

First step toward lower rates?

The stage was set last week for the start of a long, difficult journey towards a possible solution to the high energy rates which, coupled with high taxes, have had a disastrous impact on the economy of Long Island. Long Island Power Authority (LIPA) trustees, by a vote of 13 to 2, approved the much debated partial takeover plan which would split the generating and transmission and distribution of the Long Island Lighting Company (LILCO) and end the monopolistic stronghold LILCO has had over the region.

Although there are many questions still to be answered, we believe the plan has merit in that it would take control over a vital, important part of the energy system, the distribution and transmission, and pave the way for the potential start of a competitive purchasing system for the region's energy needs. LIPA proposes to split LILCO's generating plants into separate owner-

ship by private entities which would, ultimately, have to competitively market the electricity the privately-owned plans would produce. LIPA would maintain ownership of the transmission and distribution system, which would be managed by a hired management company.

There have been some who have been quick to criticize this proposal, some for political gain and others for questionable motives. Because the plan was devised at the direction of Governor George Pataki, a number of Democrats, including Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, have been quick to find fault, citing all kinds of pitfalls, some possibly real but others imagined. Because the first step in the takeover process is the start of negotiations with LILCO now that the plan has been approved, only a limited amount of specific information has been revealed. LIPA officials claim this is so because it would be injurious to the negotiations process if sensitive facts were pre-

maturely presented. That is an understandable position with negotiations still to begin. It will lose its value, however, if pertinent information is not forthcoming as the negotiations process progresses.

The negotiations mark the start, but the ultimate realization of the takeover goal will be long in coming, if indeed it does, and must pass muster in a number of ways before any final agreement is reached. There is plenty of time for opposition and criticism. Now is the time for the naysayers to back off and give those involved in the negotiations process some breathing room to do their work.

There is more than a little apprehension about a state agency negotiating with LILCO because of the infamous deal between former Governor Mario Cuomo and LILCO Chairman William Catacosinos, an agreement labeled by Wall Street experts as the "sweetheart deal of the century." That deal set one goal: close the Shoreham nuclear power facility. While the deal accomplished that goal, the devil was in the details and those details gave LILCO a return to financial health, while the ratepayers paid an enormous price. LILCO received a full value return on the cost of Shoreham, including the costs of Shoreham already recovered through grants by the state Public Service Commission (PSC) for "Construction Work in Progress" (CWIP), which had already been included in the rates. On top of this, LILCO received a profit margin for profits the plant would have produced.

If everything was the same now as it was at the time the Cuomo-LILCO deal was devised, we would be plenty worried. But a lot has changed. George Pataki is governor, not Mario Cuomo. Pataki has shown a keen concern for the problems of Long Island and is less likely to give away the store as the previous administration did. The PSC is not the same. The PSC during the Cuomo administration and the Shoreham fiasco could not do enough for the state's utilities, especially LILCO. Had the state refused to bolster LILCO with CWIP funds, as did many state public service commissions in other areas where nuclear plants were being built, work on Shoreham would have ended on its own. LILCO was in dire financial straits, its stock was down to \$3 a share, and its well would have run dry if the PSC had not kept pumping dol-

lars out of ratepayers' pockets.

But there is new leadership at the helm of the PSC. John O'Mara, an upstate attorney appointed by Pataki, is now the chairman of the agency which had originally been created to protect the ratepayers, but wound up in bed with the utilities. The PSC is beginning to take long, hard looks at LILCO's operations, its rate structure, tax certiorari funds already received by the company but not yet returned to ratepayers. There are still many changes needed at the PSC. Many of the key staff who were staunch allies to the utilities for far too many years must be replaced. A new mood must be established, one which puts the ratepayers first. We believe O'Mara's appointment as chairman is the first step toward that important goal.

With a tougher PSC to deal with, and competition on its way, LILCO faces a future that should deprive them of the strength they had in dealing with Cuomo and the closing of Shoreham. Shoreham is closed, the days of whatever LILCO wants LILCO gets in the way of rate increases should be a thing of the past. It would be in LILCO's interest to bargain with a more realistic point of view, that which is in the best interests of the company, its stockholders, and the Long Island region. The days of sweetheart deals are in the past.

