

Pataki's best opportunity

Governor Pataki's popularity and approval rating are faltering, particularly here on the Island. Whether they continue falling or start an upward trend depends on his actions on an important issue.

Pataki inherited the LILCO mess that has the ratepayers paying the highest tariffs in the nation. Pataki has been in office nine months. Soon after Pataki became governor, the chairman of the Public Service Commission (PSC), Peter Bradford, resigned. Pataki named a veteran PSC commissioner, Harold Jerry, to fill the position on an acting basis.

Jerry has been a member of the PSC for over 25 years and as a member he was part of the problem that created the LILCO scenario. Last week, Jerry was said to have resigned or been fired because he crossed Pataki over a vote on the DEET controversy. As of this week, Jerry is staying on until an adequate replacement can be found. We hope that is but a limited time.

This is the best opportunity the Governor has had since he took office to show how sincere he is about resolving our problems. How he handles it may well determine the public's opinion of him as governor for a long time to come. Almost all of the problems of high rates can be traced back to the PSC. Utilities are quasi-monopolies. They are granted a franchise to operate in a specific area based on their ability to provide reliable service and a well managed company that keeps the rates low and provides a fair rate of return for its investors.

The Public Service Commission is supposed to walk the fine line between representing the ratepayers and the Wall Street interests. For the last 30 years, however, the PSC has been a failure. They have persistently looked out for the Wall Street interests at the expense of the ratepayers.

Contrary to past practices, they had allowed LILCO to collect from the taxpayers, through high rates, funds to

construct the Shoreham Plant. Without these funds approved by the PSC, LILCO would have been forced to abandon the project in the early stages of construction. This would have saved almost the entire expenditure that LILCO has now thrust upon the shoulders of the ratepayers.

The PSC chose to ignore the most sacred principle of utility law known as "used and useful". Before a utility can build into the rate base any capital improvement, the facility must be up and operating, i.e., used, and the end product must be useful in maintaining or lowering rates. LILCO, of course, failed on both counts.

The Shoreham Nuclear Power Plant was never used commercially and its end product was never useful. In fact, contrary to LILCO's claims that we were experiencing a power shortage that would black out the grid by 1990 unless Shoreham was opened, we have an abundance of power. Power can be wheeled in from outside at lower cost than LILCO itself can generate it.

The third major mistake that the Public Service Commission took part in, and in fact actually helped create was the Cuomo/Catacosino deal that ended up costing the ratepayers three times the actual cost of construction. The PSC chairman and the PSC commissioners are appointed by the governor and approved by the State Senate. During the last 30 years these commissioners have had close ties to Wall Street. They and the PSC staff have been known to float in and out of the PSC. When they leave, they go to work for utilities, utility affiliated companies, law firms with ties to utilities and strong ties to Wall Street. This unethical scenario must come to an end.

The chairman's position is to be filled as must one vacant seat at this time. Pataki must choose well. The new chairman should have no ties to utilities or Wall Street, and most definitely should not come from the commission itself. A new PSC chairman should be brilliant, yet possess enormous amounts of common sense. The chairman should be strong and able to swiftly clean house. The problems at the PSC are not only the commission members themselves, but the staff that has been institutionalized and has such close ties with utilities and Wall Street.

The commission must be redirected to be aware of the ratepayers problems and the cost of utilities on commerce and industry. The new chairman and his new staff are going to have to find legal and technical ways of getting the ratepayers out of the quandry they are in. The new chairman must be strong enough to yank franchises where utilities have failed to live up to their obligations to operate effectively and prudently on the ratepayers behalf. LILCO should be on the top of that list.

The new chairman unquestionably is Pataki's biggest challenge and opportunity. Let's hope he does not blow it.

And why not?

Salute to the heroes

An outpouring of appreciation was directed Sunday at the brave and dedicated volunteers who stood firm against the raging flames of wildfires, and gave assistance in so many ways. They were the participants in a Procession of Heroes Sunday in Westhampton, a parade and picnic event designed to say "Thank You." The recognition for the services these volunteers offer is well deserved, and long overdue.

