

WILLMOTTS & WHY NOTS

DAVID J. WILLMOTT SR., EDITOR

Exit Fees: The Litmus Test

After admitting he had been caught with his pants down and lied to the American people, President Bill Clinton used the "let's move on and forgive and forget the past" ploy. This new political strategy seems to have caught the fancy of many of Long Island's New York State Republican Legislators, who blindly followed Governor George Pataki's lead in supporting the \$7.8 billion LILCO bailout.

Many of the state senators have shrugged the bad aspects of the deal off with: "We got rid of LILCO, and made it LIPA. We got rid of Catacosinos, so it cost us \$43 million, so what, it is all history and is in the past." Unfortunately, this is true.

However, the future is what we have to

be concerned about. The legislators all have a litmus test they must pass in order to be considered worthy of election.

That litmus test is the concept of "exit fees"; whether a separation charge should be imposed on customers who want to leave the service grid of any given utility or electric authority in order to self-generate electricity.

The utilities and their Wall Street supporters are already arguing that customers are responsible for the infrastructure investments made by the company, and

therefore, must be made to pay their fair share even if they decide they no longer want to do business with the utility.

These electric companies and investment firms want the Public Service Commission to issue a regulation that would allow the utilities to charge such a fee.

In May, Assemblyman Steven Englebright sponsored a bill that would prevent the Public Service Commission from issuing such a regulation. The bill did not come out of committee and does not have a sponsor in the state senate.

In the very near future, businesses and residents will be able to self-generate electricity. This process should not be impeded because it is supposed to be part of the LILCO-LIPA agreement under the guise of competition.

Allied Signal, one of the leaders in the gas turbine field, has compact units which businesses can install, allowing them to self-generate electricity at 3 cents to 4 cents per kilowatt hour, compared to the 14 cents a kilowatt hour being charged by LIPA.

According to Energy User News, 3,000 gas turbines have already been sold and will go on line in 1999; additional demand could boost production to 5,000 units. It is estimated the pay back time on the units is nine months to one year, particularly in high cost energy areas such as Long Island.

Plug Power has developed fuel cell units for residential use. It expects to be in full commercial operation by the year 2000. Plug Power can sell the units outright to

homeowners.

Those who do not want to lay out the capital investment to purchase can have the units installed in their homes without charge. The homeowner will then pay a meter fee of 6 cents to 7 cents a kilowatt hour to Plug Power and its affiliates, who are major upstate electric companies.

This is competition, the benefit of which Long Island has long been denied. We may continue to be denied the benefits of competition if the Public Service Commission is allowed to impose exit fees based on the abandonment of the infrastructure, and the utility or authority transmission and distribution (T&D) costs.

In the case of LIPA, it could be argued that every customer is responsible for \$23,000 of the LIPA debt.

Under an imposed exit fee structure, before customers could take advantage of competitive power by getting off the grid and using the alternative, self-generating methods, they would have to "buy out" their portion of that debt. Of course, this is not just unfair, it is not right. This is the reason why we must have a law passed that protects us from such an injustice.

We strongly recommend you ask your state legislative candidates whether they will support a measure to ban exit fees. Will they sign on as co-sponsors and actively work in Albany, if elected, to make sure this measure passes?

If he or she says "No", or there is an attempt to qualify his or her answer, you must assume that person is opposed to consumer protection and is in the pocket of the utilities and their Wall Street backers.

The LILCO-LIPA deal is done. The stockholders of LILCO were bailed out and protected at the expense of the ratepayers.

New investors have now gambled on the LIPA bonds; should their investment be protected or is it paramount that the ratepayers be protected and have the freedom to choose?

The correct response is that the ratepayers deserve to be protected. So, chose your next legislator wisely and take the time to vote.

And why not?

CORKED BAT



Regents Requirements Not For Everyone

We applaud the State Board of Regents for attempting to raise the bar on the standards of our education system. A great number of students who graduate from high school have not been able to demonstrate a high school ability in reading, writing, or basic mathematics. They have graduated while they are still unprepared for further education or employment.

The State Board of Regents has mandated that students must receive a high school "Regents Diploma" which requires them to pass a Regents exam in many different curricula. If they fail to pass all the Regents, they will no longer be allowed to graduate from high school, and therefore

will not receive a diploma of any kind. We believe these standards are too harsh and need rethinking.

