

Cuomo's nightmare:

Income tax on top of property tax

Governor Mario Cuomo floated a trial balloon this past January suggesting that municipalities could impose an income tax to replace real estate taxes as the source of school taxes.

Last week, the governor released a more formal outline of his proposal. It's a nightmare that cannot be supported. Cuomo has proposed that local school districts or counties could impose a surtax of up to 25% of state income taxes to fund schools. Not to replace real estate taxes, but on top of local real estate taxes.

Under Cuomo's proposal, real estate taxes would be capped at the current unprecedented high levels. Any increases in spending on education would then come from taxes that would be imposed on the income of the residents. State income taxes could be increased by as much as 25%.

Under the Cuomo proposal, we would not only pay some of the highest real estate taxes in the nation, but would

also be paying up to 25% more in state income taxes. Is Governor Mario Cuomo out of his mind? He totally ignores the cause of the problem. Instead of providing the leadership as the state's highest elected official, he attempts to shift the burden to the local municipalities, without offering any release.

The problem lies in state mandates which govern courses to be given, conditions under which they are given and rules and regulations on how a school district must be run. These state mandates have changed the mission of schools from education to social centers.

The state-mandated Taylor Law limits the way negotiations between employees of the school districts and the school boards may be conducted. When the school boards and the educators' unions cannot agree, they are mandated to go to the New York State Public Employment Relations Board (PERB), a state agency under the control of the governor, which has a long history of bending over backwards to give the unions what they want.

A prime example of the PERB mentality: a fact finder assigned to resolve a dispute in the Middle Country School District found "teacher salaries in the district are at the upper end of the localities to which Middle Country may be properly compared." By contrast, the fact finder declared: "taxes in the district are high. For 1991-92, the tax rate was the fifth highest in the county, up from the sixth highest in 1990-91. Thus, while teachers are relatively well compensated, a substantial tax burden is placed upon the district's residents."

The fact finder also found that the district's wealth behind each student is low, ranking 60th out of 66 Suffolk school districts, and said household income in the district ranks 16th lowest out of 71 county school districts. The fact finder recommended against the union's demand for an increase for 1992-93, which would give teachers step increments only (which represent an approximate 2% increase), but then recommended teacher salary increases of

3.25% plus increment (2%) for 1993-94, a total of 5.25%, and 3.25% plus increment (2%) for 1994-95, another 5.25%.

Having declared the teachers are well compensated, taxes in the district are high, wealth behind each student is low, and area income levels are low, the fact finder recommends increasing the problem by 10.5%, more when compounded. So much for an area's ability to pay!

The state has a constitutional obligation to provide a minimum education leading to a Regents diploma for every student. The state provides part of the cost through state aid, but then saddles the school boards with mandated regulations on any courses or increased curriculum that they may offer.

The state further limits the discretion of the school board by granting state-mandated tenure to all educators. Once in the system for three years, they are virtually locked in for a lifetime. The procedure to remove a teacher for cause is lengthy and can often cost the district several hundred thousand dollars.

Instead of trying to dump the burden on local municipalities, Cuomo should have the courage to establish a state-wide school system to educate the students and fulfill the mandates that are required by the state. If local school boards want to add enhancements, additional curriculum or extracurricular activities to the basic budget, they can be approved on Election Day, the same day that members of the board of education should be selected as we select all the rest of our elected officials.

No school district on Long Island should even consider, in their wildest imagination, adding an income tax on top of the local real estate taxes as a method of funding education. Didn't we learn from the state's lottery scam, which was suppose to boost educational funds? Instead, it winds up in the general fund and is doled out to the districts, not in addition to normal state aid, which comes from our state taxes, but instead of state aid. The lottery provides a windfall for the state's big spenders, not for the education of our youth.

Cuomo's latest proposal doesn't even make good political sense. It should be rejected out of hand.

And why not?

Replacements wanted

We recently published an editorial cartoon picturing the 10 Republicans who are "Not Wanted" for re-election. These Republican legislators went back on their word. Some legislators had promised to sunset the sales tax, but they voted to continue it. Others switched their votes; they were against the increase before, but have succumbed to the political pressures to vote for it now.

