

EDITORIALS

The pain of 9/11 is inflicted anew

Stop a moment and remember Chief of Fire Prevention Ronald R. Spadafora, who last week became the 178th FDNY member to die of a World Trade Center-related illness.

A one-time Levittown resident, Spadafora, 63, was by all accounts an exemplary firefighter who in a 40-year career provided leadership in the worst of times — from hurricanes to the many, many fires in every borough that are routine in his line of work.

But one of those crowning moments of service came after the tragedies of Sept. 11, 2001, when Spadafora supervised rescue and recovery efforts at Ground Zero. He was described as a "constant fixture" there at the time. In 2013, when parts from one of the doomed planes were found near the site, investigators searched again for human remains. "It's been 11 years," Spadafora said then, "and it tears away at you."

The experience tore away at Spadafora and other emergency workers who developed life-threatening illnesses working among that hazardous material. We are now more than 16 years past the attack on the World Trade Center, but it is chilling to continue to see the toll of that awful day.

There are no good estimates of how many NYPD and FDNY and other emergency personnel will die prematurely because of their work at Ground Zero, but surely there will be a 179th firefighter, and a 159th NYPD member, and possibly hundreds more. Thousands of responders have been diagnosed with 9/11-related cancers as certified by the Zadroga Act, the 2010 legislation that created the World Trade Center Health Program. In 2015, advocates had to beg in Congress for its renewal. The related Victim Compensation Fund is up for renewal in 2020. The programs are the least that can be done.

For now and in the future, remember those like Spadafora, yet another victim of Sept. 11. — *The editorial board*

MTA should demolish construction red tape

Imagine doing a major home renovation without delegating one person to be in charge, without obtaining detailed cost estimates or without your pick of many different contractors.

For decades, that's the scenario Metropolitan Transportation Authority capital projects have faced. The bigger the scale, the worse it gets. When the MTA wants to change a design or faces an unexpected glitch, 40 steps are required. Until those hurdles are cleared, workers keep doing the job the old way, only to have to tear it up and redo it the new way. This is why projects like the East Side Access effort to connect the Long Island Rail Road to Grand Central Terminal have experienced years of delays and cost overruns, going from a \$4.3 billion cost and an end date of 2009, to \$11 billion with an opening in 2022.

MTA board member Scott Rechler, a developer, has proposed reforms to add some common sense to this expensive madness. Rechler suggests appointing a chief executive for each project (accountability); streamlining the "change order" process (efficiency); making contracts more uniform across the MTA (standardization); easing requirements to widen the field of bidders (competition); and reducing the need to customize parts and equipment (cost reduction).

As MTA chairman Joe Lhota said last week, remaking the MTA also requires a culture change, one that could eliminate the bureaucratic morass, and reward speed and flexibility. The agency also will have to work with the unions to reform work rules that could impede these changes.

If the MTA completes a gut renovation of its own house, it might be able to get work done on its tracks and stations, under budget and on time. — *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



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LETTERS

Plastic straws are a worthy target

I disagree with Opinion-page writer Adam Minter that plastic-straw bans are not useful ["Plastic-straw bans won't do much, Opinion, June 12"].

Of course we need to deal with discarded fishing gear, as he suggests, but that's not something anyone can do every day. Anyone can stop using plastic straws. They are generally used once and then thrown away. They are too small for curbside recycling, and no one can tell which kind of plastic they are made from. Even if they don't end up in our oceans, they end up in landfills or incinerators. In some ways, they are the low-hanging fruit in addressing the huge problem of single-use plastic.

Children can pledge to stop using plastic straws.

The Earth Ranger trainees at an elementary school in Wyandanch recently held a one-week No Straw Challenge at their school. These fourth-graders are quite serious. They intend to take this issue to the wider community next year and make the No Straw Challenge an annual event. This is something they can do to address one of our world's problems. Their actions and choices are important. We should applaud these awesome kids!

Laurie Farber,
Wyandanch

Editor's note: Laurie Farber is an Earth Rangers trainer with the nonprofit organization Starflower Experiences in Wyandanch.

Don't compare with the Holocaust

Once again, the media are conflating issues — using the Holocaust as a

benchmark to force a false narrative ["Remember how the Nazis normalized evil," Opinion, June 19].

Let's us be clear. The Holocaust was a concerted effort to kill every Jewish person on Earth by gassing, shooting or working them to death — in addition to the Nazis' heinous methods and experiments.

To compare the current immigration policy with the Nazi regime marginalizes the tens of millions who died in World War II, including 6 million Jews in the Holocaust. No one from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is killing immigrants here illegally. Stop the comparison. It is insensitive and ignorant.

Lawrence Harkavy,
St. James

Editor's note: The writer's mother survived the concentration camp at Auschwitz.