We wholeheartedly agree that for students to graduate from high school they should be competent in the basic core curriculum covering math, English, and social studies; and have at least a rudimentary understanding of science and the arts.

Testing should be required in all of these subjects each year starting with first grade. If students fail to achieve at least a grade of 65 in any one subject, they should be required to repeat the sequence they did not absorb. Students who fail a number of sequences should be left behind to

repeat the grade level because, obviously, they are not going to be able to progress to a higher level without having accomplished the basics.

But not all students have either the intellect or the interest in pursuing an academic career. There must be an alternative for them.

As an alternative to just an academic approach, any student who is able to move on with minimum competency, and is able to achieve at least a 10th grade level in all subject matter, should be allowed to pursue a vocational career rather than be forced to complete the advanced and more specific language, science and math

courses during the last two years of high school.

Upon demonstrating a 10th grade competency, and successfully completing vocational training, such a student should be entitled to receive a high school diploma.

Although we do not agree with how the Regents program is now structured, we are encouraged by the benefits of bringing accountability into the classroom by both the student and the educators.

We think it is a good first step in the right direction, but feel it still needs to be modified to make it work for all students.

And why not?

Next Week: State Questionnaire Answers

WILLMOTTS & WHY NOTS

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How Many Times Can You Go To The Well?

As the scandal-ridden South West Sewer District was being completed back in 1984, residents of the area faced tremendous increases in their real estate taxes because of cost overruns. Homeowners faced the reality of losing their dwellings because no one had anticipated the true cost of sewers.

The whole sewer project is a lie. Residents of the district were scared into voting for the proposition supporting the construction of the South West Sewer District through advertisements suggesting their drinking water would be coming out of the toilet. They were told sewer rates would be so low they would never feel the impact; there was no other way around the problem which was ruining the environment and poisoning our own drinking water.

The proposition passed by a narrow margin. Cost overruns, malfeasance and corruption resulted in a spending several times higher than the original projections. Many politicians in that area had their hands in the pie; and, although some of them did not live in the district, they felt an obligation to spread the pain of repayment throughout the county.

A proposition was created to bail out the residents of the South West Sewer District by imposing a quarter percent sales tax that was to expire in the mid-nineties. The sales tax was supposed to pay off the bulk of debt and interest. Rates were supposed to be gradually raised and

by the time the sales tax expired, residents were supposed to be paying the necessary fees to operate and maintain the system without having to suffer a huge one-year rate shock. The down side of the proposition was residents from all parts of the county would be paying for the benefit of the residents in Islip and Babylon.

To mitigate this and make it more palatable to folks outside of the area, a cockamamie scheme was devised to allow smaller municipal sewer districts in Huntington and Riverhead, and the villages of Greenport, Ocean Beach, Patchogue, Sag Harbor and Northport to receive a nominal percentage of that quarter percent sales tax to augment their costs and to keep rates stabilized.

Gaffney's 1999 budget shows the South West Sewer District alone is still \$11 million in debt. If nothing is done, the bonds will go into default, jeopardizing the entire county's credit rating.

The South West Sewer District and the county's 27 smaller districts are looking at serious rate shock. Some districts are facing a manageable sewer tax increase of \$150 a year; but there are quite a few smaller districts facing an increase as much as \$1,200 a year, which may not be manageable for most of the residents within those districts.

The county executive included a proposal in his budget, by First Albany Corporation, to refinance the sewer district debt

through 30-year bonds. This is a horrendous plan requiring the residents of Suffolk County to pay \$170 million over the next 30 years to cover an \$11 million obligation. It is the worst possible scenario and it is unfortunate Gaffney even attached his name to it by including it in his budget proposal.

The most inexpensive plan has been submitted by Suffolk Legislator Joseph Rizzo. Rizzo proposed a 10-year continuation of the Pine Barrens portion of the sales tax, which is to expire in 1999.

Rizzo's proposal would direct half of the quarter percent sales tax (one-eighth percent) to stabilize and reduce property taxes for those within the county's 28 sewer districts. The other eighth percent would be divided as revenue-sharing among the county's 10 towns to meet the huge cost of capping landfills and cleaning toxic waste and other contaminated lands.