The sound of a wailing siren in the middle of a cold winter's night might cause us to wonder where the emergency is, but before we close our eyes and head back to sleepy bliss, the volunteers are enroute in an emergency vehicle, rushing to care for someone's needs. They are there for any emergency, to meet any need, despite the conditions or the horror they may face. They are the volunteers who are there no matter what. They fight flames, stop the flood of blood, evacuate the threatened to safety, support the rescuers, pick up the pieces.

We've known many a volunteer in our journalistic endeavors, and have often wondered what makes them tick. What brings to the surface the ability to respond as they do? How can they experience the horrors they sometimes do and continue to perform their selfless duties on behalf of people they do not know, and will probably never meet again, often without thanks or recognition. Because they are there when needed, they are often taken for granted. They'll be there, we assume. And they are. We never really found an answer to the question of what makes them tick. We simply came to the conclusion that they are very special people and we are very fortunate that they exist.

In the wake of the Wildfires of 1995, the flood of appreciation bubbled to the top in many ways. How best can we thank these heroes, many asked. There have been many suggestions. Contribute to the firefighters funds, and we agree, that appreciation can and should be shown on an annual basis. There are and will continue to be ceremonies, proclamations, awards and other such happenings. And this is all good.

Some, and Suffolk Life is included in this group, wanted to do something special, something that would extend beyond the immediate memory of the fires and the dedication and bravery they evoked. In a joint project, Suffolk Life and Suffolk Community College are launching a scholarship effort that will benefit a firefighter or a member of his or her immediate family. It is our hope that this can, with the public's generous support, continue into the future to keep alive the feelings of appreciation that we all feel today for the volunteers.

You can help. Not at the expense of

the firefighter fund drive held each year, or any other supportive effort for our volunteers. Something extra, something to keep alive the memories of 1995, and the realization that our lives are better and safer because of the volunteers.

Checks for the Firefighters Scholarship Program should be made out to: Firefighters Fund: SCC Foundation, indicating Suffolk Life/ SCC Firefighters Fund on the check, and mail to Firefighters Fund, C/O SCC Foundation, 533 College Road, Selden, N.Y. 11784.

And why not?

Washington's greatest lie

One of our readers from Dix Hills, Mrs. Betty Urig, contacted us and said that she had an original piece that had been put out by the government prior to the start of Social Security Fund. The four page brochure details what the public can expect and how the system would operate.

On page two the government states, "The checks will come to you as a right. You will get them regardless of the amount of property or income you will have." In discussing if you should die before 65 years-of-age, the government states, "Your family will get a payment in cash amounting to 3.5 cents on every dollar of wages you have earned after 1936."

It goes on and states, "Beginning in 1949, twelve years from now, you and your employer will each pay three cents on every dollar you earn up to \$3,000 per year. That is the most that you will ever pay." In discussing the old age reserve account, the government states, "Meanwhile, the old age reserve fund in the United States Treasury is drawing interest and the government guarantees it will never earn less than 3%. This means that three cents will be

added to every dollar in the fund each year."

In conclusion, the government states, "What you get from the government plan will always be more than you have paid in taxes." The only difference between today and 1936 is that the government lied, in plain English. This is the way the government sold the Social Security Insurance Program.

Since the conception of the Social Security program, the government developed Medicare, which is funded in part by the Social Security taxes we currently pay. This is one of the fastest growing programs and, if left unchecked, it is projected to be bankrupt by 2002. The new Republican Congress is attempting to avoid this bankruptcy. Although expenditures will dramatically increase over the next seven years, they are attempting to devise plans that will cap the growth of the funds to the rate of inflation by the year 2002.

Part of their plans call for encouraging individuals to switch their coverage out of the government plan into private providers. Other options call for curtailing doctor, hospital and med-

ical fees. Participants in either plan will be required to help fund this insurance through their own contributions.

The runaway cost of senior medical care must be capped. Failure to cap it will only mean one of two things, a bankrupt system that no longer exists or substantially higher taxes on those that are working.

Currently, almost 15% of every worker's income goes into Social Security-Medicare taxes. When state, federal income taxes, real estate and sales taxes are factored in, many of our lower and middle income workers are contributing almost half their income to taxes. High wage earners are contributing more and the end result is that few people feel good about themselves or the country they are living in. They cannot afford additional taxes and still be able to maintain any semblance of life.

