

# WILLMOTT & WHY NOTS

DAVID J. WILLMOTT SR., EDITOR

## Cell Phone Grab

Hello! Have three-quarters of Suffolk's county legislators gone completely mad, or are they just plain greedy?

At least 12 of the county's 18 legislators are participating in the theft of what will amount to at least \$12,000 a year by arbitrarily rewriting a cellular phone deal that was supposed to benefit the county's emergency personnel, social workers, public health officials, child protective service personnel, probation officers and other service staff workers.

Earlier this month, Omnipoint Communications, of Cedar Knolls, New Jersey, promised the legislature it would provide county agencies with 50 cell phones and a \$6 million upgrade to the radio system used by the county's police, firefighters and emergency rescue crews.

In return, the county agreed to give the company the rights to a county-owned radio frequency and the right to construct 35 base stations on public property.

The company operated in good faith by scheduling a date to turn over the cell phones to County Executive Robert Gaffney's office and a date to begin the county radio system upgrade. Everything was fine until just before the legislature voted on the issue. Several of our better legislative whiners refused to support the deal unless they, too, received a free cell phone from the company.

In an effort to compromise with these covetous nags, Gaffney and Legislative Presiding Officer Steve Hackeling caved in to their demands, showing their colors as the backroom political wimps we have

grown so accustomed to.

Legislator George Guldi actually boasted about how he will save time now by talking on the cell phone while driving throughout his district (which runs from Montauk Point to Center Moriches) and while traveling from the East End to Hauppauge for various legislative meetings.

Guldi and his other 11 cohorts really make it sound like these cell phones will benefit the public. But quite the contrary will happen. It will cost the taxpayers more and more each year.

The most recent statistics show that cell phones are the third largest cause of vehicular accidents — behind drunk driving and falling asleep while driving.

These legislators are the nerve center of our county government; how could they expect us to sit by idly and allow them to put themselves in physical jeopardy

while conducting county business behind the wheel?

While state and federal officials are seeking legislation that would prohibit cellular phone use by the operator of a moving vehicle, our heroes are willing to spend our tax dollars and put themselves at risk — not to mention the wellbeing of

other motor vehicle operators on the same roads.

Suffolk Legislators are compensated well for their government service. They are given very good benefit packages which include medical coverage, staff, office space, and office telephones. There is no reason for them to have cell phones on top of all this. If they disagree, let them pay for it.

And why not?



## Stranger Than Fiction

Two articles in the Albany Update column of *The New York School Board* newspaper caught our attention because the concepts they promote are so absurd.

They pertain to two legislative bills that have been introduced into the New York State Senate and Assembly.

The first bill proposes to double the salaries of public employees who walk out on their job to participate in an illegal strike. Public employees are prohibited from striking by the Taylor Law, yet this proposed legislation would double the wages of public employees who participate in a strike if the public employer, in the opinion of the union, provokes a strike.

We can see the outcome if this bill passes: Public employees would be manning the picket lines every day that they are employed to work.

Perhaps, in the opinion of the union, this would include situations like "the negotiator for the school district [or the municipality] looked at me crooked," or, "I didn't like the tone of their voice," or perhaps "They are being belligerent by not giving into my demands."

Almost anything could be an excuse to strike if it would double the union members' wages.

State Senator Nicholas Spano and Assemblyman Peter Abbate are the

sponsors of this legislation. It is clear they must be the laughing stock of their peers. This certainly would be a laughing matter except that things like this end up getting passed in the eleventh hour of the budget making process.

The other bill, sponsored by Senator David Paterson and Assemblyman Steven Sanders, would grant school teachers unemployment benefits during the summer when the schools are

closed for vacation. Teachers are paid a full year's salary even though they are only required to work 180 days a year. Summer recess is one of their benefits. It is a perk to have the summer off; a perk that very few taxpayers are able to enjoy.

Most school districts pay annual salaries to teachers, breaking up their salaries into either 20 or 26 biweekly payments. This allows teachers' incomes to continue every two weeks all year long even though they are not working during the summer.

If this bill is passed, school boards

would face huge increases in unemployment insurance premiums, which, of course, would be passed on directly to the taxpayers.

Teachers are well compensated. They have many marvelous benefits. When is enough, enough? Unemployment for teachers in the summer is ridiculous and out of the question.

Elected officials were not put in office to arbitrarily increase taxes for the benefit of special interest groups. They are expected to look out for the health and welfare of all the taxpayers.

And why not?

## 10-20-Life & Three Strikes And You're Out

The State of Florida is set to enact two strong anti-crime bills, and New York should follow its lead.