Half of the sales taxes raised under

the Rizzo plan would be used to benefit all residents of Suffolk County. Half the money would be dedicated to take care of the sewer problems which affect a small segment of the county.

Rizzo's plan would require the voters, to approve a referendum in all 10 towns.

We personally feel that those who will benefit from the sewers should fund their own liabilities. The increases we are talking about today, for the most part, are manageable. School taxes often increase more than these taxes each year.

If the voters decide it is their responsibility to help their neighbors, that is their choice. Voters on both sides of the issue will have an opportunity to have their say.

The Legislature should totally reject First Albany's plan. The only ones that win on this are bond counsel, lawyers and Wall Street. Their pot has already been filled by the LILCO-LIPA deal.

And why not.

Follow By Example

We should all follow the example set by Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa in their incredible record-breaking home run seasons.

For instance, when you achieve a goal (in their case smacking home run No. 62), don't stop there. Continue to strive for more.

McGwire, the St. Louis Cardinals slugger, certainly didn't stop, finishing with 70 round trippers, including five homeruns in the final three games of the season.

With his team out of the playoff picture, McGwire could have called it a season, and a marvelous one at that. But to McGwire's credit, he kept working hard and produced more special memories for himself, his family and his fans.

Sosa had extra incentive to keep playing hard, as the Chicago Cubs pursued a wild card playoff berth, which they captured after beating the San Francisco Giants.

Credit Sosa not only for achieving the most he could, personally powering his way to an amazing 66 home runs, but also for doing it within the framework of his team's goals.

In the sometimes harsh glare of the media spotlight, where others wilt, this

classy pair of Major League Baseball players thrive. And, they do so with wide smiles and pleasant manners.

For all intent and purpose, we were their customers and they sure treated us well.

What if we all approached our work and our relations with family, friends and acquaintances with such fervor, such joy and a complete unwillingness to accept anything but the best in ourselves?

Is not the decline of our civil society due, in part, to the poor way in which we treat each other?

McGwire and Sosa are the antithesis of that. Witness their personal and professional behavior and the way they treated baseball fans across the nation.

The service industry, so vital to this nation's economy, could take a lesson from their behavior. A smile. A simple thank you. A face-to-face acknowledgement of a customer's presence. These are priceless ways of treating people well. How difficult, after all, are those simple gestures?

As McGwire and Sosa have shown, we can rise to the top, revel in our achievements, but still take a few moments to appreciate those around us.

And why not?



The Candidate's Answers

In this week's edition of *Suffolk Life*, we publish our annual questionnaire for those candidates seeking office, in this case, our state representatives.

During spring and summer, the news staff carefully crafted these questions. The aim was to draw out the positions on specific issues that candidates would take, as well as an attempt to define each candidate's political and social philosophy and their approach to government. This state questionnaire is lengthy, containing 108 questions.

The candidates were sent the ques-

tionnaires at the end of August and were given almost a month to answer. They were instructed to answer the questions "Yes" or "No." If a candidate failed to respond to the questions, they are effectively telling you, the voter, "I do not want you to know my beliefs, philosophies and I do not respect you as a voter. I expect you to vote as an uninformed person."

Blank answers from legislative candidates are not acceptable. They generally

signify the candidate's unwillingness to identify his or her position for fear of being on the wrong side of the voter. If an answer is left blank, you can count on that candidate being against your position.

We recommend that readers first read the questionnaire and mark the questions "Yes" or "No" in the first column. Compare your answers with those of the candidates seeking your vote, and then compare those answers to other

candidates. What will emerge from this process is a true understanding of the candidates looking to represent the public.

This project is a mammoth one. Our news and production staff have worked many hours overtime to clearly present to you, the voter, as much information about the candidates as possible.

This is probably your best guide for selecting those candidates who you will be empowering to make the rules that regulate your life. Choose well.

And why not?

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What A Difference A Word Makes

County Executive Robert Gaffney recently submitted his budget to the Suffolk County Legislature for review. It is a 1,016-page document, containing thousands of lines of fact and explanation.

