

EDITORIAL

Clergy tax break can be reformed

For more than a century, New York has provided a \$1,500 property-tax exemption for clergy that is of moderate value in most of the state. But in Nassau County, the value of the exemption has grown so tremendously that in many cases, it places an unfair burden on other property owners in school districts and villages. That's because Nassau has a unique and confusing assessment ratio of 0.10 percent, meaning a \$1.5 million home has a taxable value of \$1,500. If a clergy member owns a \$1.5 million property in Nassau, the entire value is exempt.

The \$1,500 exemption from school and municipal taxes in most of the state is not much now, and it was not a fortune when it was passed. Adjusted for inflation since 1896, \$1,500 would be worth about \$45,000 today.

But thanks to the ever peculiar Nassau County assessment system, the exemption for clergy-owned residences last year excused them of \$11.6 million in school and municipal taxes. That means all the other taxpayers pick up their share, and in communities where high densities of clergy reside, the extra burden on others can be significant.

Religious leaders often toil to help others, and most earn modest incomes. Our society often has used its tax code to determine social policy. A small and partial tax break in an expensive community is warranted. But wealthy religious leaders should not get tax breaks on luxurious homes, and no homeowners should be excused from their taxes entirely.

Nassau County is required to keep its assessment ratio at 0.10 percent for the next five years while it undoes another mess, the unfair tax shift created by freezing its tax roll for seven years. But once that fix is complete, the county and state should pass laws to allow Nassau to assess property at full market value. That would solve the problem of the clergy exemption and clear up a lot of confusion, too.

— *The editorial board*

Lawmakers shouldn't duck vaccine vote

Let's start with some facts.

There have been 867 cases of the measles reported in New York State since the outbreak began last fall. So most of the 981 cases nationally that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Monday are in our region.

Here are two more facts: The measles vaccine is safe and effective. And no major religion opposes vaccination. So, New York elected officials shouldn't have to think twice before passing bills to require vaccination for all children in school and day care, except for those who medically cannot be immunized.

Yet, lawmakers still cannot agree to end the state's religious exemption for vaccination — even amid the health crisis, and even though many people abuse the exemption. Many lawmakers are getting hundreds of calls from people who oppose vaccination. But what about babies, and children whose immune systems are compromised, who cannot be vaccinated? They shouldn't have to tie up a lawmaker's phone line to get attention.

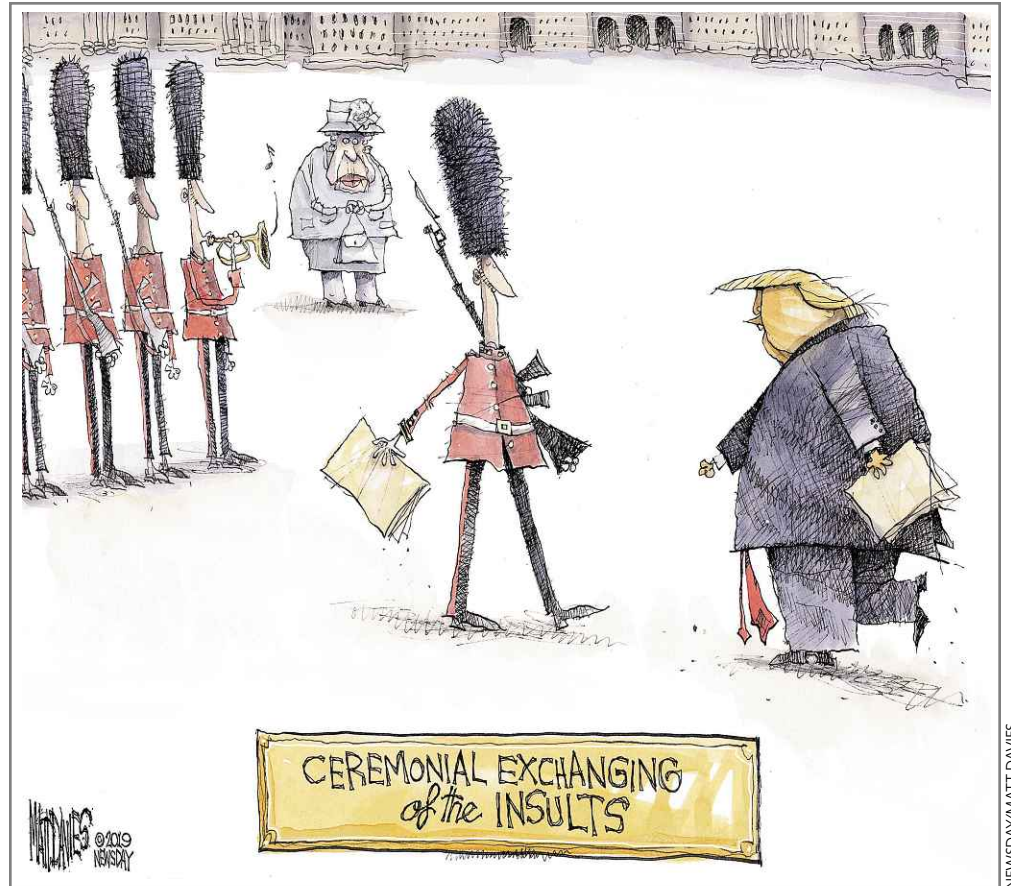
There is still uncertainty about whether the State Assembly's health committee will pass the bill. Assemb. Michaelle Solages told the editorial board on Monday that she will vote to end the exemption. She must follow through, and other legislators should make the same promise.

Nevertheless, the outcry and vitriol are leading some lawmakers to hope to avoid voting at all. State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins claims to have the votes to pass the bill. Perhaps the Senate should vote, which could encourage the Assembly to follow suit and for Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo to take a stronger stance.

Hiding from this problem won't solve it. For the sake of public health, our lawmakers' disappointing silence must end.

— *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



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LETTERS

Birth records bill could help find sons

Adoptees in New York State are forbidden access to their birth certificates unless they have a court order. Passage of legislation sponsored by Assemb. David Weprin of Queens would allow adoptees to obtain their certificates and learn the identities of their biological parents ["New York adoptees deserve equality," Opinion, June 3]. This is important for adoptees and biological parents who seek to meet.

I am one of those biological parents who seeks to meet my children. In 1975, while I was in the Navy, my children were adopted after my wife had left us. I had no means to support them and no family or friends who could help us. I'm going to be 70 this year and would like to make contact before I pass away.

I would like to tell my sons, Tommy and Bobby, who will be 50 and 49 years old, respectively, that I still love and think of them. I would like to tell them it was not their fault they were adopted, and to share our family history.

Frederick R. Bedell Jr.,
Glen Oaks

Cop Shop owners are community-minded

Susan and Salvatore Piccolo, owners of The Cop Shop in Massapequa, exemplify integrity, giving and humanitarianism ["LI Cop Shop faces NYPD suit," News, May 31].

They are pillars of the community and longterm members of the Massapequa Lions Club service organization. When the American South had a bad hurricane season in recent years, the Piccolos opened up the parking lot of

their store as a staging area to collect food, cleaning products, clothing, etc., for people in need. As president of the Wantagh Lions Club, I am proud to be associated with Sue and Sal Piccolo.

Larry Lamendola,
Wantagh

Concern for toxins in our groundwater

I am writing to express concern about the potentially harmful environmental and public health impacts from the toxic chemical 1,4-dioxane ["What's in LI water? A lot," News, June 3].

Tests commissioned by the Citizens Campaign for the Environment advocacy group, of which I am a member, found the toxin in 65 of 80 household products. It is scary to think that this probable carcinogen exists in the everyday products I use, including laundry detergent,