The first, "10-20-Life," is a plan requiring a minimum sentence of 10 years if a criminal commits a crime that involves a gun in his or her possession. The legislation also carries a minimum sentence of 20 years if the criminal uses the gun. If the criminal injures someone with that gun, he or she will receive a sentence of 25 years to life.

Ironically, the National Rifle Association, which advocates a "guns don't kill, people do" style of handgun control, has supported this type of legislation for years.

A group run by Sara Brady and her husband James Brady, who was wounded in the assassination attempt

on former President Ronald Reagan, also supports this legislation.

Both groups are often at opposite ends of the gun control argument, but strongly support the 10-20-Life plan.

The "Three Strikes and You Are Out" legislation mandates that criminals convicted of three violent felonies within five years would face mandatory, long-term prison sentences.

Both of these measures are expected to pass easily since both legislative houses in Florida and the governor's office are Republican controlled and these bills were part of their platform.

A few years back, Florida made it rather uncomplicated for law abiding citizens, with no criminal record and in good mental health, to obtain carry per-

mits for concealed weapons. The state experienced a substantial drop in serious crime after thousands of people armed themselves.

California enacted both the 10-20-Life law and the Three Strikes And You Are Out law. It, too, had a substantial drop in assaults with firearms. Murders committed with a gun were down 43.2%, and armed robberies were down 44.3% in the San Francisco area.

New York has been trying to regulate the sale of guns, a method that has had little success with protecting the public. It should explore the 10-20-Life and Three Strikes And You Are Out laws because they will place the burden on the individual gun owner rather than on law-abiding taxpayers.

And why not?



# WILLMOTTS & WHY NOTS

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## 'There But For The Grace of God, Go I'

For over 20 years, The Group has existed without official membership. We are ordinary people who come together every November, and through our combined efforts, are able to provide Christmas for 150 to 200 children. These are children who would normally be cared for by their own parents, but because of a tragedy, an accident or illness the parents were not able to fulfill their children's needs or desires.

Each year, a portion of the membership changes, but most people come back to do it all over again. We operate under a very simple principle: "There but for the grace of God, go I." We never know when life will deal us a bad hand, so while we are working and able, we contribute our funds, our time and our energy to help others less fortunate.

Everything is done anonymously. Participants often only know the first name of their fellow volunteer. No one asks about one's background and donors are never publicly identified — their names are not put on subscriber

lists.

The Group's recipients are generally only known by a letter of the alphabet, and the first name and age of the child being helped.

Only a very few people at the core of the organization, those who qualify the recipients and assign the deliveries to volunteers, know specifically the names of the families being helped.

One family which has been a long-time member of The Group recently found themselves overburdened. Their 6-year-old son, Bryan, has a rare form of childhood cancer called neuroblastoma. This insidious disease has killed one of his kidneys, it has invaded his bones and lymph nodes and has wrapped itself around his aorta.

The family has been coping with his devastating disease for six months. This year, they missed being part of The Group for the first time in over a decade.

Bryan was hospitalized in New York City and his mother was with him constantly. His father would drive into New

York each day after work to be with his son and give support to his wife. Their oldest daughter, who is in college, took leave and moved back home to help take care of their four other children. Although Bryan's father has insurance covering most of the medical bills, the financial drain on the family has been tremendous.

Bryan is about to undergo a stem cell transplant. Doctors will remove stem cells, deep in Bryan's bone marrow. Bryan will then get a final "lethal" dose of chemotherapy which will kill off the remaining bone marrow, all his blood cells and hopefully, the tumor. Transfusions will then replace the stem cells. This procedure will be done twice

and will take several weeks.

Bryan and his parents need your prayers and they need any kind of financial contribution you can make to help them avert financial tragedy. Donations may be sent to "Friends of Bryan" c/o of Suffolk County National Bank, PO Box 702, Cutchogue, NY 11935.

These people voluntarily gave an enormous amount of time and energy to help others. It would be rewarding if those in the community who can, would offer their support for Bryan.

We hope we may impose upon your generosity one more time. Your contributions will be greatly appreciated.

And why not?

## Representing The People

We are pleased to see Suffolk County Legislators are standing united behind the public interest when it comes to paying LIPA money the power authority has no right to.

Two years ago, LILCO won a controversial certiorari suit that allowed the ratepayers of LILCO to be reimbursed for the over-assessment of the company's Shoreham property by Brookhaven Town.

This controversial decision, handed down by Judge Thomas Stark, ignored the fact that LILCO had received a deal to close Shoreham. This deal was engineered by former Governor Mario Cuomo and gave the utility full value for the nuclear plant as if it were fully operational and profitable.