They let their constituents down. They kept \$120 million in Suffolk County residents' money for government instead of returning it to the people to use as they needed.

Last week we offered another version of this cartoon, featuring those who would have raised the salaries of Suffolk County Community College professors from 22.8% to 41.3%, further complicating the financial status of county government. Three of those featured last week are repeat offenders. Had these legislators had their way, this contract would have set the standard for the other county contracts yet to be resolved. The impact on the county's finances would be crippling. The impact

on your taxes would be tremendous. It is this kind of lucrative giveaway action by the county officials which has driven county government, and its taxpayers, into virtual bankruptcy. A similar giveaway by the administration of former County Executive Peter Cohalan in 1983 was the downfall of the fiscal integrity of the county, and has caused the huge increase in real estate and sales taxes. These legislators should be replaced by people who will truly understand the plight of the taxpayer and stand for good, sound, efficient government.

These incumbents only know how to tax and spend. They have forgotten how to control or cut government spending. They believe their mission in life is to grow government and increase the income of all those who work inside governmental confines.

In each of these legislative districts, there are citizens who care about prudent and responsible government. We know they can represent the average citizen better than those who have been in office so long that they have forgotten their purpose.

We encourage members of all political parties of Suffolk County to request to be screened as replacements for the incumbent county legislators. The political parties should encourage all newcomers to come forth.

The voters have been betrayed. The "Not Wanted" incumbents have demonstrated they have no intention of keeping their word. They no longer deserve to be trusted.

Challengers should screen and be ready to run in the primaries. We believe once the challengers catch the attention of the disenfranchised voters, they will find willing workers and campaign contributions. They will be able to beat the political machines that do not open their doors and arms for a new breed of legislator. A legislator who will represent the taxpaying public by being willing to make cuts and put politics aside in a genuine search for solutions to the spending hemorrhage the current crop of county officials have caused.

It's time for the citizens to take back control of their government. Let's do it.

And why not?

Voters beware: school votes near

Library and school board elections will be held during the next couple of months. As Albany legislators have completed their budget on time, we know specifically what school aid will be. This should allow school districts to provide the voters with accurate budget projections, with no surprises after the votes.

Most of the districts across Long Island will receive as much as they have received in the past year and other districts will see an increase in state aid. This should result in lower real estate taxes, since not as much money will have to be raised by taxes. This will only happen if the school boards contain spending. If they present budgets that do not reflect the increases in state aid and, instead, increase spending, taxes will rise.

Inflation on Long Island is projected

to be between 2% and 3% through next year. No budget should exceed inflation. If enrollments have declined, the budgets should be reduced to reflect this fact.

More important than the vote on the budget is the vote on the board members. An alarming number of candidates are teachers, administrators and superintendents who have a vested, financial interest in the finances of the school. Putting teachers, administrators and superintendents on school boards is tantamount to putting the fox in the henhouse.

Teachers will argue that this is a democracy and they have a right to run just as any other citizen has. That's true, but it doesn't mean that voters have to be stupid enough to elect them.

Many of the school boards across Long Island have been dominated and con-

trolled by school interests over the past 10 years. We know what has happened. Salaries have been doubled and tripled. Benefits provided exceed, by far, those offered in the private sector. Administrator and superintendent abuse has run amuck. Administrative staffs have grown tenfold in some districts. During the last decade, they have feathered their nest well, but our children have suffered from their greed.

According to a recent report published by the Digest of Educational Statistics 1991 and 1992 of the Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, New York students rank 16th from the bottom on average SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) scores. The expenditure per student was third highest in the nation, only behind Washington, DC and Alaska. Obviously, money has not

brought our children a quality education.

The average school teacher's salary on Long Island today is over \$60,000. The benefit package in most districts adds another \$20,000 to \$30,000 to the cost. Superintendents with less than 250 kids are pulling down from just under \$100,000 through over \$150,000. We have all seen how far greed can be taken with the revelation of Dr. Edward Murphy's million-dollar golden parachute. This has happened because we have allowed people who have their head in the trough to run our school boards.

