

## EDITORIAL

# Minor party, major problems

Conservative leader must be reined in

The disputed election that allowed Frank Tinari to continue as chairman of the Suffolk County Conservative Party was overturned last week by a state judge who ordered a new vote.

In a sane world, the behind-the-scenes antics of a political party that enrolls just over 2 percent of the county's voters would be very small news indeed. But in the realm of Suffolk politics, the endless manipulations of minor parties and the county's Democratic Party are central to how patronage is divvied up, voters are disenfranchised and power is retained.

Last week, State Supreme Court Justice David Reilly sought to put an end to this nonsense. He wisely threw out Tinari's September re-election as party chairman, noting in his decision that the election "devolved into a shouting match with no rule of order firmly established." Both the 2016 and 2018 party elections were deeply flawed. One consequence: a party not led by Tinari might not have made a megadeal involving cross-endorsements on eight judges now sitting pretty on the bench.

The meeting was held at the Hauppauge union hall of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and attended by participants who had no business being there, including county PBA President Noel DiGerolamo and other police union officials who came out to support Tinari at the behest of Rich Schaffer, the Democratic Party chair.

Tinari's opponent in both elections, Brookhaven Conservative leader Kenneth Auerbach, was supported by County GOP chairman John Jay LaValle, who wants to break up the Democratic-Conservative cabal.

Auerbach won in court because Tinari allowed motions and the final vote to be decided by a voice vote. Party rules, however, require each vote cast to be weighted based on State Assembly district turnout in the previous gubernatorial election, which requires a roll-call vote to make the calculation.

Even worse, at the outset of the meeting, Tinari filled vacant committee spots by allowing all those present to vote regardless of eligibility. This is par for the course. Similar misconduct in filling vacancies in 2016 resulted in an appellate court ruling that temporarily invalidated Tinari's win over Auerbach.

This minor-party madness matters to Suffolk voters because the philosophically untenable but politically profitable alliance between Conservative and Democratic leaders has allowed both parties to manipulate elections. That's because New York is one of just four states that allows candidates to appear on multiple parties' ballot lines, a form of fusion voting. It's an easily corrupted system that shrinks the choices of voters. Six years ago, Suffolk's district attorney, treasurer and sheriff all ran unopposed on the major and minor party lines.

"Stop the deals . . . stop rigging every race," we wrote then. In this legislative session, Albany lawmakers should outlaw fusion voting.

But in the meantime, Reilly has ordered all sides to appear at a March 15 conference to determine a procedure for holding a new election and the selection of a monitor to oversee the process. That monitor needs to exercise an iron hand, and make a video record of the proceeding to assure that leadership of the Suffolk County Conservative Party is chosen fairly by party members and not hijacked by political operators for their nefarious ends.

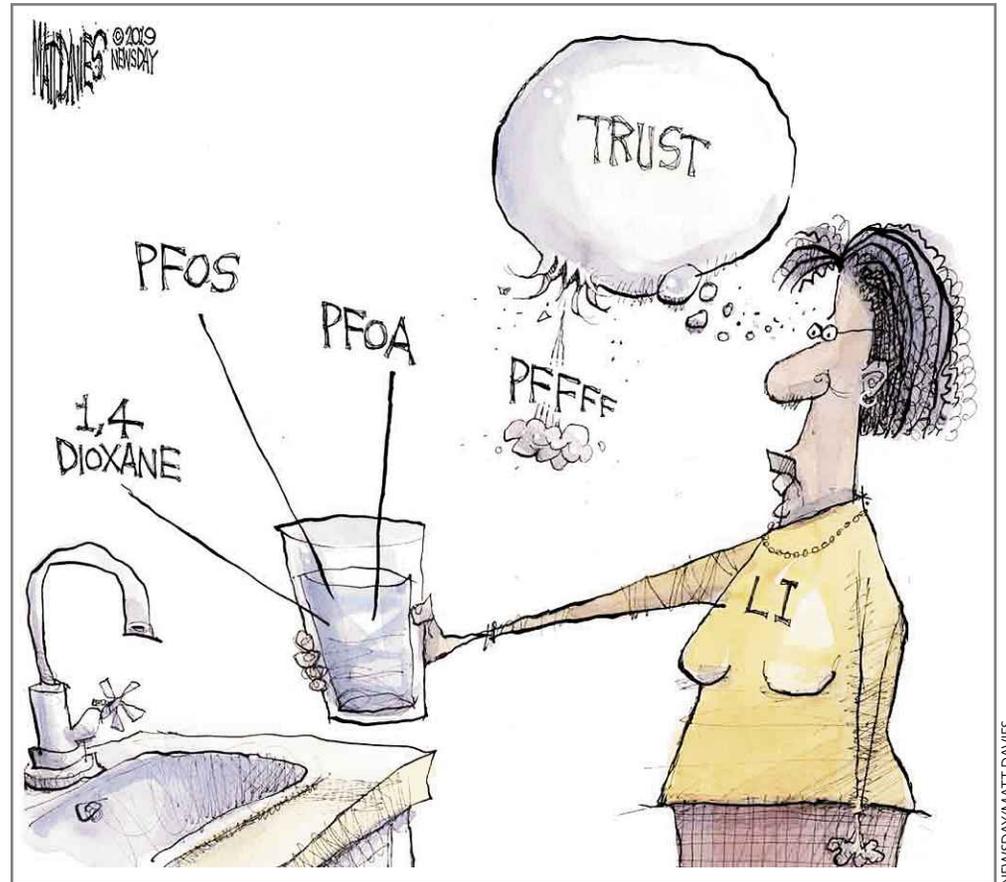
— *The editorial board*



ED BETZ

**A judge last week overturned Frank Tinari's election as Suffolk County Conservative Party chairman.**

## MATT DAVIES



NEWSDAY/MATT DAVIES

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## LETTERS

# Views on rail crash and crossings

Eliminating street-level train crossings is a long-term, expensive endeavor. A simple short-term, inexpensive way to cut down on horrific crashes like the one on Feb. 26 is to replace flimsy gates with more sturdy ones and replace the two short gates with long ones ["Fatal collision," News, Feb. 27].

Carla Wanzer,  
West Hempstead

It isn't every day that I compliment the Long Island Rail Road, but I must say the workers did an outstanding job of getting service restored on the Main Line after the fatal collision on Feb. 26. I was amazed to see that the westbound platform of the Westbury station was back in operation with trains running the

afternoon of Feb. 28 after such a horrific accident and tremendous damage. Congratulations on a great job.

Harold Rinder,  
Plainview

Often we read news of the day with less than positive reactions.

But then we read the moving article by Craig Schneider ["Priority 1: get trains moving," News, March 2] about the men who worked in sub-freezing weather to repair the LIRR disaster in Westbury. It was written with compassion about unsung heroes of our community.

Thank you for bringing this to us.

Edna Ritzenberg,  
Woodmere

Just read "Focus on safety at crossings" [News, March 3]. Once again, tragic loss of life somehow once again is labeled an accident. Why the shock? Why the anger at the LIRR?

This was no accident. An accident at a train crossing is when the car or truck's engine fails and leaves the vehicle stranded on the railway. An accident is when you wait patiently at the crossing and get hit from behind by a distracted driver and your car is pushed onto the tracks.

Here we have a situation where the driver of the obliterated car was foolish enough to think he is not subject to the laws of the road, nor the laws of physics. Not only did he make his first mistake by apparently trying to evade responsibility in a hit and run,