

Don't let your guard down

Legislators and the county executive publicly are saying that increasing the sales tax is a dead issue. Don't believe it!

There has been too much insider talk from both sides of the aisle about increasing the sales tax. The unions, both municipal and police, have been advocating this proposal. "All we have to do is raise the sales tax a half-percent and all our problems will go away," is the philosophy they seem to share. A friend, a county worker, said this quite casually when asked how things were going in the county.

We heard from others within the county, those who are part of the power structure which makes the decisions, that the financial condition of the county has deteriorated to such a point that to stay afloat the county would have to impose new taxes. They expect the scenario to build in the very near future.

This past week, county officials met with the Wall Street crowd, which showed concern that the county would not be able to meet its current bond-

ing obligations. We can see the day in the very near future when a Certificate of Necessity will be issued by the county executive for legislation seeking an increase in the sales tax, with the legislators immediately approving the measure, which would then immediately be signed by Halpin. While the proposal would still need approval by state legislators to raise the sales tax, we can envision immense pressure and crisis fear tactics being used to win that approval. The legislators and the county executive will say, "We had no choice. We could not predict the downturn in the economy, the loss of sales tax revenue, the unforeseen state mandates and the number of people who cannot pay their real estate taxes." They will promise that the sales tax will be reduced. They'll even give you a date. The date, of course, will never come.

Just last week, legislators were voicing disapproval of the sales tax increase proposal. What they didn't say, however, was that they were opposed because the "other side" of the political aisle had not voiced support. Each

side fears the sales tax increase will become a political issue in the upcoming campaigns unless both sides, both political parties, are involved in supporting the increase. One legislator, Presiding Officer Donald Blydenburgh, said last week the sales tax increase was "a dead issue." But in a "deficit-cutting plan" released by Blydenburgh, also last week, lo and behold, one of his proposed options was a sales tax increase, this one three-quarters of a cent rather than the one-half cent hike he proclaimed was a "dead issue."

Are there other things that can be done? The answer is a resounding "yes." The county can be put on a four-day work week. This would very quickly reduce, by 20 percent, county payroll costs, which are over 65 percent of the cost of government. Programs that are not absolutely necessary can be eliminated. Some of the vast tracts of land that have been purchased can be examined and those parts of the parcels that are not priority can be auctioned off.

Legal, engineering and consulting costs should be put under a microscope. The county is involved in numerous lawsuits that would be considered frivolous in hard times. Those we can get out of, we should, cutting our losses while we can. Engineering studies and consulting contracts should be shelved except for those projects that are vital to today's existence.

A number of high priced administrative positions could be eliminated through consolidation of departments and agencies. There are a whole host of other ideas that can be immediately implemented that would affect the balance of this year's spending as well as next year's.

It would take courage and leadership to perform these tasks, but unfortunately those are qualities that are not being displayed by any of our county officials. The current crop of county officials would rather point fingers at the other guy, declaring that's where the fault lies, rather than solve the problem.

Whenever there is talk of a need to cut employees, unions apply pressure and the officials fold. They cave in. They ask for give-backs, rather than present a list of positions to be cut, with the message, "Work with us or these people will have to go." Give-backs could well eliminate layoffs. Wouldn't it be better for everyone to hurt a little, rather than have some hurt a lot?

Suffolk County has suffered for years from inept management. Now that the financial crisis is starting to paralyze us, maybe true leadership can emerge out of the rubble and save us from future ruin. If not now, hopefully in November.

In the meantime, don't let down your guard. We have received a flood of People's Pledge petitions which our readers have had filled out and returned to our office. The more petitions we receive, the firmer will be the message to the politicians that no one will escape the wrath of the public if they dare to increase the sales tax, or any other tax. Call them, attend legislature meetings, let them know in no uncertain terms that they spent us into this fiscal crisis, they had better cut their way out of it. Not by asking us to pay more, but by spending less.

And why not?