Considering that up to 70% of your real estate taxes go to fund schools, it is imperative that you know who your school board candidates are and not be bow-winked into voting for those who will benefit from increased expenditures.

And why not?

Not your seashore, not your cost

When we visit Florida, we often marvel at the lengths to which this state goes to make its seashore open and available to all, residents and visitors alike. Almost the entire coastline is open for public access. Roads built along the shoreline have pull-off spots where people are encouraged to park and use the beaches. At these pull-off locations, there are park benches and, in some cases, refresh, running water for showers. Having had prior foresight, many communities banned private structures on the seaside of the road. Florida officials long ago realized that open access beaches encourage tourists and are a reward to their landlocked year-round residents, who pay the taxes.

Recently, an advocate from the Long Island Coastal Alliance was in our office describing the destruction that had taken place on Fire Island during the winter storms. Although Westhampton had received the lion's share of the publicity, Fire Island had been hard hit,

with almost 100 homes lost and about 1,500 feet of beach washed away. The surf is now pounding what is left of the dunes in many locations.

The advocate attempted to build a case for the public to spend a minimum of \$17 million to rebuild the dunes with sand dredged from the ocean. He used as an example the Carolina and Florida communities that have used taxpayers' money to maintain and build their beaches. He seemed a bit chagrined when we mentioned that these beaches belong to the public, and are a public asset.

Long Island's seashore is mostly in the hands of private homeowners who have vigorously fought against allowing the public on the beaches in front of their homes.

Recently, on a ride down Dune Road in Westhampton, we noted thousands of "No Parking" signs. Every 50 to 100 feet there is a sign that says, "No Parking - Violators' Cars Will Be Towed

Away." These signs are particularly plentiful in the areas where the original groins were constructed.

The public is probably not aware of the fact that at each one of those groins there is a right-of-way that leads to the groin and the beach. These rights-of-way are not open to the public. In the original agreement for the construction of the groins, the rights-of-way were established, but a covenant was written-in that restricted access of the rights-of-way for building and maintenance of the groins only. The average taxpayer who paid for the groins is denied the right to use the rights-of-way for access to the beach. It was this kind of selfish attitude by the landowners who are being protected with public money that brought an end to new groin construction.

At one public hearing, a representative of the landowners argued that if these rights-of-way were open to the public, bus loads of people would be brought out from Bed-Stuy. The racial overtones of these remarks finally

brought former County Executive John V.N. Klein to the conclusion that the whole idea was wrong, and he stopped the project.

The advocate from Fire Island argued that the shoreline must be protected in order to protect the mainland. We suggested that Fire Island and/or Dune Road landowners form a special taxing district and raise the funds through taxes on their own property, as long as they wanted to keep the beaches private. He suggested that they could not afford the taxes and the burden should be shifted to all residents, even though they would still be denied the accessibility.

Recently, Long Island Association (LIA) President Jim Larocca announced his support for additional taxes to fund a beach stabilization project. He suggested another increase in sales taxes, a personal income tax or a local corporate tax. Larocca has been known to be on the wrong side of more than one issue. He is on the far, far side of this one.

Sales taxes are punitive to both consumers and businesses. An income tax for a special use is questionable at best. A corporate income tax will only further the exodus of job-producing, money-making businesses off Long Island. It's a good thing Larocca is stepping down as president at the LIA. After taking this position, he should have been asked to resign.

If the public is going to be asked to stabilize the beach, then the beach and access to it should become public. Seaside homes should be condemned and a roadway constructed, as they have in Florida, with pull-offs for the public.

As we are all struggling to keep our head financially above water, this entire project should be deep-sixed and Mother Nature left on her own to build and tear down the beaches as she has always done.

At one time, the dunes in the Hamptons were nothing but a sand bar. In the mid-1800s, a ferocious storm pushed sand onto the sand bar, creating the dunes. Mother Nature, with the assistance of man, has been tearing them down ever since.