The state subsequently closed the facility, giving LILCO enough legal ground to argue that Shoreham was worthless. Because Judge Stark's court ruling supported that argument, LILCO was awarded a \$1.1 billion judgment (\$1.4 billion with interest). LILCO got it both ways and the ratepayers are paying for it.

As part of the LIPA takeover, LILCO offered to reduce the \$1.4 billion to \$625 million, and waive the judgment against Suffolk County for Shoreham.

Under the takeover agreement, LIPA was supposed to discontinue all certiorari suits LILCO had against municipalities throughout Long Island.

Nassau County was facing more than a half-billion dollars in LILCO certiorari suits, but its ratepayers have not been required to pay for those settlements.

And, since LIPA took possession of LILCO's assets, it has been charging Suffolk ratepayers 2-cents a kilowatt-hour more than ratepayers in Nassau in order to pay off the judgment.

For the past nine months, LIPA has been spending millions of dollars boasting about how ratepayer-friendly it is and how, as a public utility, it has the public interest at heart. The whole time it also has been quietly threatening to sue Suffolk County if it did not pay the \$625 million.

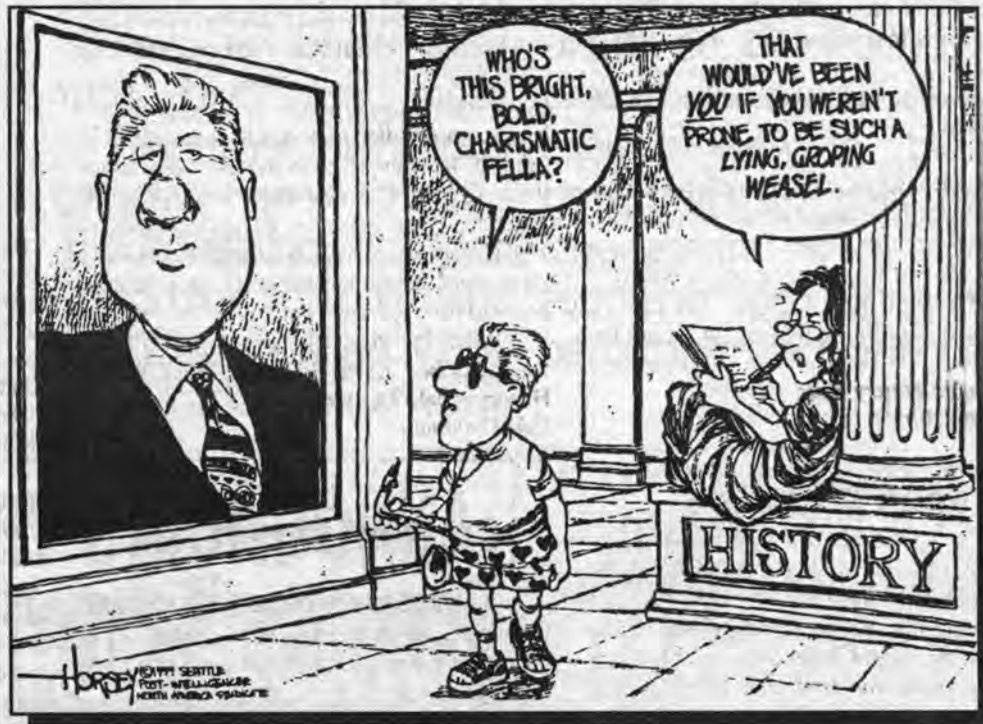
In mid-February, LIPA chairman Richard Kessel threatened to withdraw the \$625 million-reduced-amount if the county did not pay by March 1. When our county legislators refused to drop a lawsuit against LIPA and refused to pay this swindle, Kessel announced that he was withdrawing the reduced amount and demanded the county pay the entire \$1.4 billion.

What Kessel does not realize is that the \$1.4 billion is not owed to LILCO or LIPA, it is owed to the ratepayers. Since the ratepayers are also the taxpayers who would foot that bill, there is no reason to collect the money from those ratepayers only to return it to the same taxpayers.

In addition, the Suffolk lawsuit charges that the law, which established LIPA, prohibits the authority from collecting that money. Section 1020-q(3) states, "No municipality or governmental subdivision, including a school district, or special district, shall be liable to the authority or any other entity for a refund of property taxes originally assessed against the Shoreham plant."

We have often accused our Suffolk Legislators of acting in their own interest, or, for political expediency. On this issue, instead of cowering to make a bad deal, they are standing tall and representing their constituents. For that, they should be commended.

