

WILLMOTTS & WHY NOTS

DAVID J. WILLMOTT SR., EDITOR

'There, But For The Grace Of God, Go I'

As we all prepare to give thanks for the food, family and friends at our Thanksgiving tables, we must also think of the less fortunate members of our community.

Each year, hundreds of children miss out on the celebration of Christmas because of some illness or accident that has befallen their families. Over the past 20 years, a group of Suffolk County residents, known as "The Group," has attempted to help some of the families with Christmas food and gifts.

The Group is not a tax-deductible organization, but it has no administrative expenses either. Every penny donated by our readers and members goes to helping families celebrate Christmas Day a little better.

The Group pools its resources and the funds donated by our readers to provide an extraordinary Christmas for

hundreds of children who otherwise would have simply had just another day.

Each year, The Group attempts to provide Christmas for 200 to 300 children, from 50 to 100 needy families in Suffolk County. These families do not know who is involved and except for "executive members," the average person involved with The Group knows little to nothing about the families being helped.

Using several different contact sources, The Group learns of the needs and circumstances of various families who would have provided their children with Christmas were it not for some illness, death, accident or temporary loss of income.

Only a few members have access to who is being helped. Their job is to obtain lists of needy families, review their circumstances, assign the families identification letters and assign people

to shop for the children's presents, wrap and then deliver them — all without compromising anyone's dignity.

This year, we are hoping to help more families; to surprise close to 300 children by showing them the true meaning of Christmas — the giving of happiness and love.

The families will be provided with food for their Christmas feast. Depending on their needs, each child will receive clothing, ranging from coats to underwear, and many other toys and presents.

The creed for all those involved with The Group has always been, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." Those of us who are fortunate helping those less fortunate — what better way is there to celebrate Christmas?

Every child is individually shopped

for, and, as one would expect, this is a mammoth task. Each year, members of The Group return to help shop, wrap and distribute the gifts, but additional volunteers are always needed.

More important, the cost to provide this act of kindness is great. A donation of any size would go a long way to bring Christmas to one of Suffolk's children.

Unfortunately, no one can send you a receipt or even a thank you note as the cost of sending these out would take away from what would be spent on the children.

Please extend the excitement of your Christmas to some of Suffolk's less fortunate children. Send donations to "The Group," c/o Suffolk Life Newspapers, P.O. Box 9167, Riverhead, NY 11901.

And why not?

Holding Kids Hostage

The Shoreham Wading River School District was due \$9.2 million from LIPA in PILOT payments September 1. As part of LIPA's hardball strategy, which we assume has been approved by Governor George Pataki, LIPA has withheld these payments. The school district had budgeted for them, and, according to the superintendent, cannot keep the doors of the schools open without these funds.

There is no question the Shoreham Wading River School District was the chief beneficiary of the over-assessed Shoreham Nuclear Power Plant. It took the Shoreham windfall and spent it recklessly, and was the envy of every school district on Long Island because it could afford things of which other districts could only dream.

One thing all of us must keep in mind is, although the Shoreham Wading River School District was the beneficiary, it had nothing to do with either the assessment or the over-assessment of LILCO's defunct nuclear plant. This malfeasance was solely the work of the Brookhaven Town Assessors on behalf of the Brookhaven Town Board and the town supervisor.

To force a school district to consider bankruptcy and the closing of its doors is unconscionable.

LIPA is trying to force a settlement with Suffolk County on the Shoreham Nuclear Power Plant's certiorari suit judgment by playing hardball to the nth-degree against an "innocent" school district.

When LIPA was created, it was the intention of the legislature and it was written into the original documents that when the takeover of LILCO occurred, all of certiorari suits connected with

that utility were supposed to be dropped.

This was affirmed by Judge John J.J. Jones, but overturned by the state's Appellate Division Court. The suit is now being prepared for the state's highest court, the Court of Appeals.

All the certioraries in Nassau County have been forgiven. Suffolk's Shoreham certiorari is the only one that has been exempted from forgiveness.

One thing everybody seems to forget is the certiorari judgment belongs to the ratepayers, not to LIPA or LILCO. Ratepayers were charged for the over-assessments and they are due a refund if the judgment is upheld. The judgment in no way should be considered a LIPA asset.

If the Court of Appeals hears the case and later finds the judgment is valid, LIPA should be mandated by that court to return to individual ratepayers the over-assessments that they paid through their LILCO rates.