We have more worthwhile projects whose benefits are universally shared than the protection of the homes of people who are foolish enough to build on the edge of the ocean. Those are the projects that deserve top priority.

And why not?

Safety, the first priority

Disappointingly, County Executive Bob Gaffney has taken a position calling for the restriction of Suffolk County villages' code enforcement efforts.

A number of Suffolk's villages have established local code enforcement staffs who are uniformed, as are the police. Some are armed, most are not. Their alleged purpose is to enforce local zoning and planning ordinances and the rules and regulations of the villages. They also conduct foot patrols and create a sense of security in the villages themselves.

The police unions don't like them. They see them as a threat to the union. The code enforcement operations, of course, were created to supplement the Suffolk County Police's presence. The county police have long shown a disdain, and recently have had a lack of manpower, to enforce everyday violations of local laws. They consider it a waste of their time to have to go after a landowner to clean up a vacant lot. They are not about to waste their time writing parking tickets for a violator at a meter or on a side street. They do not

have the manpower to provide adequate neighborhood patrols. Foot patrols have been all but eliminated, even in communities with high crime.

Villages have their own governments and taxing authority and through these powers have elected to utilize code enforcement officers to make their communities safer and better places. They are doing it for one important reason: the county is not. Because the county officials have spent county government into virtual bankruptcy, the county is now walking away from its responsibility to protect its citizens. Every foot patrol cut, every reduction in patrol cars, is good news for the criminal element, bad news for the safety of the public.

The county government should be applauding these villages for accepting the added expense of providing the law enforcement efforts the county, under the guise of financial distress, has walked away from. "Lead, follow or get out of the way" constitutes good advice. In this case, that might be revised to read: "Do it yourself, let someone else do it, or stay out of it!"

Gaffney originally ran for county executive as a "one-term" officeholder. He swore he would not be beholden to any group or be unduly influenced by a constituency. It appears the cops have gotten to his heart. Not only is he doing the union's bidding in this situation, but he has also refused to force the issue of the state taking over the duties of the Suffolk County Police on the state-owned Long Island Expressway and Sunrise Highway. The state cops want to assume these duties and the Suffolk County cops don't want them.

The Suffolk County taxpayers, with Gaffney's blessings, will continue to pay millions of dollars a year to have Suffolk County police officers patrol these highways, instead of transferring the responsibility, and the financial burden, to the state.

Gaffney has apparently earned his chief's badge from the Suffolk County Police. But it has come at a tremendously expensive cost to the taxpayers of Suffolk County. Shame!

And why not?

The unanswered questions of BOCES

Last year, before the Dr. Edward Murphy revelation, we suggested that the school districts and the state take a renewed look at whether we need a BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) operation.

BOCES was established almost three decades ago. Its primary mission and purpose was to provide vocational education and support services to small districts who might not be able to afford these programs on their own. The concept then seemed to make sense. No one foresaw the huge bureaucracy that BOCES would become. After the

revelation of Murphy's million-dollar golden parachute in BOCES III, and the retirement of BOCES I Superintendent Dr. Raymond DeFeo, the state ordered a look at consolidating Suffolk's three BOCES districts into one.

Last week, the State Education Department issued a recommendation that BOCES I and II be consolidated, and BOCES III be left as a whole agency. According to Commissioner Thomas Sobol, the study claims a savings of \$1 million could be realized by this move.

We are disappointed, but not surprised, that the State Education Department did not examine the validity of

doing away with BOCES altogether. We are not saying that it should be done, but, we do say that the value of BOCES should be examined.

Is it needed and is it wanted? Can the services provided by BOCES be better provided by the local districts themselves? Should the local school districts be forced to pay a proportionate share of the administrative costs of BOCES, regardless of whether they subscribe to any of the services?

Has BOCES expanded beyond what is needed? Are the administrative costs of BOCES reasonable and prudent? Is this redundant and duplicate layer of

educational government needed and cost effective? Can BOCES be streamlined and made more cost efficient? Are the charges for tuition paid by the local school districts reasonable and the most economical? What can be obtained?