The people of LILCO, the rank and file, are good and dedicated people who have, unfortunately, borne the brunt of the antagonism aimed at the utility because of the actions of its top management. These same people could, and should, be the heart and soul of the energy system under new management and leadership. They could, and should, receive the respect they have been denied through no fault of their own.

The need for lower energy rates has been talked to death. Finally there is a plan to do something constructive to solve this problem. It may not be the best possible plan in the world, but it is certainly far better in concept than any we have heard to date. The plan on the table now will most likely undergo many changes before this issue is finally settled.

It's time to put aside political and personal motives and give the LIPA negotiating team an opportunity to begin their task, without daily harping and political nonsense.

It's your turn now

If you are a member of the Republican Party and are registered to vote, your time to speak out and register your views is at hand. Balloting in the Republican Presidential Primary will be held tomorrow.

Unless you are a hermit with no contact with the outside world, or a resident of the moon, you must be aware of the contest underway to secure the Republican nomination to oppose President Bill Clinton in November. The residents of a number of states have already had an opportunity to cast their votes in primary balloting or caucuses, with many more to come. Tomorrow the residents of New York State have their chance to stand and be counted.

The views of the candidates have been in virtually every newspaper and on television and radio broadcasts. They have staged debates, slammed each other in negative ads, been interviewed and quoted endlessly. The political leaders have sounded their support, expressed their views, appealed for your support. In the end, there is just one important person, the voter. Combined, the voters will speak their minds and decide the issue.

Primary balloting historically does not generate much interest on the part of the electorate. The turnouts have been extremely low. Too many people have sat back and ignored the opportunity to be a part of the system. They leave it to others to make the decisions, to set the tone for the party they support, and generally complain loudly when the public officials and politicians do not produce as the electorate wishes.

Primaries are designed to take the decision making out of the hands of the political leaders, from the smoke-filled back rooms into the light of day. The primary puts the decision in the hands of the people. If you do not participate, you will be casting a vote for the political system we all dislike, the system that gives the political leaders the right to make all the decisions, sometimes for all the wrong reasons.

If you believe the people should have a say in their government, and that government should place the people in the top priority in any action they take, you will vote tomorrow.

If you don't, take what comes and stop complaining.
And why not?

SCWA responds to letter:

'There is no asbestos in our water'

Dear Editor:

Today, we are bombarded by a large assortment of health concerns as they relate to our environment; albeit many are legitimate—however, I am happy to report that asbestos in our drinking water is not one of them. In her letter, ("Tainted water?" February 21), Gloria Johnson, a Sayville resident, expressed that concern after watching our workers replace a six-foot-long piece of transite main near her home.

Transite main is cement pipe containing asbestos as one of its components. It was primarily used up until the early 1970s in salt-water, marshy areas, because it is non-corrosive. Lower maintenance products are used today in these areas and the gradual replacement of the small

amount of transite main in our system is ongoing to reduce maintenance costs.

Johnson became alarmed, and rightly so, when she saw our workers donned in protective clothing, which included gloves and masks, while working to repair this section of water main. What she saw was our workers complying with New York State Labor regulations, which require that extreme precautionary measures be taken in handling any product that contains asbestos more than 1% by weight. The primary reason is to protect the handler and the public from airborne inhalation of asbestos. Anyone handling asbestos containing materials must receive training and become licensed by the State of New York, as our workers are.

Asbestos is an airborne contaminant that can affect lung tissue, particularly after prolonged chronic exposure. Not only are our workers protected with appropriate clothing, but the transite main is kept wet, is wrapped in polyethylene and taped to prevent airborne emissions.

Recently, the New York State Department of Health promulgated a regulation under the New York State Sanitary Code for the testing of asbestos fiber in drinking water. The standard is seven million fibers per liter. However, before public suppliers were required to do so, the Authority, on its own initiative, had periodically tested for asbestos fibers in drinking water. Our test results then, as they do now, indicate that asbestos in our water is not a problem of

any kind. Samples have been taken as required by state law from all areas where transite main is located. All were nondetectable according to the prescribed methodology for testing asbestos in drinking water. We will continue to test for asbestos as the law requires.

