

EDITORIALS

Tax question turns septic

It's bad whenever politics trumps policy. But the ongoing debacle over tax bills related to Suffolk County's program to help homeowners install nitrogen-reducing septic systems is particularly ugly.

This one is on Republican County Comptroller John Kennedy, who rarely misses an opportunity to politicize an issue involving Democratic County Executive Steve Bellone. It's no coincidence that Kennedy is challenging Bellone in November's election. If this spat is an indication of where the campaign is headed, it will be brutal.

Kennedy mailed IRS 1099 forms to homeowners who upgraded their septic systems to indicate the county grants that made the pricey upgrades possible are considered income, raising homeowners' taxes and pushing some into higher tax brackets. But the grants were given directly to contractors who installed the systems, and they are paying taxes on the grants. Suffolk officials told homeowners they would face no tax consequences, but Kennedy told Newsday that their position is "flawed."

We've chided Bellone's administration at times for failing to respect process, but this does not seem to be such an occasion. A legal opinion from the county's tax firm cited two prior IRS cases, and officials also contacted other municipalities with similar programs, like the state of Maryland, none of which send 1099s to homeowners. Some homeowners who researched the topic on their own came to the same conclusion. East End homeowners who took advantage of rebate programs offered by East Hampton, Shelter Island and Southampton towns legitimately received 1099 forms because the rebate checks went to them.

Kennedy says he plans to seek an opinion from the IRS on who should receive the tax forms. He should have done that before sending them out, not after. Instead of acting as a concerned public official, Kennedy functioned as a political opportunist seeking to score points at the expense of the very people he is supposed to serve. That's disappointing but, alas, not surprising.

— *The editorial board*

NYS overdue in returning armory to Freeport

Transferring a former New York State armory in Freeport to the village should be a top priority of state lawmakers.

The 3-acre site had been a pawn in local politics as the village's former Assembly representative tried repeatedly to sell it for \$1 to a church run by a politically friendly pastor. The decision of what happens to the property is for Freeport residents to decide.

Freeport donated the site to the state in 1949. The state stopped using it in 2011. Giving it back is long overdue.

Assemb. Taylor Raynor, who now represents the area, made it a signature campaign promise, and both she and State Sen. John Brooks have introduced bills to return the property to the village. Democrats, who control both chambers of the State Legislature, however, have yet to move those bills along.

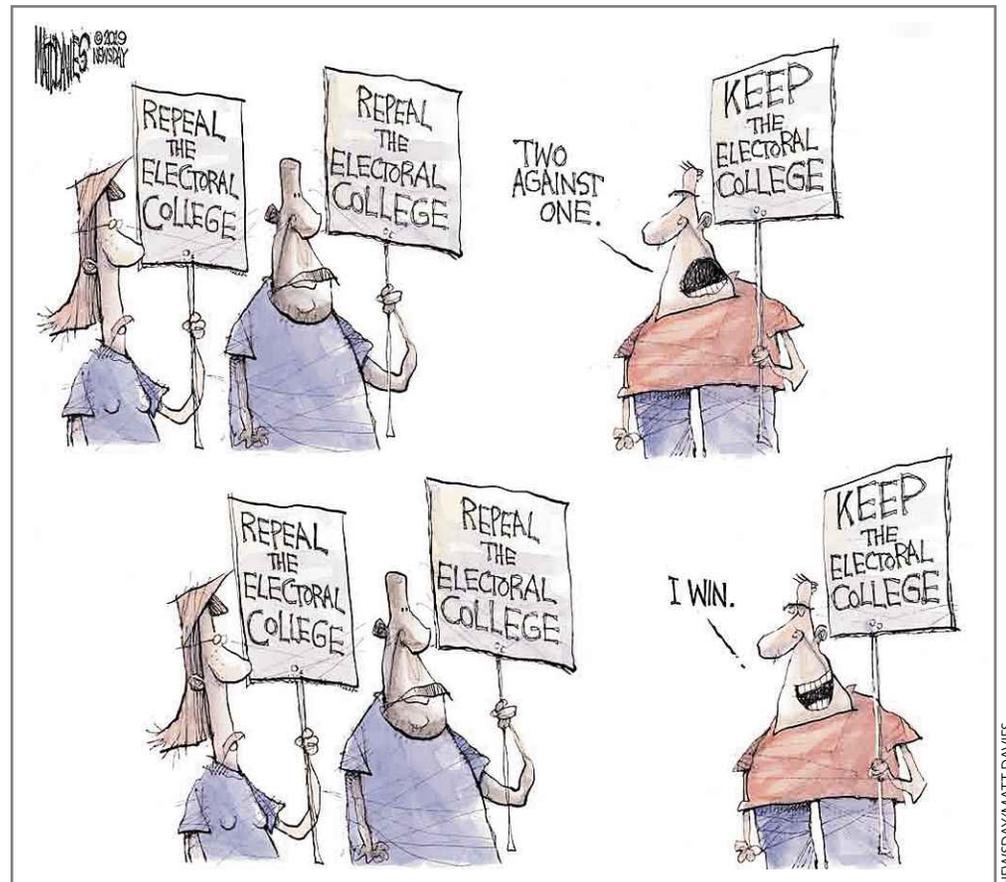
Robert Kennedy, mayor of a village where 32 percent of the property is off the tax rolls, wants to prioritize revenue. One possible plan is to move the Department of Public Works from its vulnerable waterfront location to the armory and sell the DPW real estate.