Sad but satisfying feeling

Your editor and Suffolk Life Newspapers spent over a decade fighting the opening of the Shoreham nuclear power plant. In the early days of this battle we took an incredible amount of heat. We were mocked, belittled and subject to numerous disparaging remarks. We actually had advertisers who cancelled their contracts because of our position on Shoreham.

We devoted a disproportionate amount of our time, our energies and our editorial space to this issue. We thought we would be elated when the plant was stopped. The Shoreham deal achieved the goal we sought, but this agreement between the governor and LILCO was so lopsided, so anti-consumer, that every bit of joy was taken out of this accomplishment.

We knew our position against the plant was right for the right reasons. Our readers' safety and welfare were more important than anything else. Shoreham was riddled with problems and could have been a catastrophe if allowed to operate. We knew the statistics and the horrors that were possible if there was a major accident. The scientific and engineering community had vigorously argued that there never had been a nuclear accident. That no one had died as a result of a nuclear mishap.

The accident that couldn't happen did, first at Three Mile Island, then Chernobyl. The original reports coming out of Chernobyl played down the effects of the accident. Only a handful of people, according to Russian reports, had been killed, and they were supposed to have been in the explosion and the fire fighting efforts. But now, three years later, the true effects of Chernobyl are beginning to surface. We have read reports that up

to 50,000 people died as a result within the first 30 days. Hundreds of thousands more have been affected and are dying.

In the Friday, April 26 Newsday, a report by Alison Mitchell of the Moscow Bureau started out, "The hallways and hospital wards belong to the bald children, hairless from chemotherapy, the small leukemia patients who had turned yellow and listless before their mothers' eyes." The article went on to describe the death watch that is going on all over the provinces of Russia, some hundreds of miles away from Chernobyl.

As saddened and angry as I was to read this report, I could not help but think back on our efforts to stop Long Island from being another Chernobyl. The Wash 740 report, which was part of the testimony presented to the Shoreham Commission, of which I was a member, gave a statistical breakdown of what could happen if Shoreham had a Class I accident. These statistics, when presented, not

only alarmed me but made my resolve that much stronger.

The statistics were:

- Early deaths: 40,000
- Injuries: 75,000
- Latent cancer deaths: 35,000
- Fatal radius: 17.5 miles
- Peak injury radius: 50 miles
- Property damage: \$157 billion in 1982 dollars

There were those who read these statistics and who tried to discredit them, and would have the world believe that atomic energy was perfectly safe. Chernobyl is giving us all realistic proof that these statistics gathered in 1982 were on the conservative side. The depth of human suffering that is going on in Russia is incalculable.

We can only say, thank God it didn't happen in Suffolk and that we were able to persevere.

And why not?

Wild flowers--wasted dollars

Every spring as I head to Riverhead from Southampton, I am met with a glorious array of wild flowers along the meridian on Sunrise Highway. Each day seems to be more glorious than the next. Just as the flowers are reaching their peak, I will see on the horizon an army of tractors, mowers, trucks and machinery. The next day, ugly littered garbage will lie amongst the brown, lifeless stubble. What had once been a God-created beauty has become man's ugliness.

Not only have I felt victimized, I am

totally incensed when I realize that our precious tax dollars have been wasted on this endeavor. Wasn't it just a few, short months ago that the governor was proposing turning off the lights on the highways? Lighting on our highways is for safety. Wouldn't it be far more practical to stop cutting the grass on the meridian and along shoulders of right-of-ways? Think of all the man hours, machinery and fuel that could be saved.

We all know that grasses and other plant life absorb carbon monoxide and

give off oxygen. Why not take advantage of it and help the environment? We have written about this before, to no avail, and even though we are in a severe economic crunch and the state budget for this year has not yet been passed, we can again expect to see Mother Nature's gift of beauty turned into ruin by man's insatiable appetite to spend your tax dollars.

Isn't it time to put an end to this senseless action?