The original Social Security Act was conceived in deceit as is so obvious from the government pamphlet. Reforms in the Medicare program cannot be conceived in deceit or the country will go down the drain.

And why not?

The 1996-1997 county budget

Unfortunately, Suffolk County government only budgets one year at a time. The budget that the County Legislature is looking at right now was prepared by Suffolk County Executive Robert Gaffney. This is an election year, and Gaffney naturally wants the budget and the resulting taxes to be as attractive as possible. He at least wants the perception that he has been a good fiscal manager and offers a budget document as proof.

The County Budget Review Office (BRO) is going through the three-inch document with a fine tooth comb. They will issue a report in late October. Don't be surprised if their review and analysis

comes to different conclusions than the county executive's budget people reached.

When the review is issued, the members of the legislature will debate the budget, the report and the merits of each spending proposal. The legislature has an opportunity of eliminating or correcting the county executive's proposals or assumptions. In their collective wisdom, they will send back to the county executive a revised budget which he can either accept or, using the powers of line item veto, eliminate new proposals that come from the legislators. When all is said and done and a budget is accepted for 1996, a sigh of relief will come from

all quarters for they have accepted a spending and tax plan for next year. There should be no glee, however, for the real financial problems will hit in 1997.

In 1997 Suffolk County can be facing over a half billion dollar shortfall when everything is combined. Coming in 1997 are the financial results of the binding arbitration on the police contract, increases for AME workers and the other organized labor units of the county. But more important is where will the funding come from for the approximately 450 new police officers that Gaffney has placed on the force?

The 1996 cost of these police have

been substantially modified by the one year shot-in-the-arm from the Federal Crime Bill. Many of these police were hired under this program. Much of their first year's salaries were covered by the federal grant, but in 1997, the full cost will be charged to the county residents. This will amount to between \$45 and \$50 million dollars more than in 1996.

We are now under a court order and a judgement to pay LILCO 80 million dollars, a figure rising by \$9,000 per day for interest, that was the result of an over-assessment by the Town of Brookhaven on the Shoreham Nuclear Power Plant's real estate. If this money is not bonded, the average taxpayer in the county will be wacked for \$50 more on their real estate tax bill, and the homeowners of Brookhaven Town will see a tax increase, on average, of \$550 to \$600 for this one item alone.

Coming on the heels of this is a \$650 million certiorari suit by LILCO for the later years of the Shoreham Nuclear Power Plant. If they win this case, the average Suffolk homeowner will be looking at a tax increase of around \$350. Residents of Brookhaven Town will be looking at a one shot increase of between \$2,000 and \$3,000 on the average tax bill. The alternative to this one-time hit is bonding that will drive the cost of this over-assessment to almost a billion dollars.

In addition to these known, projected factors, are the federal and state cutbacks which will be coming into place during 1996-1997. As the feds cutback on programs, municipalities will have to pick up an even larger share or discontinue services to the residents. This can impact the budget by millions of dollars.

BRO should not only be looking at the 1996, budget but give projections of what the 1997 budget might look like. The county executive and the new legislature in 1996 is going to have to hit the ground running on January 1. Their laid back attitude toward finances over the last couple of years, when they had opportunities to cut, have been wasted.

In 1996, the new realities of a downsized government will hit them like a sledgehammer and unless they are willing to bite the bullet early and hard, their failure to act will have us in the worst financial predicament Suffolk has ever experienced. Our county officials had better start facing the reality of what lies ahead. Today.

And why not?

You must vote

Beware of Proposition 3

Since this is a local election year, many voters do not give their participation as much importance or credence as they do in presidential and gubernatorial elections. In many ways, however, local elections are the most important of all.

This year on the ballot voters will find a proposition which has frightening implications, and demands their vote. A Constitutional Amendment, it probably will be called "Proposition No. 3" on the ballot. This proposal will heavily impact the future size of state government, spending and, most importantly, taxes.

The New York State Constitution requires state government to gain voter approval before they can issue general obligation bonds and incur additional debt. Debt has become one of the biggest cost factors in government. Past governments have found a way around this constitutional requirement, it is called "back door" borrowing.

The state needs money for general purposes, but does not want to raise taxes directly. They know the voters will not look favorably on additional borrowing by the government. So the govern-

ment in the past has used agencies such as the state's Urban Development Corporation (UDC) Agency and the Thruway Authority to borrow money without voter approval.

