

The most important attribute

We have been involved in politics and around politicians for over 30 years. If we were to be asked the single most important attribute a candidate must possess, it could be answered in one word: honesty.

Politicians are dismayed that the American public has lost confidence in our system of government. They are dismayed that people hold elected office in such low regard. It is the actions of those who have been in office that have caused this loss of confi-

dence. When they are on the campaign trail they tell us one thing, often saying two different things to two different audiences.

Just look at our current President and the number of times he has gone back on his promises in just six short months. Look closer to home at our own home-grown politicians. Look at what they promised you and then look at their actions.

Each year Suffolk Life surveys the candidates through questionnaires.

Their positions on the issues are published. Two years ago, we even offered the county legislative candidates the opportunity to give weight as to their priorities on such important issues as cutting the budget, extending the sales tax, increasing property taxes. A review of these questionnaires reveals, two years later, that many of the candidates were either ill-informed, bald-faced liars or just incompetent.

This is the start of the silly season. Primaries will be held within the next

week, and the candidates will go forth to win your heart and your vote.

It is time for all conscientious citizens to check the record. Who are the candidates? Is there anything in their background that makes them trustworthy? Are they believable, can they be trusted to keep their word? Will they tell one audience one thing and reverse themselves before another?

Years ago, we asked several pointed questions concerning law enforcement and the financing of the same. The Suffolk County Police did the same. The police were looking for candidates that would be favorable and supportive of them. We were looking for candidates that would be supportive of the taxpayer and would give at least equal priority to the cost of the police protection as well as to police protection itself. We both interviewed the same candidates. Both the president of the police union and we, as editors, were uncomfortable with the answers some candidates had given us. They were too pat. We compared notes and found that the candidates had answered pretty much the identical questions the opposite way to each of us. Needless to say, neither the police nor we endorsed these candidates. They were not trustworthy.

This year during the election process, we will be looking at all candidates very carefully. We are not only seeking their positions on the issues, but will try our darndest to get a reading on their integrity, their backgrounds as individuals and how they have conducted their lives. Since these candidates are seeking positions that will enable them to pass legislation that will have an impact upon our lives, their integrity, their principles and the way they have conducted themselves in the past will be an important consideration in judging their fitness for the positions they seek.

All candidates would be well advised to remember God's Eighth Commandment-- "Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor." In other words, thou shall not lie! Live up to your campaign promises. Tell the truth.

And why not?

An isle of their own

If the Suffolk County Legislature acts to ratify the agreement reached between the county and the owners of Robins Island, another chapter in this long saga will close.

For several years, the county has been attempting to acquire this island that is located in the middle of the Peconic Bay. For the last half-dozen decades, the island has been totally private, guarded and protected by its rightful owners.

Some have described the island as a "crown jewel." Others say it is an overgrown sandbar. Some insist that it is pristine. Others point to the fact that the island was the home of a brick manufacturing business and lumbering operation. Some say it is the last natural island left on the east coast. Others point to the fact that some of the vegetation was imported from Europe and planted there. Some, in the same sentence, support the acquisition of the island to keep it pristine, pure and uninhabited, but, they recommend that it play host to over 200,000 students per year who would traipse over it on environmental day trips.

The county, during its acquisition attempts, has squandered millions of dollars in taxpayers' funds on research, consulting and legal fees. Fresh water preservation is not an issue, since the island is not located over an endangered aquifer. The uniqueness of the island is its exclusivity. If the

taxpayers are going to pay for it, they are going to want to use it. Few want their precious tax dollars invested in an undisturbed, exclusive preserve for the deer and rabbits, and politicians who will use it as their private preserve.

Moderates argue that the county and the owners be released from their purchase agreement with the stipulation that only a small portion of the island be developed, with 92.5% remaining in its natural state. The area to be developed is to be clustered with restrictions on disruption of the terrain. The owners of the property would be responsible for the full taxes on the island and, through a taxing district, provide for their own ferry, water, sewer, police and fire protection.