While reviewing the budget, one of those lines jumped out at Fred Pollert, the director of the legislature's Budget Review Office (BRO). Gaffney had switched all the salary increases for the police union from a discretionary category to a mandatory category.

The mandatory portion of the county executive's budget are those items required by either the federal or state government, and items that pertain to the funding of financial obligations for which the county is responsible. According to Pollert, everything else is discretionary.

The discretionary part of the budget is held in check by a county law that imposes a cap of 4% on increases in any given budget.

The arbitration settlement with the Suffolk County Police belongs in the discretionary column. Although police arbitration is binding, the agreement is not a mandatory expense for the county, and it does not belong in the mandated portion of the budget.

Salary increases are discretionary

and must be approved by the county executive and the legislature. Keeping those increases under the cap gives the county the opportunity to argue that if

Pollert, opens a Pandora's box. Negotiators for the union are not confined by any caps or controls and the arbitrator does not have to abide by or even consider the

the legislature.

According to Pollert, the legislature can find the \$25 million to make up for the hole that will be created by this change in the budget.

We are fortunate the BRO caught these shenanigans, and with its help, the legislature should do the right thing. If the legislature fails in its obligation to be prudent, Gaffney must remember when his predecessor tried to do the same thing. A citizens' lawsuit was filed, and the county executive's ploy was found to be illegal. The judge ordered the funding to be returned to the discretionary category and County Executive Pat Halpin had a \$33 million shortfall he had to make up for in the last couple of months of his budget.

Next year, County Executive Gaffney runs for reelection. Does he want to face the same consequences and be forced to announce a huge property tax increase to cover his political games?

Southampton Town imposed a cap on its spending. In a similar way, the current town board members tried to circumvent that cap. They were taken to court and defeated.

The precedent is on the side of the taxpayer. Stop playing games.

And why not?



raises exceed 4%, they can only be funded by cutting services or positions. This becomes a powerful argument for a county negotiator.

Transferring the raises to the mandatory portion of the budget, according to

county's ability to pay.

Gaffney moved the arbitrator's award from discretionary to mandatory as a budgetary gimmick to make his budget appear to be within the legislative cap. This is wrong and should be corrected by

town board members tried to circumvent that cap. They were taken to court and defeated.

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And why not?

Ghosts, Goblins, Time Change, and Fire Alarms

Halloween is probably the second best holiday for children, surpassed only by Christmas.

It is a children's holiday that should be preserved at all cost. Keep it safe. One of the best ways to do this is to escort your children on their rounds. Do not let them eat anything until you have checked it first. If they are going to be out at dusk or later, insist they carry a flashlight.

Get your hands on some reflective tape, and attach some to the wee ones and yourself. Try to stay off the busy highways. Confine your activities to your own neighborhood. Be ever vigilant.

Speaking of Halloween, let us not forget to turn the clocks back Saturday night. When we have to change our clocks, we should automatically remember it is time to change the batteries in our fire alarms. The batteries in our fire alarms should be changed every six months.

Fire alarms have been credited with saving thousands of lives. There are two types; both work effectively. The first type is hard wired into your electrical system and, if you have a house alarm, it will automatically call your local fire department. No home should be without one.

For those who may not be able to afford this kind of system, the old reliable battery-operated system will do the job.

These alarms are easy to install. They cost between \$15 and \$20 and are available at your local hardware store. At a minimum, one should be placed on each floor, preferably close to the staircase. It is additionally advisable to place one alarm in your burner room and one in the kitchen.

Every six months, parents should gather the family together, particularly if you have small children, and establish an

emergency plan on how to act, and how to exit the house, and where to meet if the house has to be evacuated.

If you need help in developing such a plan, contact your local fire department. Most have personnel on hand that can explain it to you and have literature for you to take home.

On that issue, our hat is off to the Rocky Point, Miller Place and Mount Sinai

fire departments. They have a great outreach program to inform their residents on how to mitigate against a potential fire and how to deal with it if a fire occurs. This public educational program is one of the finest we have seen.

Have a happy Halloween. Make it safe. Keep it safe. And turn back those clocks this Saturday.

And why not?

Fiduciary Irresponsibility

This past week, New York State's Public Authority Control Board, which is comprised of Governor George Pataki, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno, increased the state debt by \$425 million, without voter approval. They are issuing bonds that will be paid back over the next 30 years.

