

Sound barriers: a wall of waste!

The tearing down of the Berlin Wall brought joyous celebrations. Here in our own land, the creation of another wall stands as a monument to waste and scorn.

You've seen it if you have traveled the Long Island Expressway in western Suffolk areas. It is the pressure-treated wooden wall, otherwise known as a sound barrier, that stretches for miles and miles. The ultimate cost of this wall will surely be mind boggling. State dollars going for wooden walls while dollars for education are being cut, user fees are esca-

lating, gasoline taxes are being hiked - it goes on and on and on.

The need for miles upon miles of sound barrier to protect, in many, many instances, homes which were built long after the Expressway was there, could be the subject of a long and heated debate. But there is another ingredient to this boondoggle that needs to be addressed.

Why pressure-treated lumber? Why not recycled plastic material specially manufactured in modular sections?

Indeed, why couldn't the state contract with a firm engaged in the manufacture of recycled plastic products? In fact, arrange for the location of such a firm, with the use of industrial development bonds if need be, to manufacture the modular sections that could be put into place much faster, to create jobs, and, most importantly, to create a market for recycled plastic?

Doesn't the state have a responsibility to help create such markets? Isn't it a state imposed landfill law that is costing governments millions of dollars to stop dumping garbage,

and to create recycling facilities? Wouldn't this be a way for the state to become a partner in solving the garbage crisis?

The use of recycled plastic for the sound barrier wall is not far-fetched at all. Recycled plastic is currently being used for the manufacture of a lumber-like product which is being used for such things as picnic tables and benches. Why not a modular section, with decorative designs, to create a more esthetic, weather resistant wall of waste?

We think this entire matter should be the subject of an intense investigation. What is the value of the walls? Who has the contract for the pressure-treated lumber? At what cost? How many firms bid on supplying this material? Who is involved in these firms? Who owns stock in the firms supplying the lumber? What is the cost per mile for the walls now being put into place?

Then, the use of plastic recycled material should be compared. Let's see a cost comparison. How much would it cost per mile for a plastic wall of waste? What economic benefits could be derived through the creation of local manufacturers for such material?

Just as is the case with the entire garbage crisis scenario, which is enriching some at the expense of the taxpayers, we can't help wondering who is getting rich with this scheme. Will we see, in the future, sound barriers along all state highways? Just think about it, if some bright light of a public official could sell the idea of putting sound barriers along the Sunrise Highway, and the New York State Thruway, there's a lot of money for someone to make.

Of course, it will come out of the pockets of the taxpayers. And it will continue to be extracted for insane "do we really need it in these times of fiscal crisis?" projects unless we demand an end to such spending.

Governor Mario Cuomo, during a recent television interview, talked about living within "the reality of hard times." Isn't it time his actions flow as easily as his words? Living within the reality of hard times should mean doing things differently, living within our means, setting priorities for the use of taxpayer dollars. It means evaluating projects, putting aside those which are "nice to have" to ensure financing for those vital for the people.

Talk is cheap. Governor Cuomo has established an impressive reputation for his articulate abilities. While that talent has thrust him into the limelight as a potential presidential candidate, we'd all be a lot better off if he would spend more time directing those within his administration to live within the reality of hard times. An alternate product for the wooden walls of waste would be a good start.

And why not?

Let's do it mother's way

Most of us grew up living with the expression, "Do it mother's way." Not surprisingly, it was the right way.

All of us have two mothers, our biological mother, who brought us into this world, and mother nature who gives us the world we live in.

As our biological mother taught us right from wrong and showed us the way to survive socially and economically in this world, mother nature also gives us a path to follow that can make a better world. The logic of both mothers are based on common sense.

Mother nature gives us air to breathe, food to eat and an environment to live in. Man, however, sometimes throws his own twist into the scheme of things that gets her a little bit out of balance. In the spring all things grow, they proliferate as the sun's rays grow longer and they are given a healthy dose of sunshine and clean air. Grass is one of the most common examples. In the spring, green shoots emerge from brown stubble and as they grow, the blades develop seeds which fall back onto the ground, creating new growth.

