

More budget smoke and mirrors

The Budget Review Office of the Suffolk County Legislature has examined Suffolk County Executive Robert Gaffney's budget for 1994 and issued an inch-and-a-half thick report of the spending plan. The front cover should be smoke grey, the back cover a mirror, for this is what this budget represents.

Over the last four or five years, county officials have been increasing their cries that they have less control of the budget because of mandates. They claim that the mandates are increasing at an alarming rate and, therefore, they have less and less discretionary room in the budget.

Suffolk Life has countered we do not think some of the items that they are calling mandates are mandates, but are electives that they have selected to include and, in reality, represent dis-

cretionary spending conveniently packaged as mandates. We have asked for documentation of the mandates. They have been promised but not produced.

As an example, in the New York State Constitution, the law under which the county is governed requires a warden, who is the sheriff. It does not require a police department. A police department is at the discretion of the county legislature and the county executive.

In Suffolk County, we have the Suffolk County Police serving the five West End towns. The five East End towns each maintain their own individual police forces. In addition, New York State maintains a police presence through the state police, who serve the parkways in the west and overall duties in the East End. These departments are

discretionary, at the will of the legislative bodies. The size, the makeup and the funding is at the discretion of the legislature.

Under the Taylor Law, police cannot strike. When a municipality cannot agree with the unions representing their police departments on a settlement, it goes to arbitration. Under the structure in New York State, the arbitrators are normally a representative of the affected government, a representative of the union and a supposedly impartial arbitrator who is assigned by the New York State Public Employment Relations Board (PERB). The PERB officials are state employees who receive their paycheck from the government. Curiously, we have often wondered why the third official does not come from the nationally-recognized Ameri-

can Arbitrators Association. The findings of the arbitrator are binding on both parties.

If the municipality finds the total cost of the contract too costly, they have the option of reducing the size of the police force, civilianizing non-police functions or cutting administrative fat to meet the taxpayers' ability to fund.

This year, Gaffney and his cronies in the administration came up with a new scheme, never before done, in developing this year's budget. They claimed that because police salaries are set by arbitration, they are mandated expenditures instead of discretionary. They are wrong. If they are allowed to get away with changing the appropriations for police from discretionary to mandated, they can violate the legislative cap that was affirmed through referendum by the taxpayers. This piercing of the cap gives them great latitude to spend millions of dollars more than was intended by the legislature or the people.

The purpose of the cap was to keep spending and taxes within the rate of inflation. This blatant attempt to switch is dishonest and a typical case of smoke and mirrors by elected politicians.

The Budget Review Office caught Gaffney in this deception. Now that the legislature knows about it, they cannot let it stand. If they do, they will have no controls on future spending. This maneuver, if permitted to stand, most assuredly will bring a taxpayers' suit which will waste even more taxpayers' money in a defense of the government's illegal maneuvering in violation of the law.

There are many other instances within the budget of deception and smoke and mirrors. We know it takes time to read through an inch-and-a-half thick technical report, but it is incumbent upon each sitting legislator and those who will be sitting next year to do so.

Read, think, analyze, debate and then vote only on an honest budget.

And why not?

You will pay the cost

President Bill Clinton has revealed more details on his proposed national healthcare program. For those who listened, it became painfully obvious there is no Santa Claus. Hard working, productive, middle-class Americans will pay the cost.

A tax of approximately 11% will be imposed on everybody who earns a paycheck in this country. Approximately 7.5% of it will be hidden as a tax on the employer and the employee will be directly taxed 3.5%.

Although it will appear as an employment tax, no one should kid themselves that the employer is going to pay it. Businessmen look at the total cost of employment. This includes the actual wages the employee gets, the taxes withheld, the benefits paid, and the regulatory costs, which constitute the total cost of the employment or what the employer is paying his employees.