Pataki and company are not building bridges, prisons or other long-term capital projects. They are going to spend this money on everyday items that should be funded through the current tax structure.

The New York State Constitution specifically states the government is not allowed to issue bonds without voter approval. Pataki and company are

ignoring the constitution and the constraints it puts on them as elected officials.

New York State has the worst investment rating in the nation, outside of Louisiana, because of its enormous debt load. Instead of reducing that debt, they are adding to it.

This financial gimmick is financially imprudent. A businessman would be laughed right out of the bank if he came to a lending institution and asked for a 30-year loan of a million dollars to buy office supplies and computers that would be used up within five years.

The bankers would ask him how a prudent businessman could expect to borrow money to pay for disposable equipment that is going to require 30

years of debt to pay off. They might ask, what do you expect to do; come back here in another five years and borrow another million dollars? The answer would be, sorry Charlie, no tuna sandwich today.

Would you consider borrowing money to buy a car, furniture or clothing and take out a 30-year loan to pay it back? Of course not! Even unsophisticated money managers would not consider a stupid move like this.

Here we are, on election eve, with Pataki asking to be reelected to office while he orchestrates total fiscal irresponsibility.

If you need a reason to vote against Pataki, he just may have given it to you.

And why not?

WILLMOTT & WHY NOTS

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County Comptroller

Joseph Caputo *Republican*

Democratic challenger Robert Diamond lacks the experience and credentials necessary to take command of this post. Diamond cites an "imbalance of

power under one-party rule" as the foundation to his platform for asking for the job, but incumbent Republican Joseph Caputo has done an effective job spearheading the office of the county comptroller. His record contradicts Diamond's allegations of one-party rules.

Under Caputo, there has been much arrogance emanating from the county comptroller's office, but his borrowing practices have earned Suffolk respectable credit ratings with leading investment firms.

Also, ongoing audits conducted by Caputo's office, and challenges of former county executives regardless of party, have kept the county's spending practices in line, and have played a pivotal role in streamlining such purchases as the police department's vehicular fleet.

Caputo's administration has "saved

Suffolk's taxpayers more than \$72.5 million," relative to debt management, budgeting, and spending. The Sales Tax Enforcement Unit, established under Caputo's tenure and in conjunction with New York State, has benefited Suffolk County \$1,034,759 from January 1997 through August 1998 in assessments from referrals, and Suffolk County has received \$371,599 in cash resulting from related cases. Caputo has the experience to continue the job.

The county comptroller's salary is \$98,000 a year. The position calls for a car as a perk. Caputo's requests for salary increases have consistently been denied by the county legislature. We believe the present salary of the county comptroller is adequate for the duties and responsibilities of this position, especially since his only reason for a salary increase is because his deputy comptroller, a civil service employee member, is making a few bucks more.

Despite his unfriendly approach to people, *Suffolk Life* believes Joe Caputo is the candidate to maintain continuous stability of the Suffolk County comptroller's office because he has demonstrated that since he was elected the late seventies.

County Propositions

Proposition One

This proposition addresses campaign finance reform, which is long overdue in Suffolk County, but it has too many flaws.

Voters are being asked to support legislation to make campaign financing in Suffolk a public matter, funded through public money. This money would be collected from donations of \$1 to \$5 from each landowner willing to check off the appropriate box on his or her property tax bill.

This is a good idea with great intentions, but the law does not require candidates to participate. It simply suggests they have an option to participate. And, even if a particular candidate wants to participate, and the opponent does not want to participate, both candidates are excused from finance reform.

In addition, there is no guarantee the public will support the program through donations. The voluntary donation given by checking off the appropriate box on one's federal income tax form has offered very little funding.

This measure was sponsored by Suffolk Legislator Steve Levy, and we commend him and those county legislators who supported it with him, but it falls short of real campaign financing reform.

Suffolk Life votes "no" on this proposition.

Proposition Two

In the long run, this proposal is an attempt to move toward providing low cost electricity to Suffolk residents.

The legislation is calling for a change in the composition of the Suffolk County Electrical Agency. Currently, there are seven members, five of whom are appointed by the county executive and two appointed by the county legislature.