Please be assured, Ms. Johnson, that the Suffolk County Water Authority is totally committed to providing its customers with the highest quality water. In our 45-year history, we have never exceeded any drinking water standard and that's saying something, as New York State has the strictest standards in the nation.

Michael LoGrande, Chairman/CEO
Suffolk County Water Authority

Determination, a key to success

Determination is a very powerful emotion. Coupled with a very worthy cause, determination can be a formula for success. Such is the history of the dedicated groups of women who are taking on the problem of breast cancer and attempting to determine some answers as to why, when, what.

That determination has been very apparent in the long and arduous hours spent in conducting surveys of specific areas to determine possible clusters of the disease, and with that information, attempting to seek a possible cause. The creation of breast cancer support groups, coalitions, lobbying efforts to gain governmental funds and attention

have gone a long way toward many of the significant accomplishments gained focusing on the problem. Since the start of the first county mapping effort in West Islip, word has spread, and recognition of the growing nature of the problems has been achieved.

The most impressive factor of this story, in our view, is the fact that the majority of the volunteers are victims of the disease. They are not speaking from fear, but rather from experience. Once through the initial trauma of the diagnosis and treatment, these activists made the decision that they would not simply surrender, they would fight back. They've been there, they know the impact, and they want some an-

swers and an end to the problem so that others will be spared the ordeal they endure. Those are the seeds of the motivation that sparks endless hours of effort, and one cause after another to overcome this disease.

Diane Sackett Nannery is a name you have heard before and which, we're sure, you will hear again and again. She is a prime example of the dedicated breast cancer activist who envisions a goal and forges ahead to reach it. Diane has battled breast cancer herself. She wanted to call attention to the disease, wanted to alert women to the need to have mammograms to detect the disease as early as possible. "I want women to know there is a light

at the end of the tunnel. Don't wait for it. Pick up a flashlight and go," she has said about the quest for a postage stamp to continually shed light on the problem.

Considering the vast number of different stamps introduced by the Postal Service—movie stars, birds, animals, various causes—one might assume that to have a stamp proposal approved is an easy task. Not so. A special committee makes the selections based on who knows what criteria. The quest for an MIA-POW stamp took years to achieve. But like so many breast cancer activists, obstacles are simply challenges to overcome. Nannery, a Hauppauge postal worker, has already taken on a huge challenge and has achieved remission. Bureaucratic stumbling blocks or red tape obstacles pale in comparison when compared with the fight for health.

Working with student artists, Diane came up with a proposal for a postage stamp. She sought support from the media, from the public. She button-holed public officials and convinced them to join her cause. And last week, at a special ceremony in Washington, Postmaster General Marvin Runyon announced the breast cancer awareness stamp will be issued in June.

We are filled with awe and admiration for the achievements of those who have taken on the fight against breast cancer in so many ways. We admire their determination, their ability to focus on the issue rather than the impact already felt in their own lives. Diane Nannery is in the focus because of her success in the realization of a dream—the breast cancer stamp to foster awareness of the problem and the need for solutions. But there are so many others who display equal determination and courage that it would be impossible to name them all.

Their cause is worthy, their goals a must. We urge you to join us in offering applause and support for the goals they seek. No one is safe. No one is immune. When the solution we pray for comes one day, it will be the efforts of the dedicated breast cancer activists here who will have made it happen. They truly deserve our wholehearted support in this quest. And why not?

In the classrooms

It's time to get tough

Governor George Pataki has proposed legislation which would give teachers the power to suspend for up to five days those students whose unruly behavior disrupts the normal activities of the classroom. It is an idea worthy of strong consideration, but one, unfortunately, that has drawn some sharp criticism in some ranks.

Violence and disruption of classroom activities is a growing problem in far too many schools today, more so in the upper grades than at the elementary level. Without discipline and the power to enforce it, there is little hope that the problem will simply go away. An arrogant student intent on being a disruptive force has no place in a classroom where other students are attempting to learn. Those that choose to ignore rules, and strive to force their rebellious attitudes into an educational atmosphere deserve a swift and meaningful punishment for their actions. Suspension from a classroom by a teacher who is dedicated to serving the whole class and their educational needs is hardly unjust punishment for disruptive actions.