Man, with his compulsion for uni-

formity, devised the concept of cutting this grass to a uniform level, and called it lawn. When I was growing up, the clippings were allowed to remain on the lawn. Within a day or two they had sunk into the earth and a process of nature rejuvenating the soil began. Nutrients and other compounds contained in the clippings were allowed to decompose to rebuild the soil. The clippings also acted as a mulch, conserving the water contained in the soil, allowing the grass to remain greener and more productive. As a kid, this system was okay with me as there was less work to do when it was my turn to cut the grass.

In recent years, it has become fashionable to bag the clippings and put them out at the curb for the highway department to pick up, or to place them with the garbage for the sanitation people to take away. It is estimated that grass and other yard waste today can use up as much as 20 percent of the available landfill space, which has caused part of the garbage crisis, leading to costly incineration programs. The earth that we depend upon is part of our life cycle, and yet it is being denied needed nutrients

and humus, which in turn results in our having to utilize chemical substitutes and excessive amounts of water through irrigation.

Why don't we give up with our compulsiveness of having the prettiest lawn in the neighborhood, and give mother nature a break by returning to mother nature what is hers? We not only will be giving mother nature a break, we will be giving our wallets a break too, for we will cut down on the things that we are putting into our garbage dumps or burning through expensive incineration programs.

To supplement this effort, every home should have a compost area. In a remote part of the yard a compost container can be built that is attractive and useful. In this unit should go excessive clippings, leaves and other yard waste. It can be supplemented with household discards such as unutilized vegetables, fruits, coffee grinds and egg shells. When decomposed, these items make an excellent rich mix that is excellent fertilizer and mulch for other plants.

Let's give the world a break and do it mother's way.

And why not?

Time to take your pills, Joe

Just when we thought the county had been polluted with about as much political shenanigans as we could stand, Joe Caputo, the county's comptroller, proved us wrong. He put political spitefulness in the forefront, while putting the county's fiscal crisis aside to satisfy his own petty gripe.

An important meeting was held August 23 which brought a number of county officials together, with representatives of a bond rating company, in hopes of bringing about an upgrading of the county's bond rating. A recent reduction in the rating is hurting taxpayers with higher interest costs for county borrowing. The meeting was designed to show the bonding folks that the county was putting things back together in its fiscal environment; that politics, which had been a major problem, was being put aside for the sake of improving the county's financial climate.

A major player in the county's bonding activity is the county comptroller. Just last week, he went out to bid on \$55

million in tax anticipation bonds, which was needed to keep the county afloat. But Joe Caputo, the county's elected comptroller, wasn't at the August 23 meeting. He refused to attend the meeting.

Why? Well this is the way it came out at a legislative meeting last week: Legislator Steven Englebright addressed Caputo, who was present at the meeting. Englebright declared he could not believe reports that Caputo refused to attend the meeting because he was miffed that the administration had not approved the hiring of five clerical workers for the comptroller's office. "I do not wish to believe that something as petty as your five clerical workers could be leveraged against the financial condition of Suffolk County," Englebright exclaimed, adding: "Tell me it isn't so."

"That's absolutely correct. If they will not give me the employees, why should I cooperate with them?" Caputo responded.

Well, there are a lot of reasons, but

chief among them is the responsibility to do his job, to put aside the petty political nonsense that has helped put this county into a fiscal crisis, and to do what is right for the people.

There was a time when Caputo showed potential for being a good fiscal watchdog on the county level, as he was in his previous role as comptroller for Islip Town. But over the years, Caputo has allowed himself to be diverted from that role by a number of causes and an ego that doesn't seem to stop. If it weren't for the fact that he has a very good staff, the comptroller's office would not only be a county disgrace, as Caputo has become, it would be in total chaos.

We don't know if medical science has advanced to the point of providing medication that could cure the political insanity that prevails in Suffolk County these days, with Caputo's recent actions as a prime example. If there is such medication, our advice would be:

Take your pills, Joe!

