

Should teachers be board members?

We have noted while reviewing candidates for school board positions a number of candidates have indicated that they are school teachers or are married to people in this profession. It could be argued that teachers who are within the system should know best how to run that system. Conversely, it could be argued that those who feed off the system should not be part of the policy-making board which determines how well they

During the last few years, citizens paying the taxes that fund and run the schools have taken a renewed interest in these establishments, and have successfully become members of school boards. They have begun to question the status quo, the wasteful expenditures, the lack of a quality education for the mainstream children. They are putting up

strong opposition to the demands of teachers and administrators for unrealistic pay increases.

We seriously question if one from within the establishment, teacher or administrator, or their spouse, could put up this kind of argument. Teachers have been quoted as saying, "I am not a teacher in this school district, therefore, I can be objective." We don't think so. A favorite tactic of the school unions, while in negotiations with the school boards, is to use the concept of parity, i.e., what other districts are paying their teachers, to demand equivalent pay. If a teacher were to support an increase in salary within the district that teacher serves as a board member, there is an overflow effect that directly impacts the teacher's salary and the local district where he or she works.

The teacher unions this year are taking a much more active part, supporting candidates who will be favorable to union demands. They are organized, they are financed and they are attempting to create an aura of calm so they can take over as many boards as possible.

Taxpayers and particularly taxpaying parents who have students in school should carefully evaluate the credentials of all school board candidates. Our expenditures for education have increased in frightening increments. Today it costs us as much in tuition each year to send a child from kindergarten through high school as it does to enroll a student in a private, prestigious college.

Unfortunately, our high cost of education is doing little to improve the quality of education our mainstream children receive. A frightening number

of children are promoted from grade to grade regardless of whether or not they have mastered the skills they were required to learn. It is sickening to see kids dumped out into the real world without the basic ability to read, write and do arithmetic. Children with a superior intellect and those with handicaps may be getting a fine education, but those in the middle are getting short-changed.

Because too many of us have not taken part in school elections and budget votes, the establishment has run away with itself. Even though we have had declining enrollments, administrations in some districts have grown ten times in size and cost during the last decade.

Salaries paid school personnel far exceed the average family's annual income. Yet, they demand more. The only way to stop this runaway tax train is to put people on the school board who will demand productivity and a good, quality education for the average student.

Read over the qualifications of those who seek board seats. Check and see whether they have any direct or indirect vested interest. See who they are being backed by, ask whether they will benefit personally or collectively from their participation.

It is up to the voters to ensure that the boards are run by people who have both cost and the quality of education in mind.

We have heard time and again the taxpayer plea that taxes must be brought under control. School taxes make the biggest dent in your pocket. If you really want things to change, and sanity to reign in the matter of taxes, you must become involved or suffer the consequences.

And why not?

Put police back on the street

Suffolk County and the police unions are in negotiations. A new Police Commissioner, Robert Creighton, has been appointed. There is a new administration running the county, an administration headed by County Executive Robert Gaffney. The county is broke and its potential for finding new sources of taxes is doubtful. The economy of the Island does not allow for tax increases. The residents do not have any more dollars left to give.

The police are demanding a six percent increase each year over the next three years, plus a whole host of other expensive benefits and perks.

During Gaffney's campaign, the issue of police productivity and the dis-

proportionate number of officers who were assigned to non-patrol functions was debated. It was suggested that Suffolk's needs for police protection could be met without additional police costs by realigning the police department, and eliminating non-police jobs which currently have officers assigned to them. Many of these functions could be performed more than adequately by civilian personnel, or be eliminated.

This is an ideal opportunity to negotiate an elimination of non-police functions being held by police officers. The positions range from ice hockey instructors, video camera operators, to clerk and secretarial functions being performed by \$80,000 a year officers. If the

negotiators were successful, they could increase the patrol functions with less overall administration, which might leave some scarce dollars for some increases in salaries or benefits.

Any increases the police receive must come from increased productivity by the department. Reassignment may be the best way to accomplish this goal. The timing is right. A new police commissioner is on board, as is a new county executive with majority support on the legislature. Collectively they must work together to bring about the changes necessary to provide the utmost police protection within the ability of the taxpayers to support.

And why not?

Flat tax is interesting proposition

Jerry Brown's flat tax is an interesting proposition. Carried out to its fullest, it would be fair, economical and make sense.

About 20 years ago we were involved in a research project to see if a flat tax did make sense. The premise of the project was one single flat tax to replace every other tax, from local taxes through federal taxes. One flat tax collected on the local level and then moved upward to county, state and federal governments. The conclusion reached was that if a flat tax of 13.56 percent was imposed upon the value of products developed or produced, wages and profits earned on a local level, the entire federal, state, county and local governments, including schools, would be financed without any other tax.

