

Seeking tax breaks

Lawmakers urge restoration of SALT deductions

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Long Island Reps. Peter King and Thomas Suozzi have introduced bipartisan legislation that would retroactively restore the full State and Local Tax deduction that was capped as part of the GOP's 2017 tax reform measure.

The King-Suozzi bill, introduced Friday on the second day of the 116th Congress, would repeal the \$10,000 cap on SALT deductions, which the two lawmakers called "unfair" to Long Islanders who pay disproportionately higher property taxes than other parts of the country.

"The elimination of the state and local tax deduction is a punch in the gut to Long Islanders," Suozzi (D-Glen Cove) said at a news conference Monday outside the home of Farmingdale Deputy Mayor William Barrett. "It's unfair to everyone on Long Island."

King (R-Seaford) charged that New Yorkers already get "short changed" by the federal government, getting 79 cents back from



Farmingdale Mayor Ralph Ekstrand is flanked by Rep. Tom Suozzi, left, and Rep. Peter King.

Washington for every dollar they pay in taxes — or a shortfall of \$48 billion annually. He called the SALT cap a "disgrace" and unfair to residents who purchased homes on Long Island expecting to utilize the deductions.

"We are subsidizing the rest of the country," King said. "This deduction is one of the few breaks that New York does get to partially offset what we

provide other states."

King's 2nd District and Suozzi's 3rd District are among the top 25 nationwide for state and local tax deduction claims, according to data from the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center, a nonpartisan think tank in Washington, D.C.

More than 250,000 families, or 43 percent of households in Suozzi's district, which covers

most of Long Island's North Shore and parts of Queens, claim the state and local tax deduction at an average rate of \$18,300, staffers said. More than 207,000 households, or nearly 48 percent of residents in King's district, which straddles Nassau and Suffolk counties, claim a SALT deduction of just over \$20,000, officials said.

Both King and Suozzi voted

against the \$1.5 trillion tax package, which narrowly passed the House and Senate in December 2017. The law provides tax breaks for corporations and most middle-class families, but limits deductibility of state and local income and property taxes to \$10,000 on federal tax returns.

On Long Island, where residents pay among the highest property taxes in the nation, roughly 530,000 homeowners, or 36 percent of all tax filers in Nassau and Suffolk, are affected by the cap. The average SALT burden is higher than \$10,000 in 52 of 62 New York counties.

Kyle Strober, executive director of the Association for a Better Long Island, which represents real estate developers, said he is holding off purchasing a home with his wife because of the cap on SALT deductions.

"The loss of SALT would be devastating to our economy here, particularly because strong communities are built on homeownership," Strober said.

The King-Suozzi bill must first clear a vote in the Democrat-controlled House Ways and Means Committee before it heads to the floor for a full House vote.

Push for legal pot spurs driving safety fears

BY ALFONSO A. CASTILLO
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Lawmakers and law enforcement officials from throughout New York State raised concerns on Monday about the ability to go after drivers under the influence of legalized marijuana.

Officials, during a roundtable discussion, considered the impacts on road safety from the potential legalization of recreational marijuana in New York. The discussion, at Molloy College in Rockville Centre, was organized to educate legislators on some of the legal and logistical challenges ahead — if Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo is successful in his push to legalize marijuana.

The event, hosted by State



State Sen. Todd Kaminsky

Sen. Todd Kaminsky (D-Long Beach), included comments from Oregon Assistant Attorney General Deena Ryerson who said fatal car accidents involving a driver under the influence of drugs far outnumber those involving a drunken driver.

Ryerson and other law enforcement experts recommended against setting a threshold for the amount of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in a person's system who is operating a motor vehicle because of the variables. The kind of marijuana used, how much of it was used, and how recently it was used can make all the difference, they said.

In the absence of reliable technology to easily detect the marijuana in drivers, prosecutors urged the state to commit more funding to certify police as "drug recognition experts," who are trained to recognize the intoxicating effects of pot.

"We really need to just prove that the person is impaired, and there's never going to be a num-

ber that just correlates to impairment on the toxicology side," Ryerson said.

Echoing the point, Nassau Assistant District Attorney Maureen McCormick noted that under Colorado law a person has to have 5 nanograms of THC in their blood to be prosecuted for driving under the influence.

Nassau would not have been able to prosecute Joseph Beer, who pleaded guilty to driving under the influence of marijuana and aggravated vehicular homicide in the 2012 Southern State Parkway crash that killed four of his passengers.

Kaminsky called it a "very important and, frankly, alarming discussion" and said lawmakers and prosecutors should continue working together to make

sure any legalization bill considers the potential impact on roadway safety.

"Other states have legalized already. They've seen the fatalities on their roads and all the negative consequence that came from it," Kaminsky said after the meeting. "We can learn from them and try to do it right."

Landon Dais, national director of Partnerships at MedMen, a California-based cannabis company, encouraged lawmakers to work alongside industry leaders to achieve their goals.

"We can say, 'OK, we're not going to legalize it.' That's not going to stop the use of marijuana," Dais said. "The reality is we have this usage of marijuana. The question is how can we make it safer?"