

It's Called "Tax Creep"

The middle class on Long Island is shrinking. It was 67% of our population in the nineties. Today it's 58% and declining swiftly.

By Steve Levy, former County Executive, now heads Center for Cost Effective Government getting to work.

Tax Creep - the little here, little there tax increases that cumulatively can put homeowners over the edge. It's how we've reached the point of near no return in New York when it comes to our confiscatory property taxes.



Steve Levy

"A billion here, a billion there, and pretty soon you are talking about real money," is how Senator Everett Dirksen once described the folly of looking at each federal spending increase in a vacuum.

When it comes to raising taxes, fees and rates on Long Island, for instance, we hear the same refrain from local special interests and taxing jurisdictions. "Don't worry, it's just \$20 here or \$40 there." With the myriad layers of government on Long Island,

pretty soon you are talking about \$500-\$1000 annual increases. This, at a time when we've seen a yearly exodus of 125,000 New York residents for cheaper pastures and when we should be pushing our tax burden downward to remain more competitive.

Look, for example, at just a few suggested new increases that are coming our way.

Water Bill Increase - Suffolk officials... are lobbying for a new tax on our water bills to help enhance septic systems. It sounds good in a vacuum, and when the public is asked if they'll support fees to protect their water, they invariably accede. But will they still be as positive when they hear they will be hit with a yearly fee of *up to \$300* just for this program (or that they already have been taxed \$1 billion for water protection, or that the feds gave us \$600 million already for projects that are coming our way)?

School Bonds - Look at numerous school districts that are floating huge bonds - from thirty to one hundred million dollars - for infrastructure improvements and additions. Want a new turf field, roof, windows or gymnasium? Sure - why not? But would you feel the same when you hear the bond (which is sometimes floated in lieu of regular operating expenses to bypass the 2% tax cap) will cost you an extra *\$250 a year for decades to come*.

PSEG /National Grid - Then there are the utilities. PSEG wants another *\$31* for revenue lost due to our enhanced conservation and National Grid added on another *\$75* for infrastructure and other fees. Add to that Governor Cuomo's proposal to bail out upstate nuclear power plants to the tune of \$7 billion that all New York ratepayers will bear. This is *\$42* annually per household for years to come.

LIRR- The Long Island Railroad just added another *\$168 per year* for the privilege of

The Suffolk County police taxes were increased last year by County Executive Steve Bellone's record high county budget of \$2.96 billion. This includes a 3.6 percent increase in the taxes to pay police in the five western towns.* The new police contract, negotiated by Bellone, will provide some units average salaries of \$227,000 per year. It was sold as "only another \$43 a year."

But still, after adding this all up, we are talking about real money. Annual increases of \$1,000, or even \$500, at a time when homeowners are hemorrhaging, is cruel, unfair and destined to provoke even more residents to flee.

A recent LIA study showed that our middle class on Long Island is shrinking. It was 67% of our population in the nineties. Today it's 58% and declining swiftly. We must stop looking at these individual increases standing alone, and consider their collective impact. We must have the courage to say no to the things (the politicians) want, so that we have the capacity to say yes to the things we need.

* "The towns and villages on the East End — including the Towns of Riverhead and Southold—have retained their own local police departments. But they are still charged for county police headquarters operations and assistance by special county police units such as the homicide squad, arson squad as well as the helicopters of the department's aviation section," Karl Grossman, Suffolk Close-Up.

Holtsville Hal Predicts Six More Weeks of Winter

Amid some boos from the crowd of nearly 500 Brookhaven residents, Suffolk County's most famous weatherman awoke from his slumber Thursday, February 2, Groundhog's Day, to predict six more weeks of winter rather than an early spring.

According to legend, if a groundhog sees its shadow after emerging from his burrow on Groundhog Day, there will be six more weeks of winter weather; if not, spring should arrive early. Holtsville Hal is just one of the more than 100 animals residing at the **Holtsville Ecology Site's Animal Preserve**, which is open all year-round. For more information, visit www.brookhavenny.gov or call 631-758-9664. *Kristen D'Andrea*

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