The community would enjoy the quality of life that was created by its ability to develop wealth and employment within its boundaries. The county, state and federal governments would receive a flat percentage of the local ability to create income, to finance only those requirements that were needed to carry out the fulfillment of their specific responsibilities. No money would flow downward, no redistribution of the wealth would take place. People in business would have the incentive to earn

because they would keep the larger portion of the wealth earned.

Each community would determine, within the earning power of the community, how it wanted to disburse its money. Did the local community want to spend more money for schools or police? Did it want to spend more on social services than recreation? And a myriad of other questions that they would have self-determination over.

A Democratic opportunity

Suffolk County Executive Robert Gaffney's omnibus spending plan has been approved in the legislature. The Republicans got their act together and the Democrats presented expected political opposition. The bill will, Gaffney estimates, cut \$70 million from Suffolk's deficit this year.

It's a good start, but it is not enough if we are to avoid sales tax or real estate tax increases next January.

The county executive's people, in concurrence with legislative leaders, claim the \$70 million is enough, even though they acknowledge that the real deficit may be as much as \$120 million.

The harder the community worked, the more productive it was, the better the community would be. An end would be put to the infernal waste of dollars being collected at the local level, passed on to the state and federal governments who then redistribute it as politicians see fit and send it back home with mandates, requirements, and strings attached.

The larger forms of government

would be diminished, returned to their original purpose. Power would be returned to the people who have direct control over their local governmental officials.

Brown may come or go, but the idea of a flat tax replacing every other tax in this country should be further researched and explored. It's time that the people got a break.

And why not?

There are other detractors who claim that the savings from the Omnibus Bill will not total more than \$50 million. From where we sit there may be some truth in both viewpoints. But as a prudent business person who does not want to see a tax increase this year, let's plan for a worst case scenario and find another \$50 million to save.

This gives the Democrats who opposed Gaffney's plan an opportunity to come up with additional details on their own plan, which was not incorporated into the Omnibus Bill. The Democrats had offered other alternatives, but they were put aside. If the Democrats now come back with a good government bill,

not a political one, for reducing county expenditures by another \$50 million, they should be able to garner the support of the Republican majority, because no one wants to be labeled as being responsible for raising taxes.

The bill must be free of political games or it will go down to a sound defeat. Here is the opportunity the Democrats have been waiting for, to be on the right side of reason for the right reason.

We hope the leadership of the Democratic minority seizes this opportunity and helps reestablish financial sanity in Suffolk government

And why not?

It's time to pay the piper

This time last year we had estimated that former County Executive Patrick Halpin had this county in the hole for approximately \$120 million. It appeared that the county was on the verge of bankruptcy.

Halpin and the legislature instituted furloughs and other cost containment measures as they went through a series of financial gyrations. Those actions ultimately led to Halpin and the legislature increasing the sales tax by 14.6 percent, another half-cent on the dollar.

As September rolled around, and the legislators and the county executive ran for re-election, to a man they claimed that we were out of fiscal danger. They, somehow, had fixed all our problems. As we analyzed the figures, the best that we could come up

with was \$40 million in reduced spending and increased taxes. This left a hole of between \$50 and \$90 million that the Gaffney administration would inherit on January 1. In addition, it was also apparent that Suffolk County's budget for 1992 was out of whack. It appeared that revenues were over-estimated by at least \$40 million.

As outsiders, we did not have the information to make an absolute, accurate prediction. Working with the Gaffney transition team, it became apparent to us that those inside government didn't have a firm handle on these figures either. So many games have been played over the last decade that Suffolk had become financed by guesswork.

One of the first things that Gaf-

fney established was setting up close communication among his budget director, the legislative budget officer, the comptroller and the treasurer. Information was to flow on a daily basis between these four officers as each tried to develop a totally accurate picture of our financial condition.

Gaffney proposed, and the legislators turned down, an Omnibus Bill that was projected to save a proposed \$70 million. On re-submittal, it passed. It is now estimated that the real savings this year will only amount to \$15 million. This leaves the county with about a \$55-million shortfall of meeting its financial obligations. Although county officials now predict the deficit is at \$90 million, we believe the real deficit figure is closer to \$120 million, making the financial

problem far greater than county officials will now admit.

The county has three choices. The county executive can declare a fiscal emergency and in doing so can seek limited or unlimited powers from the legislature. Even if 30 percent to 40 percent of the county's staff was laid off, and other expensive cuts in the budget were implemented, residents could face large tax increases next year.

Another option is for the county to borrow, through a one-year budget note, the \$90 million to \$120 million needed to meet current obligations. This would have to be paid back next year with interest and could result in the county's portion of real estate taxes jumping from \$400 to \$700 for the average homeowner.

The third option left to the county executive and the legislature would be to float a ten-year deficit bond for the same amount of money, an action that would result in an increase in taxes of \$105 per taxable property on an average tax bill. To do this, a full financial emergency must be declared by the legislature and the county executive would have to accept a Financial Control Board that would oversee control of all of Suffolk's finances. This is similar to what New York City underwent when they also faced bankruptcy. The bonds issued to bail out New York were called the Big Mac's.