Although the employer would prefer to pay everything directly to the employee, government regulations force him into this ridiculous system of

camouflage. For example, an employee says, "I am making \$200 per week," which is what the employee takes home. That comes to \$5 per hour for a 40-hour week. But let's look at the truth. On top of the \$5 per hour, the withholding taxes amount to roughly 30% to 40%. This is the cumulation of federal and state withholding for income taxes, social security, and other governmental ordered payments. This comes out to \$2 per hour. On top of this, the benefit packages that include employee contributions have such items as disability insurance, workmen's compensation, health benefits, life insurance and other perks. This can easily exceed \$2 to \$3 per hour, bringing the total cost of the wages paid by the employer to \$10 per hour.

Under Clinton's plan, the employees' contribution will be charged directly to the cost of labor. Two things will automatically happen. The employer, to keep within budget, will be forced to add the cost of this tax to the cost of his employee. To counter this,

he will either have to lay off employees, cut back on hours or benefits, or increase his prices to neutralize the effect of this increased cost.

If the employer is lucky and he or she is in a non-competitive business, and outside of government there are few, the consumer will pay the costs. This means that the cost of bread and butter, necessities and luxuries will have to increase in price. Middle-class Americans who work and produce will find their dollar buys less after the government gets through with it. This will have a double whammy effect as consumers, whether businesses or the general populace, cut back on their purchases because they have lost their buying power. Jobs will then have to be cut back. Unemployment will increase, small businesses will cease; overall, taxes will decrease and there will be a new round of crying from the government that they need to tax more to make ends meet.

Simply put, Clinton's health plan is going to make a lot of people sick.

And why not?

The Group is hard at work again

Last year, almost 200 children experienced the joy of a Christmas which they were destined not to have. To their surprise and delight, they found numerous boxes under the Christmas tree, when they expected none. Their parents, who normally were able to provide Christmas, could not do so that year because of circumstances which normally included accidents, health reasons, job losses and other unavoidable circumstances.

Where necessary, the children were clothed with socks and underwear, through outerwear. They received a few of their most wanted or appropriate toys, games and books. The Group also provided modest resources so that a proper holiday meal could be served, with some leftovers for the next few days.

Neither the parents nor the children knew who their benefactors were. They never had to lose their dignity or wonder if someone knew of their names and their circumstances.

For the last decade, The Group, an informal gathering of volunteers,

comes together right after Election Day. By then, we have received many communications from people who will have needs this Christmas. Each need is explored. They must meet the criteria we set when we first established The Group. The families who receive assistance, in most cases, had been gainfully employed. Through circumstances beyond their control, they will not be able to provide Christmas for their own children.

Readers write and tell us about acquaintances, neighbors and friends in need. Family members also tell us about someone they may have been helping, but their personal finances are too strained to do much to offer a joyful Christmas this year.

After a family is accepted, they are assigned an alphabetical identification. The children who will receive the gifts are identified by their first names, their ages and their sizes. A list of their clothing needs is established and a short list of toys and fun gifts is included.

Our shoppers adopt the child and

vigorously scour the merchandising countryside in an effort to fulfill all their dreams with a limited amount of money. We are aided by some retail establishments who allow our shoppers large discounts as their contribution. We have a few wholesalers who provide us with mass merchandise at their cost and, oftentimes, below. Another establishment provides the boxes and giftwrap that we cannot afford on our own.

We are funded solely by contributions. Each member of The Group anonymously gives what they can. Many who have come to know us have joined us by making their own individual donation. Some service clubs have done likewise.

Every year we have more children than we can afford to help, but, by the grace of God, we make our funds stretch further than they should. This year promises to be harder than most. There are numerous families who have faced unemployment and Christmas is just beyond their means. We hope all who have been blessed will share what

they can with us.

If you would like to join The Group's efforts, we encourage you to send a contribution to The Group, c/o PO Box 167, Riverhead, NY 11901.

Contributions are not recognized publicly as everything is done anonymously. We do not send out acknowledgements as the cost of these would take away from our purchasing power for the children. This we can guarantee: not one cent of the contribution will be spent on salaries, overhead or administrative costs. These expenses are all covered by an anonymous benefactor.