And why not?



## The Immigrants Around Us

There has been a tremendous influx of immigrants to Long Island over the last decade. Most are Hispanic, coming from Mexico, Guatemala and other Central American countries. These immigrants are the backbone of many of our service industries. They do the jobs no one else wants to do.

An unofficial hiring area has developed in the Farmingville area. The workers appear along Horseblock Road between 5:30 and 9 a.m. They are picked up as day laborers, by landscapers and construction firms.

Residents in the area are alarmed by these mass gatherings and have called upon government officials to take action. Some of the immigrants are documented and have green cards, some do not. Some of the employers are licensed and registered, others are not.

The Immigration National Service has turned a deaf ear to the complaints, claiming they have neither the staff nor the money to investigate the situation. Little to no effort has been expended by county or state officials to make sure that the

employers have the proper licenses and permits.

What is apparent is that there is a need for governmental intervention. The hiring should be moved from its current location. Might we suggest the memorial on Bald Hill. This is away from the housing and it is easily accessible, and the memorial stands for freedom and American values.

Most of these immigrants have come here because America has always held out her hand to the oppressed and downtrodden. The immigrants are not here as freeloaders. They are here to work, and there are jobs for them to do.

The Suffolk County Department of Labor also should become involved by organizing the operation, making sure those looking for jobs have green cards and that the contractors who are picking them up have the proper licenses or permits.

This situation is not going to change or go away on its own. Controlling it, organizing it is the best path to follow.

And why not?



## WILLMOTT &amp; WHY NOTS

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## Taxes On Taxes

Nobody likes taxes, yet we have become accustomed to paying them.

Most of us know that there are taxes charged on gasoline, the price of which has recently dropped to under a dollar a gallon in this area.

Last week, we casually asked the owner of a gas station where the pump price was 89 cents for unleaded regular, what the taxes were on the gas. He answered, about 58 cents a gallon.

We were amazed and checked with the state legislature's Ways and Means Committee and found out that the gas station owner was only a little off. For every gallon of gasoline used, consumers pay 14 cents in petroleum business taxes, 8 cents in motor fuel taxes, 3.8 cents (4%) in state sales tax, a .05-cent petroleum testing fee, a .2-cent oil spill fund fee, and a little more than 4 cents (4.25%) in sales taxes for Suffolk County. Consumers are also charged about 20 cents in federal taxes.

These figures suggest that we are paying about 55 cents in taxes for every gallon of gasoline we purchase.

It appears that when the cost of gasoline increased, the feds and the state secretly increased taxes while the public's anger was directed at the oil companies for price-gouging.

When you realize that a gallon of gasoline only costs about 30 cents, you quickly come to the realization that the state and federal government have been taking rapacious advantage of us.

With this kind of revenue coming in, you would think New York State would have the best roads, bridges and tunnels in the world.

Unfortunately, these gasoline taxes do not go into a dedicated transportation fund. In New York, they go into the general fund and are used for whatever the governor and our legislators decide will buy them the most votes. In the meantime, we drive over roads that are crumbling, bridges that are falling down, and tunnels that have not been updated in decades.

The most grievous insult is the sales tax we pay on our petroleum purchases. We are paying a sales tax primarily on taxes.

Well, there is something you can do about it. Even though the price of gasoline is down, now would be a good time to write to your state representatives and your congressional representatives to demand a reduction in federal and state petroleum taxes.

And why not?



## No Offense Meant

Last week, in our editorial, "The Immigrants Around Us," we suggested that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Bald Hill be used as a staging site for a controlled hiring center for the immigrants who are working as day laborers.

A number of veterans called who were offended at this suggestion. They contend the Veterans Memorial is theirs. It was erected to honor the men and women who have served in wars, came home injured or who died. Some

expressed fear that the memorial would be desecrated by graffiti and litter.

The memorial does honor the veterans and in retrospect it was insensitive of us to suggest the site. We apologize.

We still believe, however, that for the immigration laborer condition to be corrected, a central site regulated by the government is a better alternative to the free-for-all that takes place daily in the middle of a developed community.

And why not?

## Public Safety First

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is claiming that after two years of review, it has found "no safety significant issues" with the High Flux Beam Reactor (HFBR) at Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL), which was closed because of a serious tritium leak in 1996.

While it is good to obtain an "outside" review of this 33-year-old reactor, instead of simply allowing the Department of Energy to monitor its own operation, it is hard to completely trust this report because it has been done by the same NRC that claimed LILCO's Shoreham nuclear power plant was safe and that it was not necessary to worry about the evacuation of Long Island.