And why not?

Why Suffolk is in trouble

The municipal and the police unions are lobbying the Suffolk County Legislature and the county executive to increase the sales tax as a way of solving Suffolk's financial dilemma. It is fair to look at Suffolk's budget to try and determine how we got into the predicament we are in. Are we being fair to our county employees? How do they match up with private sector?

In 1981, Suffolk County had 11,904 budgeted positions. Under Halpin's 1991 projected budget there were 10,847 positions. This is a decrease in ten years of 9 percent of the budgeted positions. If our work force has shown a reduction, shouldn't we be able to live within our means?

In 1981, the average salary for a county employee was \$21,722. Today it is \$44,687. In 1981, when benefits were factored in the total cost per employee was \$23,145. Today it is \$50,950. Salaries alone have increased over 100 percent, but benefits added on top have skyrocketed. Social Security is up 167 percent, health insurance rose from \$991 per employee to \$5,797 per employee, a whopping 485 percent increase.

The benefit fund, which is the catch-all for additional goodies such as pre-paid legal fees, eye glasses, etc., jumped from \$268 per employee to \$720 per employee.

Suffolk County Police were earning, in 1981, an average of \$43,285, with benefits. Today Suffolk County Police are earning \$81,317 each, on average, with benefits.

During the same period that our cost for county employees more than doubled, the increases in the private sector averaged only 62 percent. In many industries the percentage of increase was substantially less: construction - 44 percent; manufacturing - 56 percent; transportation and public utilities - 45 percent.

We often suspected that municipal employees had a much better deal than those who worked in the private sector. In most profit making companies, the work week is 40 hours. In the county it is 35 hours in some instances, or 37 and a-half hours, depending upon the job. Sick pay is not cumulative and averages from a few days to a few weeks. County employees receive 13 sick days per year, and get paid for 180 days if they accumulate 360 or more at retirement. Two week vacations are normal in the private sector, with some of the large companies offering three and four weeks to long-term employees. The county gives up to six weeks. Holidays in the private sector average six to seven. In the county, the number is 12. There are a number of other differences such as paid personal time off and a very lucrative retirement plan that is based upon a whole host of manipulated data, including the three highest years of pay and the accumulation of sick time and comp time that, in some cases, has amounted to over \$100,000 in severance bonuses.

We did an analysis of the salaries paid by private enterprise and those paid by the county. The numbers, as you will see, are staggering. The private sector numbers were supplied by the New York State Department of

Labor. The Suffolk County numbers were extracted from the salary schedules. For comparison sake we used the median numbers from the state, which is the middle salary between entry level salaries and top salaries, and the middle of the range for Suffolk County. The comparisons are as follows:

Clerk typist - Private, \$258 per week; Suffolk County, \$430 per week

Laborers - Private, \$325 per week; Suffolk County, \$430 per week

System analyst - Private, \$664 per week; Suffolk County, \$893 per week

Data processing manager - Private, \$917 per week; Suffolk County, \$1,260 per week.

In the top management positions the average differences were even more astounding. The Long Island average for a president of a corporation is \$1,183 per week, or \$61,516 annually. This would compare with Halpin, the county executive, at close to \$100,000, and top deputies in his administration making \$98,400.

The picture becomes clear why Suffolk County is in the shape it is in. We honestly have been overly-gener-

ous or damn poor negotiators.

During this ten-year period, clerks and laborers in the county have gone from \$8,300 in salary annually to \$27,000 when steps are included that are part of the incentive package. This is a 225 percent increase. In the higher grades, where you would find assistant department heads through supervisors and managers in grade 25, the salary went from \$18,100 annually to \$55,500, with steps. In grade 33, salaries went from \$25,500 to \$78,300. This is a 206 percent increase during the same period that wage increases in the private sector averaged 62 percent.