This agreement sounds to us like the public is getting an opportunity to eat their lunch and still have it. The island will be a taxpayer, not a tax absorber. The cost of preservation would be borne by the estate owners. Development would be limited and the vast majority of the land kept as a nature preserve--compromise and common sense instead of all or nothing.

The legislators would be fools to turn their backs on such a proposal. The proposal is good government and good politics.

The owners of the island will still have to obtain permission from

Southold Town government for development of any of the island. They will have to go through zoning and planning, a SEQRA review, which involves all the state agencies. With these safeguards, the owners would be hard-pressed to develop a plan that did not meet the expectations of the county's agreement.

The county is in a precarious financial condition, with a growing budget deficit and no solution in sight. To continue to pursue a legal battle to acquire the island, and to spend over \$25 million, including interest on bonds, to purchase 7.5% of the island is to ignore the reality of the county's situation. Food pantry shelves are bare, health programs have suffered, human needs are being sacrificed.

Environmental groups will apply intense pressure in an effort to force the legislators to kill this agreement. They want it all, they are not satisfied with 92.5%. They have an opportunity to secure an isle of their own. They should combine forces and raise the funds to purchase the island outright, and do with it as they wish. But the taxpayers who are hard-pressed to pay their bills, and those who are slowly but surely being forced to leave this county because of the escalating tax burden, should not be asked to subsidize their all or nothing at all demands.

We encourage all 18 legislators to adopt this plan.

And why not?

We are part of a world economy

Like it or not, we are all part of a world economy. This realization should lend support to the North American Free Trade Agreement between Canada, the United States and Mexico.

Today it is not a matter of competition between a product made in New Jersey and one made here on Long Island. Competition is worldwide and the entrepreneur who can make the best product at the cheapest price wins the heart of the consumer. Most of us would prefer to buy American, to support American manufacturers and our nation's labor force. But, in reality, when the consumer goes to the marketplace and is offered a sports jacket at \$99 that appears to be made as well as the \$199 model or the \$299 model, without a tinge of guilt he will buy the

\$99 jacket.

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

There is great fear that many American manufacturers will flee to Mexico. Ross Perot describes this as a big "whoosh," the sucking sound of Mexico taking American jobs. He is right, this will happen, as it is already happening today. Thousands of American jobs have already gone over the border, where labor rates are significantly less. Governmental rules, regulations and interference are not the problem there that they are here in the U.S. This is the reality whether we have an agreement or not.

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

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

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

A free trade agreement will allow America to export freely into Mexico as well as import from her. Mexico, whose standard of economy will increase because of employment opportunities, could become a major consumer of goods and services from the United States. The free trade agreement should be supported.

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

And why not?

Targeting the wrong culprits

The recent decision by the Olympus Corporation to build a new headquarters on the Long Island Developmental Center (LIDC) site in Melville has unleashed an expected and typical torrent of criticism aimed at the "NIMBYs" (not in my backyard) who had opposed the project. That criticism, however, has been focused on the wrong people. The full brunt of the blame lies elsewhere.

The Olympus controversy was more a result of governmental blundering and arrogance than it was a matter of NIMBYism. It was a product of secret deals and "fast track" efforts to push the project forward regardless of its impact on the area in which it was to rise.

The Olympus headquarters was to have been constructed on a portion of state-owned land being surplus because of a phase-out of the LIDC's operation there of providing care for severely handicapped individuals. The phase-out of that operation was not an instant decision, it was long in coming. But typically, state officials did nothing to plan for the future use of the facility.

Instead of meeting with town officials and local residents to create a partnership of planning a future use that would be beneficial to all and conform to the neighborhood it shares, the state, with cooperation from the county, opted to muscle its way through local opposition.

The state's Urban Development Corporation (UDC), headed by Vincent Tese, set out to run roughshod over local zoning and opposition. Tese, if the name sounds familiar, was Governor Mario Cuomo's chief architect of the Cuomo-LILCO (Long Island Lighting Company) deal which shut the Shoreham nuclear power plant, and, unfortunately, drove Long Island's rates to the highest in the nation. That deal, which refunded LILCO for all its expenditures, mistakes and all, for the Shoreham facility, and threw in a profit to boot, has done more to drive Long Island into fiscal despair than anything else. It has driven more businesses and jobs from Long Island than any actions by any group of "NIMBYs."