And why not?

Primaries are grassroots politics

Primary elections give the rank and file of the registered voters within the party the opportunity to express their beliefs behind closed curtains. Because the primary permits the party members a voice in the selection process, it is normally a good and healthy activity for the political parties. Primary balloting this year will be held tomorrow, September 12.

In odd numbered years, the Republicans, in addition to directly selecting candidates, are given the opportunity of electing their committee people. During even numbered years, the Democrats and Conservatives do likewise.

There are some notable primary races this year. For county executive, the Republican committee chose Bob Gaffney as their standard bearer. Gaffney is a lifelong Republican who is a

multi-term assemblyman in the New York State Assembly. An examination of his voting record clearly indicates that he has, in the majority of instances, supported the Republican leadership in position bills.

Gaffney is being opposed by Patrick Vecchio, Smithtown supervisor. Vecchio was originally elected to supervisor as a Democrat, in a campaign during which he bitterly opposed the Republican party. Vecchio sought the Democratic nomination four years ago for county executive, but the leadership of his party turned him down. Vecchio then changed his registration from Democrat to Republican, and set out to secure the Republican designation for county executive. Some of the people he had originally ousted on becoming Smithtown supervisor, he brought back into the administration once he changed his enrollment.

Suffolk Life and its editors are independent, but we kind of look at enrollment in a political party as a religion. Under normal circumstances, you do not change religions for political expediency. If you do decide to change your religion, it is generally based upon long thought and matured beliefs. If I was registered in a party, I would be looking for someone to represent my party who totally and thoroughly subscribed to the philosophical beliefs and aims of the party.

Vecchio is also running for the Conservative party nomination for the office of county executive. He is running against the Mayor of Asharoken, Bill Kelly, who is a registered Conservative and who is seeking the rank and file vote of the registered Conservatives. Vecchio claims he has earned the right to seek the Conservative nod, based upon his record as supervisor of Smithtown as a Democrat, and his assertion that he ran a tight fiscal ship.

Kelly is a self-made millionaire. He started a company in the computer world by buying, selling and leasing traditional computer hardware. He has served as mayor for several terms and, like Vecchio, claims to have run an extremely tight ship, literally getting out in the field and doing some of the jobs himself, when needed.

Kelly is very upset at the leadership of the Conservative party. County Conservative Chairman Pat Curcio has wheeled and dealt with his leadership, traditionally offering the Conservative endorsement for jobs and favors. Not jobs and favors for the rank and file, but jobs and favors for the privileged few, including himself and his family. The endorsements were often given to candidates who had a philosophy alien to conservative beliefs. Philosophy had nothing to do with Curcio's wheeling and dealing, greed did. Conservatives normally are very principled people. They become Conservatives by enrollment because of their disenchantment with both the Republican and Democratic parties and the philosophies they stand for.

We have often wondered why the privileged few have had such an enor-

mous control over the rank and file when that rank and file can put an end to the leader's political prostitution through the voting booth. The Kelly/Vecchio race gives them such an opportunity.

In Islip there is another very interesting inter-party fight going on. Incumbent Supervisor Frank Jones is being challenged by Tom Barraga, a New York State Assemblyman. This past spring, Barraga attempted to become the Suffolk County Republican leader. He was rejected in this bid, then he announced he was going to primary Jones. There has been bad political blood between Barraga and Jones, bitterness which dates back to an agreement by the Republican committee not to accept cross-endorsements from the Conservatives. Barraga broke ranks and accepted the Conservative endorsement, and thus touched off the feud that has been going on now for some time.

According to some political reports, Barraga, a career politician, faces the loss of his assembly seat through redistricting. Instead of working within the system, Barraga chose to challenge the incumbent rather than wait for the natural opportunity to secure this position. The campaign has been bitter at times, and has centered around personal allegations rather than issues of substance.