The scam works like this: The state sells a prison, such as Attica, a state asset, to the UDC. The UDC gives the state the cash which goes into the general fund. The state, in return, leases back the prison from the UDC. Voter approval is circumvented. The state gets a windfall of cash to squander and the UDC has rich profits to spend without governmental control.

The practice first started under Nelson Rockefeller when he avoided going to the public for approval to build the State Plaza in Albany. Governor Mario Cuomo used it for Attica Prison and had the Thruway Authority pull a similiar deal when they sold the Thruway and leased it back. As a result of these deals, only \$5.2 billion of the state's debt is voter approved. The total state debt this Spring was almost \$28 billion.

This Constitutional Amendment is supposed to correct this condition but has more loopholes in it that any scoun-

drel can use to avoid any taxpayer approval for bonding. It calls for non-voter approved, general obligation debt and bonding that would not require voter approval, called revenue bonds. It increases the amount the government may bond to \$36 billion. This is on top of the \$22 billion worth of bonding that has been done through the back door.

New York State already has one of the highest ratios in the nation of debt caused by "back door" borrowing. Most of the recent bond issues that have been put to the voters have been turned down.

You should contact your State Legislator, find out how they stand on "Proposition 3". If they favor it, they favor increasing your taxes. If they don't favor it, tell them to get off their duffs and introduce a plain and simple bill that stops "back door borrowing".

At the writing of this editorial, the Constitutional Amendment is tentatively called "Proposal No. 3". There is a court challenge and the number may be changed on the ballot. We will give you any updates in our November 1 issue, the last edition before Election Day, November 7.

And why not?

Next week in Suffolk Life

During the next two weeks, Suffolk Life will be publishing the answers to our annual questionnaires sent to all candidates. Next week you will be able to read what the candidates for running for office in the ten towns have to say.

The issues are presented in a "yes" or "no" format. We strongly recommend that subscribers read the questionnaires and answer the questions themselves. Compare your answers to those given by the candidates. If a candidate has failed to answer the questions, you can be fairly sure he does not want you to know the answers because his position is probably opposed to your own.

In constructing the questionnaires we have tried to cover political philosophy, governmental ethics, finances, environmental and specific questions that are relevant to your own town. By the time you have read through the questionnaires and studied the responses, you should have a good idea of the position of each candidate.

Do candidates always tell the truth in their responses? Unfortunately, we have seen contradictions in the past. The best way you can guard against this misinformation is to hold the successful candidates' toes to the fire. Pull out and file this questionnaire. As government devel-

ops during the next two years, follow what your elected officials do. If you find them going in a different direction than they have answered, contact them immediately. Remind them of the commitment they made to the voters. Don't let them off the hook. Be ever vigilant.

In essence, the candidates' answers are their pledge to you on how they will act once in office. Candidates should live up to their word and be thrown out if they don't. Next week we will publish the town questionnaires. On October 25 candidates running for county executive legislative office will have an opportunity to give you their positions on the issues.

On November 1, we will publish our comments and endorsements, which are based on our reporters' coverage of the candidates' interviews with the editorial board, their past records and their answers to the questionnaire. Our endorsements are the consensus of the news team and the editorial board. Each of us is given an opportunity to express our opinion and then we vote. The winning candidate receives our endorsement. Democracy rules.

And why not?

Not all bids are really bids

During our interviews with the prospective legislative candidates, the question of the county's bidding procedures has come up numerous times. The impetus for this was the county's leasing deal that some had called a scandal and others call unnecessarily expensive. The deal was brought about by a type of bid called an RFP, a request for proposal.

Under this scenario, a municipality puts out a notification that is broad-based, but addresses the generic purchase or service they wish. Proposals are sought to meet the pre-specified specifications. Companies submit their requirements, obligations and the delivery of product. At best, the procedure is wishy-washy and has enough loopholes that you can drive

a Mac truck through. In the end, the buyer is never sure they got the best price, the bidders never know if they are on equal ground because the flexibility of the proposals leave out important elements, or the bidders may over-bid on elements that later are subject to change.