Those who wail about the "antibusiness" impression given by those who opposed the Olympus project are not dealing with reality. The high cost of taxes, caused by governmental waste and wanton spending, and the highest in the nation electric rates drive businesses away, as do many of the antibusiness laws passed by our legislative bodies. Unless those problems are corrected, Long Island will continue to be antibusiness despite all the governmental giveaways in sweetheart land deals and low cost power allocations to a select few.

Instead of creating a consortium of contractors and a partnership of local officials and residents, to plan for the future of the LIDC site, the UDC came up with a special deal for one contractor, Ronald Parr, to develop the Olympus project. Why wasn't the project put out to bid? Why was it a closed, one-contractor deal from the very beginning?

Parr faced a multitude of financial problems, and finally, just days before Olympus backed out of the deal, came up with a new arrangement which would have set up a new partnership with a German construction and development company, with Parr no longer the general contractor on the project.

The new pact would also have modified the lease between Parr and the UDC

to include an automatic purchase clause stipulating that if the court orders a halt to construction or a certificate of occupancy, the UDC would purchase the site. And if any delay occurred due to a court-directed action, the UDC would assume all debt service payments on the project, which are estimated to total approximately \$1.4 million. This would have required the UDC to purchase the site, complete the project, and market and sell the site on its own. The UDC's total financial exposure to the project could have reached \$40 million.

These facts are conveniently forgotten by those who choose now to focus the blame on the "NIMBYs" who fought to protect their neighborhood and the town's zoning regulations. They are so eager for jobs that their previous mistakes have driven away that they ignore the fiasco of state and county bungling which created the atmosphere of mistrust surrounding the project.

There were other sites in the Huntington area, but Olympus chose not to explore their use. There are other sites on Long Island, where Olympus declares it wants to stay. Hopefully, a lesson will have been learned by the power brokers in state and county government and they will not try again to muscle their way through local governments and residents.

Attempts to discredit neighborhood

concerns are often coupled with the cry of "NIMBYism" as if there is something wrong with homeowners seeking to protect their neighborhoods. Such cries are generally raised by those far removed from the impacted area, and whose affluent neighborhoods are not the targets of the bureaucratic misuses of power. Their words might be better heeded if they, for once, looked closer to home to plan their grandiose projects.

Rather than condemn the concerns of those trying to protect their neighborhoods, we suggest those who seek to flex their bureaucratic powers look closer at their own sweetheart deals and governmental arrogance, and put an end to the power plays that seek to push aside proper planning. Before another proposal is advanced for the LIDC site, a master plan of future development must be prepared. And future sitings of major projects anywhere else should be accomplished with local participation replacing arrogant power.

Other towns looking to take advantage of the Olympus' decision to back out of the LIDC deal would be well advised to seek the community's participation before they, too, find themselves facing a storm of controversy.

And why not?

Honesty in government

Governmental reform is at the top of the priority list of an angry public tired of political deceit and bureaucratic boondoggles which squander taxpayer dollars and give special interest groups the special consideration denied to the average public. But reform efforts face an uphill fight because the reform needed must come from the same politicians we must protect ourselves against.

A case in point: a member of the House of Representatives, Rep. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, has initiated an effort to end the secrecy surrounding discharge petitions, a procedure which frees bills that have been bottled up in committee by powerful political leaders. The Wall Street Journal, which has launched an editorial crusade on behalf of Inhofe's effort, describes the discharge petition process this way:

"Discharge petitions work as follows: often a committee will simply sit on a bill it knows would pass if allowed to come to a vote on the floor. The only way to free hostage bills is to convince 218 members to sign a petition to 'discharge' the bill from committee and force a vote. But the names on any petition are kept secret, so members can posture in favor of a popular bill while quietly making certain it is never voted on. And as a discharge petition nears the magic number of 218, House leaders routinely twist the arms of pliable members and force them to remove their names. The result: committee chairmen have a stranglehold on what legislation is voted on, and both ordinary members and their constituents are disenfranchised."