During the last few days before Christmas, The Group gathers to wrap each present individually and deliver the gifts anonymously. We wish the whole world could be with us when parents who are without hope realize that there are people out there who care, and they will be able to say to their children, "Merry Christmas, see, Santa did come."

Join us if you can, for "there but for the grace of God go I."

And why not?

1993

Veterans Day

Time has a way of causing memorable events to fade into the background of our memories. With the historic happenings in Russia and the apparent end to the Cold War, we forget the sacrifices that have been made in the past to preserve the cause of freedom in our land, and in areas throughout the world.

Certain happenings jog our memories. The sights and sounds of our young men and women engaged in Desert Storm combat, and more recently the horrible sight of American servicemen's bodies being dragged through the streets of Somalia, cause the realization that while we may be lulled into a sense of security here, there are places throughout the world where the fight for freedom continues to rage, and our servicemen and women still serve.

These thoughts come to mind because tomorrow, November 11, is Veterans Day. This day has been set aside to pay tribute to those who served their country in time of need, who suffered loss of limbs and other tragic consequences, and in memory of those who made the supreme sacrifice, giving their life for their country.

The American Legion, in calling attention to this special day, notes: "Tributes take on many forms—statues, plaques, ribbons, testimonials and many others. We pay tribute to the accomplishments of persons from many walks of life, from movie stars to business leaders and community servants to heads of state.

"But America's veterans bestow

the greatest tribute of all upon their nation and their neighbors—the gift of service. When called to serve, they leave home and family to travel to remote and desolate places to preserve our precious heritage and lift the yoke of oppression for millions throughout the world."

On this Veterans Day, 1993, we join in paying tribute to the men and women who have honored our nation with service, sacrifice and allegiance. We pray for the safe return of those in the service of our country who still face the guns of war. And pray, too, for a final resolution to the questions that still linger over the fate of those who are missing in action.

Please observe this special day with a salute to our veterans.

And why not?

For terminally-ill children

A decade of wishes fulfilled

There are many, many organizations hard at work in our communities meeting the needs of those who face crises in their lives because of health problems or other dilemmas. All deserve praise for their efforts.

The recent festivities marking the 10th anniversary of the Make-A-

Wish Foundation of Suffolk County, Inc. provide an opportunity to applaud the efforts of a dedicated group who strives to bring happiness into the lives of terminally ill children. Make-A-Wish has helped fulfill the wishes of more than 250 children with tragic, life-threatening illnesses and, in so doing, has brought bright rays of sunshine into lives darkened by fear and apprehension.

Make-A-Wish has adopted the following mission statement:

"Our mission is to be a friend, to the children whose dreams light up our world, to the volunteers whose time and talents help create magical experiences and lasting memories, and to the contributors who provide us with the resources to ensure that no wish goes unfulfilled..."

The stories of suffering are heart-wrenching, the happiness which comes with wishes realized for those who fight a battle for life great. Here are some examples:

Kenny, a nine-year-old with leukemia, swam with the dolphins at the Dolphin Research Center in Florida.

Kristen, a 15-year-old diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease, was treated to a shopping spree at Macy's followed by a sunset dinner at Windows on the World.

Sixteen-year-old Christina, struggling with a brain tumor, traveled to Hawaii and swam in the Pacific Ocean.

T.J., an eight-year-old with muscular dystrophy, watched his hero Hulk Hogan perform in the ring and then posed for pictures and spent time with the "Hulk."

David and Tricia, twins who suffer from the same degenerative neurological disease, visited Disney World and Universal Studios with their family. The possibility of travel had, for quite some time, been an unfulfilled dream.

Chris, an eight-year-old with acute leukemia, wished for and received a big screen TV and recliner.

Ten-year-old Jamie, who has Non-Hodgkin's disease, enjoyed a long awaited cruise with her family.

Nicky, an eight-year-old with acute leukemia, wished for and received a computer to help pass the long hours during recovery.