RFPs came into vogue in the bidding for professional contracts, most notably, on software development that could not be nailed down to exacting specifications. RFPs have now spread to equipment and services that, by normal definition, can be specific and detailed.

The car lease deal is an example of an abuse of the system. The county intended to buy specifically

equipped vehicles for specific purposes. The specifications would have been general enough to allow the bidding of General Motors, Ford and the Chrysler Corporation's vehicles. Under the original RFP issued by the county, the winning bidder was to provide a \$1,000 bond for each vehicle to guarantee the maintenance and repair of the fleet. This costly item contained in the original RFP was, after the fact, eliminated from the successful bidders' contract. It put the other bidders at an economic disadvantage. There are a number of other changes that lead to the charge that the bid had been steered and custom designed to fit the needs of the successful bidder. Charges were made right up to the signing of the

contract that the original bidders had no opportunity to take advantage of the bidding.

RFPs are fraught with possibilities for corruption and manipulation. Instead of shying away from them, most municipalities seem to have embraced them. The question that Suffolk County residents should be asking is, why?

If tight specifications can be written into firm bid proposals that enable the county and the towns to seek out the maximum amount of bidders for specific merchandise, why not follow this procedure? Why accept a convoluted bidding system that encourages manipulation and creates the perception of wrongdoing?

The county legislature and the boards of each of the ten towns should develop laws requiring firm bids except in cases where there are so many unknowns that a straight bidding system would not work. RFPs should be limited to professional contracts, but even these should be bid on the basis of a firm hourly rate and a plus or minus perimeter for the entire program. If those who are bidding go beyond the perimeter, they should eat the difference. If they bring the job in under, they should receive a bonus based on the estimated price.

RFPs are a bad business practice. Let's end them now.

And why not?

A needed solution

Evaluators can't provide

The cost of the Pre-K Handicap Program in Suffolk County seems to finally be under control. The program mandated by the state ran rampant in Suffolk County in recent years.

During the late 80's and 90's, the cost of the program went from under \$10 million to over \$120 million. The program was partially reimbursed by the state government. Suffolk County, although only having 7% of the state's population, consumed 75% of the entire state's allocation for this program.

Under the regulations established by the state, outside agencies interviewed, evaluated and determined the needs of the candidates for the program. They also were the providers of the care that they had recommended.

Obviously, Suffolk County did not and could not have 75% of the children who were diagnosed with pre-k handicaps with only 7% of the population.

Gaffney inherited this problem when he took office. Although the county was paying the major portion of the bill, they had no input into the process. The county became more active in having county representation during the evaluation process. That involvement and oversight has stemmed the rapid increase in the program.

Under the old system, children with minute developmental problems were being placed into the program. The pre-k system was rapidly becoming, according to some legislators, a very expensive day-care/babysitting service. The cost for each child en-

rolled is over \$20,000 per year. With the county's increased involvement and input, controls were put on the evaluators and the numbers started to drop. This has helped.

What is needed now is a division of the evaluators from the providers. We must stop these outside agencies from being the providers and the evaluators. This will take an act of the state legislature.

Our assemblymen and state senators know the pain this program has caused Suffolk County. They know what the solution is and they must enact laws that provide a safety net for the children in need, but stop the outside agencies from profiting at the expense of Suffolk County residents.

And why not?

Aftermath of verdict

Remembering the way it was

With all the controversy that has erupted over the O.J. Simpson verdict, we have been forced to face our own feelings about prejudice and bigotry.

During the forties and fifties we grew up in the Town of Riverhead, which was a center of commerce for the East End. We were surrounded by vast potato fields and duck farms.

The population was mixed. The English had originally settled the community. The Irish, the Italians and the Germans came to Riverhead in the early 1900's. Blacks came to Riverhead to work on the farms in the 30's and 40's.. The blacks were followed by the Poles who immigrated in droves after World War II. Most of the immigrants coming to Riverhead, including the children, could not speak a word of

English. The children of these early immigrants all went to school together. Surprisingly, there was little or no bigotry. National pride, maybe. This mostly came out on St. Patrick's Day and other ethnic holidays. We all associated freely. We did not segregate ourselves by race, religion or creed.