In other words, business as usual, the kind of political deceit that has caused the public to lose faith in the integrity of those who serve in Washington.

Inhofe recently made available to the Wall Street Journal the names of those House members who had not signed the discharge petition, and the Journal published that list. Two House members from this area were included, Democrats Gary Ackerman and George Hochbrueckner.

Suffolk Life asked both why they did not sign the petition. Ackerman replied that "you have to have a system that runs the House." He added: "The majority

rules, the majority sets the rules." He viewed the Inhofe proposal as an effort to "turn the majority over to the minority." He noted a similar system is in effect in the New York State Senate. The Republicans in control of the Senate need only "star" a bill, and "you can't get it discharged if it is starred." That comparison, we guess, makes secrecy and control by political muscle perfectly okay in Washington in Ackerman's mind. But not in ours. The Senate "stars" should be eliminated as well.

Hochbrueckner claimed the Wall Street Journal "editorial misrepresented both the process and my position." He said before the article appeared, he had not received a request to sign onto the bill or discharge petition. He was asked to sign on August 23, he said, by another member. Hochbrueckner said he was waiting to hear the report of a Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress, a bipartisan group working to develop an integrated package of congressional reforms, and he would consider signing Inhofe's petition after the committee presents its package in September and "I can determine how Rep. Inhofe's resolution of a single problem fits with the overall effort to improve the function of Congress."

While conceding "as long as the list remains secret, constituents cannot know whether their member of Congress supports moving a bill to the floor over the objections of a committee," he also argues that "this system does not prevent controversial or unpopular bills from coming to the floor, nor does it prevent public hearings." He also claimed, "If the issue is important enough, the discharge petition does work." According to the Wall Street Journal, "Only 44 of 490 discharge petitions have ever succeeded." Among those were two balanced budget bills which reached the House floor via the discharge petition route. But if the leaders wanted to keep those bills bottled up, under the current rules congressmen could be telling their constituents they support the bills, but secretly keep their names off the petition to discharge them from committee.

Hochbrueckner also echoed a claim by Rep. Joe Moakley, chairman of the powerful Rules Committee, who insists that openness would help lobbyists. Hoch-

brueckner said, "Opening the discharge petition process to public view, however, could mean opening the door to lobbyists who would press members of Congress to sign such petitions to bring bills to the floor quickly without thought, preparation or public hearings. Thus special interest groups could get ill-conceived or even bad bills passed quickly."

Really? Is our Congress so out of control, so inept, that a shroud of secrecy is needed to prevent them from doing something as stupid as quickly passing ill-conceived or bad bills? Let's face facts: lobbyists already have the doors wide open, their campaign contributions and other distributed goodies are the key.

Good news came late last week. Inhofe garnered the 218 signatures he needed for the discharge petition, and the bill is slated for a floor vote by the full House on September 27. Our guess is that the leaders will be applying tremendous pressure to kill the bill at that time, so the fight is not yet over.

Come on congressmen! While you did not support the discharge petition, you can cast a vote for an end to this congressional arrogance. Let's put the rhetoric to rest and do the right thing. Eliminate the secrecy. That's what the people want, that's what the cries for reform are all about. Open the doors of Congress to full public scrutiny. Put accountability back in government. If you're not part of the solution, you bear the blame for the problem.

The "majority rules, the majority makes the rules" philosophy serves the politicians, not the public. It's pure politics, not public service. The majority makes the rules and passes the laws, but when things go wrong, they point the finger of blame elsewhere. The federal deficit, if you listen to the words of the Democrats, was caused by former presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush. But the Democrats were in the majority. They had the votes. If they make the rules, they should also deserve the blame!

If you think our local congressmen should be held accountable for their actions, and not shrouded by secrecy, Ackerman's local phone number is 423-2154, Hochbrueckner's is 689-6767. Voice your view.