We opened this editorial by saying primaries are good and healthy if done for the right reasons. However, in the Islip race, we suspect it is more about political spitefulness and self-gratification than it is to build a stronger and better Republican party.

There are a number of other primaries this year. We do hope, and strongly encourage, all registered voters whose parties have given them an opportunity to select their candidate, to turn out and vote. A vote in a primary election can actually be more significant than a vote in the general election, for the registered faithful are being given the opportunity of directly selecting the candidate they want to be their standard bearer.

And why not?

Poor, poor Mario

Several of our readers sent us a column published by Ray Kerrison in the New York Post lamenting the personal staff of Governor Mario Cuomo.

Mario, as you know, is the besieged governor of this state. The poor man has had to cut services for the people to the bone. He knocked off almost a half billion dollars' worth of school aid to Long Island districts in this "Decade of the Child." The poor governor had to slash aid to local governments, causing town councils to eliminate programs and absorb the loss in state aid by increasing local budgets.

Poor, poor Mario has even cut his own personal staff in the mansion we taxpayers pay for. Do you realize the personal sacrifice that Mario and Matilda have made? They cut their personal staff of servants from 21 to 15. That represents almost a 30 percent drop. Who will be left to shine his shoes and fix his Cheerios? How can

this man be expected to suffer such indignities while running for the Presidency of the United States?

Mario tells us he is a fiscal conservative and that is the reason he should be elected President. When he first took office, the budget for running his modest home in Albany, which locals have dubbed Cuomo's Castle, was \$462,700. By imposing his voodoo, conservative economic practices he only raised it to \$798,000. Can you imagine what he could do if he had the White House at his disposal?

Mario is a real savior of the great American middle class. Right at home, where the pocketbook is, he is providing 15 jobs for people who might otherwise be unemployed. Of course, we, the taxpayers, pay for it. That's some guy, that Mario. A real sport when it comes to spending our money.

And why not?

Point of view

Child abuse reports: professional duty

By Maxine E. Wofse, BA, RN,
Educational Director, Lewin Educational Services

Today, one hears only too frequently about the deaths of children as a result of child abuse and maltreatment. Although once thought only to be a problem among the poor and the illiterate, child abuse has proven to be a malady that knows no ethnic, religious, financial or educational barriers. The thousands of victims that suffer from serious physical and emotional damage are likely to grow up perpetuating this pattern of abuse on their own children unless they are given the treatment and protection necessary to break the cycle.

Children of abuse and maltreatment are not always easily identifiable. Learning to "hide" the abuse for protection of themselves and the abuser makes the task even more difficult. Also, victims of abuse and maltreatment do not al-

ways bear visible marks and bruises of violence. Many suffer from physical neglect, sexual abuse, or abandonment, with no responsible person to care for them.

In an effort to protect more of these helpless victims, the state legislature has established a one-time requirement for many professionals seeking licensure and re-registration. Chapter 544 of the Laws of 1988 as amended requires that members of certain licensed professions, and many teachers and school administrators, must complete two hours of course work or training in the identification and reporting of child abuse and maltreatment. Licensed professionals affected by this new requirement are physicians, chiropractors, dentists, registered nurses, podiatrists, optometrists, psychologists and dental hygienists.

The statute specifies certain information which must be offered, including the physical and behavioral indicators of child abuse and maltreatment, and the reporting requirements set out in the Social Services Law, such as when and

how a report must be made, the actions a reporter is authorized or mandated to take, the legal protections afforded reporters, and the consequences for failing to report.

Although professionals are legally accountable to report child abuse, all citizens are urged to report suspected cases. Reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused or maltreated is sufficient reason to seek help, absolute proof is not needed. The Child Protective Services Act protects reporting individuals from any liability when the reporting was made in "good faith." Suspected cases or questions should be reported to the state's Central Register for Child Abuse and Maltreatment. Toll-free telephone calls can be made 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by dialing: 1-800-342-3720.

For more information on child abuse, contact your local department of social services or write to the New York State Central Register for Child Abuse and Maltreatment, 40 North Pearl Street, Albany, NY 12243.

