

EDITORIALS

Gov undercuts his ethics effort

It's hard to pitch yourself as an ethics reformer when you keep narrowing the definition of who's covered by your ethics reforms.

That's the spot Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo has put himself in with his tortured explanations of an executive order on campaign contributions. It was signed in 2007 by then-Gov. Eliot L. Spitzer, tweaked by successor David A. Paterson, and renewed by Cuomo on his first day in office. The order bans campaign donations to a governor from most of his appointees and bars them from soliciting such donations. It's a good rule. Appointees to boards and authorities often control millions of dollars via grants and contracts. There should be no hint of payoff for gaining that privilege.

But after reports that Cuomo has gotten nearly \$900,000 from appointees and \$1.3 million from their families and businesses, his administration said the rule applies only to appointees Cuomo can fire, not those he selects but who must also be confirmed by the State Senate to fixed terms. A few days later, another interpretation emerged: Appointees are not subject unless they have to file financial disclosures with the Joint Commission on Public Ethics. That's an even smaller group.

This doesn't pass any test — smell, common sense or one given in kindergarten.

Every year Cuomo pitches, with varying degrees of exhortation, a package of ethics reforms. His 2018-19 budget proposal includes measures to institute public campaign financing, require local elected officials to make financial disclosures, and close a loophole that lets secretive limited liability companies make big campaign contributions. Bravo.

Cuomo should add a law based on the executive order that makes clear that all governor appointees, their families and businesses are banned from making or soliciting donations on his or her behalf. That would be a pitch worthy of a real ethics reformer.

— *The editorial board*

Another way Nassau can end culture of corruption

Nassau County Executive Laura Curran's order barring county employees involved with contracting or procurement from accepting gifts from vendors sends the right message. But if Curran wants to take a more significant step to end the county's culture of corruption, she must drastically reduce the limits on political contributions from those vendors, currently set at \$50,000 for countywide offices. That was one of her campaign promises.

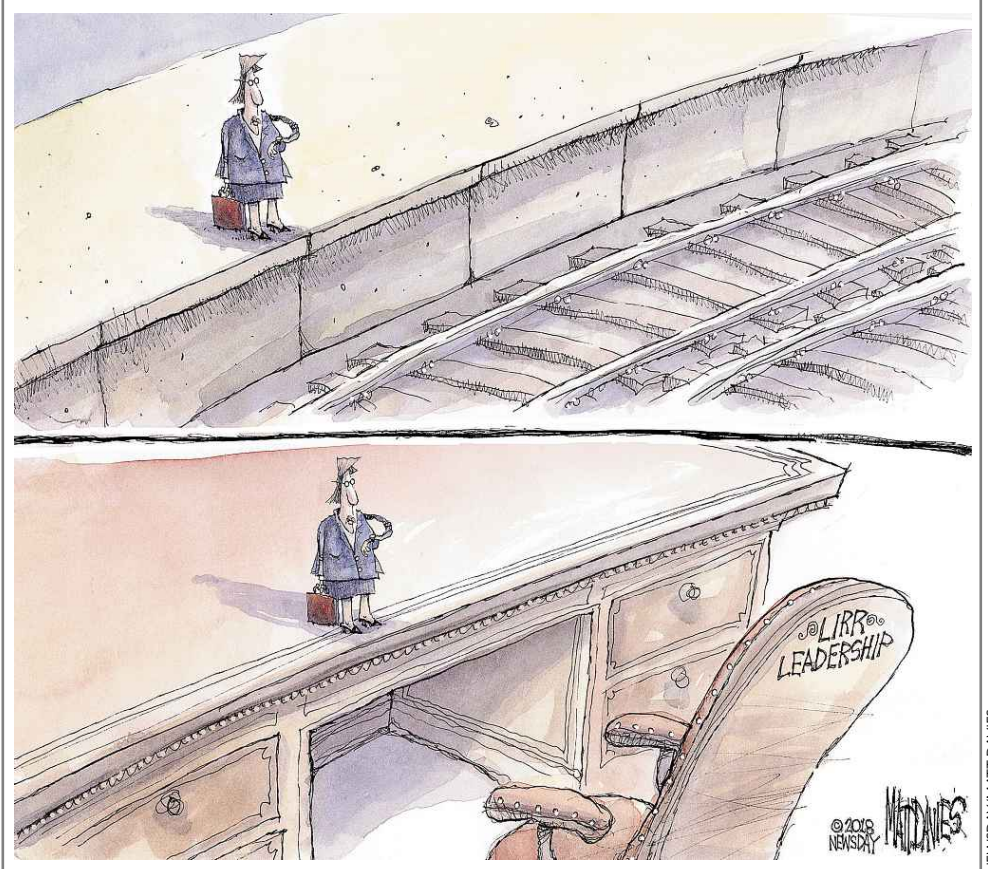
Last week, Curran signed an executive order that bars employees who have a role in influencing how taxpayer dollars are spent from accepting even a cup of coffee from those seeking to do business with the county. The previous rule barred gifts worth \$75 or more.

Nassau County is besieged with scandals. Former County Executive Edward Mangano is to go on trial this month on federal charges of taking bribes and gifts from restaurateur Harendra Singh. Mangano's wife, Linda, is charged with accepting a no-show job from Singh. Former Mangano chief deputy Rob Walker is charged with lying to the FBI about accepting \$5,000 from a county vendor. Former State Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos is due to be retried on corruption charges involving a contract that sold Nassau County sponges for storm sewers. And a Newsday investigation found hundreds of contracts written for just under the \$25,000 limit that required legislative approval, many for the politically connected, some for work not needed or performed.

No law can stop bad actors, but Curran must send a message that the pork fest for friends and family is over. A ban on significant campaign contributions for those seeking county office would mean more than barring cups of coffee for employees.

— *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



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LETTERS

President's budget threatens food aid

I am writing to express concern about the president's proposed cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in his 2019 budget ["Budget swells deficits," News, Feb. 13].

It's essential that people can obtain food to keep themselves and their families healthy. Research shows that people who don't have access to healthy meals are more likely to suffer poor health. SNAP ensures that families can have enough food to eat and can still make ends meet.

SNAP doesn't help only families, seniors and people with disabilities. It also benefits local businesses, retailers and farmers, pumping money into our economy, which raises wages and creates higher-paying jobs. For all these reasons, any effort to cut SNAP is harmful and

short-sighted.

Unfortunately, the president's budget represents a major threat. It's not just the much-discussed Harvest Box, which would replace SNAP with a package of nonperishable milk, peanut butter, canned fruits and meats, cereal and other items. This approach would ignore the nutrition and health needs of individuals and could create a logistical nightmare.

Linda Bopp,
Albany

Editor's note: The writer is executive director for Hunger Solutions New York, a nonprofit organization.

On school security and gun laws

One immediate and low-cost safety procedure could be put in place in all middle and high schools ["LI district proposes armed guards," News, Feb. 27]. Have security

personnel inspect all backpacks, book bags, sports totes, music cases and art cylinders brought to school. Long guns and ammunition magazines are not easily hidden on a person's body. Security folks might also find illegal drugs like opioids, which would help fight another problem.

Chuck Darling,
South Setauket

Along with so many after the massacre in Parkland, Florida, I was heartened and inspired by the teenagers who spoke out so forcefully and eloquently against all that is wrong with our laws and our complacent attitude toward America's gun culture ["Historic moment for high schoolers," Opinion, Feb. 27]. I was excited by their leadership and the clarity of their comments and reasoning.

I was happy to say to myself, "Let them lead, and I will