And why not?

Happy
New Year



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September 16, 1993

The responsible spending option

In a recent editorial we took issue with the comment from a public official that there was "no other viable alternative" to the extension of the county's sales tax increase to ease the county's fiscal crisis. We suggested several alternatives which might help cut county spending, including auditing of agencies under contract with the county for special programs and getting the county's bus system out for public bid. Two events in recent times proved us right.

The county contracted out management of the bus transportation program for the preschool and handicapped services the county must supply to Value Management Consultants (VMC) on July 1. Since that time VMC has reported a savings to the county of \$450,000. The firm has been able to cut costs by developing more effective routes for buses, improving timing of service and changing the bid specifications for the bus

companies that provide the buses. VMC went out to bid for buses that would allow more flexibility in the use of the vehicles. Previously, some routes took two-and-a-half hours to complete, but the county had contracts that only allowed for two-hour buses or four-hour buses. The bid specifications were changed to include a three-hour bus and save the expense of a separate two-hour bus. The Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) had previously managed the transportation system for the county.

We note with some satisfaction that County Executive Robert Gaffney now says he will use the same principle in regard to the county's bus system and will solicit bids for five "test" routes. Frankly, our satisfaction is tempered by the fact this sudden interest in doing what is right is so long delayed and so many wasted millions of dollars late. For

far too long the county, and that includes Gaffney and many of the county legislators, has shied away from trying to save taxpayer dollars in the operation of its bus system. The county now buys the buses, pays all operation and maintenance costs, and throws in a profit to boot. When Suffolk Life began to editorialize on behalf of putting the bus routes out to bid, county officials quickly, without notice, extended those contracts. That action alone raises serious questions about the way the county has acted.

The Suffolk County Legislature's mandate relief committee recently heard testimony from the county comptroller's office which detailed a pattern of chronic overcharging by those who provide educational services for the children's preschool and handicapped programs.

According to Chief Deputy County Comptroller Joseph Poerio, audit teams from his office uncov-

ered overcharges, incorrect billings and other problems with the private firms that supply these state mandated services to the county. These overcharges and overbillings total, on average, between \$300,000 and \$500,000 per provider of taxpayers' dollars. He estimates the county has uncovered between \$3.75 million to \$4 million in incorrect billings to the county as a result of the 13 audits his department has conducted this year.

We have long urged the county to conduct audits of the contract agencies it utilized for county-funded programs. We believe a system must be put in place which weeds out these overcharges before payment is made. While the county has worked out repayment plans and negotiated settlements with these providers, the payback period will be as long as 10 years in some instances because, if the county tries to recoup its money from current reimbursements, the provider may go out of business and the county could get nothing. Meanwhile, the county operates in a deficit condition while these providers are working with taxpayers' dollars.

If it takes more auditors, then hire them! We have far too many politically-connected exempt employees floating around in the administration. Abolish some of those positions and put the money to work where it will weed out waste, where it will bring a return to taxpayers. Creating a three-hour bus to serve a two-and-a-half-hour bus route, instead of wasting money on a four-hour bus, is pure common sense. Didn't anyone on the county payroll have enough sense to think of that?

No alternatives? Hogwash! All it takes is common sense and a will to spend taxpayers' dollars wisely, something that appears to be lacking in county government. Those who have the authority to spend hard-earned taxpayer dollars and who have failed to ensure those dollars are spent wisely have much to answer for.

And why not?

Suffolk's just wonderful!

There he sat, Suffolk County Executive Robert Gaffney, the man this newspaper stuck its neck out for. Gaffney was smiling like a Cheshire cat. He was outlining his 1994 budget for Suffolk County.

The spending was only going up 5%. Real estate taxes were going down in nine out of the 10 towns. Gaffney was pleased as punch he was able to increase the county work staff. New full-time cops, new part-time cops. Taxpayer-paid community college educations for youngsters who want to enroll in the police sciences. Special new medical units for the infirmary when it opens in September of 1994.