Campaign 1991: off and running

The primaries are over. The winners are obvious. Democratic County Executive Patrick Halpin will face Republican Bob Gaffney on the Republican line and Conservative Bill Kelly on the Conservative line.

The biggest winner in last Thursday's race was the system, for it proved that when the rank and file of particular parties are given the opportunity to select candidates of their own philosophical beliefs, they are not afraid to base their vote on their own beliefs rather than on deals that had been made by party leaders.

The biggest loser was Pat Curcio, who has wheeled and dealt, along with a very small group of other Conservative leaders. They envisioned they had great power when, in reality, it was the people of their party who had the power.

To correct a possible misunder-

standing in last week's editorial, when we made reference to Curcio and others feathering their own nests, we were not only referring to Curcio but to the other leaders who have obtained jobs for themselves and some family members. Curcio has a job on the Senatorial staff of Senator Ralph Marino.

The new Republican head of Brookhaven Town, John Powell, gambled his entire political future on securing the nomination for Bob Gaffney. Brookhaven, although the largest town in Suffolk, has traditionally not been able to secure top positions for Brookhaven candidates. Powell pulled this off and backed up his actions by motivating the committee people who turned out the vote, which went 70 percent for Gaffney, 30 percent for Vecchio. Although those in the Gaffney and Kelly camps were elated Thursday night, they should not

be misled by their victories. There is no cakewalk ahead.

Yes, 70 percent of the people have a negative image of Patrick Halpin. They know it was he who raised the real estate taxes by as much as 169 percent on the East End and an average of 40 percent on the West End. Yes, they know it was the financial mismanagement of the county's affairs that created the need to increase their sales taxes by 6.6 percent, bringing the total to eight cents on a dollar.

The voters are looking for positive alternatives. Someone who has solutions to the problems rather than just identifying them. Voters are going to be looking very carefully at the plans the county executive candidates put forth. They want to know who will give them the best hope of surviving the financial calamity that Suffolk has become.

Before any of the politicians sit back on their laurels, they must remember the lesson of the gubernatorial race last year. Mario Cuomo was elected by only 15 percent of the people who could have voted. Here in Suffolk County, right now, 40 percent of the people who are eligible to vote are not registered to do so. They only have until October 12 to register. If they are not registered, they cannot choose their next leader, and they will be relegated to accepting whatever the next government gives them. They will have no right to complain.

During the Cuomo race, only half of the people who were registered turned out to vote. Thus, 15 percent of the possible voters made the final selection. If you are not registered, you can obtain a registration form from your local post office, or by calling the Board of Elections at 852-4500. Local registration days will be held on Monday, October 7, and Saturday, October 12. Again, contact the Board of Elections for your nearest location, or you personally can go to the Board of Elections in Yaphank and register.

During the next seven weeks, you can count on a daily barrage of mailings, newspaper advertising and radio advertising messages designed to confuse you and to convince you that one candidate or another is the best choice.

Halpin has a war chest of almost a million dollars, so you can expect your mailbox to be flooded, and the air waves engulfed in political rhetoric.

If you are one of those who has said, "enough is enough," and "we will remember in November," you must do two things. Be registered before October and show up at the polls, so that you may exercise your right to vote and bring about the government you deserve.

And why not?

Why not one Election Day?

The Suffolk Life editorial board started the political interview process last week. During these interviews an idea was expressed which, we believe, merits consideration.

Towns send out the tax bills. These tax bills include the taxes due the county, the school districts, library districts and other special use districts.

On Election Day, in November, we select the elected officials for federal, state, county and town governments. Town and county candidates are on the ballot in odd numbered years, federal and state during even numbered years. At other times during the year, we hold elections for

other special taxing entities, such as the schools, library, fire, water and other taxing districts. These special district expenditures make up the majority of our real estate tax bills, yet, these votes receive the least amount of attention. In most instances, the board members are elected by the fewest people.