But rest assured, if the Court of Appeals finds validity in the judgment and orders its repayment, the burden of the verdict will unquestionably bankrupt the Shoreham Wading River School District and possibly the Town of Brookhaven. The county's financial position will be weakened and there will be a severe financial crunch with which Suffolk County will have to deal.

To allow any school district to go bankrupt, for any reason, is unthinkable. The Court of Appeals, New York State and LIPA must consider these ramifications before LIPA presses to obtain money to which it is not entitled.

And why not?

1999 World Series Champions

There is nothing more fitting than seeing America's most successful professional sports franchise, the New York Yankees, win a 25th championship of this century.

While everyone is not a Bomber-backer, all should respect the team's professionalism. From Manager Joe Torre to players like Paul O'Neill, Tino Martinez, Mariano Rivera and Orlando "El Duque" Hernandez, the

Yankees are the epitome of remaining cool under pressure.

Perhaps, best of all, the Yankees win the right way: no boasting, no taunting their opponents and no preening before the cameras.

The New York Yankees. Team of the decade. Team of the century. They are the 1999 World Champions.

And why not?

State Legislators Out of Luck

The New York State Court of Appeals recently rejected a lawsuit brought to allow the New York State Legislature's members to continue to receive their pay when they fail to pass a state budget by April 1.

Last December, the New York State Legislature, in a deal to receive an unprecedented pay hike, agreed to have the state suspend biweekly paychecks until a budget was passed. When the legislature failed to pass a budget on April 1, paychecks stopped. The legislature cried foul, even though they had voted on this provision.

This year, these poor boys and girls did not get a paycheck for four months. They received their paychecks retroactively in one lump sum once the budget was passed in

August. Legislators were made to feel some of the same pain they had imposed upon schools, towns and counties. Because the budget was not adopted on time, New York's schools, towns and counties did not receive their state aid on time.

The municipalities had to go out and borrow money to keep going. This year, many legislators had to do the same thing. This reality check gave them some indication of the harm they are doing to the folks back home. Now that they have lost their case and are faced with the reality that late budgets mean no pay, there might be a sense of urgency in Albany to get the budget passed on time.

That would be refreshing.

And why not?

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The Voters Spoke

The voters went to the polls last week and, as expected, the turnout was light. This was disappointing. Our vote is one of our most treasured privileges. It gives us the opportunity to elect our leaders and give them direction.

The voters passed most environmental issues, particularly the clap trap of the third round of the South West Sewer District, which was cloaked in environmental camouflage. Oh well! The quarter-percent sales tax will continue to be collected for the next 25 years. Let us hope it is not wasted or squandered.

When the voters were asked to have a referendum on tax-pockets picked to support election reform, they rebelled 2 to 1. The problem is, however, election reform is needed. It is

worthy of support, but not on a piecemeal basis that mandates all residents pay for political welfare.

Rightfully, Initiative and Referendum just got easier. We now expect to see many issues on the ballot that the county executive and the county legislature feared to address. Although we have a republic form of government, the voters should have a direct mechanism to voice their opinions.

And, as we expected, the voters overwhelmingly supported oversight over LIPA. The county is now mandated to be a watchdog of LIPA. This is the first time any ques-

tion on LIPA has been allowed on the ballot and more than two-thirds of the voters approved it. The county must now act in unison; the legislature cannot go one way and the county executive another.

Speaking of the county executive, we noted 5% less voters approved of Gaffney than approved of him four years ago. There

were only about 20,000 votes separating Mahoney from victory. Gaffney had more than \$1 million to spend and spend he did. Mahoney had almost no organization and less than \$300,000.

There are almost 1.5 million people in Suffolk County and less than 250,000 voted. That is the real disappointment in Campaign 1999. We have the government we deserve. The only way to make it better is to monitor it diligently.

And why not?

Support The Sunrise Fire Scholarship

Thousands of firefighters rushed to the scene almost five years ago to protect the area's homes and property during the Sunrise Fires. These men and women were volunteers who were willing to risk their lives to prevent injury or loss of property during one of Long Island's greatest fires.

In honor of those firefighters, Suffolk County Community College and Suffolk Life Newspapers are proud to sponsor the Sunrise Firefighters Scholarship. This is a \$500 award given each year to a qualified student attending the college. The only requirements are that the student has been active in community service and is a firefighter or son or daughter of a firefighter.