This is the same NRC that is currently attempting to whitewash numerous safety and procedural problems at the Millstone 2 and 3 nuclear power plants in Waterford, Connecticut, which is only about 12 miles from Long Island's North Fork.

There is nothing wrong with conducting some of the more important projects in the fields of medicine, physics, biology, chemistry or the environment. In fact, most Long Islanders are proud that Long Island has long been at the forefront of advancements in those fields because of the work that Long Islanders have accomplished at BNL.

The NRC's 86-page report allegedly clears the path to reopen the HFBR. While it claims there are no significant problems, it also makes light of the fact

that BNL did not conduct regularly scheduled safety monitoring, or emergency reviews. The report then dismisses many of the significant non-safety problems as a "misunderstanding" of DOE "proficiency requirements."

In the final chapter of the report, the NRC offers the disclaimer, "Some additional information may be required and perhaps some changes to regulatory requirements...."

The NRC was established in 1974 to "...ensure adequate protection of the public health and safety...." It is high time that federal agency started taking its job more seriously instead of simply bowing to political and industrial pressures.

When he took charge of BNL in late 1997, Director John Marburger promised to maintain a working relationship with the community so that residents felt comfortable with all of BNL's safety issues. Also, former DOE Secretary Federico Pena promised that his agency and BNL would "continue our efforts to rebuild trust and confidence with the Brookhaven community ... our goal is clear — to do world-class science, while ensuring public health, employee safety, and the protection of the environment."

The DOE and BNL must follow through on those promises. All of the residents surrounding the 5,265-acre BNL site must be completely satisfied with the safety process at the facility or this nuclear reactor should remain closed.

And why not?

## Goodbye Joe

This past week, we lost two heroes named Joe.

Joe DiMaggio was one of the best baseball players in America. He succumbed to cancer. We had a love/hate relationship with Joe DiMaggio. We were Brooklyn Dodgers fans and he represented the enemy, the Yankees. As youngsters, we wanted him wearing the Dodgers uniform in the worst way. But DiMaggio was true to the Yankees and led them through several World Series.

DiMaggio was more than a baseball player, he was an exceptional human being. Whether on or off the field, he conducted himself as a gentleman — someone a young kid could look up to. And, even though he has been retired from baseball for almost five decades, he was still ranked as America's number one baseball hero.

The second hero named Joe is County Legislator Joseph Rizzo. Joe is the longest serving legislator in Suffolk County's history. Rizzo has always been Rizzo. Truly a man's man, Joe never learned how to speak with the forked tongue so common in politics. What was in his lung was on his tongue. You

never had to guess where he stood or why.

Joe recently announced he will not seek reelection. He will retire at the end of this year. That is a great loss for the people of Suffolk County, especially since he was the strongest proponent for holding the line on spending and tax increases.

Rizzo is responsible for Suffolk's tax cap which holds county spending to 4%. Without Rizzo there, we are not sure whether others will have the courage to say "no" to increased taxes and increased spending.

Both Joes came from common backgrounds and rose to high positions, but never forgot the people who helped them along the way. We offer our prayers for DiMaggio and hope he is playing on God's team.

Rizzo has eight more months of service that he has promised his constituents. We are grateful for this and wish him well in his retirement. He has not only earned it, but he has earned the respect of his peers and his constituents.

We thank him for a job well done. And why not?



# WILLMOTTS & WHY NOTS

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## The People Beat LIPA

The residents of Suffolk County are greatly indebted to Suffolk County Supreme Court Judge John J. Jones Jr., who ruled last week that the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA) must stop attempting to collect the \$1.4 billion owed to LILCO because of the overassessment of the Shoreham nuclear power plant.

A year ago, LIPA acquired LILCO's assets for almost \$8 billion and forgave all of LILCO's certiorari suits in Nassau and Suffolk, except for Shoreham. LIPA trustees and officials have claimed they could not "forgive" the Shoreham certiorari case because it had been decided by a court of law before the LILCO-LIPA deal was completed.

LIPA then began a long campaign, through politics and legal argument, attempting to convince the Suffolk County Legislature to pay the Shoreham certiorari award.

LIPA chairman Richard Kessel recently attempted to blackmail the legislature by threatening it would demand the entire \$1.4 billion from Suffolk if the county did not agree to pay the \$625 million LIPA agreed to accept just after

it acquired the utility's assets.

Years ago, Kessel was known as a fierce consumer advocate because he acted as an aggressive watchdog for the people. Now he is said to be maneuvering to run for county executive in Nassau and has consistently snuffed Suffolk ratepayers and taxpayers while adamantly defending Nassau.