Each election is a very expensive proposition because, in most cases, voting machines must be deployed, Board of Election personnel paid overtime, additional poll watchers must be hired. The obvious conclusion and solution should be for one Election Day for all elected officials. This would result in more people taking part in their government.

It might be argued that the fiscal years of these special districts do not coincide with the fiscal year of towns and the county. Why not adjust them so they do? If we figured out a way of sending out one single real estate bill, we should be able to figure out a way of having one Election Day and the start of one fiscal year.

There are over 660 individual taxing districts on Long Island. There has been a widespread call for consolidation. There is strong provincial interest that is opposing this concept. A single Election Day and a uniform financial year might be a very viable alternative. Let's think about it.

And why not?

Point of View:

Failing schools are the real problem

By Charles M. Richardson

This is in response to the August 14 letter from A.H. of Riverhead, the apologist who blames "the failing family system" for the disasters of our public education system (PES). If it were really a "family-breakdown" problem, and the PES was doing its job, we would see a lot of failing grades given out! But we see more honor grades than ever.

Some networkers have come up with a book, "Educating for the New World Order," which explains what is really going on: It reveals not only greed and a conflict of interest, but also blatant illegalities in a politically-oriented campaign of sophisticated psychological stratagems aiming to radically change the way children think, as opposed to educating them academically.

In 1988, Dr. John Cannell, a West Virginia physician, wrote of his discovery of the corruption of standard achievement tests in a report, "How all 50 states are above average," followed in 1989 by his book, "The 'Lake Wobegon' Report: How Public Educators Cheat on Standardized Achievement Tests." Despite a verification by the U.S. Department of Education that Cannell's findings were correct, there has been no congressional inquiry or bureaucratic action to restore integrity to the test system parents depend on for knowing the academic condition of their children. The

corruption of standardized achievement tests is the reason that only college entrance exams (SAT and ACT) revealed the decline in U.S. student capabilities.

You frequently hear the argument that the reason for the SAT sag is that more students are taking the test and lowering the averages. Data does not support that argument: Were that the case, there would be just as many top scores as ever. But the number of over-750 verbal scores has declined from 2,817 in 1972 to only 1,226 in 1990—a drop of 56 percent!

What is also being neglected is evidence from schools which use powerful phonics-based language programs (e.g., Spalding) which produce superior performance in difficult populations, without preschool. New York's Education Commissioner Thomas Sobol opened the door for discussions along this line at a Long Island business breakfast meeting June 12. Part of his main thesis was that "We have a long-term quality problem." Further, in response to a question about special-education funding formulas being a disincentive for quality, he emphatically "ran with the ball" that "improving the effectiveness of mainstream reading programs will result in fewer kids being in special education."

There are too many children in "special education." The major curriculum problem is not so much in special ed as in the regular programs, where defective reading methods "spin off" marginal kids into special-ed—kids who can suc-

ceed in regular classes where schools emphasize intensive phonics. Ironically, phonics methods cost less than the "look-say" basal reader programs and the "whole-language" chimera currently being promoted.

Blame should not be all heaped upon teachers, as they are victims of the system through mistraiding and misguiding. They are the front-line troops, who cannot be held as accountable as "the generals."

Here in New York, the bureaucracy is insidiously grabbing for more control through a quietly-advanced section of the "New Compact for Learning" on "Shared Decision-Making." This section calls for erecting new curriculum-planning groups, appointed by teacher unions, to be accorded substantially equal status with the elected school boards in determining school educational affairs.

Further, a memo from Sobol to the Regents recommends advancing the implementation date from mid-1993 to late 1991, possibly because of a perceived threat to the bureaucracy control from more taxpayer/quality-activist groups becoming influential on school boards.

Here on Long Island some of the Tax PAC movement is shifting its focus beyond money issues to the quality and "control" issues described above. If our money-manager-political leaders can't exercise necessary oversight to recognize when money is being mismanaged (e.g., S & L's, BCCI), how can we expect them to see through the jargon and recognize when our education is being mismanaged?