Twelve-year-old Danielle, who has thalassemia major, was thrilled to meet her heroes, New Kids on the Block.

Christine is a four-year-old with neuroblastoma. She traveled to the Magic Kingdom to see Mickey Mouse on his Big Red Boat.

Paul, an 11-year-old with Duchenne's muscular dystrophy, traveled to see and meet the Oakland A's baseball team in California.

Charles, age seven, has leukemia. He was granted his wish of traveling around the country in a Winnebago with his family.

In a world filled with many problems, some small, others virtually unsolvable, the realization of a wish come true for a young, suffering child offers escape, even for just a short time, from the too often dark realities of life. We applaud those who help make this possible, and wish for many more decades of success for the Make-A-Wish volunteers.

And why not?



WE SALUTE OUR
VETERANS

The first obligation

Married people have an obligation to their spouse, themselves and, more importantly, to children they bring into this world.

On a regular basis we run into people who have been divorced and awarded custody of the children, and the court has ordered the non-custodial spouse to pay child support. But, too often, there is none forthcoming.

The spouse who does not have custody of the child walks away from his or her obligations, leaving the custodial parent to make it on his or her own. The custodial parent must both work and be a parent, and often he or she is unable to make ends meet.

We have listened to arguments made by non-custodial parents for not making support payments: "The custodial parent will not allow them visiting rights...The custodial parent makes it very difficult for them to see their children...If they make their support payments, there isn't enough

left over to support themselves in a style they believe they deserve." All these arguments may be true, but it does not negate the responsibility of both parents to the child. Those responsibilities must come first.

Suffolk County recently announced the expansion of the Child Support Enforcement Program beyond serving just welfare recipients. The program will now be available to all Suffolk residents who have been awarded support by the court. The county will go after those parents ignoring their obligations for support, track them down and garnishee their wages. They will be forced to live up to their obligations. The county will retain 10% of the support collected as a fee for this service, and it is anticipated that this funding will break the bureau about even. The winners will be the children, and that's the way it should be.

And why not?

NAFTA: it's needed, we support it

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which is to be the subject of a vote in the House of Representatives in Washington today, has been spotlighted in the news, sensationalized by a televised debate between Vice-President Al Gore and former presidential candidate Ross Perot, and the target of claims and counterclaims that often defy reality.

NAFTA is an important subject, however, which can have a meaningful impact on our future. As we stated in a previous editorial, we support the passage of NAFTA for the reasons expressed in that editorial:

"Like it or not, we are all part of

a world economy. This realization should lend support to the North American Free Trade Agreement between Canada, the United States and Mexico.

"Today it is not a matter of competing between a product made in New Jersey and one made here on Long Island. Competition is worldwide and the entrepreneur who can make the best product at the cheapest price wins the heart of the consumer. Most of us would prefer to buy American to support American manufacturers and its labor force. But in reality, when the consumer goes to the marketplace and is offered a

sports jacket at \$99, one which appears to be made as well as the \$199 or \$299 model, that consumer will, without a twinge of guilt, buy the \$99 jacket.

"We can set up tariffs that will make the foreign model seem more expensive. We can set up obstacles that make it difficult to import, but there are always six ways of getting around these rules and regulations.

"There is great fear that many American manufacturers will flee to Mexico. Ross Perot describes this as a big 'whoosh,' the sucking sound of Mexico taking American jobs. He is right, this will happen, just as it is al-

ready happening today. Thousands of American jobs have already gone over the border where labor rates are significantly less. Governmental rules, regulations and interference are not the problem there that they are here in the U.S.

"We lost a good chunk of our automotive production to Japan and Korea. America refused to build high quality, small cars priced within the reach of the average consumer. Japan and Korea and, to some extent, Germany, responded. Tariffs did not prevent foreign competition.

"Most of our electronic industry moved off our shores as well. Where America was once predominant in this field, foreign governments and the capitalists ate our lunch. The same has happened with a good portion of our ready-to-wear and domestic industries. Free from oppressive unions, counterproductive work rules, overbearing governmental regulations, foreigners can produce more productively and economically than America will allow herself to do.