Students have the next three weeks (until December 1) to present an application, letter of recommendation from someone obtaining each student's community service activities, and documentation of volun-

teer service as a firefighter for the applicant or a member of the applicant's immediate family.

The SCCC is also looking for area businesses and civic groups to become involved in order to expand the scholarship program to increase the award or to offer more than one award.

This is a worthy cause, especially when you consider that Suffolk's volunteer firefighters respond 365 days a year regardless of weather conditions or personal involvement. They respond at all hours of day or night and spend countless hours in training so that they can protect our lives.

Applications and donations can be sent to Sunrise Firefighters Scholarship Fund, c/o College Admissions Office, Suffolk County Community College, 533 College Road, Selden, NY 11784.

And why not?



Dishonest and Dishonorable

This past Friday, the Suffolk County Legislature convened to take up two proposals presented by County Executive Bob Gaffney after he had issued a certificate of necessity. This certificate eliminates the normal waiting period and debate.

Three days after County Executive Gaffney was reelected, he presented a proposal to the legislature that increased his salary by 31%. This is dishonest. It also will increase the salaries for other elected and appointed officials by the same percentage, and give the legislators a 34% increase.

This is both dishonest and dishonorable. During the campaign, Gaffney spoke nary a word about wanting, deserving or extorting a 31% increase in his salary. Not one legislator spoke out in favor of this huge, whopping increase for the county executive or for themselves.

The county executive currently makes \$114,975. Gaffney will now receive \$150,000. Legislators currently are paid \$49,680, and a 34% increase in salary will bring them to \$67,500 per year. Not bad for a part-time job. Other appointed officials whose compensation is close to Gaffney's would likewise see an increase.

The voters did not elect Gaffney to increase his salary. For the county executive or the legislature to change their base salaries at this point is deceitful. It sends a message to every other county employee that the till is overflowing with cash and "if county leaders can grant themselves a 30% or 34% salary

increase, they can do the same for us."

The county executive and his top managers, including the legislature, have received salary increases every year since 1986 based on inflation adjustments. When the 1986 salary agreement was reached, the inflation adjustment was supposed to be the cap. This year's eleventh hour sneak attack, without discussion or forewarning, is deceitful.

As part of the salary deal, in a 13 to 4 vote, the legislature was bought off; it abdicated its responsibility on the LIPA certiorari suit and gave Gaffney the sole discretion to settle with LIPA. That is like putting the fox in the hen house. Gaffney has persistently been soft on both LILCO and LIPA. The legislature was the only balancing influence.

If any legislator had indicated that he or she had lost their courage and were willing to give up fighting for the people against LIPA, the outcome of the election might have been different. Many of the legislators spoke with the same bravado they had throughout this long ordeal. How they could change their minds three days after they had been reelected is not understandable.

This betrayal of trust flies in the face of the overwhelming support by the voters, mandating that the county continue to fight when they passed the oversight bill 70% to 30%. Obviously, both of these scenarios had been cooked up and planned in the back room long before the voters went to the polls.

Once again, we have been sold out and sold out big time.

And why not?

Nassau's New Democratic Majority

Rebelling against Nassau's huge financial deficit, the voters threw out many of the incumbent Republican legislators, including Chairman Bruce Blakeman, and replaced them with Democrats.

Nassau is currently \$300 million in the red. The Democrats have won a hollow victory because they now are going to have to deal with the consequences. One of the reasons that got Nassau so far into the hole was the police arbitration ruling that gave Nassau police a 35% increase in base salary.

This was unrealistic, as the arbitrator never took into consideration the community's ability to fund such a large cost. This is the Nassau police the highest paid in the nation and put an unbearable shackle on the taxpayers, which cost the Republican majority their leadership role.

The Suffolk County Police Benevolent Association is looking for parity with Nassau during the current contract talks. According to the Suffolk County Budget Review Office, if Suffolk police are given

parity with Nassau, an additional \$220 million to \$304 million will have to be raised from the property owners within the Suffolk County Police District.

Can you afford it? If you cannot, you had better bombard County Executive Bob Gaffney's office, which will do the negotiating. It would also help if you contacted your county legislator.

The new Democratic majority in Nassau gives the Suffolk County Legislature an opportunity to talk about issues that affect both counties. As an example: Nassau refused to even look at the Suffolk Legislature's position on the LIPA deal. They did not have to do so. They were the all-powerful Nassau Republicans who looked down on Suffolk as not worthy of consideration.

