H. Johnson (Fourth Senate District, Babylon), Senate majority whip, recently lashed out at the Long Island Lighting Company (LILCO) for its efforts to enrich the cause of its stockholders at the expense of its ratepayers. We share in Johnson's anger. With high energy rates one of the primary causes of economic woes here on Long Island, we can ill afford a utility's devious schemes to add to those problems.

As a result of his actions, Johnson reports LILCO officials were backing off from a plan to allocate cost savings resulting from a recent debt refinancing directly to stockholders rather than as a benefit to the ratepayers. "When I learned of LILCO's attempt to divert ratepayers' money to stockholders, I immediately contacted the Public Service Commission (PSC) to urge that they reject this scheme by the company," Johnson reported. "I pointed out that the LILCO chairman, directors, and officers, as heads of a government-sponsored monopoly, are expected to pursue advantageous financing terms as a responsibility of their positions. To claim, as LILCO did, that this refinancing is an 'extraordinary initiative' on the part of company management is ludicrous."

Johnson reports that in a letter responding to his request, PSC Managing Attorney Richard C. King reported that LILCO has formally withdrawn its petition to directly enrich stockholders with a share of the

savings resulting from its lower-cost refinancings. "I cannot emphasize enough the improper and infuriating nature of the LILCO request. I am pleased that I was able to expose this completely inappropriate request by LILCO and that the company decided to abandon its shell game with ratepayer money," Johnson declared.

We applaud Johnson for his diligence in this matter. It is disheartening, however, that the LILCO scheme was not rejected immediately by the Public Service Commission. Unfortunately, however, the Public Service Commission has in the past, and would seem to be continuing, its sweetheart relationship with utilities

at the expense of the public. The ratepayers should be assured that LILCO, or any utility, would make every effort to operate as efficiently as possible, and turn back savings on efficient operations directly to its customers.

This incident spells out the need for oversight over the operations of the PSC to ensure that additional schemes of this kind are not filtering potential savings for the ratepayers into the greedy hands of company officials or its stockholders. Isn't it time for a good, long, hard look at the supposed regulatory agency that is far too cozy with those it is, by law, supposed to be overseeing?

And why not?

Killing the golden goose

Suffolk County enacted a resort tax, a special extra sales tax on the rental of any room that will be utilized for three months or less. The purpose of the tax was to raise funds for the promotion of tourism on Long Island.

Part of the money raised by this tax is funneled into the Long Island Tourism Bureau which spends it promoting Nassau and Suffolk counties. Oddly, Nassau County does not impose a resort tax on its hotel and motel industry. Yet, Nassau County directly benefits from Suffolk's investment.

Resort people are up in arms. They have already felt the effects of this tax and it means lost business. We expected this to happen because when New York City piled on the visitors' tax, the visitors dissipated.

People and tourists choose to go to places where they feel comfortable. They stay away from those places they feel are abusing them. Tourism is an ultra-sensitive industry. It's affected by the winds and the whims of the guests.

We have an incredibly beautiful area on eastern Long Island. Our pri-

mary market comes from metropolitan New York. Its residents are fortunate, they have a multitude of seashores from New Jersey to Cape Cod to choose from, plus crystal clear lakes upstate and in Pennsylvania. New Jersey, Connecticut and Vermont. Those areas don't have the longest parking lot in the world. We do. This impedes our visitors. Most of these communities do not charge a special tax on its tourists, instead, they welcome them with open arms.

Suffolk's special resort tax should be repealed. It's hurting, not helping.

And why not?

The never-ending Shoreham saga

If one word must be used to describe the entire Shoreham saga, it has to be greed. LILCO (Long Island Lighting Company) chose to build Shoreham not out of need, but out of greed. Profits are insured by the amount of money a utility puts into capital construction. For a project to be deemed prudent, there must be a need, but, as we have seen, in the case of Shoreham, figures lie and do not agree.

Shoreham has never generated one kilowatt of commercial electricity. Yet, we have an abundance of electricity on Long Island. LILCO constantly presented false figures and over-stated projections of need which indicated that unless we had Shoreham, we would have experienced brownouts and blackouts over the last few years. Obviously, this did not happen. What did happen was the fact that LILCO stockholders and Wall Street got rich.