We are out of the recession here in Suffolk County. The coffers are overflowing. Elected and appointed county officials are going to get a raise. If the rest of the county work force wants a similar type of raise, they can have it too.

What's there to be unhappy about? It's "Joysville" in Suffolk. What was the hullabaloo two and three years ago that caused so much discontent and grief? Could it be that this year is a local election year? Could it be that Gaffney forgot to mention that every man, woman and child is paying just about \$90.30 more in sales tax than they did two years ago? Let's see, with 3.2 people to a household that comes out to just about \$300 per family, or about three times as much as what the average family will see their real estate taxes go down.

Somehow, this new math escapes us. It goes something like this, if I give Bob Gaffney \$3 in sales taxes, I get \$1 back in real estate taxes. The math that I was taught tells me I am being shortchanged in the process.

But what the heck, the county executive has a big, smug smile so why shouldn't we be good, little, dumb, nitwits and smile along with him?

Why should we bother to look at the six-inch-thick budget? Why not take his word for what is in it? Bob Gaffney is honest, isn't he? He wouldn't try to pull anything on a friend or the people of Suffolk County. He wouldn't offer a document that was smoke and mirrors. After all, here is the man who had over a \$100 million deficit just two short years ago. This is the man who promised the residents of Suffolk County that if they allowed him to increase their sales taxes through 1993, he would pay off "high tax Halpin's" deficit and get Suffolk County on its financial feet. And rescind the sales tax increase?

Gaffney is the man that promised the residents of Suffolk County that he was going to downsize government

so they could afford to continue to live here.

Wasn't it Bob Gaffney who said he was going to contain spending so there would be no need for new taxes? Wait a second, did we miss something? Wasn't the sales tax raised during 1993 used to pay the \$75 million in bonds that we needed to pay our bills and keep us out of bankruptcy? Now that the bonds are paid off, the debt has been retired. That leaves \$75 million leftover. Is the \$75 million being used for expanding county government, the opposite of containment? Aren't new taxes the opposite of reducing them? Is all of this honest and honorable?

Why aren't you smiling, Gaffney is! Has the last laugh been on us?

And why not?

Don't let sharing be hostage

Riverhead Town Assessor Leroy Barnes at a recent Suffolk County Assessors meeting offered a persuasive argument for sales tax sharing between the state, the county and towns.

Currently in Suffolk County, only the state and the county share in sales tax revenues. In many other counties in New York State, the towns are cut in for a share, too. Now, the towns must rely solely upon real estate revenues for funds to operate the towns' services and government.

As we commented a few weeks ago, the state legislature recently passed enabling legislation allowing towns to postpone the impact of taxation on home improvements. The towns could pass local laws that forgive the first year's taxes and phase in on a gradual basis the taxes on

new improvements over a 10-year period. When the towns pass these local laws, they are expected to kick-start the construction trades and, thus, improve the economy. Many homeowners postpone or do not do wanted construction for fear of increases in their taxes.

Barnes contends that, before the towns enact these laws, the towns should be cut in for a share of the sales taxes that will be generated by these projects. He is right, but he is wrong. Yes, the towns should share, that's reasonable. The reality, however, is the county and the state with their own financial dilemmas won't consider a sharing arrangement. As a result, if Barnes' suggestion is followed, nothing will get done. Homeowners will hold off on their projects, sales taxes will not be generated and the towns will not have new assess-

ments this year or for a number of years. Homeowners will have another reason to be discouraged about living here. Government's inability to do what is right will be the additional motivation to pack up and get out.

The towns should be cut in this sales tax sharing. There is no logical reason why the state or the county governments should be an exclusive hog. But, that is another fight for another day.

Town boards would be wise to consider the enactment of local laws phasing in the taxation on new improvements. The sooner they do it, the better off the homeowners, the construction trades and, yes, the towns, which, after the first year, will start to see new revenues from these new improvements.

And why not?

The elusive \$37.5 million

For the last two weeks, we have been conducting our political interviews with the Suffolk County Legislature candidates. One particular aspect has been maddening; both challengers and incumbents, almost without exception, did not understand the sales tax issue.