Times have changed and it is a grand opportunity to open up the lines of communication. We are an island. It is time for the east to meet the west and form a consensus for middle ground.

And why not?

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Rescind the Raises

Most Suffolk County legislators must be having trouble looking at themselves in the mirror in the morning. We have heard nothing but outrage from the citizens of Suffolk County over the outlandish raises the legislators gave themselves and County Executive Robert Gaffney three days after the general election.

During the campaign, no one brought up the proposed raises as an issue. The raises increase the base pay of the legislators and the county executive by 30%. Gaffney issued a certificate of necessity that is supposedly reserved for emergency measures. The legislature was called into a special session on Friday and voted on these increases without prior public knowledge or debate. Sneaky and dishonest? You bet.

What's to stop the legislators at the next legislative meeting from increasing the county executive's wage to a million dollars and increas-

ing their wages to a half million dollars?

We, the people of Suffolk County, can stop them through the Initiative and Referendum process. We can circulate petitions and if we are able to get 25,000 proper signatures in the next 45 days, we can stop the raises from going into effect. This is a difficult task because an organization will have to be put together and hundreds of volunteers throughout Suffolk County secured. During the holiday season when people are spread thin, it might be next to impossible.

On January 1, the Initiative and Referendum procedure will become easier and less cumbersome to use. We granted ourselves this right when we passed the ballot initiative on election day. We now only need 2.5% of the gubernatorial votes from each of the 10 towns. This is a more

manageable number for a volunteer organization to garner. More importantly, petitioners do not have to put their election district numbers on the petitions. This bureaucratic trap has been eliminated.

On January 1, we can start a new initiative to roll back the legislator's salaries to the 1998 level, and make any changes in the base salary other than inflationary raises subject to voter approval. This would put the legislators' salaries back in the

hands of the citizens.

The legislators and the county executive have shown they have no self control and their greed knows no bounds. We the people must put a harness on those who abuse us. If you are interested in becoming involved in a movement to roll back the raises and make future salary increases subject to voter approval, send in the coupon printed below. If enough people want to volunteer to take control of their own government, Suffolk Life will call an organizational meeting and start the process.

And why not?

Roll Back The Raises: Yes, I volunteer to help with the petition drive to roll back the raises and make all future raises subject to voter approval.

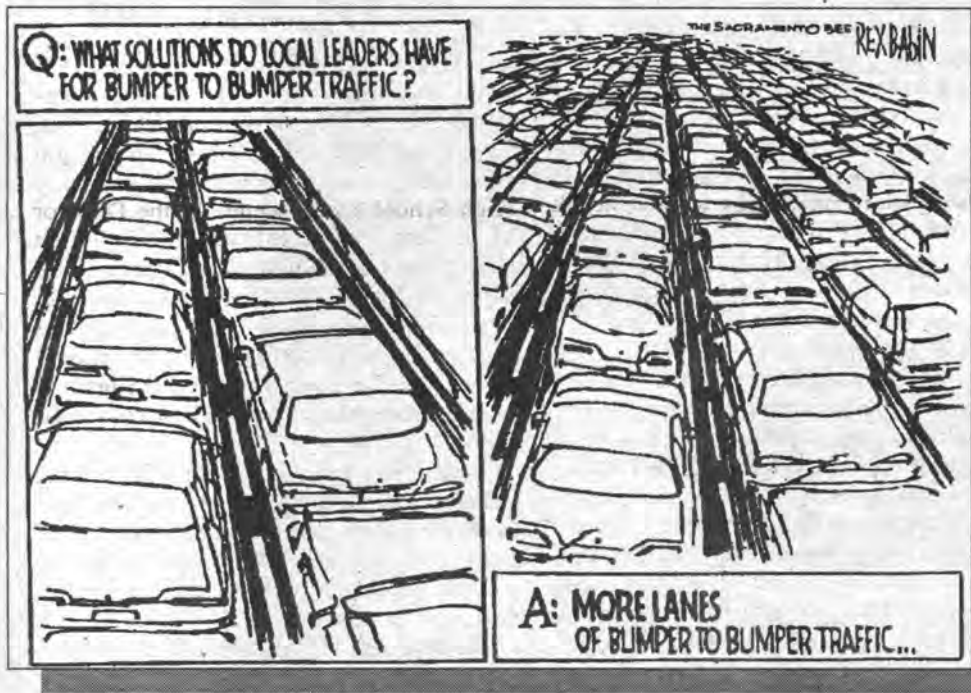
Name _____

Street Address _____

Town _____ Zip _____

Telephone Number _____

Please clip and mail to Roll Back the Raises, c/o P.O. Box 9167, Riverhead, N.Y. 11901



Where Did the Money Go?

