

EDITORIALS

The party boss at the controls

There is no justification for Babylon hiring Lindsay Henry as an assistant town attorney while he faces a charge of third-degree assault in the beating of his girlfriend.

That is, unless you are Town Supervisor Rich Schaffer, you double as Democratic Party boss of Suffolk County, and hiring people you know when you want to hire them for whatever position you want to put them in is just the way you do business. Then you need no justification.

Henry's hiring is wrong. Schaffer's defense — that he is sensitive to domestic abuse issues and will fire Henry, a former Babylon councilman and Independence Party member, if he's found guilty — is what you say about someone already in your employ whom you are disciplining but not firing. To hire Henry under this cloud, after interviewing no one else, is to say you're more interested in taking care of friends than the terrible message you're sending to victims of domestic abuse.

No one has played the game more creatively than Schaffer. But resistance is rising to his dictatorial control. Voters rebelled against his shenanigans last year in Suffolk's sheriff race and rejected his first choice.

Now, Liuba Grechen Shirley — a Democrat maneuvered out of a Babylon Town Board run last year by Schaffer so his choice could run unopposed, and who now seeks to challenge Rep. Peter King in November — has written a letter to Babylon officials asking them to fire Henry.

Schaffer responded to Grechen Shirley's protest by writing a letter to Newsday (see below) in which he said, "I cannot support the conviction of someone in the court of public opinion, with congressional candidate Liuba Grechen Shirley acting as judge and jury."

No, that job belongs to Schaffer.

— *The editorial board*

Trouble for counties when fees are taxes in disguise

If a state judge's decision and logic prevail, Laura Curran might find herself with an even more difficult set of budget challenges than she anticipated when she ran for Nassau County executive.

And Suffolk County's leaders ought to be very worried, too.

In December, State Supreme Court Justice Anthony F. Marano ruled in favor of commercial property owners who sued Nassau County over fines assessed when they failed to file financial information with the county. The decision stated that because the fines were not intended to pay for assessment operations and were instead to be used "to balance the county's budget," they were unconstitutional, and were an illegal tax.

That decision would wipe out \$5.2 million in revenue for 2018. But it also cast tremendous doubt on all of Nassau's other excessive fees and fines implemented to avoid passing tax increases — and Suffolk County's, too.

Marano cited several past decisions to show government fees and fines must be used to pay for a service or oversight they're related to.

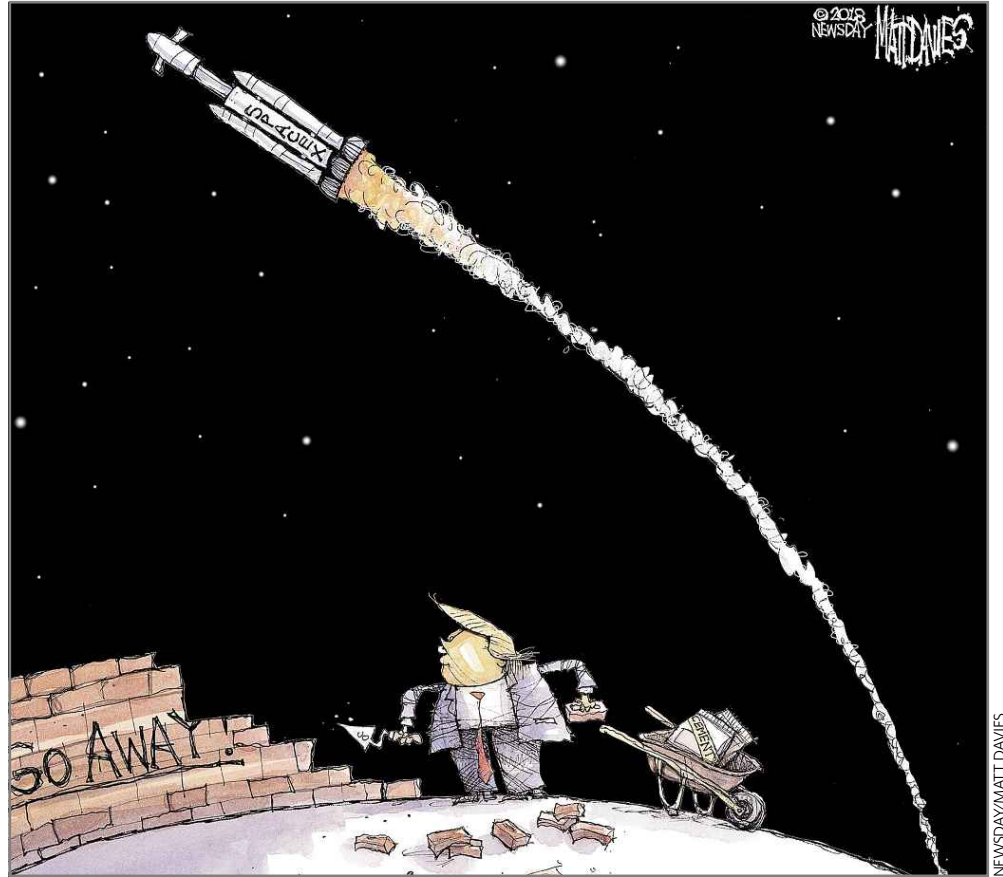
In Nassau, a \$55 traffic ticket surcharge raises tens of millions of dollars. A \$300 mortgage recording tax and a \$355 tax-map verification charge on real estate transactions help the county clerk's office, with a budget of \$6 million annually, bring in about \$45 million to the general fund. In Suffolk, thanks to the excessive fees charged on real estate transactions, the county's Real Property Tax Service Agency brings in \$66 million a year in fees on a budget of \$1.2 million.

Although Nassau County is appealing Marano's ruling, and a similar suit against Suffolk has not yet been heard, past case law is clear.

Fees and fines are to be used to pay for the services they're related to. Everything else should be paid for with taxes. No matter how politically painful it might be.

— *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



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LETTERS

Babylon official will be fired if convicted

I feel it's important to set the record straight on my position as it relates to hiring Lindsay Henry, who has been charged with beating his girlfriend, as an assistant town attorney ["Letter targets town attorney," News, Feb. 2].

I grew up in a household headed by a mother who was a raging alcoholic and who killed a 21-year-old man in a 1977 drunken-driving accident. My siblings and I suffered through years of both mental and physical abuse which, although rough, shaped me into the person I am today.

Throughout my 30-year career in government, I have supported legislation to combat domestic violence, including the creation of the Suffolk County policy that requires an ar-

rest be made following any allegation of domestic violence, as well as funding for women's advocacy groups that provide services for victims of domestic violence.

Domestic violence of any kind, when proved in court, is completely abhorrent. As women across our country are courageously speaking out against violence and harassment, it's vitally important that women who have been silenced for too long are able to have their voices heard.

However, I cannot support the conviction of someone in the court of public opinion, with congressional candidate Liuba Grechen Shirley acting as judge and jury. Our country was founded on due process, and I believe strongly that "innocent until proven guilty" is the foundation of our judicial system. If Henry is convicted, I will

personally ensure that he is terminated from town employment.

*Rich Schaffer,
Babylon*

Editor's note: The writer is Babylon Town supervisor and chairman of the Suffolk County Democratic Party.

Really? Three \$25G bonuses for cops?

I read "Copping big pay raises" [News, Feb. 1] and got to the part where for three successive years, Northport police officers will each receive a \$25,000 bonus.

I read it again and again and was still thinking I had read it wrong.

Police have very hard jobs, but how much is enough? Those who choose to be officers know what is involved. They put their lives on the line every day. I just don't understand the