We looked at our fellow classmates as being handsome or homely, smart or stupid, weak or strong. We basically judged each other on our abilities, personalities and looked for the good in each other rather than the bad. These were some of the good times in this little pocket of America. I am sure things were not the same down South or in the big cities, but here in this sleepy little town, we liked each other.

We were saddened to hear the

commentary after the Simpson trial. This American, for one, does not believe that the nine black jurors released O.J. because he was a fellow African-American. We believe the jurors sat through that horrendous trial because they believed in the American system of justice. They listened to the testimony from the prosecution. They weighed the defense's presumption of innocence until reasonable doubt became the critical factor.

In the jurors' minds, it was the evidence that counted, not the color. We owe them a debt of gratitude, not for the verdict they delivered, but for how they reached it.

Riverhead is not the idyllic place I grew up in, but, I hope, the seeds of understanding and goodwill have survived.

And why not?

Check blanks

Inside Suffolk Life this week you will find Suffolk Life's annual questionnaire answered by those who are seeking council or supervisor positions in the local towns.

We recommend that before you read the candidates' answers, you answer the questions yourself. Compare your answers to those of the candidates. Are they with you or against you?

If they failed to answer the questions, you can fairly well assume that their answers would not be what you would agree with.

We encourage you to study this questionnaire, save it and refer back to it during the campaign. Use it to help you make up your mind what candidates you will support.

Plan now on voting on Tuesday, November 7. This is the day you will choose the kind of government you wish to serve you by selecting the candidates.

And why not?

Let's fix the problem

Income taxes vs. real estate taxes

During our political interviews this year, a number of legislative candidates suggested that we should explore a move from real estate taxes to income taxes as a method of funding government and schools.

Last week, some teacher, police and municipal union officials came out in support of this concept. No one likes the concept of real estate taxes because the government can tax real estate and improvements and has the ability to place a lien on your property if the taxes are not paid. In reality, no one really ever owns real estate, we just have an open-ended lease on the property. The government has the ability to increase the cost of this lease without our direct negotiations or approval. This gives the government an open checkbook at our expense.

Proponents of an income tax sys-

tem for funding schools and local governments claim that it is fairer because it is based upon wages and earnings. The more you earn, the more you would pay. Proponents are only proposing to eliminate taxes on residential properties. Commercial and industrial properties will continue to be taxed on real estate, in addition to higher income taxes on the owners of the property as well as the corporations and companies that own this real estate.

Because of the oppressive real estate taxes, businesses and productive Long Islanders are moving. Most businesses and employees in today's age have the ability to move. With modern communication and transportation networks, it is not imperative that you be located in a state like New York.

States that are attracting new businesses and employees have not only

lower real estate rates and lower utility rates, but much lower income tax and corporate tax rates than New York. New York State currently has one of the highest personal and corporate income tax rates in the country. Businesses and professionals that move can immediately enjoy larger net incomes, after taxes. To add to our current income tax rates will only accelerate the exodus of higher income wage earners and profitable corporations.

An income-based funding of local governments would have a particularly devastating effect on the East End and our other "beach" communities. Second homeowners pay a huge portion of these local real estate taxes. In Southampton, 39% of the town's tax revenues come from second homeowners. For the most part, these residents file their income taxes from their "other" address. This revenue would be lost and would have to be made up by the remaining residents. Not a pleasant thought.

Before anyone endorses this idea, we should all, particularly our elected governmental officials, be forced to solve the problems that have created the high real estate taxes. The three major cost factors that make up government expenditures are education, law enforcement and social services.

On Long Island, we spend over \$12,000 per student per year for education. This is two-and-a-half times the nation's norm. Teachers' salaries, including benefits, are almost twice what they are in the rest of the nation. The administrative structure of schools is bloated, having grown 10 times in the

last 15 years. Educational costs eat 70% of the taxes raised through real estate. They eat up almost one-third of the state budget.

Five-year law enforcement officers cost \$140,000 per year. This is far in excess of most police departments throughout the country. It is substantially higher than New York City's police, where crimes and social problems are much greater than in Suffolk County.

Social welfare programs in New York State are twice as liberal than in most other states. We spend almost three times what California does on Medicare and Medicaid and serve 300,000 people less.