County Executive Bob Gaffney proudly announced in September that welfare rolls had been reduced during the last seven years by 62%. To the casual government watcher, this would seem like great news. Welfare, a program that takes from the middle class and gives to the poor, had finally been brought under control. Welfare fraud had been cut back through fingerprinting and by putting capable people to work in various jobs.

You would expect with such a tremendous reduction in the welfare

rolls, its cost would have been proportionately reduced or at least substantially lowered.

But an analysis of the budget indicates the county portion of the welfare costs has only decreased by a minuscule amount over the last seven years. In Gaffney's 1999 budget, it actually goes up higher than it was when he came into office.

Was Gaffney's spin honest? We don't think so. In fact, if you want to talk about welfare fraud, this would be a good place to start.

And why not?

While the Long Island Rail Road claims it is attempting to be a good neighbor, it ignores or chastises Suffolk residents who have complained about the loud, ear-piercing screech of the whistles on the new double-decker trains.

This is not the first time the LIRR has attempted to convince the residents they are overreacting to the new whistles.

At first, the LIRR denied any knowledge of a problem; then it tried to tell residents the whistles only sound louder because the new train engines are not as noisy as the old engines; then the company agreed to conduct a study; now it is back to ignoring the issue.

Thousands of residents all over Suffolk County have complained about how these new whistles, which the LIRR claims meet federal regulations, rattle the windows of homes along or near the tracks and actually prevent people from communicating when the train pulls into a station.

These residents are not only complaining about the noise level; they are concerned about the duration of the whistles as well.

Suffolk Legislator Steve Levy has explained that the law requires the train engineers to blow their whistles at each and every railroad crossing, but there is no law that requires the whistles to be as loud as they are or for the whistles to be sounded for as long as they are.

Levy is chairman of the legislature's ways and means committee. He has asked the LIRR to come before his committee to explain the problem and why a study has not been conducted.

Just because the LIRR is protected by the Metropolitan Transit Authority, which answers to no one, is no reason that the public should have to suffer.

If the LIRR or its parent company, the MTA, do not come up with satisfactory answers, the legislature must begin litigation against them.

And why not?

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Tomorrow, on Thanksgiving Day, we will gather with our friends and family to give thanks for the life we have enjoyed during the past year. Most of us have been the beneficiaries of a vibrant economy. For the most part, the world is at peace. Huge medical advances have been made that have helped some people overcome life threatening illnesses. Yes, we should thank God for our bountiful blessings.

Unfortunately, not all of us have been blessed. There are families right here in Suffolk County who are preparing for the difficult task of telling their children that Santa cannot come this year.

The little ones believe in miracles and somehow hope that, even though their mom or dad has suffered a tragedy, there will still be a Christmas.

Every year, through good and bad times, there are those who end up without hope. Twenty years ago, a small

Let Us Give Thanks

group of friends who were thankful for their blessings were discussing the plight of others. The discussion centered around those who did not fall into the normal safety nets provided by our social agencies. We were talking about the working families, who normally provide for their children, but, because of an illness, an accident or an economic tragedy, could not provide a Christmas for their children.

We decided to try and make a difference. We agreed to pool our resources and try to make Christmas come true for at least one family that first year. We set up some ground rules. This was to be a pure charity, no officers, no directors, no administrative costs. Every cent we raised would be spent on the children. Everything would be done anonymously under the name of "The Group." The

recipients would never know who their benefactors were other than they were a group of fellow citizens from Suffolk County.

Families are selected through an investigative process. The children are individually shopped for. First we address their clothing needs. It is our desire to see all the children are dressed warmly, from underwear to outerwear, and everything in between. But Santa does not just bring clothes; there are toys, games and books that go a long way in lifting the spirits of the kids, giving them pleasure where they had not anticipated anything.

When Santa's "elves" complete their shopping, each gift is gaily wrapped and tagged from Santa. The gifts are bundled and finished off with a food gift certificate so each family can rejoice around

a proper meal.