"There is still hope for America in the manufacturing sector, but it will only be with the moderation of terms and conditions that will allow us to compete against our worldwide competition.

"A free trade agreement will allow America to export freely into Mexico as well as import from that country. Mexico, whose standard of economy will increase because of employment opportunities, could become a major consumer of United States' goods and services. The free trade agreement should be supported, just as it is by our Democratic President and was supported by his predecessors.

"America can no longer afford to cripple herself economically by stifling productivity. The barriers to free trade, productive competition, must be removed. To survive, the free enterprise system must be unshackled."

And why not?

Reap what you sow

"The best government is that which is closest to the people," goes an old saying that bears much truth, at least in theory. But the degree of public apathy that lives today makes one wonder if any government will ever be as good as it could be if people really cared.

The public turnout at the recent elections suggests the further government is away from the local ballot box, the more interest and participation is generated. Presidential elections generally draw a larger turnout of the voters, 78% to 82%. Gubernatorial contests come next with a 65% to 67% turnout. Lower on the list are the county and town elections, normally 50%, and, unless an extremely controversial issue exists, the elections for school board members draw the lowest voter participation, about 5%.

Only 37% of the registered voters went to the polls in the recent election. That means 63% of the voting public didn't care enough to have a say in seating those who will control the destinies of our county and our towns for the next two to four years.

By virtue of default, they have given carte blanche to those who do turn out to pick our governmental officials. It is this lack of interest that fertilizes the strength of the special interest groups that permeate our society. The majority of the general electorate that pays the bills is, in effect, saying: "We don't care. Do what you want. Listen to those who pressure you for specific actions to gain their votes."

School board elections are a prime example of where special interest rules because the public, all too often, simply doesn't care. Sure, they cry out in financial pain when the tax bill arrives. "What's going on here?" they cry when the bill goes up year after year. "Why doesn't someone do something about the continual tax increases that are driving me out of my home?"

If, after intelligently reviewing the candidates and the issues, you voted, you are, in fact, contributing to a possible solution. But, if you didn't bother to vote, if you stayed home and forfeited your responsibility, ask yourself this question: "If I don't care enough, why should I expect anyone else to care?"

Next year we will elect a governor. Before that, however, we will elect the people who will establish the policy and control the operation of our schools. They will oversee the administration of the educational programs that will shape the future lives of your children. They will spend the dollars that come from the largest share of our property tax bills. The size of your future tax bills depends upon how efficiently they do their jobs.

Do you really know who these people are, their philosophies, the particular skills and qualifications they possess? Shouldn't you? Since they control the largest share of your tax bill, shouldn't you be concerned enough to find out?

If everyone who has complained about "politicians, government spending, high taxes" takes the time to participate in the system and becomes involved in the decision making process, change might be possible. As long as the public apathy continues, we will reap what we sow.

And why not?

The best Christmas gift on your list

With Thanksgiving just a week away, thoughts of Christmas come to mind, with the holiday shopping season soon in full swing. There will be scores of community events and festivities to herald the holiday season, a time of year enhanced by the closeness of family and the joy of "belonging."

Belonging is not only a personal relationship, one to another, it is also a time to reflect upon where we come from. The communities in which we live play an important part in our overall quality of life, and the success or failure of those organizations that are important to us.

The health of our communities is of vital interest to us all. The financial viability of our "Main Streets" to

survive is crucial to the health of our communities. But that financial viability continues to be threatened by the invasion of the "retail giants" that are flooding our neighborhoods. The giants are here because their marketing surveys promise a profitable existence in our midst. Hometown flavor or ties play no part in their decisions to locate. The price clubs and the large chain operations are concerned more for the dollars in the community than they are for the community organizations--the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Little Leagues, booster clubs, honor societies, garden clubs, and service groups. The local merchants, those who are part of the community's everyday life and activities, are the foundation of support

for such groups. They offer personal attention not only in the daily course of business life, but in the affairs of the community as well.

