

EDITORIAL

State needs gov to deliver on bags

Cuomo right about need for action

Last February, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo called plastic bags littering our streets and waterways a "statewide challenge." At the time, he blocked a New York City law that would have instituted a 5-cent fee on plastic bags. Instead, he established a task force to come up with a statewide solution.

"This task force will be different than usual as this matter requires expeditious action," Cuomo promised in a statement that day. A month later, Cuomo established the New York State Plastic Bag Task Force. Its mission was clear.

"The working group will be charged with developing a report and proposed legislation to address the detrimental impact of plastic bags on the state's environment," a news release said. "Members of the task force will work to develop a uniform and equitable statewide plan to address New York's plastic bag problem."

Earlier this month, during a holiday weekend, that task force quietly released an 86-page report. It listed eight wide-ranging options that covered nearly any possible solution, from maintaining existing policies to adding a fee to banning the bags. But the task force did not make any recommendations. It did not establish "a uniform and equitable statewide plan," and it did not propose any legislation. Since the task force released its findings, Cuomo has said virtually nothing about plastic bags. So much for a task force that would be "different than usual."



BRANDEE DADDONA

A shopper in Riverhead in 2016.

This year, Suffolk County instituted a 5-cent fee for plastic and paper bags at retail stores. But much of the rest of the state has done nothing. The City of Long Beach, and towns and villages on the South Fork are among a few exceptions.

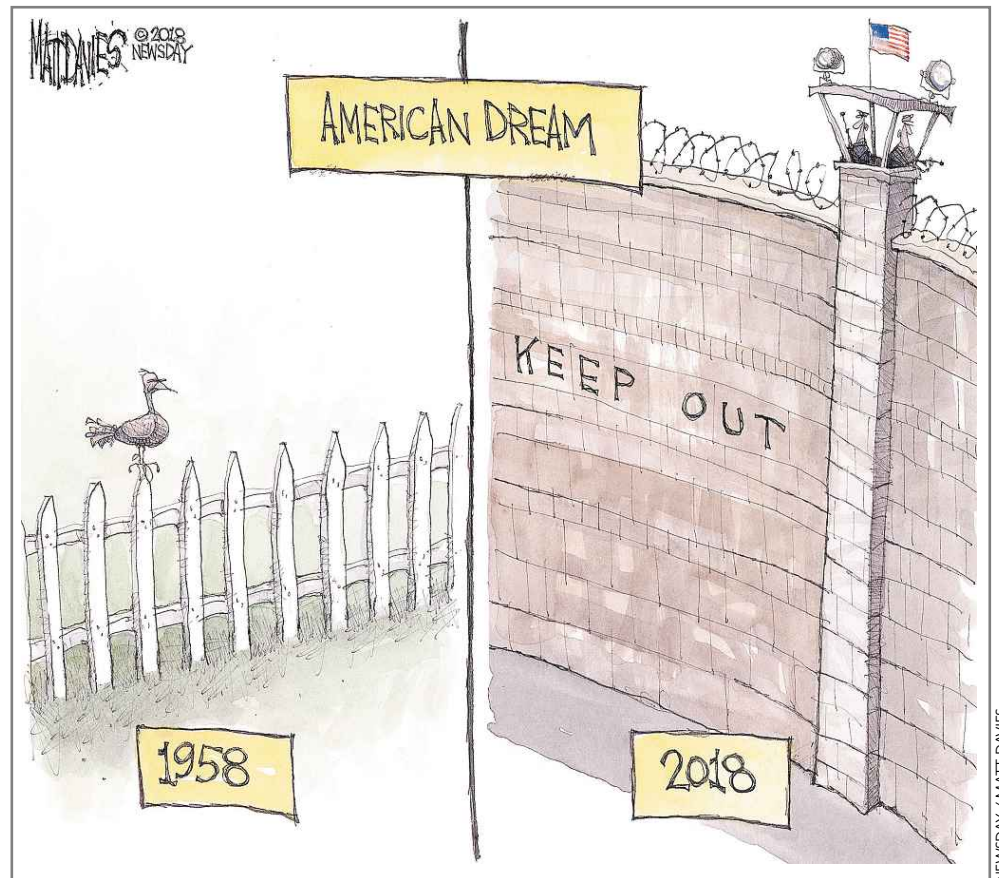
In 2016, the New York City Council tried to do the right thing by passing a 5-cent fee. It could have changed city residents' behavior, reduced waste, and protected birds and fish. When the State Legislature and Cuomo stopped it, they said a statewide policy would be better. Now, a year and a half later, the city is exactly where it started. In that time, countless plastic bags have clogged storm drains and waterways, gotten stuck in trees, and piled up in our landfills. We have a meaningless task force report, and silence from the governor.

State Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan also has failed to take the lead. Last week, he told a business group that the New York City plan he helped kill was "idiotic" because the nickel bag fee would go to retailers. But he doesn't support a law that would allow them to direct that money to the environment or an outright ban.

Regardless, the governor's staff said he plans to come up with a statewide solution "as early as this session." Clearly, this solution won't be easy. Cuomo has to draft a tough New York law and use all his muscle to corral legislative support for it.

This is, after all, a "statewide challenge." — *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



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LETTERS

Deeper reasons for Hempstead's woes

The Hempstead school board's power wrangling, stretching back years, is symptomatic of the giant elephant in Hempstead's room: decades of overloading one district with needy students ["Problems have NY's attention," News, Jan. 21].

Nassau County is 71 percent white, yet Hempstead High School is 63 percent Hispanic and 35 percent black. Hempstead's public school students disproportionately qualify for free or reduced lunch.

This racial and socioeconomic concentration is not happenstance. Our village has absorbed burdensome quantities of low-income housing units for decades. Needy people with no roots in Hempstead get steered here, and their children have no choice but to attend long-overcrowded schools.

Impose so high a proportion of struggling families, and problems inevitably arise, with competition for control among the village's groups. These groups end up crammed into one district because of the NIMBY treatment they have gotten for decades from predominantly white districts.

Middle- and higher-income Hempstead residents of all races choose to educate their children privately, increasing socioeconomic disproportion in the public schools.

When will New York State stop focusing only on school boards, and instead reconfigure our balkanized school districts? School board accountability is desperately needed, but we need common-sense regional support even more.

*Reine Bethany,
Hempstead Village*
Editor's note: The writer is the Hempstead Village historian.

Musings on the troubles of the LIRR

As a frequent commuter on the Long Island Rail Road, I heartily agree with your Jan. 21 editorial, "The LIRR is off the rails."

Immediate action and a change in leadership are needed to fix the rapidly expanding problems of the LIRR.

However, I would like to point out that no candidate was nominated, and that I might have a solution that would effectively solve all of the issues raised by the editorial board while requiring no additional funds from Albany.

The LIRR should be merged into the New York City Housing Authority.

Timetables would become perfectly accurate, because all trains would become permanently stationary. Overcrowding would be overcome because the cars would be