Bring the cost of these three functions of government under control and not only real estate taxes, but income taxes as well, could be substantially decreased. Most political leaders won't touch this subject with a 10-foot pole. They know what the problems are but fear the unions that represent the vested interests in these three categories. They prefer to stick their heads in the sand rather than provide leadership. Yes, they will take potshots at the general targets of administration, that is politically popular, but it won't get to the core of the problem.

Does it make any difference what pocket we take the money out of? When all is said and done, the same people will be funding government, and the majority of the revenues will come from middle income America. Let's fix the problems and leave the window dressing alone.

And why not?

The right to know

Babies born in New York State for the last several years have been routinely tested for the AIDS virus. Just as routinely, the parents were denied the knowledge of whether their child carried the virus or not.

The Pataki administration announced this past week that they intend to allow parents, if they so choose, to be notified that their child has tested positive for the AIDS virus.

Under former Governor Mario Cuomo, this rule was debated. There was a public outcry for this information to be shared with the parents. For

reasons we do not fully understand, some people were against the release of this information.

Unquestionably, parents have a right to know the results of any test conducted on their child if they so choose. Early information may allow them to acquire proper medical care for the child and develop the needed strategies necessary to prevent the spread of this virus.

We congratulate the Pataki administration for facing this issue head-on.

And why not?

The message was right

The gathering in Washington last Monday of 400,000 black men was right. Rev. Louis Farrakhan, the leader of this movement, is held in disrespect by many for the blatant anti-Semitism, anti-white positions that he has taken in the past. His call to black men to atone for their failures and rededicate their lives to productivity is to be commended.

Last week in this editorial column, we discussed the O.J. Simpson verdict and reminisced about what it was like to grow up in the Town of Riverhead in a prejudice-free environment. The period of time I was speaking about was the early '40s and '50s. The black community that had come to Riverhead in the '30s to work the farms had matured. They had grown and prospered. Many had worked their way off the farms into more productive jobs and businesses. They were following the American dream. Work hard, save your money, buy a house, educate your kids so that they can be economically and physically better than you were. It was working.

During the late '40s and early '50s, there was a huge influx of migrant

workers coming into the communities in late July, early August. They would work the fields through September and October and then move on, following the crops. These people were the least educated and the downtrodden of society. Their nomad lifestyle was not much different than it had been in Africa, from where most had come. They lived an existence that was, at best, day-to-day. Many were indentured servants, subservient to a "crew boss" who controlled almost their entire existence. They were forever in debt and subject to brutal and inhumane treatment.

With the advent of the Great Society, major changes took place. Welfare became a way of life rather than a temporary substitute to get individuals over hurdles or hard times. The migrants quickly realized that they did not have to move. Without working, they could enjoy a better quality of life than they could by following the crops. These migrants soon settled in large numbers throughout Long Island. These people were different than the blacks who had settled here. They lacked vision and values. They did not

want to work for respect like everyone else—it was their right; the government said so. There are many whites who fall into this category as well, it's not a black problem, it's an attitude problem.

The government told them, "You don't have to work, we will house, clothe and feed you." The government told them, "You do not have to behave in an acceptable manner. If enough of you commit crimes, you can paralyze the judicial system. You don't have to achieve in school; it is all right to be disruptive. It is your right to bring everyone down to your standards."

During the next 30 years, we grew a generation of people who had no respect for themselves or anyone else. They had been encouraged to not follow the American dream, but to follow a life-time of non-productivity and waste.

This was particularly hard on the black families who had begun to follow the dream and had integrated themselves into their communities and were respected. Their children asked, "Why should I follow your rules or emulate your determination to succeed? I see

my buddies scamming the system and having incomes that are far greater than you can achieve by honest endeavors."

One father with whom I had grown up discussed this problem with me one day. I had no real answer, and he had little to contribute. The system was working against his attempts to be successful with his children.

Farrakhan's call to the black men of America to get their act together, to be proud husbands, fathers and productive workers is the right message. At last, someone is bringing the problem out from under the rock and facing it head on. Not on race, but reality.

The Spanish, Asians and Middle Eastern people who have come to this country in the last 20 years have proven that America is a tolerant place where it doesn't make any difference what the color of your skin is or even if you have the ability to speak the English language. If you are willing to work hard, be productive, follow the American dream, you can succeed. But you must be willing to work hard and put your best forward.

And why not?