We believe these are all valid questions deserving answers. We know once government creates a function they are reluctant to change it or get rid of it. BOCES is too expensive a luxury to keep in existence if the services can be provided more economically.

Let's find the answers to the questions and have an open discussion.

And why not?

Providing balance for taxpayers

Controversy has developed over a mailing in the Patchogue-Medford School District registering opposition to the recently defeated budget. Because the mailing was sent via a postal permit issued to Brookhaven Town's Republican Leader John Powell, some school officials have raised the cry of "politics" invading school district affairs. We think that claim is without merit.

Powell acted as a concerned citizen, not the Brookhaven Town Republican leader. Powell is a resident of the district. As did other residents, he faced a 29% increase in the school portion of his real estate taxes. In his case, it would have amounted to over \$100 per month in taxes.

Powell also has a son in the school system, and will be sending his other child there too. He registered concern about the deteriorating education students are receiving.

We wish Powell had acted as a political leader. Both Republican and Democratic leaders have kept their mouths shut too long on the escalating cost of education in Suffolk County. The politicians who are involved with town, county and state races, and have some control over 30% of the budget, have nothing to say over the 70% raised for schools.

The educational lobby is as much of

a political machine as the Republican or Democratic organizations. They are as big and as well organized as either party. The educational lobby is the single biggest lobby in Albany. There are few state legislators that dare buck this lobby. Almost to a man, they would go against their party leader, even to changing their registration, rather than buck the teachers' lobby on an important issue.

We believe that all the people would be better served if the school board candidates ran with a party label, and the parties took a position on the budgets. The real elected officials have to carry the school boards' water on taxation. If you are going to take the blame, at least be part of the process. Give the voters an identifiable target, one that is accountable rather than nameless, faceless school board members who, for the most part, have been put there by the educational union with the support of the parent-teachers' coalition.

School officials have, for years, utilized every means available to them to promote approval of the budget. That includes sending flyers home via the students, in many cases in cooperation with the Parent-Teachers Association (PTA), raising fears about the ramifications if the budget is defeated. In-school campaigning by teachers frequently occurs. School district newsletters, sent out at taxpayers' expense, contain more propaganda at budget time than worth-

while news about student accomplishments.

Recently, a special assembly was held at Walt Whitman High School in Huntington Station to register 18-year-old students "to vote on our school budget. Our superintendent, Dr. Daniel Domenech, and the Board of Education President Judith Madenberg will explain the significance of the budget and the importance of the students' right to vote."

Were both sides of the budget issue discussed? Did Domenech and Madenberg explain the financial hardships out there in the public? How the skyrocketing cost of education results more from escalating salary costs to teachers and administrators, approved by giveaway school board attitudes, than by improvements in the educational program? Or, did they concentrate their remarks on the programs that would be cut under an austerity budget, cuts specifically devised to hurt the kids: cut out lunches, make them walk farther, take away sports?

Prior to the special assembly, students were given a memo and were asked to have their third period teacher sign the communication which was to serve as a pass to the assembly. The memo was then to be given to one of the administrators at the door. Why? Was that an effort to know who came, and

who didn't? The letter was addressed to "seniors and juniors who will be 18 years old by May 4, 1993." How did district officials know who qualified? Is it possible they utilized confidential school information to target those they could lobby to vote for the budget?

What happened in Patchogue-Medford was nothing more than making another viewpoint possible. If the facts in the mailing were wrong, pinpoint the error. If misinformation was sent out, condemn that. Who made the mailing possible is not the problem. Let's be honest, folks, if that mailing had promoted the passage of the budget, there would have been no complaint.

It is ridiculous to hold school board elections in the spring. Our school districts and boards of education waste millions of dollars a year sending out voting booths and hiring inspectors, when the selection of school board members could be conducted in conjunction with the general election in November.

If the law was changed to make election day for school board members on the same day that everyone else runs, the taxpayers could save an enormous amount of wasted money. More importantly, more residents would take part in the election process.