In 1990, County Executive Patrick Halpin enacted an additional half-cent sales tax levy that was to expire at the end of 1993. The revenues from this portion of the sales tax went into the general fund. It was used for current operating expenses and to reduce Suffolk County's debt.

In 1991, Bob Gaffney was elected county executive. Upon taking office, the county was faced with an operating deficit of between \$75 million and

\$120 million. Gaffney convinced the county legislature that there was a need for an additional half-cent sales tax, that was to be used to pay off the county's debt and bring the county back on a pay as you go basis. Gaffney's sales tax, like Halpin's, was scheduled to sunset on December 31, 1993. He, like Halpin, promised that it was temporary and that it would end once Suffolk was on firm financial footing.

Three-quarters of the Gaffney sales tax was to be placed into a dedicated fund. This three-quarters of the half-cent would raise a minimum of \$37.5 million. Notes were issued by Suffolk County government for this \$37.5 million. These notes will be paid off by December 31, 1993. Part of the additional one-quarter of the half-cent sales

tax was to be dedicated to the Suffolk County Police to fund new police, pay for their training and restore the presence of police to neighborhoods. This cost was estimated to be \$15 million. The balance raised under the Gaffney half-cent was to go to the general fund and be used to offset mandated costs.

This past summer, the Suffolk County Legislature once again showed a decided lack of independence and capitulated by extending both the Halpin and the Gaffney temporary sales taxes through 1995. During our interviews we have questioned the candidates as to why they gave in. Their confused answers were, if we did not extend the sales tax, real estate taxes would have doubled. The increased cost of the mandates passed down by the state

have driven up the cost of doing business in Suffolk. When we reminded the candidates of the scenario in which the Gaffney half-cent went into a dedicated fund and the \$37.5 million raised and used during 1993 would pay off the county's debt, and therefore would not be needed in 1994, they stared at us with blank expressions.

This \$37.5 million is new money in 1994. It was not used to meet mandates or to provide for governmental services. The purpose of this sales tax levy was to pay off past accumulated debts. That mission is now completed. It was not the taxpayers' intention in going along with this temporary sales tax to provide new money to grow the government.

The proper disposition of the \$37.5 million in excess money that will be raised under the sales tax extension should be dedicated to reducing real estate taxes. If the \$37.5 million is applied to this, the county portion of the real estate taxes could be reduced by one-third in 1994 and 1995.

Gaffney has tried to hide this. He and his staff have successfully confused a number of the incumbent legislators. They have hidden the money in the projected budget and will spend it if allowed, creating the next crisis which will require another extension of the sales tax and a huge increase in property taxes.

Failure to deal with the sales tax funds that were dedicated to pay off the debt is not good government. It is this type of financial wizardry that has led to the financial chaos that has almost brought us to bankruptcy in this county.

The ladies and gentlemen of the legislature know what the problem is and they can fix it by taking apart the county executive's budget and crafting a document that allows the residents of Suffolk County the ability to afford to continue to live here.

And why not?

We must take a close look

For weeks, the media has been filled with stories about President Bill Clinton's revolutionary, new healthcare program. That new program was unveiled last Wednesday night when he addressed the nation, and talked for an hour. The speech was mostly rhetoric and noticeably shy on specifics and details.

We had hoped that the print media would fill in the sound bites with hard facts and explanations. Although there have been tons of articles printed, they too seemed void of the specifics which are being proposed.

We are not at all sure that medicine, itself, is in a state of disarray as the President would have us believe. What is sure, and everyone agrees upon, is that the cost of delivering medicine is too high. The plan does not seem to address the cost of medicine, or provide a mechanism for delivering it less expensively.

According to what has been published, 87% of the American public has health insurance. Those that do not

have health insurance and are without means to pay for it can be and must be treated in emergency rooms at most of our local hospitals. In addition, in Suffolk County, we have numerous health clinics where citizens can seek and receive medical care. Depending upon the financial circumstances, the patient services are free or charges are made based upon the patient's ability to pay.