The unions now say they don't want their bubble to burst. Increase the sales tax and our worries will all be over. We say to the taxpayers, we say to the politicians, is there any reason, is it fair, that we pay our governmental employees salaries and benefits higher than those salaries workers in the private sector are paid, whose salaries are determined by the marketplace and competition?

Salaries we pay administrators and workers alike in our towns, our county government and our school districts,

are totally out of proportion with reality and must be reversed. In good conscience we must stop the confiscatory taxes that are decreasing the values of homes and forcing people into foreclosure. We must give the citizens room to breathe.

We must look at realistic alternatives other than increasing taxes. It's time for county labor unions to share the burden, to give back some of the excess salaries and benefits they are being paid above the private sector. This can come about through renegotiation. If unions will not be realistic, then the politicians must cut back on the staff. If it's layoffs the county unions want, then it will have to be layoffs. If they want to spread the burden evenly, then a four-day work week and reduction in hours must seriously be considered. When the contracts are renegotiated, the county's position must be parity with private enterprise that is making county government possible through taxes and wages they pay.

And why not?

Albany, out of control

New York State's budget, by law, was due on April 1. But state legislators, who apparently believe themselves to be above the law, simply ignore this legal deadline. This is a typical display of arrogance used by dishonest politicians to evade their responsibilities. But this is not the only thing that is dishonest.

In Governor Cuomo's budget we read of austerity slashes to most people-sensitive programs, particularly to education here on Long Island where state aid is scheduled to be cut up to 80 percent if the Cuomo budget is adopted as presented. What most people don't know, or fail to realize, is Cuomo's total budget calls for an actual increase of \$2.6 billion. A growth rate of almost five percent.

Cuomo has made a big deal about alleged cutbacks in federal aid being the cause of his dilemma. According to the Empire Foundation for Policy Research, during the next fiscal year federal grants to the states will increase by 12.7 percent.

The state is in trouble not because of cutbacks in federal aid, but because of reckless spending policies. Since Governor Cuomo took office, the state payroll has been increased by 31,000 positions. Have you noted any difference in services during the last nine years? Is the state making your life any more enjoyable or improved your quality of living?

The governor, with the consent of a capitulating state legislative leadership, has given away the store without demanding a return on the investment they have made with your tax dollars. Last year, during the gubernatorial election, candidates targeted the wasteful welfare policies here in New York. Medicaid, which is

the health insurance plan for those not able to take care of themselves, was used as an example.

California, which has always been considered a liberalized state, was able to provide Medicaid services for 1.45 million more recipients at a cost of \$4 billion less than New York. One can easily see that the standards used in New York waste at least \$5 billion. Why has New York not revamped its Medicaid policies so that we can be as economical in providing necessary services as California?

New York spends almost \$2 for every dollar spent by other states in the nation on education. Yet, from 1980 through 1990, New York dropped from 36 to 45 in SAT scores. Almost a third of the state budget is spent on education, yet we are not receiving the product for the money that we are investing.

New York is in dire financial straits because of the wasted money it spends. Its taxpayers are the highest taxed in the nation, yet this is not enough. New York lost hundreds of thousands of jobs because of its taxing policies. Over 900,000 New York positions fled over the border to Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut and Vermont, where the tax burden is not as oppressive.

To correct this imbalance, personal tax rates were reduced in 1987. The governor and some of his liberal cronies would have you believe that these tax cuts were too generous, and they are the cause of our financial dilemma. In reality, personal income tax revenue between 1987 and 1990 increased by \$2.7 billion. This windfall was wasted by increasing the state's payroll from top to bottom.

The New York State unions have

been publicizing the fat and the bureaucracy, duplication of administrative positions, and no-show jobs. The list would be laughable if it were not so painful.

This year's budget negotiations have been protracted because the legislature, both the Republican-controlled senate and Democrat-controlled assembly, have dug in their heels. Senator Ralph Marino, who controls the senate, is totally opposed to increases in any form of taxes. For once he seems to have the courage to not go along to get along. Unfortunately, he has not presented any concrete plan to offset the governor's increased budget.