Because the Suffolk Legislature refused to buckle under the pressure, Suffolk's legislature beat Kessel at his own game.

The legislature filed a suit against LIPA charging it was in violation of the state legislation that created the public authority because that legislation states: "No municipality or governmental subdivision, including a school district or special district, shall be liable to the authority or any other entity for a refund of property taxes originally assessed against the Shoreham Plant."

Judge Jones supported that law, stating the legislation "grants unquali-

fied immunity to the taxing jurisdictions from the payment of tax refunds." He further stated that LIPA is "exempted ... from the payment of any taxes upon the property acquired from LILCO."

LIPA trustees and officials had claimed they were entitled to the certiorari award because of a 1997 decision by Judge Thomas Stark.

But, Judge Jones ruled that, under the state legislation that established LIPA, the residents of Suffolk are not obligated to pay the certiorari.

LIPA is expected to file an appeal, continuing its litigious relationship with the public, but now is not the time for LIPA to file counter suits or appeals against the very ratepayers it serves.

The public has spent the past 30 years hating LILCO for its greed, high electric rates, and unjustified political clout. There is no reason for LIPA to continue that legacy. LILCO was an atrocious entity that took advantage of its monopolistic presence on Long Island.

LIPA has a clear opportunity to become the people's utility it was meant to be. It was initially created to provide the public with realistic electric rates, not to be a perpetual combatant of the people.

LIPA has the perfect opportunity to prove it is the people's utility, and that it is above the brazenness that LILCO wallowed in. The public is best served if LIPA accepts Judge Jones' decision. It is the law.

And why not?

## Too Many Ifs

The Suffolk Legislature's proposal to eliminate the county's 4.25% sales tax on footwear and clothing (up to \$110 per item) makes a lot of sense initially, but without a detailed breakdown of how the anticipated \$34 million loss in revenues will be recovered each year, this proposed legislation must be tabled.

Both the Budget Review Office and the county executive's office agree that if sales tax is eliminated for footwear and clothing, the county's general fund will lose \$29 million; western Suffolk's Police District will lose \$1 million; \$2 million to pay Suffolk's portion to help subsidize the MTA will be lost; and \$2 million will be taken out of the county's water quality program.

County Executive Bob Gaffney validly argues that without a detailed review, the reduction of \$34 million from Suffolk's coffers would force a drastic increase in property taxes, or a cut in county programs and personnel.

As it is, the county portion of property taxes in some East End towns last year increased as much as 72%. And, because of the 1996 contract that gave police an 18.7% salary increase, western Suffolk residents in the County Police District are already expecting a 2% property tax hike to cover the \$28.1 million needed to satisfy that contract.

Last week, the Budget Review Office presented a 12-page memorandum to the legislature claiming that the proposed sales tax elimination would have a minimum impact on the county budget.

Usually, we find the Budget Review Office to be right on the mark, but its memorandum on the sales tax reduction states that county spending would not be affected: if there is budgetary constraint; if step increases are limited to contractual agreements; if there is only a 7% increase in the county's self-insured health coverage; if there is only a 2% increase in the budget for Suffolk County Community College; if there is a reduction in court lease payments; if

there are no capital construction improvements; if there is no loss in state or federal aid reimbursement; if there is no cost for any Y2K problems with county computers after 2000; if there is only a 4% increase in health center appropriations; and if there is an average 5% growth in sales tax totals.

From where we sit, there are way too many "ifs" in this proposal, which means that eliminating the sales tax might be a great idea, but the implementation of it has yet to be completely thought through.

Instead of just rushing into something that will increase property taxes or require serious damage control in the near future, it is much more prudent to send the sales tax reduction proposal back to the legislature's finance committee.

Part of the thinking behind the proposed sales tax reduction is to stimulate more retail sales, but no one has done a conclusive study that proves consumers did anything but temporarily alter their shopping habit when the state and county temporarily waived these sales taxes in the past.

If the legislature really believes the loss of \$34 million from the county's coffers will benefit the public, then let it prove this over the next 12 months by eliminating unnecessary programs and expenses. Such a demonstration of fiscal conservatism would surely show the public the legislature has clearly considered the complete impact of a \$34 million reduction in county sales taxes.

This also would greatly benefit the taxpayers by creating a surplus that could be used to reduce property taxes or fund a reserve account that could cover any future shortfalls created by the proposed elimination of sales taxes on footwear and clothing.

The public clearly wants tax cuts, but it also demands that those tax cuts are the results of a good government that has done its homework.

And why not?