A recent Newsday editorial suggested Pataki's proposal be scuttled because a remedy already exists. The remedy, according to Newsday, is sending the disruptive student "to the office" where corrective action can be applied by the school principal. However, we wonder why, if that current "send to the office" remedy is the answer to this problem, the disruptive problems continue to grow?

Why shouldn't the teacher, who is the brunt of the disruptive action, have the right to eliminate the disruptive student from the classroom to protect the other students from the distracting behavior? Newsday worries that giving teachers this power would lead to "arbitrary, inconsistent and even intemperate decisions about problem students, and erodes the authority of the principals." Leaving the solutions to the principals could well lead to the same type of decisions by the principal, and erodes the authority of the teacher.

Classroom teachers are in the front line of the educational warfare that disruptive students wage. They, not the principals, bear the brunt of these actions and they, not the principals,

should have the immediate ability to do more than send a disruptive student "to the office," where all too often they are simply isolated rather than punished. A disruptive student does not fear "going to the office," a punishment that simply achieves the goals sought: the bolstering of their tough ego and escape from the classroom. They become heroes to that segment of their peers who, without a firm show of punitive action, are more likely than not to imitate the disruptive behaviors because they think they can get away with it, that the teacher has no power to enforce discipline in the classroom.

Without parental enforcement of the needed discipline to prevent unruly and disruptive behavior, there is little hope that the required attitude adjustment will be accomplished. Far too many parents complain they "can't do anything" to correct the wrongdoings of their disruptive children. They expect the schools to do what they themselves can't, or won't, bring about.

It has been suggested alternative classrooms be established to deal with the disruptive students, and the idea is worthy of consideration. Weeding out

those who have no interest in getting an education, and whose behavior deprives others from doing so, is certainly better than exposing other students to the impact of unruly behavior. It might be time to consider the creation of "educational boot camps" fashioned after the boot camps for habitual offenders, where life is tough and behavior modification becomes the wisest course of action for those sent to such facilities.

Governor Pataki's proposal, which increases penalties for possession of a weapon on school grounds and for assaults on teachers and school employees, is worthy of consideration and should not be so easily dismissed as Newsday would have us do. The New York State Senate has approved the measure. The Assembly should do the same.

The time has come for age-old "going to the office" solutions to be put aside and strong punitive actions put into place. Violence and disruption in the classroom must end, and Governor Pataki's recommendation to give the classroom teachers the power to control their own environment is a step in the right direction.

And why not?

We are feeling mighty proud

The bylines that appear above the stories each week represent a dedicated group of journalists who work mighty hard to keep our readers informed about the important events which affect their communities and the lives and families of our readers. They rarely receive the recognition they deserve. Thus, when one of our Suffolk Life writers receives recognition for their efforts, we burst with pride for the praise their efforts have earned.

So it is that we are mighty proud that one of our Suffolk Life writers, Barbara LaMonica, was honored last Sunday as Woman of the Year by the Patchogue-Medford Youth Services for her dedication to the youth of the community, and her achievements in serving the Patchogue-Medford communities. The honor is well deserved.

Barbara has, for many years, been an active volunteer for a host of community causes. She instituted a journalism club

in the Patchogue-Medford School District and was advisor for 11 years. She worked with youngsters to help hone their writing skills and enhanced communication in the community through the publication of a newsmagazine produced by club members. She was instrumental in the introduction of a New York Islanders Hockey Clinic at the Bellport Middle School in the South Country School District, which permitted students to participate in a clinic with Islander players. She co-chaired a cultural arts dinner dance in the Patchogue area for five years, helping to raise thousands of dollars for the Patchogue-Medford district's PTA organizations to underwrite an enhanced cultural arts agenda. She produced an educational documentary video highlighting Patchogue Village's Centennial.

Her efforts have earned tributes along the way. She is a recipient of the Patchogue-Medford's Superintendent's Award for exemplary volunteer service, is an honorary member of the Patchogue Lions

Club, and gained recognition from Kraft/Walt Disney World as a national runner-up for volunteer service. And she has done this and more while giving top priority to her husband, Vito, and two daughters, Gina and Christina.