One of the best Christmas gift ideas you can put on your list this year is this one for your community: shop locally. Enhance that sense of belonging by becoming a part of the festivities in your own local areas, the tree lightings, Christmas parades, carol sings. You will not only enhance your own Christmas spirit, you will be ensuring the economic health of the community in which you live, and those who offer support throughout the year.

Many of the merchants, in order to add excitement to your shopping experience, have become involved in

a Suffolk Life Holiday Shopping Spree which offers a brand new 1994 Chevy Cavalier VL Coupe, plus \$10,000 in major prizes, including a six-night vacation at the Rendezvous Resort on beautiful St. Lucia. In addition, there will be \$500 gift certificates from a number of businesses, and thousands of dollars more in gift certificates from hundreds of local retailers. See advertisement in this issue. Join the fun.

The true spirit of Christmas--"Peace on earth, good will toward men"--symbolizes the special magic of the holiday season. Being a partner in the life of your community by shopping locally will enhance that magic. It could well be the best Christmas gift you select this year.

And why not?

Thanksgiving 1993:

Much to be thankful for

Times have changed. No longer is my grandmother's house the center of attention at Thanksgiving. How we miss those days.

Thanksgiving for me always meant an early rise, into the woods for a traditional hunt, arriving home at noon. The smells coming from the kitchen left my mouth watering. The kitchen itself was a beehive of activity as the women of the house prepared one of the biggest holiday treats of the year.

Thanksgiving was a time of friendship and good cheer. Neighbors and friends came through in a steady parade. Today, because most people work and families are no longer located in the same area, the tradition has changed but the meaning hasn't.

Thanksgiving is a day we all set aside to give thanks for the abundant harvest each of us have experienced in our lives. Some years are better than others, but in reflection even in

the bad years there is reason to give thanks. When we concentrate on the positives, the negatives don't seem to mean as much.

This year, if we sit alone or at a heavily-laden table, let's reflect upon all the good things that have happened over the past year and give proper thanks to our individual God for allowing us this happiness.

•Happy Thanksgiving.
And why not?



Thanksgiving: A time for sharing

There will be those who, on this Thanksgiving, will look with dread upon the coming of the next holiday, Christmas. Because of circumstances beyond their control, they will not be able to provide a Christmas for their children. How do you tell the little ones that Santa will not stop at your house? They do not understand unemployment, accidents or ill health. But "The Group" does.

The Group is made up of individuals from throughout Suffolk County who have joined together and will provide Christmas for the children whose parents can't. During the next four weeks, they will be out shopping for these families, buying clothes and

necessities, and a few fun gifts. They will be neatly wrapped and, just prior to Christmas, anonymously delivered to the parents so that they may provide Christmas for their own children without anyone knowing that they were helped.

The Group is made up of just average, hard working people who operate under a very simple motto, "There but for the grace of God go I." Most, at one time or another in their own lives, have known ill-fortune. Many have been personally exposed to the trauma of financial problems and having to do without. They pool their money, their talents and their resources, joining forces with many others whose contribu-

tions make it possible to reach out and provide the warmth of Christmas to those who have given up hope.

Last year, over 50 families and more than 200 children benefited from The Group's efforts. It takes thousands of dollars and thousands of man-hours to make this project a reality. Already this year, The Group has identified over 50 families who meet our criteria, which is very simple: our mission is to help those families who are in need because of circumstances beyond their control. Normally these families are able to provide for themselves, but this year, because of circumstances, they can't. The Group strives to turn the darkness into a time of happiness. Not

only with gifts, but in the realization that there is someone who cares, and that those in need are not alone.

Kids who have been reduced to going to school in tattered clothing are able to go back, very proudly, with new outfits. Underwear is abundant, as are socks and other necessities. Worn, threadbare coats are replaced with new, warm ones. This is done with the hope that, for at least the next six months, their lives will be more normal.