The Group attempts to deliver the gifts when the children are not home so the parents can give their children the presents without having to identify where they came from.

Over the last several years, we have been able to raise money to bring Christmas to as many as 200 to 300 children. This year, we have already received numerous requests for assistance and we will do our best to meet these needs.

If you would like to become part of The Group, we ask for generous contributions. Every penny we receive will be spent on the children. All other costs normally associated with this kind of effort are donated by volunteer members of The Group.

If you really want to make this a meaningful Thanksgiving, pass the hat when your friends and family gather together, and share your bounty with others.

Trifurcated Rates Are Fair

County Executive Bob Gaffney has been empowered by the Suffolk legislature to reach an agreement with LIPA over the Shoreham certiorari judgment. He is supposed to work out a deal that will be less than the \$620 million LIPA had put on the table to settle the \$1.2 billion judgment.

LIPA has been charging Suffolk County residents a higher, bifurcated rate than is paid by Nassau County residents to pay off the certiorari judgment. From the beginning, Islip Town Supervisor Peter McGowan protested this bifurcated rate. He insisted the residents of Islip and the other eight towns did not receive a proportionate share of the monies from the over-assessment of the Shoreham nuclear power plant.

The county as a whole, all 10 towns, received about 25% of the cash from the over-assessment. Brookhaven Town and the Shoreham Wading

School District received the remaining 75%.

McGowan maintains that electrical rates, the mechanism currently being used to pay off the judgment, should be higher in Brookhaven than they are in the rest of Suffolk County. Brookhaven's rates should be in proportion to the gain the town received.

For example: McGowan feels if Nassau County is paying 13 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity and Suffolk is being charged 15 cents, Brookhaven Town should be charged 17 or 18 cents and the rates in other Suffolk towns should be reduced to 14 cents. Trifurcated rates would be directly related to the benefits received. This is fair, as it spreads the gain and the pain honestly.

Brookhaven government may cry foul and point to the South West Sewer District, which benefited western, south shore residents but ended up being

paid for by the entire county through a sales tax. Residents within the South West Sewer District had been promised taxes amounting to \$100 to \$150 per year, but because of cost overruns and corruption they were facing \$800 to \$1,000 in potential assessments. Many residents were faced with the possibility of losing their homes.

Brookhaven town residents would be affected by the higher electric rates; but the rates would probably not be more than they had to pay LILCO before the LIPA take over. Brookhaven can hardly cry poverty after residents all over Suffolk County were bombarded all last summer by television commercials with Supervisor Felix Grucci pronouncing what a wonderful place Brookhaven is to live with its low taxes. These low taxes had been provided, in part, by the over-assessment of Shoreham. How many of the other nine towns

are planning a grandiose, wildlife park and zoo?

Brookhaven over-assessed Shoreham; it selfishly took the money and ran. Now that it has been caught with its hand in the cookie jar, the situation has become a countywide problem with the town looking for its neighbors to bail it out.

Islip Town's Supervisor and Babylon Town Supervisor Richard Schaffer respectfully wrote to the county executive to encourage him in his settlement negotiations to consider trifurcated rates. McGowan, like Teddy Roosevelt, is known to speak softly but carry a big stick. We would not be a bit surprised to learn he and Schaffer are already preparing a substantial legal challenge if Gaffney and LIPA try to continue bifurcated rates instead of trifurcated rates.

Gaffney should take heed.

And why not?



Feds Sue On Air Polluters

The federal government has finally gotten off its duff and put the Midwestern utilities, which are responsible for heavy pollution, on notice it is going to sue to stop utilities from adding pollutants to our air. These utilities use mostly coal burning plants that have been accused of putting up to 50% of the pollutants in the air, seriously affecting the entire Northeast.

This pollution eventually becomes acid rain, which has been blamed for wiping out entire forests and indiscriminately coating our homes, cars and boats. What is more important, it affects the air we breathe and con-

tributes to the respiratory ailments from which we suffer. These pollutants may be a contributing cause of the all too prevalent cancers with which we are afflicted.

Although we have laws that are supposed to prevent this pollution, the utilities have circumvented them by disguising routine repairs as pollutant avoidance measures. The utilities have two choices — voluntarily clean up their acts and the air or do so by force, along with severe fines.

Let us hope the suit receives expeditious processing.

And why not?