In her journalistic efforts for Suffolk Life, Barbara has steadfastly adhered to the goals of our news operation, coverage that is balanced, fair and accurate. She has written a variety of feature stories with the sensitivity each subject required. She harbors a keen desire to fully and fairly report on the important stories in the communities she covers.

We're proud of the efforts of our reporters and writers, and of the dedication they give each and every week to the important happenings in their communities. And we are extremely pleased when their accomplishments earn the recognition they deserve.

Barbara LaMonica, we salute you. You have made us proud.

And why not?

Five percent is petty cash to LILCO

The Public Service Commission (PSC) is not satisfied with the Long Island Lighting Company's proposal to reduce electrical rates on Long Island by 1.4%. They shouldn't be. The PSC is demanding that LILCO officials justify why they cannot reduce rates by 5%. Even 5% is puny when you consider that LILCO's rates are the highest in Mainland, USA. They are 50% higher than the nation's average.

LILCO's meter fee for the privilege of being hooked up is twice that of Florida's. The kilowatt rate LILCO charges is 17.5 cents. The kilowatt

charge for Florida Power and Light is around 7 cents, and they still are able to be a highly profitable corporation.

LILCO claims that if they have to reduce rates by 5% they will be brought to a position of bankruptcy. They will not be able to serve their debt load and meet their financial obligations. Since 1987, LILCO has received bonuses that equaled the rate of return they would have had if Shoreham had been operational. In addition, because of the Shoreham settlement, they have had a windfall of profits brought about because of lower interest rates and fuel costs they were

projecting during this period.

LILCO should have used these windfall profits to reduce the LILCO debt, but instead, company officials have used them as dividends to artificially prop up the attractiveness of their stock. They played the Wall Street game at the expense of the ratepayers.

During the last eight years, the board of LILCO has developed outlandish golden parachutes, for the chairman on top, of bonuses and increases in salary. The board threw all caution to the winds, figuring that they had the PSC in their pocket and

there was no end to what they could suck out of the Long Island ratepayers.

Governor George Pataki, ignoring LILCO's threats, is restructuring the Public Service Commission. The new chairman is a selection of his own choice, as are a couple of new appointees. The PSC has, in its new tougher look at LILCO's finances and the way they spend them, essentially told LILCO their free ride is over. They must bring the cost of electricity on the Island down. In return, LILCO once again is raising the red flag of default. We said it then and we say it now; incompetent management that can't make a profit out of a monopoly should be sent packing.

LILCO does not deserve to survive as a corporation. It has heavily contributed to the economic pain of this once viable region. If LILCO's board raises the specter of default, the price of their stock should fall and acquisition by Long Island Power Authority of the corporation should be at more favorable terms than what was originally projected.

Go ahead, LILCO, keep crying wolf and you may find that Grandma still has some teeth left.

And why not?

For college, taxpayers

Bring home the bacon

Suffolk County Community College is a top-rated, top-flight, home-grown, higher educational establishment. Hundreds of thousands of Suffolk residents have achieved an excellent education at this facility.

The cost of an education at Suffolk Community College is split three ways: the state, the county and the students each pick up a proportional share of the cost. Students can go through Suffolk Community College for about \$2,600 per year, or under \$5,500 for two years, to earn an associate degree. They can live at home, which saves on room and board and, in most cases, they can work, easing the families' burden by helping to fund their college education.

By comparison, a student going to an out of the area college faces at least \$6,000 a year in pay for room and board on top of tuition. And \$6,000 is the most conservative estimate, with most non-ivy league colleges costing between \$10,000 and \$20,000 for tuition, room and board.

Because of a peculiarity in the law, which the New York State Legislature has refused to address, if a student eligible for Suffolk Community College decides to go to a community college outside of Suffolk County, Suffolk County residents are forced to pay the tuition. Over 2,100 students from Suffolk

County this year have taken advantage of this loophole. This costs Suffolk County taxpayers millions of dollars a year.