The Assembly Republican Minority has issued a 100-point plan for cutting back on government but, of course, this is being ignored because they are in the minority.

Pierre Rinfret, the Republican gubernatorial candidate last year, recommended an across-the-board 10 percent cutback in all departments, coupled with a freeze on hiring for the next two years. Combined, this would cut back the state payroll by 25 percent. Some would say that this is too dramatic, too drastic. It isn't, when you consider that the state's payroll increased by 31,000 positions, almost doubling in less than ten years. What we got along with in 1981 we should be able to get along with in 1991. There have been no gigantic increases in services or programs provided by the state.

What we need in Albany is common sense, courage and the badly missing ingredient, leadership. Times are tough. We can't afford the fat and luxuries. The people need a break.

And why not?

Don't do it!

The worse way to dig ourselves out of the financial crisis we are in here in Suffolk is to increase the sales tax, or any other tax.

The elected officials, County Executive Patrick Halpin and the county legislators, can be compared to raving alcoholics who stumble to the bar, crying an awful tale of woe that they brought upon themselves because of their alcoholism, pleading with the bartender to give them one more drink, promising that it will be the

Well, this bartender and the hundreds of thousands of taxpayers here in Suffolk County say, "No!" You can't have another drink, the well is dry. Even if the well weren't dry, we would be hurting you and hurting everyone else if we let you take the easy way out. Furthermore, you are a drunk. You have proved, by your past performance, you can't be trusted. If you want me to believe you now, you must go through the horrors of withdrawal, get yourself straight, iron out your problems. Someday down the road, if my finances change and we are able to meet our bills, and if there is something else to throw into the well for legitimate purposes, and you can prove that you can handle it, we will carefully consider your request.

Suffolk County taxpayers have given all they can give to the insatiable appetites of the politicians and the people who work for government. The politicians have not been reasonable, have not been responsible. They gave in when they should have had the courage to say "no." The county's municipal and police unions have relentlessly asked for too much and gotten too much. As we demonstrated in last week's editorial, county employees are receiving more than 20 percent higher wage levels than those in private industry.

Two decades ago, government workers were paid, on average, 20 percent less than what people were paid in private enterprise. They opted for these jobs for two very simple reasons, security and benefits. Public employees traditionally were given, in lieu of large salaries, social welfare plans that took care of them from cradle to grave, retirements and pensions that allowed them to live in modest comfort after they retired, and an inordinate amount of time off as compensation for lower wages.

County wages during the late seventies and the early eighties caught up with the private sector. Benefits and time off still far exceed that being offered by private employers. During 1982, the union took a hard-nosed stand. Former County Executive Peter Cohalan was facing his first re-election bid. He was holding tight also. As election drew closer, Cohalan blinked and told his negotiators to settle at any cost.

The contract the public employees achieved increased salaries on an average by 42 percent. In some cases, when the increase was factored into steps, municipal employees ended up with up to 78 percent increases. The exempt employees, those who were political appointees not covered by

negotiations, received commiserative increases that jumped numerous political hacks as much as \$30,000 in salary. This contract brought about the wage disparity between the public and private sectors.

When we raised a cry of alarm, numerous county workers, including the president of the county union, charged that we did not know what we were talking about. But we had done our homework. We had the facts and the figures. Union President Charlie Novo came to our offices to discuss the ramifications of the contract. As we went over it with him, page by page, fact by fact, he became quieter and his face developed a pallor. He said, "I didn't realize what I had gotten. This settlement can bankrupt the county."

We replied, "When the contract takes full effect it must cause one of three scenarios. There will have to be massive cutbacks in government, layoffs. There will have to be givebacks by the union during the next contract negotiation or, if everyone gets lucky, the economy will pick up such steam that the increases can be paid out of increased growth and the resources the county is receiving."

