

EDITORIALS

Mercury vapor an alarm for all

The fact that three Long Island school districts have discovered mercury vapor emanating from synthetic flooring in some buildings should be an alarm — alerting other districts to investigate their facilities, and for state officials to set appropriate exposure limits.

Mercury is highly toxic. It affects the nervous system and the brain, especially in children. In a pregnant woman, it can be transmitted to a fetus. Since it is heavier than air, mercury vapor tends to settle near the floor, and accumulates in rooms with no air conditioning or other ventilation. All of that is troubling since this kind of rubberized flooring, installed from the 1960s to the 1990s, was typically put in gymnasiums.

Long Island isn't alone in confronting this problem. Mercury vapor from synthetic floors has been found in schools in New Jersey, Minnesota, Colorado, South Carolina, Ohio, Oregon and Arizona. Generally, levels of mercury vapor in those states and in schools in Amityville, Merrick and Miller Place have been below exposure guidelines. But that only reveals another problem — the patchwork of standards set by different arms of the federal government and various states.

New York must set a limit for schools that works for kids, who are more vulnerable, and for teachers, whose exposure is greater. Legislation from State Sen. Todd Kaminsky (D-Long Beach) would set the number at 0.75 micrograms per cubic meter, the same standard used in Minnesota for yearlong exposure for gym teachers and students. It's a good starting point for discussion and hearings. State officials also should offer practical guidance to districts dealing with mercury vapor, including advice to check whether concrete underneath the synthetic flooring is saturated with mercury.

Mercury is a risk our kids cannot afford to take. — *The editorial board*

Styrofoam ban signals a welcome concern

Congratulations to the Nassau County Legislature for banning Styrofoam. Impressively, the vote to stop merchants from using polystyrene products in restaurant takeout and coffee cups, among other things, was unanimous — 19-0. It's not often that the county's lawmakers take such an undivided stand on strong environmental action.

That unexpected boldness is not diminished by acknowledging that Nassau was following in the wake of others. Neighbors Suffolk County and New York City, as well as Albany County and more than 100 municipalities around the country, also have banned Styrofoam. In fact, it would be reasonable to wonder why New York State lawmakers aren't acting on Styrofoam as well — given that Maine has passed a ban, Maryland lawmakers have sent a similar bill to their state's governor for his signature, and other measures to banish Styrofoam are moving through the state legislatures in Connecticut, New Jersey and Hawaii, among others.

Now that Nassau has embraced environmental religion on this issue, perhaps lawmakers can sustain their passion long enough to vote to place a fee on paper bags. That would pair well with the statewide ban on single-use plastic bags adopted in the state budget, in that the two steps together have produced the best results in getting customers to stop using disposable bags and switch to reusable ones.

GOP Legis. Laura Schaefer said the Styrofoam ban is a "wonderful thing to do for our environment." There are lots of other things lawmakers can do, too. And the more they do, the better they — and Nassau's environment — will feel.

— *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



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LETTERS

Two sides of the 45th president

Democrats are unmerciful. The Mueller report found no collusion with the Russians, so now Democrats in Congress want President Donald Trump's tax returns, and Democrats in Albany pass a bill to allow state charges against a U.S. president and associates who are accused of federal crimes and receive presidential pardons ["State action targets presidential pardons," *News*, May 22].

How about questioning whom Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo pardons?

I feel that Democrats are acting like a bunch of sore losers after the 2016 election. Stop, already, and let the president do his job.

*Virginia Schnappauf,
Ridge*

President Donald Trump calls himself "the most trans-

parent president probably in the history of this country," but he has a funny way of showing this.

He paid \$160,000 to keep Stormy Daniels quiet. He would not speak to Robert Mueller (the take-home test doesn't count). He removed the White House guest book from public view. He doesn't like people taking notes in meetings with him. He has meetings without the White House stenographer recording them. He has cut back on media briefings, which had been the primary means of relaying what the president does on a daily basis. He sometimes won't speak to media he believes are liberal.

He denied public access to his tax returns on the basis that he was under audit, though that is not a barrier to releasing them.

Can you imagine if he were a secretive man? He would be like the Wizard of

Oz hiding behind a curtain. And the voice we would hear would probably belong to Trump adviser Stephen Miller.

*Robert Broder,
Stony Brook*

Democrats have not been able to summon the courage to effectively oppose and hold President Donald Trump accountable for his egregious grabs for power.

His offending conduct, however, transcends the political and, to the extent that it poses an existential threat to our nation and its fundamental institutions and conventions, it spills over into the realm of morality. Morality is the bailiwick of our religious institutions. Their leaders of all stripes have been shamefully silent in the face of the Trump onslaught. They need to aggressively voice their opposition in the media.