

EDITORIALS

A doable fix for drunken driving

The decline in drunken-driving fatalities represents one of our nation's greatest policy triumphs, even though operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated spawns thousands of tragedies each year.

In 1982, 21,113 people were killed in drunken-driving accidents in the United States. By 2017 that number dropped to 10,874, thanks to stiffer penalties and a relentless social campaign. That's a vast reduction, but we must do better. Technology exists that could almost eradicate drunken-driving fatalities, save money and reduce accidents. We just need the will, and the passage of a bill recently introduced by Rep. Kathleen Rice of Garden City.

Rice has written legislation that would give manufacturers a 10-year deadline to equip all new cars with alcohol-interlock devices to prevent operation by drunken drivers. Such systems, which detect the blood-alcohol level of drivers, already are required on the vehicles of convicted drunken drivers in many states, including New York.

A 2014 University of Michigan study found that requiring such devices could prevent 85 percent of all drunken-driving deaths, saving about 9,000 a year. That's the equivalent of reducing the rate of gun homicides in the United States by about 64 percent. And the reduction in both fatal and nonfatal accidents would save an estimated \$54 billion a year, enough to more than cover the costs, according to the study.

Those opposed to mandating technology to make it impossible for drunks to drive would curse the supposed "nanny state" and argue that such devices would violate their rights. The same argument was made about seat belts. But no one has a right to drive drunk, and everyone has a right to be free of the threat of drunken drivers.

— *The editorial board*

Many fronts in the war for clean water on LI

It would be easy to shrug off a recent report from the New York Public Interest Research Group that found that Long Island is the state region with the most emerging contaminants in its drinking water. We've known that for a while, after all; what's the big deal?

But there is great value in the reminder it provides to all Long Islanders that whatever we put into the ground ends up in the aquifer that provides the water we drink and in which we bathe.

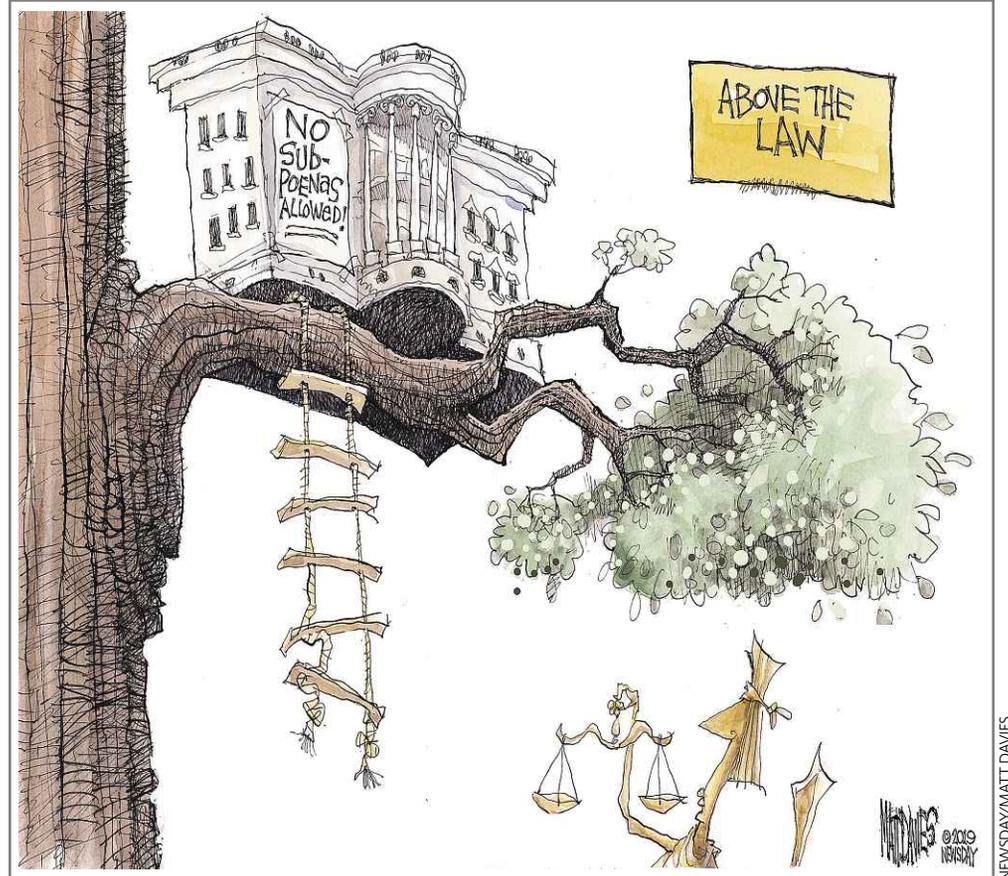
The best-known examples come from our industrial legacy — like the 24 contaminants in the awful Bethpage plume. But many of us play a role with the fertilizers and pesticides we put on our lawns and spray in our yards, and the household chemicals some of us flush down our drains and into our cesspools and septic systems.

The report reinforces the need for testing. Water suppliers do that regularly; owners of private wells must be as diligent. But testers also need standards for comparison, and the state Department of Health still has not set limits on the probable carcinogen 1,4-dioxane as well as PFOS and PFOA, substances used in firefighting foam and nonstick coatings, all of which have turned up in many public and private wells.

Limits guide and dictate when treatment is needed. But traditional filtering doesn't work with 1,4-dioxane and new technology, not yet mass-produced, could cost up to \$1 million per well. A bill sponsored by Sen. James Gaughran and approved by the State Legislature that makes it easier for water districts to sue polluters and chemical manufacturers would help the more than one dozen water districts that already have filed such suits, if Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo signs it, as he should.

Let the new report be a warning: It would be far better to stop pollutants from reaching the aquifer in the first place. — *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



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LETTERS

Troubled by clergy tax exemption

The growth in property tax exemptions for clergy is not only shocking but, in my view, unconstitutional ["Clergy exemption takes \$463M off Nassau tax rolls," News, June 3].

I firmly believe in separation of church and state and find the fact that I have to support religious institutions and individuals claiming to be spiritual leaders unconscionable. I am a non-believer and am forced to financially support religious organizations directly or indirectly.

This is a flaw in the concept of property taxes. This is a bad form of taxation that has really negative outcomes, such as poor school districts, crumbling infrastructure and environmental harm. Meanwhile, we argue about assessed valuations, what's fair and who should assess our properties. The

time has come to find a new way to finance schools and government. Our system is in shambles.

By the way, I am an ordained minister through American Marriage Ministries, which describes itself as a "nonprofit, interfaith and nondenominational constitutional church," and I could apply for a religious exemption for my house because I can perform legally binding marriages in my home.

Gabriele Kathryn Libbey,
Harbor Isle

The suggestion in your editorial that reforms for the clergy tax exemption wait at least another "five years while it [Nassau County] undoes another mess" is unacceptable ["Clergy tax breaks can be reformed," June 4]. Given the history of assessment in the county, I believe this issue will have faded from memory in five years or more.

Delaying a fix gives beneficiaries years more of an exemption I believe they never should have had. The giveaway already has gone on way too long. The state should reform the clergy exemption right now by making the \$1,500 a flat deduction of the tax bill or granting the same exemption it does for volunteer firefighters or veterans.

Every day that Nassau's outrageous, unintended, inflated exemption continues is a slap in the face to every county resident who pays property taxes.

Cary Brozik,
Woodmere

Reasons for mass shootings are many

After another mass shooting, gun control is again proclaimed to be the overriding issue, the National Rifle Association the reason for reckless, out-of-control gun own-