If approved, three members will be appointed by the county executive (including someone with a background in gas or electric generation, and transmission and distribution). The county legislature will appoint four members, representing residential rate payers, commercial and industrial rate payers, consumer advocacy organizations and a member from acknowledged environmental groups.

This will ensure the Suffolk County Electrical Agency would be more independent in its policy making and obviously much more diverse in its concerns.

Suffolk Life strongly endorses the revamping of the Suffolk County Electrical Agency.

Proposition Three

This paper has been extremely cautious in offering its support for bond issues touted as the only way to preserve the environment.

This proposition is for \$62 million: \$20 million for open space preservation; \$20 million for active parklands; \$20 million to acquire farmland development rights; and \$2 million to construct an environmental museum and education center.

This is one of those bonds designed to appeal to Suffolk's West End residents as well as those living on the East End. It is a good idea, but it does not consider the cumulative impact of the numerous existing state, county and town preservation bonds that will be coming due over the next several years.

If our state, county and town representatives continue to offer bond issues, Suffolk's residents are going to end up in financial slavery through bonded indebtedness or forced to relocate.

Suffolk Life recommends a "no" vote on this proposition.

1st Congressional District

Michael Forbes

Republican, Conservative, Independence, Right To Life



The election campaign for the United States Representative in the First Congressional District has been a heated race with two solid candidates.

Republican Michael Forbes (R-Shirley) pledged four years ago to strive for a balanced budget. He was an influential member of the House Committee of Appropriations in forging the country's first balanced federal budget since 1969. With his involvement, Congress passed the nation's first budget tax cuts for seniors, working families and small businesses since 1981.

In fact, most of the issues that Forbes promised to address have been dealt with. He still has much to do before sitting back and relaxing, but he has been a pro-active representative of the people.

To his credit, Forbes has been a leader in environmental issues and business issues, ranging from protecting the public from contaminations caused by Brookhaven National Laboratory, finding federal funds to

help revamp the area's downtown regions and computerizing Suffolk County Police vehicles, to protecting the Long Island Sound and preserving open space on eastern Long Island.

He is not afraid to jump party lines if he feels a proposal would benefit his constituents.

Due to his hard work and dedication, Forbes should continue to represent the First Congressional District.

Democratic challenger Suffolk County Legislator William Holst has worked in a bipartisan manner and has worked to help keep county spending under control.

His experience as the former president of the Greater Smithtown Chamber of Commerce, has made him particularly concerned about what can be done to revive business areas, especially the downtown regions of Suffolk County.

Holst is a fine county legislator, who has served his constituents well. The people of Suffolk County, specifically in the Smithtown area, would be better served if he remains in the county legislature.

Suffolk Life wholeheartedly endorses Mike Forbes for reelection.

First Assembly Seat

Patricia Acampora

Republican, Conservative, Independence, Right To Life



Except for one issue, Patricia Acampora has done the job the people elected her to do. She has a take-charge attitude and a determined ability to stand up for the causes she believes are in the best interests of her constituents in the First Assembly District.

Her decade-long tenure as aide to former Assemblyman Joseph Sawicki placed her as a top candidate for her first term. Her constituent service and knowledge of Albany got her reelected to a second term.

As a freshman Assemblywoman, Acampora worked to unite the entire Long Island delegation in Albany to better represent the area. This legislative coalition must be completed and Acampora appears to be one of the driving forces behind it.

Republican Assemblywoman

Acampora, however, is not without faults. The incumbent told *Suffolk Life* she was not content with the LILCO-LIPA deal and she claimed she "did what she could" to prevent it from happening. However, she never spoke out in public and stood in line next to the governor when he presented it to the ratepayers two years ago. We are not convinced she tried hard enough.

Michael D'Arrigo presented himself as a young, energetic candidate who has the potential to become a worthy candidate in the future. This 22-year-old views elected office as an opportunity to bring government back to the people. That is refreshing, but he is running against an incumbent candidate who, for the most part, has the people in mind.

Except for the governor's LILCO-LIPA deal, Acampora's dedication to this area is proven and the First Assembly District should continue to support this incumbent.

Suffolk Life endorses Patricia Acampora.