Suffolk Community College officials have persuaded the Suffolk County Legislature to allow them to enter into an aggressive campaign to promote the opportunities offered in our own community college system. The purpose of this campaign is to stop the outward flow of students in Suffolk to other out-of-county schools. If a student can afford the room and board that is often necessary, or the commutation, they should be able to afford the tuition. They shouldn't be looking to Suffolk County taxpayers to fund their choices when they have the education available in Suffolk County.

Many of the students who go out of the county go to Nassau Community College because they have a nicer campus and other amenities than are offered by Suffolk. Some of these students have not taken a serious look at what Suffolk has to offer, they just like the idea of getting away as long as someone else is paying for it.

If an aggressive marketing and advertising campaign can be developed that results in more Suffolk students going to Suffolk colleges, we are all for it. However, we also encourage our readers to write to their state legis-

lators, encouraging them to allow counties to opt out of funding out-of-county tuition when the needs can be filled right here in Suffolk County. We do not need any more drains on the Suffolk County economy.

And why not?

Spend it or lose it

Albany has sent down a message to local municipalities that they must either spend the dollars they have been granted or lose them.

Annually, the state allocates monies for general purposes. Municipalities write grant proposals as a bid for these monies. The proposals are evaluated, and awards are made. This system encourages many municipalities to develop wish lists and make applications for grants that they neither need nor can realistically use. This adds to the cost of government, and ends up wasting hard-earned taxpayers' money.

As part of the process of cutting state expenditures, the Pataki administration has let the municipalities know that they have until the end of the month to fulfill their obligations

under these grants or they will lose them.

Some of the municipalities are crying foul because they got used to rolling these grant allocations over from one year to the next. We have little sympathy. If there wasn't an imperative need for the grant or the allocation, why do it? There is nothing written that says just because the money is there, you should spend it. If it is not necessary, don't do it.

Let us use our tax dollars on a priority basis and where it is going to do the most good for the most people. Isn't that the common sense we have all been asking for in our government?

And why not?

Forbes fumbles, but flat tax shouldn't

Magazine publisher Steve Forbes spent almost \$30 million of his own money in the Republican primary seeking the nomination for President of the United States. He didn't make it, but the basis of his programs, the flat tax, should. Using this issue, Forbes has brought this concept to the forefront. The idea needs more fleshing out, but from where we stand, it could be the impetus our country needs for renewed economic growth.

Forbes proposed a flat 17% tax on

all wages. A couple with two children, earning under \$36,000 a year, would pay no tax. Those earning above \$36,000 would pay a flat 17%. If they earned \$10,000 above the threshold, they would pay \$1,700 in tax. If they earned \$100,000 they would pay \$17,000. If they earned \$1,000,000 they would pay \$170,000.

Forbes's proposal allowed for almost no deductions. Opponents of the flat tax raised the red flag of interest on mortgages not being deductible. Proponents were not successful

in pointing out that the flat tax would eliminate all the loopholes that the ultra-rich use to avoid paying taxes. These loopholes, when manipulated, allow the very wealthy to pay almost nothing.

Tax filing would be made much simpler. It is envisioned that your federal tax return would be printed on a postcard. Forbes' flat tax would generate reinvestment in America and provide the capital which is needed to get us out of the paralyzing economic doldrums that America has

been in for most of the '90s.

Unfortunately, Forbes depended upon sound bites and 30-second commercials to sell his ideas. Citizens of America did not have the opportunity to digest what this meant to them. We hope that Forbes, with all his financial resources, will continue to champion the idea of a flat tax which will lead to a full debate on this issue, so that the average citizen will see how it can benefit them.

And why not?

Understanding school costs

Residents of Long Island are being asked to vote on school budgets and elect boards of education this coming May.

School costs make up 60% to 70% of the average person's property tax. In addition to the taxes raised by real estate, the state provides between 38% and 42% of the average budget in state aid.

School costs are broken into two parts: those true mandates ordered by the state that meet the curriculum requirements that allow students to receive a Regents diploma. These are the hard and fast mandates ordered by the state. The balance of the budget is made up of electives selected by school boards as required or requested by students and parents. Most school boards claim that 90% of the budget is mandated by the state. This is not true but

merely an extension of the truth.

