

## EDITORIAL

# LIPA bill won't save taxpayers

### Settling Northport case is best option

Last month, the State Senate passed a bill sponsored by Sen. James Gaughran that would bar the Long Island Power Authority from collecting refunds on overassessments of the Northport power plant or any other asset it claims is overassessed. The Assembly version of the bill, sponsored by Steve Stern, is sitting in committee.

The legislation is clearly unconstitutional because it would deprive ratepayers and utilities of all contract, property and procedural guarantees under state and federal law to prevent overtaxation. It's dangerous because it would allow municipal assessors — LIPA deals with 13 assessing jurisdictions — to put any value they want on properties without fear of legal challenges seeking repayment.

The legislation also is counterproductive to the goal of those trying to stymie the revaluation of the Northport plant.

If it passes, National Grid, the owner of the three generating plants where LIPA is challenging tax assessments, would likely look to shut them down when its power-supply agreement with LIPA ends in eight years. There is no guarantee these warhorse plants will be needed in the future. Offshore wind, as well as other off-Island power supplies, are coming online.

If the plants became obsolete, their property values would plummet. Reducing assessments on the National Grid plants would make upgrading them more attractive, and mean continued local tax revenue.

A similar legal strategy to force continued oversized taxation on a LIPA plant failed famously once before.

In the 1986 law that created LIPA so it could acquire the bulk of the Long Island Lighting Co. was a clause dealing with the Shoreham nuclear power plant. Its intent was to strip LILCO of the right to seek a refund of excessive property taxes the utility paid to Suffolk County, the Town of Brookhaven and the Shoreham-Wading River school district.

LILCO challenged the law, suing to recover its tax overpayments. LIPA inherited those suits in the takeover and won a ruling from the state Court of Appeals that said it was owed \$1.4 billion in past overpayments. LIPA agreed to take \$620 million. Suffolk residents are repaying the money through a surcharge on their power bills — through 2028. Not a good track record. Any residents in the Town of Huntington or the Northport-East Northport school district blinded by the false promise that a new law will save them should think again.

The desire of lawmakers to respond to pressure for a favorable solution is understandable. But if that's the goal, their best option is to persuade Huntington leaders to accept the fair deal LIPA has on the table. It would cut tax payments on the plant by 50 percent and spread that reduction, and resulting tax increases, gradually over eight years. That settlement also would set the table for LIPA to keep buying power generated at the National Grid plants. The judge in the Huntington case, set to reconvene the trial in July, is unlikely to issue a ruling as favorable as LIPA's offer. And as history with Long Island's dominant power provider has shown, an unconstitutional law might curry political favor, but it won't help those communities recover once a devastating judgment is delivered.

— Editorial board



NEWSDAY / JOHN PARASKEVAS

LIPA is challenging the taxes levied by Huntington on the Northport plant.

## MATT DAVIES



NEWSDAY/MATT DAVIES

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## LETTERS

### At times, referees do make mistakes

No player, coach or fan should abuse an official ["LI sports officials driven out by verbal abuse," News, May 28].

Having said that, I'm confused about why coaches in a competitive environment such as high school sports are expected to not question an official when he or she obviously has made a wrong call. This is not abuse. As a matter of fact, coaches are doing their jobs by sticking up for their players.

Most coaches spend 2 to 2.5 hours a day, six days a week, with their players during the season, and many hours out of season. For most coaches, the pay is nowhere close to equitable for the time they spend on their teams. We do it because we love coaching, and we love our players. We give

our hearts to both.

When an official makes a bad call, I'm not going to clap my hands and say, "OK, you'll get it right the next time." Abuse should never be tolerated, but questioning calls is not abuse.

Officials at high school games are not volunteers. They've accepted a job — a job that does not warrant abuse, but a job that at times deserves criticism. If you expect not to be criticized, then being a high school official — or coach, for that matter — is probably not a job you should take.

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**Editor's note:** The writer is the former boys varsity basketball coach for East Meadow High School.

One of the main reasons fans cross the line and abuse officials and coaches is because there are rarely any

consequences.

When I was an assistant coach of a soccer team for 13-year-olds, the dad of a very talented player (a very nice guy outside of game time), was particularly annoying one day.

The coach pulled his son out of the game, had him walk around the field to the fan section and tell his dad, "Coach told me to tell you, if you yell or instruct me at all during the game, he will not let me play."

That parent never was unruly again.

All youth players are supposed to display sportsmanship. Along with various permission forms parents sign, I suggest a "fan's code of conduct." Along with guidelines for obvious behaviors, the code should say, "If the parent or relative of any player violates these rules, the player is subject removal from the game."