In any one of the three plans, the executive and the legislature must agree to a plan for severely cutting back Suffolk's government. The taxpayers cannot afford what we have anymore. This may well lead to a return to a 40 hour workweek for all county employees, including the police. Benefits and salaries will have to be scaled back to those that are being paid by the private sector or by other comparable regions in the country. Contract agencies will have to be slashed, as we can no longer afford the niceties that they perform. Leases and agreements with vendors must be renegotiated. All but necessary use of outside law and consulting firms must be stopped.

Government has an ideal opportunity to do what has to be done as the labor contracts of all county employee groups have expired, and new contracts reflecting the necessary changes can be incorporated.

The day of paying the Pied Piper has come. Suffolk has lived in a fantasy world we no longer can afford. We are broke, and we might as well accept the fact. We have borrowed on tomorrow, there are no more tomorrows to look forward to.

The county executive, the legislators from both sides of the aisle, have limited their options down to virtually nothing. This is the last opportunity they have for self-government, after that our government will be run by court appointed administrators. We pray that our leaders have the ability to do what should have been done a long time ago.

And why not?

Old age discrimination

Each day we get older and each day we should be asking ourselves how much longer are we going to put up with our seniors being discriminated against.

The Social Security system was developed to provide pensions for people who turned 65 years of age. It was intended to be financed by a tax on our earnings while working, and continue to be funded by a tax on the earnings of the people who come into the system after us. It was not meant to be an end all as far as the financial planning of our future went, but a supplement. It was supposed to be a pure and simple insurance program. It has turned out to be nothing more than an outright tax. The distribution is not fair and equitable, just look at the notch problem.

People who were born between 1917 and 1927 receive less than people who were born before or after these dates. The average-earning 65-year-old retiree born between 1917 and

1926 receives an average of \$916 a year less than the same average worker born between 1912 and 1916, and \$480 a year less than the same worker born between 1927 to 1931. Most of these people were part of the armed forces who defended us in World War II!

Even more discriminatory are the penalties placed on seniors who continue to work after they are eligible for Social Security. Once they have earned \$7,500 their Social Security benefits are reduced. For every two dollars they make through the sweat of their brow, they lose one dollar of the benefits they have earned and accumulated over their lifetime. In addition, they continue to pay Social Security taxes on their current earnings. Does this make sense?

Many senior citizens must work because their Social Security does not meet today's high cost of living. More important, many work because they want to. They are productive and

most of these people have a strong work ethic. They have never been able to enjoy relaxation. It isn't their gig to chase a golf ball around the golf course seven days a week, or spend hours in programs that were designed by some bureaucrat. They want to work, they want to earn money, they want to be paid for it, and they don't want to lose the benefits that they have saved for through enforced taxation through all of their working life.

This age-old complaint has been raised repeatedly to Congress. Congressmen, instead of righting this wrong, has sat on their duffs, writing their bad checks while spending millions to investigate the sex life of the tsetse fly.

It's time for justice in this country. Take care of your old. Those who are willing to take care of themselves should not be penalized. Do it now because it is the right thing to do, and we'll all be there sooner than we like to think.

And why not?

Point of view

Breast cancer study needed

By Assemblyman John L. Behan

Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths for New York State women. Because early detection and treatment provide patients with the best chance for recovery from this dreaded disease, it is important for women to learn about techniques that can help detect cancer in its early stages.

The month of April was designated Cancer Awareness Month in hopes that women would find out more about breast self-examination and mammograms. Earlier this month, I co-sponsored a mobile mammography screening in East Hampton with the Women's Outreach Network which provided convenient mammogram testing for women. I urge all women to look for special mammography screening opportunities like this, or to schedule a regular mammogram with their doctors.

More women will soon be provided with the chance to learn more about detecting and treating breast cancer as the result of increased state funding which has been made available. State aid for the State Breast Cancer Education and Detection Program has been expanded to \$2 million from \$1.6 million in the 1992-93 state budget. The program, which operates 12 projects throughout the state, provides education, mammography, physical breast exams, instruction on breast self-exam, referral for treatment, and follow-up services.

The increased funding puts New York State in a better position to receive funds through a matching grant program of the Centers for Disease Control. If the state is selected to receive funds from the Centers for Disease Control this fall, our state will triple the amount of increased funds the program will receive this year.

Because Long Island's breast cancer rates are alarming enough to have received national attention, I am supporting legislation this session which would appropriate \$500,000 to the Department of Health for use by the Breast Cancer Detection and Education Advisory Council to study and evaluate environmental factors and the incidence of breast cancer in women residing on Long Island.

The Long Island Breast Cancer Survey that was authorized by the legislature in 1984 to determine the reasons for the high incidence of the disease on Long Island was incomplete because it focused primarily on "lifestyle" factors.

This new survey, which would give equal weight to environmental and lifestyle factors, is absolutely necessary. It is important that we determine why Long Island's breast cancer rates are so high.