Amid these packages are a scattering of toys, games, books and other desires every child has. Many of those involved in The Group's effort envision the happiness, and the laughter of little children joyous over an unexpected toy, and dip deeper into their own pockets for just one more special present. We also try to provide the Christmas meal and enough left over to get them through the holiday week ahead.

The Group is not a formal organization. The identities of the recipients are kept anonymous. Contributions are not even acknowledged as this would waste precious resources that are needed for the children. No salaries are paid, all administrative and overhead costs are donated. Every penny raised is spent on the kids.

This year the needs are greater than ever due to the economy. We need all the help we can get. If you would like to have a special, warm feeling on Christmas morning of knowing that you are truly celebrating this holiday in a meaningful way, we ask you to contribute to The Group. If you do, you will share in the blessed feeling of having brought joy into the lives of those less fortunate than you.

Join us and the hundreds of people who have become benefactors over the last decade and help us be able to make this year special for those who have endured temporary setbacks and need a friend.

You may send your contributions to "The Group," c/o of Suffolk Life Newspapers, PO Box 167, Riverhead, New York 11901.

And why not?

Two simple words: Play, pay

My late dad was not long-winded. When it came to giving me advice, he did it concisely. I remember one lecture he gave me that consisted of two words, "play, pay." He was referring to all vices in the world, girls, booze and gambling. In this area, drugs were not part of our culture. These two simple words have been a guiding light for me. If you are going to play, you must be willing to pay the price.

Senator Alfonse D'Amato (R-New York) must have had a dad like mine. He has introduced into a crime bill a very simple, yet forceful, measure to stop criminals from using guns in the commission of a crime. If you have a gun in your possession in the commission of a felony, you have earned yourself a guaranteed, no release, 20 years, plus time for the actual crime. The discharge of a firearm in the commission of a crime earns you 30 years with no time off for good behavior. Harm or kill someone, kiss your life goodbye. You will never see daylight even if you avoid execution. Play, pay—pure and simple.

We do believe that most criminals, those that take the law into their own hands and have no regard for society, would think twice about using a gun in the commission of a crime if

they knew they had these automatic "no time off" sentences facing them, and incarceration in a federal penitentiary far removed from good old, liberal New York.

There is great hysteria in America about guns. The Cinderella liberals have been selling the notion that if we further restrict and make it impossible for good, law-abiding citizens to obtain a firearm that violence will go away. These good intentioned folks also believe in the tooth fairy. They ignore the reality that guns are as readily available as "Big Macs." Lawbreakers are not stopped by laws that say you cannot own a gun without first being registered with your local law enforcement agency. For those who are willing to commit a crime, it doesn't make any difference whether they break one law, two laws or a couple of hundred laws.

Last week, there were two news reports of muggers attacking the wrong guys in New York City. Two punks, armed with an air gun, tried mugging a citizen. They were blown away. The citizen was armed and could defend himself. He is not dead, they are. A few days later, three punks tried mugging a transit cop who, although in civilian clothes, was also armed. These parasites are no longer on the streets. These two instances will do more to slow down

muggings than all the police on the street will accomplish.

It's time that America faces reality. We are living in a lawless society. People don't care about the law. They do not fear the consequences. This element of society has returned to the age of the wild where they believe it is their right to take, to maim and to harm those who cannot defend themselves. They have no fear of the police who are hamstrung with socially-correct laws and regulations.

The criminals laugh at the courts with their turnstile justice. They know the statistics better than those within the system. For every 50 robberies you commit, you will be caught once. For every 10 crimes you have been apprehended for, you will walk free nine times.

Gun laws are for silly citizens who still believe in the system. They are not for the criminal element who doesn't obey the law anyway.

D'Amato is right. Unfortunately, although this measure has passed in the Senate, it most likely won't get through the Democratic-controlled House. Congressmen talk about being anticrime, but they lack the social responsibility of enacting laws that the criminal will fear. Only you, the voting public, can change that attitude.

And why not?