The biggest financial beneficiary of the Shoreham plant was the Shoreham-Wading River School District. Ninety-one percent of that school district's costs were paid for by the taxes assessed against Shoreham. These taxes were paid by every consumer of LILCO. They were charged for these taxes in their electric rates. The school district, with this windfall, embarked upon a spending spree the likes of which had never been seen before in education.

While adjacent school districts in Riverhead and Rocky Point were spending \$5,000 to \$7,000 per student, Shoreham-Wading River was spending \$14,000 to \$15,000 on each student. Ironically, during this period, Shore-

ham-Wading River students were not comparing favorably with their peers in the surrounding districts in important subjects such as reading and math. But they had all the benefits and luxuries that money can buy. Outlandish gyms with the latest in exercise equipment. Computer centers that would be the envy of high tech firms. Greenhouses for horticulture. Boats for sailing, and the list goes on and on.

Through Governor Mario Cuomo's "sweetheart deal" with LILCO to close the plant, the Shoreham-Wading River School District was guaranteed a continuation of its wanton spending ways through Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) funds designed to ease the impact of the loss of Shoreham's assessment and tax yield. Thus, the district could ease its way into the normal financing restrictions of other school districts whose residents were footing the bill for Shoreham's windfall.

Now, it turns out that those who have benefited from Shoreham's tax yield in the past, including county, towns, schools, and other special districts, are slated to receive \$1,255,571,073 in state funds, dollars that come out of the pockets of state taxpayers, because of a state law passed many years ago. This until-now unknown windfall comes via Section 545 of the Real Property Tax Law, which stipulates "whenever the state or an agency of the state acquires real property which becomes exempt as a result of such acquisition and which constitutes 2% or more of the total taxable assessed valuation...the state board (of Equalization and Assess-

ment) shall establish a 'transition assessment' which will in effect prevent any loss of taxable assessed valuation on the assessment roll for the first year..." and which limits the impact in future years to a 2% loss.

This startling revelation came about through Assemblyman I. William Bianchi, whose office was involved in investigating why the removal of Shoreham's assessments was having a negative impact on the financial conditions of other school districts in Brookhaven Town. In the course of that investigation, Bianchi and his staff came upon the "transition assessment" boondoggle. This is what they learned:

Transition assessments were implemented to ease the impact of state takeover of lands—most usually recreational areas. The total impact of this in 1992 came to \$676,670 paid out to school and fire districts and villages in upstate areas.

When the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA)—a state agency—took over ownership of the Shoreham plant, the availability of transition assessments kicked in. Without fanfare, the Shoreham-Wading River School District, Library District, town, county and other special districts, applied for these funds. The amounts are substantial. A printout from the Equalization and Assessment Board reveals that the county and town would share in this windfall until the year 2007, with the county slated for \$75,482,908 and the town \$42,335,120 over those years.

The school district, according to the printout, would receive transition as-

essment funds until the year 2113, and is eligible for \$1,059,140,314. The fire district would benefit until the year 2144, and receive a total of \$35,220,376, the library would receive \$40,692,575, while the lighting district would be eligible for \$2,699,780. The total cost to state taxpayers over the years would be \$1,255,571,073.

To add even further insult, because of the elimination of the assessment for the Shoreham nuclear power plant, the school district which was categorized as a high-wealth district in the past, would now become a low-wealth district and be entitled to even further state subsidization through the state aid formula. All of this is at the expense of every other school district on Long Island and throughout the state.

Other districts throughout Brookhaven Town have already adversely felt the effects of the closing of Shoreham through a change in the town's equalization rate. The Brookhaven Town residents of the Bayport School District are facing a 28% increase in their school taxes due to this one single factor. The tax rate in that district will be \$118 per \$100 of assessed valuation as a result.