The economy did boil through 1987. In 1988, Patrick Halpin raised real estate taxes up to 169 percent in some instances, to pay for the over generous 1983 contract. This was not enough. Halpin and the former Democratic-controlled legislature did not have the courage to do what they should have done, cut government back to the size that people could afford. The Republican-controlled legislature which we have had for the last two years has shown about the same amount of courage, which is none, and has muddied the waters further by playing raw politics with the finances.

Halpin has shown his total lack of leadership by playing even more ruthless politics, and the end result is the crisis we have today. The public does not have the money to bail out the drunken politicians. The taxpayers do not have the funds that will enable them to continue paying county employees salaries that are not on parity with the private sector. If the unions insist upon maintaining the salary and benefit scale, then our elected officials must do what they should have done four years ago, cut the work force to meet the taxpayers' ability to fund, or cut the county work week to four or four and a-half days. Immediately, Halpin and the legislature should take an axe to the exempt positions, eliminate every position that is political by nature and not absolutely essential to the health and welfare of the county. This is where the high priced, political appointed bureaucrats are, in the administration. Selectively and carefully, mid-management and staff positions should be eliminated and not filled.

We do not have the luxury of being nice guys anymore. The worst case scenario would be to give government a tax increase as this time; it would just perpetuate the fraud of the eighties.

And why not?



Memorial Day with meaning

This year, let's make Memorial Day have real meaning. After World War II, Memorial Day was a major, meaningful holiday. World War II was fresh in the minds of citizens. It had been a long, drawn out battle that had cost thousands of American lives and changed the lives of many others for all time.

No one escaped the effects of World War II. Both the social and economic landscape was changed. Citizens of those days gathered together in parks, churches, at monuments and along parade routes to pay respect to those who did not return, and those who returned wounded and disabled, and, in fact, to all those who gallantly had given their best efforts in the service of our country.

Memorial Day ceremonies went out of fashion during the Vietnam War. Somehow, unfortunately, it became socially unacceptable to pay tribute to those who had lost their lives protecting this country and the freedom we so often take for granted. This year, due to the Gulf War, its

rapid conclusion and America's success, patriotism and respect for the armed forces is again back in vogue, as it should be.

We encourage mothers and fathers who have small children to turn out at parades, wave your flags high. Show pride in patriotism, and, most importantly, tell your children of the horrors of war, the reasons for war, and that to be a proud, strong country each and everyone of us must stand tall when called.

All of us during Memorial Day should raise our eyes high, pause for a moment and thank God for being merciful and bringing the vast majority of Americans who serve in the gulf home safely. Let us say an extra prayer in remembrance for those who lost their lives in the desert conflict, both in combat and in support of the war effort. As proud Americans, we should salute our veterans of all wars, of all hostilities, who have kept our great nation free.

And why not?

Two birds, one stone!

Petitions are currently circulating seeking a referendum on the November ballot which seeks the abolishment of the Suffolk County Legislature. While there has been much pro and con on this issue in previous years, the legislature, with its actions on the current county fiscal crisis, is making the best case for its own demise.

At a marathon legislature meeting last week, the legislators dilly-dallied, hemmed and hawed, and battled all day and half the night and could come up with agreement on only one course of action. This was to give County Executive Patrick Halpin the necessary authority to develop layoff lists of county employees, an action Halpin has suggested as a means of curbing spending to ease the deficit.

Even that action, however, will undoubtedly be an exercise of futility. Coupled with the authority is the requirement the legislature have final approval. Anyone who has been an observer of county happenings in the past knows full well what scenario will unfold:

Halpin will devise the lists, county employees will apply pressure, and the legis-

lators will cave in. They will seek to put all blame for the budget deficit on Halpin's shoulders, and will make a grandstand play of refusing to go along. And the deficit problem will be back to square one.

Blame is what is motivating the county officials these days. They're more interested in that than they are in finding solutions. Political advantage is the goal. The legislators blame Halpin and Halpin blames the legislators. The people wind up the losers.