Springtime elections only serve those in the educational establishment who are able to lower voter turnout, confuse platforms and, because of a lack of identification of the candidates, to stack the boards with people who have proven they are unable to say "no," which has brought about the horrendous school tax burden Long Island is crippled with.

Apathy is the major problem existing in school districts today, apathy on the part of the taxpayers. Go to a school board meeting, look around, how many people are there? Not many! Take a look at the vote totals for both budgets and school board elections, the total number of people who bother to vote is a disgrace.

In those instances where people do get involved, be they members of Tax PAC or other tax-cutting advocates, they face the wrath of teachers or PTA members who have their own vested points of view. The lobbying efforts of teachers and PTA groups is well known. Their activities in board elections on behalf of candidates favorable to their cause are legendary. If what we're concerned with is fairness, where are the cries of concern over those actions?

Any effort to level the playing field, to get more people involved, to fully air the problems of financing education within the means of the people to pay, is to be applauded, not condemned.

The self-interest and greed of the educational establishment demands correction. The school boards basically are concerned with finances. The actual running of the school, the development of the curriculum is left up to the superintendent and the administrators. Most boards do nothing more than rubber stamp their recommendations.

The primary responsibility of the school boards is to develop an educational system that is within the communities' ability to fund. Bringing the organized political structure into the process of electing school board members is long overdue. Holding the election of these school board members on the general Election Day in November is imperative.

And why not?

Hidden taxes are hurting

We have received numerous phone calls recently expressing alarm about the hidden taxes that have been imposed on Suffolk County residents.

One of the most notable is the Suffolk County User Tax, which is imposed on top of the New York State Motor Vehicle registration fees. This hidden tax jumped the cost of registering a car by almost 100%. Not a nickel of this money is going into a dedicated transportation fund for the county. The revenues from these fees are filtered into the general fund and squandered at will by the county executive and the county legislature.

Another injustice is imposed when the second portion of real estate taxes are coming due. Those who fail to pay the first portion are finding that to pay their taxes they must pay the Suffolk County treasurer a \$100 processing fee for their delinquency. This must be paid on top of their late fees and interest owed on their delinquent taxes.

This past week, a woman called up in tears. Between sobs she explained that her taxes last year had been increased substantially. She had budgeted the money to meet the former tax obligation, but did not have the money for the additional taxes. She went into arrears. By rearranging her finances over the next five months, she had carefully put together just enough money to pay her entire tax bill, the known penalties and the accrued interest. When she was met with the demand for \$100 to start the process, she broke into tears, not only out of frustration but because she was tapped out and did not know where she could raise another \$100 before the deadline.

Why are we doing this to ourselves? The majority of the owner-occupied

homes that are in arrears have the problem because the tax burden that has been levied upon these homes is much more than the owners ever anticipated it would be.

Most people who buy homes budget very carefully and feel a degree of comfort that they can cover the mortgage and the existing tax burden. As taxes have jumped by huge percentages, the economy has slowed down. Overtime and second jobs have evaporated. The burden became too much for too many.

Suffolk County has a record number of delinquencies this year. The total bad debt of the county is at an historical high. Slapping a \$100 processing fee on

these people is not only foolish, it is cruel and insensitive.

The county legislature would be wise to consider the elimination of this processing fee. They are already getting their pound of flesh in late penalties and 13% interest accruals. The county, with all its hidden charges, is as bad as some of the credit card companies and the Mafia.

We would like to run a "Wanted" poster containing the names of the legislators who recognize their past mistakes and repent by repealing this grossly unfair penalty.

Will your legislators' name be on it, or will we be forced to run another poster, "Not Wanted For Re-Election?" And why not?

Alive and well

Like most Americans, we felt that with the fall of Russia the menace of communism was dead. That the threat of this insidious philosophy had burned itself out and crumbled under its own weight. The cold war was over. The threat of nuclear annihilation had ended. We could get on with our lives without fear.

Last November, we were in South Africa. One of the more frightening observations we had was that communism as a philosophy and a form of government was very much alive and well. It had not died, was not mortally wounded, nor had it even just gone away. We just chose to ignore it.