Ironically, at the time Bianchi was detailing these facts to Suffolk Life, officials of the Shoreham-Wading River School District were holding a press conference discussing a plan to deal with the loss of Shoreham taxes through cuts in staff, programs and tax increases. Nowhere in that plan is there any mention of transition assessments or the funds it would yield, even though they had already made application to receive these funds. Asked why, Superintendent David Jackson said the district believed it was prudent to deal with the tax loss in the most conservative fashion possible, insisting there were no guarantees these extra funds would be forthcoming.

Obviously, this whole situation is a grave miscarriage of fairness, one that offers additional proof of the haphazard manner in which Cuomo rushed into a deal that enriches LILCO without thought to the impact of the people.

The state legislature must undo what it created. At a time when school aid is being slashed, asking taxpayers to dig deep into their pockets to benefit those districts and municipalities who have been enjoying a huge windfall over the years is ludicrous. This whole scenario heightens the need for school funding to be addressed. Regardless of whether we have local school boards or not, funding for schools should be done statewide, rather than district by district. Aid should be disbursed on a per pupil basis with only adjustments for the regional cost of living. Every student in the State of New York deserves the same break. Every student should have the same basic educational package that leads to a Regents diploma or that prepares them for work after graduation. The funds, the facility and the staff should be provided by the state. Once these basic educational responsibilities have been met, then local taxpayers, if they choose, can select additional curriculum and enhancements that could be paid for through local funding.

Our state legislators must, once and for all, end the lunacy that education has become and bring about meaningful changes that will benefit all of our children, not just a few.

And why not?

Who gives a hoot?

Owls' home versus yours

Under the Endangered Species Act, the natural habitat of the spotted owl is protected. The owls' habitat happens to be in the middle of the Great North West Forest. The Great North West Forest is found in California, Washington and Oregon, and is the prime source of construction grade lumber.

The Endangered Species Act has brought the harvest of this wood, used for the construction of homes, to a virtual standstill. The majority of the lumber mills located in those areas are expected to close by the end of the summer.

If you read this far, you are probably saying, "Who gives a hoot? I love the environment, I want to see it protected and, besides that, it doesn't affect me."

Wrong! Last Saturday we were speaking with a young man, a contractor who has ventured upon his first home ownership. He bought a small, antiquated house for well under \$100,000. The house is badly in need of renovation work. Before purchasing the house, he drew plans and received estimates for the materials. He recently went to purchase these supplies. To his surprise and shock, he found that the cost of some of the lumber needed for his project had

increased 60% to 80%. He was devastated. Bewildered, he asked, "How can I afford it?" Chances are, because the spotted owls' home is protected, he will not be able to afford a home of his own.

Like thousands of other young people, his dream of home ownership will have to be put aside in the name of protecting the endangered species. We have watched numerous projects being stopped, stalled and abandoned to satisfy the environmentalists' desire to protect the salamander, moths and other incidental wildlife.

I was brought up close to nature. I appreciate the fine balance that is required between man and his environment. I have always considered myself a conservationist. Wherever possible, I have accommodated nature, and have done what I could to perpetuate the natural things around me.

At my first home, I set aside a small section of my property and kept it wild. In this little chunk of woods, adjacent to a pond, I enjoyed the presence of rabbits, possums, raccoons and muskrats, as well as a host of birds and insects.

I have virtually no lawn at my current home, utilizing a meadow and woods as my landscape. Mother Nature

provides the fertilizer, the clouds provide my irrigation. My reward is an abundance of deer and other four-legged creatures that have found a safe haven. Birds of every description flock to the area, enjoying feed and water. Most of my neighbors have endeavored to keep their properties primarily wild as well. This is a compromise with nature. We have our homes, but so do the natural inhabitants. We co-exist out of compromise.

Instead of adopting an all or nothing attitude, shouldn't our elected officials and the bureaucratic regulators find the optimum way that the needs of both man and nature can be served? Put aside the very necessary tracts, leave standing sufficient trees to provide homes for the owls. Allow planned cutting to meet the market's demands. Replant as you cut, refurbish the forest so as to provide a never-ending source of lumber for the future's needs.

From where we sit, the needs of the young man we spoke about are as great as those of the owls. We give a hoot about his needs, as well as those of the owls. Both could be met through common sense and compromise.

And why not?