Each day that comes contains another drastic scenario regarding the county's finances. The county will run out of money by the end of the month. Suffolk County will be bankrupt. The idea of bankruptcy might not be a bad one. Could we get rid of the county and the legislature at the same time? Take the taxes we send to the county and distribute it to the 10 towns?

It may well be time we consider two birds with one action, the legislature and the county! Who would miss them?

And why not?

D.E.C. had the opportunity

In June 1990, the Suffolk County Health Services Department released a scientific and hydrological study pertaining to the possibility that landfills were polluting our water. The report was a blockbuster in that it indicated that most landfills were not the contributors to or the contaminants of water as was once believed. That at older landfills where leachate problems existed, the adjacent affected areas would be much more economically served by public water than by closure.

The report was kept bottled up for four months. Suffolk Life obtained a copy and published it in October, 1990. This caused a flurry of denials that it was an actual report. County Executive Patrick Halpin characterized it as a "draft report." It was suspected that Halpin, a Democrat, had been pressured into this stance by the governor, who has, through appointments, control over the DEC. Halpin claimed the report had to go to the DEC for its review before it could be released.

The DEC sat on this report for almost nine additional months. Dr. David Harris, Suffolk County health commissioner, whose department employees had collected the scientific data contained in the report, has recently charged that while the DEC has criticized the report, it has failed to provide any data opposing the findings of the health department. The report, as issued, stands, Dr. Harris declared, since the DEC has not presented any scientific findings to the contrary.

The protection of groundwater from pollution from landfills was the entire foundation of the state's landfill ban. The question now is, why is the DEC continuing to push for the closure of landfills if they do not contaminate the water? The DEC falls back on the premise that the legislature in 1983 passed the law, at the request of Governor Mario Cuomo, that ordered the landfills closed on December 1, 1990. The legislators who voted on this law now admit that they were not informed about the facts, the truth. They voted for what seemed to be a popular environmental issue and did not think of the ramifications. What data was available had been taken out of context, and was not valid or based

upon hydrological or other scientific studies.

The DEC says, the law is the law, if you don't like it, change it. We say, and every Suffolk resident should also, why enforce a law that is going to double the cost of town taxes within the next two years, just to comply with a law that we know now was a mistake? Where is the common sense?

The Suffolk County Health Services Department is the protector of health in Suffolk County. Health Commissioner Dr. Harris is well-respected as a professional and has always been considered above politics. He has served under both Republican and Democratic county executives and has run his department in the interest of the Suffolk County residents' best health. We have disagreed with Dr. Harris on some issues, such as fluoridation, but, overall, we hold him and his department in great respect.

The health department report was based upon outstanding research, including hydrological studies. The "208

Study," which was the grandfather of water protection in Suffolk County, was a political document that was based upon assumption and political maneuvering. The hydrological zones were laid out on a motel room floor at 3 a.m. in the morning, in a game of political give and take. This study was not based upon hydrological studies or totally accurate scientific data. It was a political document.

The move to close all landfills on Long Island is going to make a lot of people very rich. Everyone knows who controls the carting industry, much of the trucking industry, as well as junk, which we now call recyclable material. The closure of the landfills plays right into the hands of the mob. If the landfills do not contaminate the water, as the health department report indicates, why close them, other than to meet the agenda of the mob? Why should local residents have to double their town taxes to pay tribute to the mob?

Most communities have very aggressively moved toward recycling and composting projects. This still leaves

pure garbage that needs to be disposed of. The most economical and practical way of disposing of it is to landfill. If recycling and composting can reduce the waste stream by up to 80 percent, incinerating garbage reduces the contents by 75 percent. This still leaves us 25 percent of the material, which is now highly concentrated and contains dangerous flyash, to be landfilled. The burning of the garbage creates a whole set of new environmental problems that may, down the road, force the closure of incinerators, as it did once before. The practical and logical thing to do is to realize we have made a mistake, repeal the 1983 landfill closure law and, in its place, order mandatory recycling and composting.