If a school board chooses to offer electives or curriculum beyond what is required for the attainment of a Regents diploma, they may do so, but they must follow the mandated requirements as directed by the state. Because of this, school boards can get away with the statement that 90% of the budget is mandated when it is not true.

Recently, New York State Comptroller H. Carl McCall issued a document outlining the costs of education by county in New York State and the rest of the nation. It came as no surprise that Nassau and Suffolk counties spend an average of \$12,070 per pupil. We are in the top five counties in the nation in terms of educational costs per student.

Surprisingly, Schoharie County in

New York spent \$5,562 per student while still operating under the same state mandates as Suffolk County. Both counties come under the direction of the New York State Board of Education and the New York Regents, which impose the rules on all school districts. Most New York school districts spend an average of \$7,500 to \$8,000 per student, one-third less than Long Island districts.

The difference in the spending primarily falls into three categories: quantity of administration and their cost, compensation of teachers and their pupil load, and curriculum offered and the cost of offering these electives.

Every school district on Long Island is top-heavy in administration. Most Long Island districts are spending 10 times what they spent on administration 10 years ago, even those districts that

have had declining enrollment. Schools have developed layers of bureaucracy that are self-perpetuating. Teachers who can no longer make it in the classroom had jobs developed for them away from the daily grind of working with kids.

Every school board should be examining what positions they had in administration 10 and 20 years ago, and what positions do they have today? Can positions be cut, what effect will it have on the kids, and what effect will it have on the taxpayers?

The question of teacher compensation must be examined. The average per capita income in Suffolk County is \$24,000 per year. The average family income is \$46,000. The average teacher on Long Island makes well over \$60,000 per year and has a benefit package that brings the cost up over \$100,000. This is the cost per teacher, not the family's income.

Teachers' salary levels today surpass those of attorneys and are on par with doctors who work an average of 65 hours per week, according to the statistics from the New York State Department of Labor. It is supposed to cost 10% to 15% more to live on Long Island than other regions of the state. The difference of this percentage can easily be justified, but Long Island teachers far surpass the statewide average.

School boards must look at tenure as part of the solution. They must also advocate for the removal of the Triboro Amendment. This amendment allows teachers to continue to receive raises in the form of step increases even when they do not have contracts. If teachers continue to receive the kind of increases they have received over the last decade in the future, they will bankrupt the system, which will result in a wholesale reorganization of the educational structure within the state. Do the teachers really want this inevitable outcome?

School boards must realistically take a look at the curriculum and the enhancements that they have added over the years. Are these enhancements necessary? Are they affordable? Are the tax dollars that are being allocated prudent and in the best interest of the entire community?

Between now and our school district voting day, residents should be looking for candidates for the school board that they can support. Every candidate running for school board should have to explain why they are seeking this position. Do they have any ties to the educational system that they would benefit directly and financially from? Why are they willing to put themselves at the center of attention? What's in it for them? Why are they willing to devote hundreds of hours of their time to a nonpaying position? What is their vision for education today and tomorrow? What can we afford for education and when is enough, enough?

The educational establishment will be going all out to elect school boards that will be friendly to them. Taxpayers and voters should balance what is good for education against what is good for the community as a whole and what the community can afford.

We urge everyone to get copies of the curriculum offered by their school district. Find out how many students are enrolled in each course, particularly those that have been created by the school boards and are not mandated by the state. Make school boards justify the offering of these courses and their logic for spending your money on them. It's your right to know. You are paying the bill.

And why not?

Why doesn't I & R work?

Suffolk County is the only county in New York State that authorized an Initiative and Referendum mechanism. Initiative and Referendum, in theory, allows the citizens to bring legislative initiatives, i.e. laws, to the forefront to be placed on the ballot and their fate determined by the voters on Election Day.

In California and many of the more democratic and people-oriented states, I & R procedures are not only allowed on the county level, but on the state level as well. Because of I & R, California's real estate taxes cannot rise any more than 2.5% per year. I & R was responsible for stopping Massachusetts' mad, inflationary, governmental spiral.

We have long been a proponent of I & R. Sure, we elect our representatives. We give them power to make laws on our behalf. Unfortunately, legislators don't always act on our behalf, they succumb to lobbyist pressures and the demands of special interest groups, then refuse to act and nothing changes.

