EDITORIALS

On cigs, Nassau should go to 21

Suffolk County has raised the age for purchases of cigarettes to 21, as have New York City and New Jersey. So have Hempstead and North Hempstead towns. The City of Glen Cove and the Town of Oyster Bay are nearly alone in the region in allowing sales of tobacco products to buyers younger than 21. Nassau County can change that.

Now, finally, Republicans who hold a majority in the Nassau legislature will support a bill to raise the age to 21, a year after they blocked an attempt by Democrats to do the same. The Rules Committee will consider the change on May 7, after Presiding Officer Richard Nicolello said the necessity of limiting vaping and marijuana paraphernalia purchases by minors, which the law would also accomplish, changed his mind about the law.

There is still opposition from Republican legislators who think people older than 18 can make decisions for themselves. That is a compelling argument. We let people vote and serve in the military at that age, and generally consider them full citizens. But we do not let them drink at that age because society has concluded they are often too young to make good decisions about alcohol.

Deciding to start smoking is terribly foolish. The choice by young people to smoke suggests they are not mature enough to understand how dangerous and addictive tobacco is. People who don't start smoking young usually never start at all. And when people 18 through 20 can't buy cigarettes, the 16- and 17-year-olds in their social groups can't bum them.

A 2015 report by the nonprofit National Academy of Medicine projected that raising the age to buy tobacco to 21 could prevent approximately 223,000 premature deaths among Americans born from 2000 to 2019.

Nassau needs to join its neighbors and raise the age.

— *The editorial board*

Bellone bungled exit from solar-panel contract

Give Suffolk County officials credit for seeing the development potential in land just south of the Ronkonkoma Hub. Call them perceptive for realizing that a plan to build solar carports at a 3,000-spot parking lot at the train station would limit that potential.

But give them an F for failing to properly exit a contract to construct those carports, a decision that will cost Suffolk taxpayers at least $13.5 million, and probably a good bit more.

A recent State Supreme Court decision found that the county under Executive Steve Bellone did not honor a contract with a private company negotiated by predecessor Steve Levy to install the solar panels. What's more, Justice David T. Reilly wrote that Suffolk "intentionally breached the lease agreement," making it ineligible to recoup from insurers $7.8 million of the $10.8 million awarded to EDF Renewable Development Inc. of San Diego. Suffolk, which has paid out the other $3 million, has now lost three court decisions related to the contract and is appealing the insurance ruling. This is not skillful management.

We don't blame Suffolk for wanting out of the contract. The county did end up receiving four big, intriguing development proposals for the land there. But there is a right way to amend deals, and it involves lots of talking. Suffolk could have found another location for the solar panels; Ronkonkoma was one of seven installations in the EDF contract. It could have reduced lease payments due to the county. It could have purchased material EDF had bought for Ronkonkoma.

Suffolk could have, and should have, done something — anything — to avoid making taxpayers pay for the county's failure to follow the correct process, again.

— *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES

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LETTERS

Contracts, mandates raise our local taxes

The firm hired by the Long Island Regional Planning Council to study our region's high taxes asked me, as a former county executive, for my thoughts on the issue. I agreed, but cautioned that the council must not take the easy way out: to simply call for more or different types of revenues ["Seeking revenue to cut property taxes," News, April 18].

Unfortunately, that's exactly what the council did.

The root of high taxes on Long Island is not a lack of revenue, it's excessive costs that emanate from exorbitant municipal contracts and state mandates.

We don't need a higher sales tax, we need an end to state mandatory arbitration that's given us $200,000 police salaries. We need to eliminate overtime in pension calculations, limit termination pay for unused sick days, and end 20-years-and-out retirement plans. We need to eliminate the Triborough Amendment, which continues step pay increases even after a public contract expires. We need to convert taxpayer-guaranteed pensions to private sector-type 401(k) pensions for future public employees.

The report laments that these needed changes will not come about because they require state legislation. But rather than restating the obvious, that taxes are high, why not pressure the state to change these burdensome laws?

Steve Levy,
Bayport

Editor's note: The writer is executive director of the Center for Cost Effective Government, an advocacy organization, and was Suffolk County executive from 2004 to 2011.

Fallout from Starbucks incident

Why is it that any negative interaction between white people and people of color is assumed to be racially motivated?

In Philadelphia, two black men entered a Starbucks, purchased nothing, and sat down. They said they were waiting for a friend. They were asked to leave and refused ["Starbucks eyes training on 'unconscious bias,'" News, April 17]. What gall! Police were called.

Why did these men believe they had the right to take up space provided for customers without supporting that business? Suppose they entered a restaurant and sat at a table to wait for a friend? Or any business, office or clinic that provides seating for customers?

It's not racial. These days, we're encouraged to say