Another idea is to sell the armory on Babylon Turnpike for development and use the money to improve the DPW site, which was badly damaged in superstorm Sandy.

Evaluating the best use for the property will take time and study. That can't start until the village has the title.

— *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



■ See more Matt Davies cartoons: newsday.com/matt

LETTERS

A rail could reduce overpass crashes

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo proposes spending \$25 million to install infrared beams, bells and flashing beacons to warn drivers of trucks and buses that they're heading for bridges too low to clear ["Gov: Add to low-bridge alerts," News, Feb. 21].

This suggestion, in addition to being very expensive, could be sensitive to outdoor elements that would hurt reliability. Electric warning signs might not work any better.

Instead, install a rail across the entrance at a height equivalent to the clearance height of the overpass. The driver of a truck or bus would see the rail and realize the need to stop before the overpass. A vehicle hitting the rail would incur the cost of repairing it. Simple and cost effective.

Rick Volpe,
Melville

Ill-timed cartoon on Israel, anti-Semitism

As American Jews feel fear and pain over the anti-Semitic comments of Rep. Ilhan Omar, Newsday cartoonist Matt Davies reminded Jews that anti-Israel criticism isn't necessarily anti-Semitic. His "False alarm" cartoon [Opinion, March 8] depicted an "anti-Semitism" fire truck encountering a critic of Israel.

The thing is, Omar did make multiple anti-Semitic statements. So Davies piles on with a point not germane to the issue.

However, even if it weren't off-topic, we again see the special lowly status Jews get in the acceptable bigotry spectrum. Do people who oppose same-sex marriage get a pass for not necessarily being anti-gay? Do people who oppose affirmative action get a pass for not necessarily being racist? Of course not.

The fact is, most of the loudest critics of Israel are silent about nations that commit atrocities every day. Their unique standard for and focus on Israel is the result of anti-Semitism almost always, as is their reluctance to really have the open debate about Israel that they claim to seek.

Davies' cartoon is only theoretically true. But it is hurtful and ill-timed. And by leaving Omar out of the picture, the cartoon rubs salt in the wounds of Jewish readers.

Jake Novak,
Merrick

Chef Maroni made dining out fun again

Many on Long Island were stunned by the loss of Michael Maroni, hands down the best chef on Long Island, a man who made dining out fun again ["Michael Maroni, 57, esteemed chef,