We were very involved, in fact, we were responsible for the creation and the enactment of an I & R procedure for Suffolk County residents. We were involved in the first few initiatives and quickly learned that although we technically have the mechanism available to us, the process had been bastardized by the politicians and made so difficult that it is nearly impossible to utilize.

Under the original I & R Act, the procedure was extremely cumbersome.

Its time schedule for completion required 442 days, yet the regulations required that from the first day an I & R petition was filed the conclusion had to be determined within one year, 365 days. In order to meet that time frame, no one segment in the procedure could take their allotted time for the completion of their duties.

This reminded us of a joke that went around during the civil rights voter registration days in the south. The story went that a reporter was covering the drive in a county that was about 70% black. The drive was going very well and the reporter inquired of the old, white, political boss if he wasn't concerned that he was soon to lose his power. The boss answered, "nope." The reporter inquired as to his complacency. The political boss answered, "'cause I'm still gonna do the countin'."

I & R has been on the books for almost 20 years in Suffolk County and the politicians are still doing the counting.

Steve Levy, a county legislator from Sayville, wants to balance the scale and has filed a bill to correct some of the inequities in the present law so that democracy might prevail in Suffolk County.

One of the prerequisites for initiating an I & R procedure is securing the signatures of 5% of the voters in each of the 10 towns. Levy's bill would cut this percentage to 2.5%. It would drop the number of signatures needed from over 20,000 to a little over 10,000. To be on

the safe side, any supporters would still be required to gather at least 15,000 signatures as the political bosses have all kinds of techniques built into the system that can disqualify signatories. These roadblocks can range from the size of the petition, the validity of an election district, or the proper address. Some people use a post office box as an address even though they have a street address also, and they can't remember which one they filed on the board of election affidavit. If dates have been left out and filled in, the signatures are invalid. There are a whole host of other requirements that must be complied with that lay people who are not actively involved with political organizations would have no knowledge about. The system was designed to keep the counting in the political hands, and it has.

Citizens should have the right for redress, to put up for voter approval issues and laws elected legislators fear to address.

If Levy's bill is passed, it still will not be easy to get a measure on the ballot, and petitioners will still have to make a case to the voters in order to be victorious.

Levy's bill should have the support of every legislator who believes in the Constitution and the concepts of democracy. We encourage all legislators to co-sponsor Levy's bill. Let them show their constituents that they respect the voters' right to determine their self rule.

And why not?

SCPD must be managed

During the past year, Suffolk County has added 200 new police officers to the ranks of the Suffolk County Police Department. The new police officers were authorized by the county executive and the county legislature to bring the forces up to strength and to eliminate the need for overtime. The new officers were a multi-million-dollar investment. Part of this investment was intended to be funded through the savings on overtime.

In the 1996 budget, overtime was cut from \$10 million to \$5 million. During the first three months of 1996, the police have spent about \$3.2 million of the total budget allocation. At this rate, they could spend some \$9 million more than the county budgeted for.

Concerned legislators and the county executive are asking why. They know that

the taxpayers cannot withstand any more budgeted shortfalls. They can't absorb any more tax increases. The obvious place to look is to Police Commissioner Peter Cosgrove.

Cosgrove claims he has done all he can and has stated that if he is forced to do so, he will have to cut back or eliminate sector and foot patrols. These are the sensitive community issues. Instead of perpetuating fear, Cosgrove should be looking to his chain of command who are directly responsible for the assignment of overtime. If he has commanders who can't control the personnel under them or the hours that they work, he should consider reducing their rank.

In today's economy, the police, like any other branch of government, have to live within their budget. They have a job

to do, and they must do it with the dollars that they have allocated. The police are not sacred cows even though they have a serious mission to carry out.

There are some who feel that while Cosgrove shares in the blame, an early retirement program for civilians working in the police department, which was pushed by the county executive and legislature, has had an impact as well. Because of the departure of civilians under this program, police officers have been called upon to perform some of those duties.

County Executive Robert Gaffney should order Commissioner Cosgrove to cut out the fat and still provide the police protection the people are paying for without outlandish overtime that obviously is out of control.

And why not?