## Names or Nothing

Under New York State law, if an unwed mother is the recipient of Social Services and refuses to name the father of her child, her welfare benefits can be reduced by 25%. Governor George Pataki has proposed increasing that penalty to 100%, or the elimination of those benefits.

Fighting for child support from estranged parents has been a continuing battle for Pataki. He has successfully pushed through legislation that allows the Department of Social Services to investigate and fine deadbeat parents. The legislation allows the state to impose an automatic cost of living increase in child support orders to ensure that child support orders keep pace with inflation.

Legislation has also allowed the administration to impose liens on property of deadbeat parents and increased access to records of financial institutions, government agencies and private entities to help track deadbeats.

But these measures only work if the state knows the name of the deadbeat involved.

In many cases, the mother of a child will know the name of the father, but for one reason or another will not give that name to the state.

In order for a fair system of child support to work, every woman receiving DSS benefits for herself and her child must cooperate with the state in order to place a portion of the financial burden of raising her child on the

armed with the name of the child being supported by DSS, the state can be

aggressive in its legal pursuit for child support.

The state is all too aware that in many circumstances, mothers continue to live with the men who have fathered their children while collecting welfare benefits.

In many of these cases, there is a legal problem because the parents are not married. These women and children are supported by the state while also enjoying the father's income if he is working. This scenario is an obvious ripoff of the system through a loophole that exists because the parents are not married.

The governor has also pushed through legislation that allows the state to order a paternity test which should help to prevent this situation.

We believe Pataki is right in this move. Opponents argue that some women will not give up the names of the men who fathered their children out of fear, but the governor's proposal excludes any woman who can prove that she or her children are in physical jeopardy if this information is provided to the state.

In addition, there are other means of providing these women with protection, including stricter restraining orders. If a woman fears abuse, simply giving her unconditional welfare benefits does not diminish the fear.

Most Americans bitterly resent watching people abuse the system, but do not object to reaching out and helping others in legitimate need. Pataki's plan to cut Social Service benefits is a good start at revamping the state's welfare system.

And why not?



# WILLMOTTS & WHY NOTS

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This is one for the people!

It doesn't take long to become disenchanted when fighting on the non-political side of an issue that will impact the lives of the people. For that reason, the decision last week by Supreme Court Judge John J.J. Jones Jr., is a breath of fresh air in a stagnated political climate.

Judge Jones took a good look at that section of the law that created the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA), and said, in essence that Suffolk County is right.

The legislation that created LIPA explicitly states LIPA has no legal claim to the tax certiorari judgment awarded to the Long Island Lighting Company for overcharges on the taxes for the Shoreham nuclear power plant.

LIPA claimed it had a right to assess Suffolk ratepayers \$625 million for that judgment, and threatened to go for the entire \$1.4 billion certiorari award if Suffolk legislators did not immediately withdraw its litigation.

In truth, LIPA had nothing to do with that tax claim. Yet LIPA officials have been charging Suffolk ratepayers a 2% surcharge to supposedly pay for the \$625 million the authority claims it is owed.

## A Call To The Attorney General

The statute, which created LIPA, clearly stated LIPA was prohibited from claiming those funds.

Any money owed as a result of a tax overcharge rightfully belonged to the people who were overcharged, the rate payers, not LIPA.

But LIPA has disregarded that and included the \$625 million figure in the bonding for the partial takeover of LILCO, and started, without authorization, the 2% surcharge on the electric bills of Suffolk rate payers.

Opponents of the \$7.8 billion LILCO-LIPA deal opposed that move as did the members of the legislature who supported the lawsuit that was decided last week.

LIPA will undoubtedly appeal Jones' decision, and the war will continue.

LIPA officials complain foes of LILCO are continuing to battle the issues as if LILCO still existed. What they fail to see is that the issues are still there under a different name.

Former LILCO Chairman William Cat-

acosinos is no longer there, but the new chairman, Richard Kessel, is exhibiting the same arrogant views that earned Catacosinos the anger of rate payers. Kessel is fast becoming the "Cat" of the past. Richie should now be known as "Cat" Kessel.

The trustees of LIPA are handpicked political appointees who serve the politicians rather than the ratepayers. They may live among us, but they serve the politicians and not the people. The politicians eliminated the right of the people to elect the LIPA trustees, and the actions of those who currently serve offer the reason why.

Although the people won this battle, this war is not over. The Appellate Division, where the case is surely destined to be heard, has been the scene of other battles that gave politics more importance

than the rights of the people.

The lesson to be learned from the decision by Judge Jones is that victory can be achieved; that someplace along the road there will be an honest face, an honest man, who will put aside political ambition and promises, and rule on the merit of the issue.