The garbage scenario here on Long Island is becoming too reminiscent of prohibition. Prohibition proved to be an unpopular and unworkable law that gave birth to the heyday of the mob. We finally woke up and repealed it and that is what we should do here. The sooner the better, before it totally bankrupts the people.

And why not?

Not one inch of land

Suffolk County has lost its legal battle to acquire Robins Island. The county spent over \$3 million of our tax dollars in this futile pursuit. The federal bankruptcy court ruled this past week that the contract into which Suffolk County had entered was invalid under bankruptcy law.

Robins Island lies in the middle of Peconic Bay. It has a long history of being absolutely private. It has been owned by a succession of people who kept it as a private preserve, guarded 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It has long been sought for the public, but no one was willing to pay the price.

Legislator Steven Englebright made the acquisition of this island a crusade. He envisioned the island as a living laboratory of what Long Island once was in its primitive state. Englebright convinced the county to negotiate a \$12 million purchase price. Englebright wants the island open to the public and claims that 250,000

people a year would visit the island. He envisions bus loads of students being ferried onto the island to wander along trails that would be cut through the native habitat. His logic totally escapes us, as we fail to see how the island would remain pristine and undeveloped with 250,000 people traipsing over it each year. If Englebright's plan comes to reality, the island will become nothing more than a developed piece of parkland sitting in the middle of the bay, slipshoddily operated and inadequately protected as are most Suffolk land acquisition. The \$12 million acquisition cost will become over \$30 million by the time legal fees and contractual expenses and interest are compounded into the picture. Over \$30 million that can be used to save jobs and maintain services that are already in existence.

When the county officials learned that they had lost the law suit they immediately announced they would

appeal the verdict. It should be noted that the county is not using the county attorney's office, it is using an outside law firm, a major New York City practice where partners' time can run up to \$500 per hour. Suffolk County workers are facing over 1,000 layoffs. Halpin has ordered the county put on a four-day work week. The county is out of money for both necessities and luxuries. Robins Island is definitely a luxury that we very simply cannot afford.

The awarding of lucrative legal contracts often goes to political contributors. Halpin is facing re-election this year. He may need every contribution he can find. In fairness to the people of Suffolk County and to the county workforce, Halpin should order the appeal to cease so that we can cut these outlandish legal fees that we cannot afford. The needs of the people are more important than the wants of some.

And why not?

Voters: Don't approve a blank check

Most Long Island voters will go to the polls in the next few weeks to elect school board candidates and approve or reject school budgets.

WARNING: Most budgets being presented could be Trojan horses. Some school boards have used the assumption that they will receive more aid than they actually will, while others have tried to be more realistic. But the reality is, all assumptions at this time are nothing more than guess work. No one knows until the state finalizes its budget how much state aid will be forthcoming.

Voters who go to the polls thinking that the budget as projected will result in a tax increase that is not too high could well face a much larger in-

crease than they anticipate. Once they have accepted the budget proposal they no longer have a say, no matter what the increase is. The only defense taxpayers have is to vote "no" on these budgets. The budgets can be resubmitted at a later date, after the state has finalized its budget and the true ramifications on taxes are known.

Never give a politician a blank check, but that is exactly what you are being asked to do by approving any budget at this time.

We encourage everyone to turn out and vote in this year's school board election and budget vote. Between 60 and 70 percent of your real estate taxes fund the educational establishment. If you com-

plain about high taxes and don't vote, you only have yourself to blame.

Pay particular attention to those who are running for school board. Be particularly leery of those candidates who are in the educational establishment or are being supported by the teachers union, or the Parent Teacher Association. Unfortunately, some people who work in the educational establishment are more interested in feathering their own nests than they are in the quality of education given our children.

Check for the date your school vote will be held. Turn out. Make your voice known.

And why not?