

| | |
|------------------|-----|
| Business | A19 |
| Corrections | A11 |
| Long Island | A10 |
| Lottery | A35 |
| Movie listings | B4 |
| Nation | A14 |
| Obituaries | A20 |
| Opinion | A16 |
| Reaching Newsday | A11 |
| TV listings | B18 |
| Weather | A18 |
| World | A14 |

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Newsday (USPS# 388-760) (ISSN# 0278-5587) is published daily except Sunday and Christmas Day by Newsday LLC, 235 Pinelawn Rd., Melville, N.Y. 11747. Periodicals postage paid at Huntington Station, N.Y. Postmaster: Send address changes to 235 Pinelawn Rd., Melville, N.Y. 11747.

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Inside ExploreLI

TOP STORIES

A push for union wages

What Nassau wants on projects with tax breaks

BY JAMES T. MADORE
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The Nassau County Legislature has unanimously backed a move in Albany to pay union wages and benefits to construction workers on building projects that receive tax breaks.

The endorsement comes as supporters and opponents of the higher rate, known as the prevailing wage, attempt to reach a compromise before the State Legislature ends its regular session on June 19.

The endorsement also is a rare show of bipartisanship in Mineola and provides a boost to unions that say real estate developers should be compelled to pay the prevailing wage on projects that win taxpayer aid from state or local governments.

Developers, contractors and business groups say the projects will be too costly if they are forced to pay more.

They succeeded in keeping the wage hike out of the 2019-20 state budget, which was adopted in April.

The prevailing wage bill “will ensure that the taxpayer-funded subsidies we are using to spur development also create strong, middle-class jobs for Long Island construction workers,” the Nassau lawmakers said in a May 8 letter to state Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-Yonkers).

“It’s no secret that Long Island is an expensive place to live, and in Nassau County, the wages this legislation will codify give construction workers a quality of life they wouldn’t otherwise have,” states the letter signed by Presiding Officer Richard J. Nicoletto (R-New Hyde Park), Minority Leader Kevan Abrahams (D-Freeport) and 17 other county lawmakers.

Kevin Law, president of the Long Island Association business group, said this week the bill being embraced by Nassau lawmakers “would increase construction costs.”

He added that “negotiations between business groups and

labor are continuing and remain aimed at achieving some of the goals outlined in the legislators’ letter while not stifling economic growth and important projects in our region.”

The LIA, Long Island Builders Institute and the developers’ group Association for a Better Long Island have banded together to oppose the prevailing wage bill, which is sponsored by state Sen. Jessica Ramos (D-Queens) and Assemb. Harry Bronson (D-Rochester).

The business groups also hope to achieve a compromise with the union umbrella group Nassau-Suffolk Building and Construction Trades Council on alternative legislation.

Council president Matty Aracich praised Nassau lawmakers on Friday, saying, “The prevailing wage supports people in the community, fosters growth and investment, and helps the tax base.” He also said he hopes the Suffolk County Legislature will make an endorsement.

Suffolk lawmakers haven’t yet taken a position on the legislation, a spokeswoman for Pre-

siding Officer DuWayne Gregory (D-Copiague) said.

Under current state law the prevailing wage must be paid to all workers, union and nonunion, on government-funded public-works projects such as roads, mass transit and schools. But that wage rate is not required for those employed on private construction projects aided by industrial development agencies or the state.

In Albany, Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie (D-Bronx) and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo are discussing a proposal to apply the prevailing wage to private projects if government tax breaks, grants or bond financing exceed a certain percentage of the total cost, according to three sources with knowledge of the talks who requested anonymity because they weren’t authorized to discuss them publicly.

Cuomo told Newsday recently that he supports expanding the wage requirement, but not in ways that would reduce the availability of affordable housing or undermine economic development.

1 LI beach on expert’s Top 10 list

Some of the best beach access in the Hamptons exists on Coopers Beach in Southampton Village and there’s a snack bar there that serves lunch and drinks as well.

Those are some of the reasons Coopers Beach is again on the list of the Top 10 beaches in the country by coastal expert Stephen P. Leatherman, a professor at Florida International University known as “Dr. Beach.” No other New York beaches made the list.

Leatherman, who has compiled the list for 29 years, ranked Coopers fourth this year — the same position it held in 2018 — and it was rated No. 1 in 2010.

“As the first ‘Gold Coast’ in the country, Coopers Beach is hundreds of yards wide, made of grainy white quartz sand,” Leatherman said in his descrip-



Zachary Sedgwick, left, of Brooklyn romps on Coopers Beach last year with dad, Robert, and brother Elliot.

tion of the beach for the list. He adds, “The beach is backed by large sand dunes covered by American beach grass interspersed with large and extravagant mansions.”

Topping the list is Kailua Beach Park in Oahu, Hawaii, which Leatherman described as “a beautiful white sand coral beach with generally small waves, making it great for swim-

ming and kayaking.”

Listed among its amenities are lifeguards, free parking, bathrooms, beach showers, picnic tables, volleyball courts and kayak rentals.

— LISA IRIZARRY