



STEVEN ENGLEBRIGHT  
4<sup>th</sup> Assembly District  
Suffolk County

THE ASSEMBLY  
STATE OF NEW YORK  
ALBANY

CHAIRMAN  
Committee on Environmental Conservation

COMMITTEES  
Education  
Energy  
Higher Education  
Rules

COMMISSIONS  
Science and Technology  
Water Resource Needs of Long Island

MEMBER  
Bi-State L.I. Sound Marine Resource Committee  
N.Y.S. Biodiversity Research Institute  
N.Y.S. Heritage Area Advisory Council

July 27, 2020

Dear Presiding Officer Calarco and members of the Suffolk County Legislature,

I write to you regarding a very important choice that you will soon be making that may set back environmental policy for decades on Long Island.

When the ¼ cent drinking water protection plan referendum was passed in the late 1980s Suffolk County led the nation in progressive environmental legislation. Is tomorrow's vote a sign that we now intend to give up that mantle of leadership? I hope not, because protecting our drinking water is clearly more important than ever.

When we as an earlier group of Suffolk Legislators helped launch this major environmental initiative, it was based on the idea that the funds raised through this tax would be put in a lock box fund for clean water and open space protection. That the non-renewable resources of land and water define our quality of life was understood and, for the first time became official policy.

In the referenda that followed our legislative action we didn't ask the voters to use their tax dollars for drinking water protection--*unless we need that money for something else--that maybe we'll reveal to you later.*

Rather, the simple premise that we need to preserve Suffolk's drinking water source areas was presented to and overwhelmingly validated by Suffolk's voters.

How sad that the proposed new referendum completely contradicts what science has taught us about the connection between clean water, clean land and good health. It asks our citizens to vote against their own best interests.

It also presumes that they are so unwise that they will be duped into abandoning their expectation that they and their loved ones will always, predictably, have access to abundant pure water from natural processes.

Incredibly, abandonment of a predictably healthy environment is exactly what the authors of this pending legislation advocate.

In words crafted to be confusing this proposal for a new referendum offers a false choice between property taxes and public health by proposing to “increase the percentage of sales tax revenue that goes toward county-wide property tax protection.” This word salad is, in fact, a deceptive money grab.

The proponents of this new referendum drafted language suggesting that if you vote yes to drain funds away from environmental protection that it would stabilize your property taxes. That is untrue. It is a misdirection to present this expectation. The “taxpayer stabilization fund” is, in fact, Suffolk County’s general fund and there is nothing that separates these two entities except the lie itself.

During the last six months our lives have changed in countless ways due to the coronavirus epidemic. However, it is the disease of mistrust of government that concerns me in this matter.

Suffolk’s Drinking Water Protection Program funded by this ¼ cent sales tax was a great confidence builder between the people of Suffolk and their local government. Unfortunately, the proposal before you, if passed, will contribute to further erosion of belief in County government. As we work to recover from the serious damage to our economy, we are going to need an abundance of trust. For this reason, it is my hope that you will vote no and reinforce the belief that County government is worthy of public trust.

Do the other functions of County government deserve continued support? Yes. Emphatically so: County government’s employees --from elder care specialists to police officers—are heroes whose services our families and communities need. I only wish that other funding mechanisms for making County government work in this fiscally stressed time were going to the voters instead of this short sighted one. I stand ready to work with you toward better funding alternatives. However, to use this particular special account as a slush fund to plug up budget holes whenever they arise is public policy malpractice.

The earlier referenda placed before the voters and passed overwhelmingly on numerous occasions became a bond between the citizens of this county and their government. This bond must not be broken. That this fund would be used to protect our drinking water supply and the open space that guards our sole source aquifer is a solemn pledge that recognizes pure fresh water as life-giving and integral to the long-term health and well-being of every present and future Suffolk County resident.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Engleright". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.