We pray there are more jurists of Judge Jones' caliber in our future.

In the meantime, we call upon the Attorney General, Elliot Spitzer, to protect the rights of the ratepayers of Suffolk County. We urge Spitzer to conduct an audit of the amount LIPA collected through its illegal surcharge, and to take a good look at the LIPA budget, which undoubtedly contains more fat than lean meat.

Spitzer made a lot of promises to protect the public during his campaign for his job. It is now time for him to deliver on that promise.

And why not?

## The Clock Is Ticking

Almost no one expects New York State government to bring a budget in on the deadline of midnight, March 31, as required by law. It has not happened for the past 15 years.

Governor George Pataki is developing a contingency plan to keep the state government running while the politicians twiddle their thumbs.

What is different this year is that the legislators' salaries will stop if the budget deadline is not met. Their pay will not resume again until a budget is passed. Individually, they will suffer some of the pain that school districts, municipalities and agencies endure because the state government cannot fund them on time. These governmental agencies have had to resort to borrowing funds to meet their responsibilities which increases the cost of government and taxes.

Legislators, who have failed to do their job, will now have to resort to short-term financing and maybe the interest they will pay will give them a sense of urgency.

The Assembly, dominated by the Democrats and led by Speaker Sheldon Silver, wants to increase the budget by \$4.6 billion.

The Senate, dominated by the Republicans and led by Majority Leader Joseph Bruno, wants to increase the budget by \$2.7 billion.

Pataki submitted a budget that would increase spending by \$2.4 billion.

This past week, Pataki said he is willing to undergo a long, drawn-out fight. He has pledged to hold the spending increases to the rate of inflation which is now running between 1.8% and 2% depending upon who is doing the calculating.

We applaud Pataki for holding the cost of government to the rate of inflation. Why should government increase faster than the rate of growth?

As in the past, proponents of increased spending have marshaled their troops in health and education. They

painted a dire picture of huge cutbacks when in reality Pataki's budget gives them more funding than they received last year. No, they are not going to get what they wished for; but, who does?

Media managers and spin doctors will issue press releases based upon their sponsors' wishes. They will claim cutbacks based upon inflated figures and will fail to bring the true facts to the public that their agency or institution will receive an increase over last year, it just will not be as large as they wanted. They will spin this misinformation to create an illusion which they are hoping will panic the users of these services.

Pataki has pledged to dig in his heels. He threatens to use line-item vetoes to cut the budget back to reality.

In the last two years, Pataki was forced to compromise over the budget. New York State badly needed Workman's Compensation reform. Sheldon Silver refused to make these corrections unless Pataki gave in to his party's spending demands. It also worked the other way, we are convinced Pataki used the budget issue to force Silver to climb aboard the LILCO bailout.

Last year, rent control reform was the issue. Again, Silver used this as a bargaining tool. Pataki gave in and as a result, rich people are living in apartments in New York City for a few hundred dollars per month. If it were not for the governor-speaker deal, those apartments could have been on the open market commanding several thousand dollars in rentals.

Pataki was a candidate for governor last year. He wanted to be doling out our tax dollars to special interest groups throughout the state so he went along with Silver and okayed a bloated budget. This year it is a different story.

It is good to see him regain his prudent sense. This is good for the New York State economy and taxpayers.

And why not?



## In Praise of God

As we pass the vernal equinox, and enter the spring season, we enjoy a time of renewal and revival; a time when most people of the world give praise and thanks to God.

Muslims are taking time out of their normal life to travel across hundreds of miles of desert to participate in the hajj, a sacred pilgrimage to Mecca, the most holy city of Islam.

Tonight is the first night of Passover. During this eight-day festival, known as Pesach, Jews celebrate their freedom. It is a commemoration of the Exodus from slavery in Egypt. Much of their time is spent praising God through prayer and ritual.

This Friday is a most solemn day in Christian history. Jesus Christ was crucified and died on the cross, and was buried. Three days later, on Easter Sunday, Jesus rose from the dead and

ascended into heaven. Jesus' death allowed for the forgiveness of sin and opened the gates of heaven.

Christ's life here on this earth gave us the blueprint that all of us are commanded to follow. If the Bible is followed and each person not only respects himself but respects his fellow neighbor, wars could be a thing of the past and each of us would have a much simpler life.

When we see the death and despair that is happening throughout the world, we find even more reason to believe in God, and pray for a quick end to such violence. Regardless of the religion or denomination a person chooses to follow, it is important to accept all our fellow humans, as we are all made in His likeness.

Praise be to God.

And why not?