In discussions we have had with people from other parts of the world, we have come to realize that the commu-

nist movement is marching forward with new converts every day. The recent headlines about the turmoil in Russia should send a shiver down everyone's back. How far off are we from a return to the Old Guard? Has the war machine really been dismantled? Do the citizens and the army believe they are better off under democracy than communism? Have we let our guard down to such a point that we may become more vulnerable than we ever have been in the last three decades?

Just because you want harmony and peace for all mankind, doesn't mean that it will be. We had best be aware and concerned. And prepared.

And why not?

A time for reasonableness

It is the duty of a newspaper to speak out on the people's behalf when it sees their government going astray.

On April 14, Suffolk Life Newspapers published an editorial faulting the proposed Suffolk County Community College faculty contract. The Faculty Association, angered by this editorial, has struck out at Suffolk Life. They are attempting to organize a boycott of the paper by contacting advertisers through postcards demanding that they stop advertising in Suffolk Life or they will suffer financial ramifications. They accuse Suffolk Life of being off-base on our facts. The facts we used came from the Suffolk County Legislative Budget Review Office and an analysis of the proposed Suffolk County Community College faculty agreement.

According to the Suffolk County

Budget Review Office, the contract, if signed, would have increased the faculty's salaries by 22.8% to 41.3% over the term of the contract, retroactive from 1991 through 1996. This increase is a combination of built-in step raises and additional negotiated raises. Currently, the employees, as a result of the old contract, are still getting the step raises which range from 2.2% to 4.4% each year. The contract would have covered the additional raises which cumulatively amount to the percentage stated here.

The Suffolk County Budget Review Office warned that the increases would have required a piercing of the cap on county expenditures which had been enacted by the legislature to control expenditures and taxes. It would have required a super majority of 14 legis-

lators to pierce this cap. The total cost of the contract and the steps is an additional \$21 million. For 1993, where no raise was to take place, each employee was to receive a bonus of \$1,250. There was no money allocated for these expenditures in the budget.

The big picture

Currently, Suffolk County is in negotiations with all its labor units. Traditionally, the labor units have played leapfrog on each other's contracts. Using parity and fairness as a negotiating stance, each unit wants at least what their predecessor received and whatever else they can squeeze out at the negotiating table.

The Faculty Association is arguing that they are only a small unit within the county. The professional staff is 390 full-time faculty members. The total county work force is about 10,000. Would it be fair for the county to give those in academia a larger increase than they are prepared to offer the man who labors with a shovel or the woman who is a clerk typist? What the county does for one unit of labor, they are almost mandated to do something similar for all others.

We do not think that the Association of Municipal Employees (AME), the largest of the unions, or the PBA (Patrolmen's Benevolent Association), or any of the other labor unions would buy an agreement that the county could find money for the academic faculty but could not find money for raises for the rank and file.

Setting a precedent

In the 1993 budget, Suffolk County has allocated \$440,535,636 for wages and an additional \$142,409,407 for cash outlay fringes. The total personnel cost budgeted for 1993 is \$582,945,043.

Our fear, when we wrote the editorial, was that the settlement with the Suffolk County Community College Faculty Association would become the minimum standard for the balance of the negotiating units. Taking the average between the 22.8% and the 41.3%, which is 32%, would mean that the county would have to raise an additional \$186,542,414 in taxes to meet this financial demand. This would require a one-and-one-half-cent increase in sales taxes or a 44% increase in real estate taxes.

Currently, we are paying an 8.5% sales tax, and although 1% was supposed to be temporary, it's about to become permanent. To finance this labor agreement, sales taxes might have to be raised to 10%. A 44% increase in overall county real estate taxes is not acceptable to the public. This is not only unacceptable, it is unaffordable. Residents in record numbers are being forced out of the county because of the faltering economy, record-breaking taxes and the huge increases by LILCO (Long Island Lighting Company). Suffolk County already has a reputation as a high tax area.