One aspect of Clinton's plan that is particularly disturbing is the co-insurance feature. It is our understanding at this point that if an individual opts for his or her choice of particular doctors or hospitals, they are required to pay 20% of the total cost.

It has always been our belief that medical insurance should be used to cover the catastrophic expenditures that the individuals cannot cover themselves. It is a much more important feature of a policy to have full coverage on the top rather than full coverage for the nickel and dime, everyday normal medical expenses. Most individuals are able to cover expenses up to one or two thousand dollars without losing their

homes, but, how many people can cover a 20% expenditure of a \$100,000 or \$200,000 medical bill? Most medical plans require some co-insurance through deductibles and shared expenses up to \$5,000 or \$10,000, but after that, medical expenses are covered 100% and people get the protection they need.

As important as the financial aspects of health insurance programs, the quality of care and the patient's ability to select the practitioners they have faith in is more important. This is particularly true when it comes to serious medical problems.

Before passing judgment on the Clinton plan as a whole, or any individual portion of the plan, it is imperative for the administration to spell out even the minute details. Once this information is available, we can absorb it, Congress can debate it. There will be ample time for each of us individually to make up our minds whether to support or fight against this mammoth, new, social program.

And why not?

Getting out that special interest vote

The public financing reform referendum which will appear on the November ballot has a number of flaws which we have noted in previous editorials. One of our concerns, the lack of accountability over "in-kind" services, comes clearly into focus in a recent press release by the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV) Education Fund.

This group, which operates out of a New York City headquarters, has targeted certain legislative and town races here in Suffolk County. "In addition to its endorsements, NYLCV will provide grassroots resources and assistance to four selected races where the candidate has exhibited an outstanding commitment to the preservation of the environment. NYLCV is organizing get-out-the-vote rallies, field canvasses, phone banking and staffing campaigns with volunteers," the group said in its recent release.

These campaign efforts are not

new, nor are they restricted to political election races. The use of volunteers, from both in and out of the area, is utilized in school board races as well, with educational groups supplying the people, phone banks, and other services.

It would be wise for the voter to consider the fact that these groups have a vested interest. In the case of NYLCV, it is "an unprecedented opportunity to refocus Long Island's commitment to the environment," according to the group's executive director, Tensie Whelan. In school board matters, such help is given those most likely to be sympathetic to the views of the supporting groups, such as teacher associations. Commitment to the causes of these special interests may not necessarily be in the best interests of the survival of the taxpayers.

A case in point: There is much controversy over the proposal for the county to purchase Robins Island. Environmentalists are bitterly battling for the total preservation of the island, in

opposition to a proposed agreement that would assure the preservation of 92.5% of the land in exchange for limited development, the construction of 22 high-priced homes. Environmentalists say construction of 22 homes would destroy the "pristine" nature of the island. The opposing view declares the county, in its present fiscal condition, cannot afford the \$9.2 million purchase cost, double that figure for the inclusion of interest costs over the years of the obligation.

The subject of Robins Island was one of the important considerations listed in a recent Green Voters 1993 Guide to Long Island. Unfortunately, the information listed for two legislative candidates, Debbie Pfeiffer (D) seeking to unseat incumbent Thomas Finlay (R) in the 10th Legislative District (LD), and incumbent Maxine Postal (D) who is opposed by Ronald Travis (R) in the 15th LD, is erroneous.

The Voters Guide states that Pfeiffer "supports no development on Robins Island," and Postal "supports the purchase of Robins Island to protect its pristine state." In interviews at Suffolk Life last week, both candidates said they support limited development, the proposed county agreement, because of the fiscal restraints of the county. A spokesperson for NYLCV concedes an error was made.

Issues concerning the environment are important, but no more so than the county's fiscal problems. Decisions made by the voters should be based on factual information, and the actions of special interest groups in election campaigns should be held accountable for integrity of their claims. Just as voters should know the factual views of the candidates who seek their votes, they should also question the motives of those who surround the candidates in their campaigns.

And why not?