Some comparisons

We checked with the New York State Department of Labor and professional societies to try and determine what the average wages in Suffolk County are, based on 52 weeks of employment. A medical doctor earns an average of \$125,000 a year. Doctors work an average of 56.5 hours per week, with an average compensation per hour of \$42.50. Most attorneys earn at least \$20 per

hour on level one, and up to \$60 per hour or more on level four. The average weekly hours for attorneys are 39.5 per week.

According to the state labor department's Bureau of Labor Market Information, the average private sector worker earns \$25,555.92 annually. They work an average 40-hour week for an average hourly compensation of \$12.29. The average for all governmental workers at the local level is \$679.97 per week. The white collar workers work 35 hours per week and their average salary is \$19.43 per hour. Blue collar workers work 37-and-one-half hours per week and earn \$18.13 per hour. On an hourly basis, governmental workers make almost 50% more in gross salary than their counterparts in private industry. In addition, governmental workers have a fringe package that private industry cannot touch.

Most workers in private industry have not received wage increases over the last couple of years. Many have been laid off, overtime has been cut back and second jobs have all but vanished. The economy has hurt all of us. The good times of the '80s that produced the income through increased wages and profits disproportionately are gone. To ask the people, the private sector workers who are making the least amount of money, to pay more in taxes to fund raises for public sector employees at this time, is neither fair nor is it reasonable.

Although some public sector workers have not received negotiated increases in salaries, others have benefits from step increases that range from 2.2% to 4.4% per year. Although they may be the result of a prior contract, they are raises no matter how you look at it. The cost of these raises must be funded through the government revenue stream which is predominantly taxes. This is not the time to take a hard-nosed stance demanding more than the taxpayers can afford. The mass exodus of residents leaving Suffolk County or attempting to by putting their homes up for sale, should tell all that we are lucky to have a secure job, and to ask for more is not prudent or practical.

Tuition up 34.1%

Suffolk County Community College has, in the last two years, raised its tuition by 34.1%, causing economical hardship for those the college was created to serve, the students. How much more can the tuition rates be driven up without foreclosing on a higher education for many of our youth? Faculty Association officials claim the salary increases would not hurt the taxpayers, the funds would be taken from excess tuition funds. But that argument fails because those funds are designed to shield students from still another tuition rate increase. Use them for faculty salaries and the students will suffer.

It's time to be mature and realize that just because you demand, does not mean you are entitled to receive.

At Suffolk Life we believe we are responsible for being the public's voice. When we see our government entering into a situation that is perilous, we have a responsibility to speak up. It would be a lot easier for us to join the many others who take the easy path and keep their mouths shut. Freedom has its price and sometimes it is distasteful.

And why not?



Memorial Day 1993

Remember why

Memorial Day will be observed this coming Monday. It's a national holiday and most of us will have a day off from work. As Memorial Day is the start of the summer season, we will be having our barbecues, parties and enjoying the excellent recreational activities available here in Suffolk County.

At some time during the day, please try to remember and offer some observance for the meaning of the day. This is the day that we pay homage to the men and women who died and were wounded. We should offer a prayer for those who gave their lives in defense of this country so that we can be free.

As the years have past since World War II, the heights of patriotism have diminished. As a youngster, we well remember the sincerity and deep feelings as the community turned out in support of Memorial Day services. The streets were lined five deep as parades passed by, the flag was saluted and almost everyone had a lump in their throat as the

Gold Star mothers who had lost a son in battle passed by in the parade.

The crowds used to number in the hundreds at the memorial services. There would be nary a dry eye as taps were sounded and the rifles roared. The images of war were fresh in their minds. Almost everyone knew of a young man or woman who had left to serve their country, and did not come home.

Since World War II we have been involved in other wars in Korea, Vietnam, and most recently, Desert Storm, to free Kuwait. These wars have also left their scars, and the men and women who gave of their lives and their limbs should be honored. Most communities will hold Memorial Day services. We encourage you to attend. If you cannot find time, at least stop, say a prayer on behalf of these people and thank God we are not in conflict on this Memorial Day.

And why not?