

OPINIONS

The state can't afford to scare off investors

Economic growth, new tax revenue and the means to attract new businesses to the region are all built on the idea that New York state actually welcomes investment. In the state capital, in the wake of the failed Amazon headquarters deal, that simple assumption continues to be shredded.

This lethal threat to the economy comes from a bill now being considered in Albany that would mandate a 30 percent increase in construction costs across New York, which would drastically impact economic activity. The Long Island Housing Partnership, a nonprofit focused on affordable housing, cautions that there could be as much as a 40 percent increase in construction costs on the Island under the proposal. The bill is an effort to expand the definition of public works so that any privately financed project would be required to pay the highest possible wages and benefits, otherwise known as "prevailing" wages. The architects of this bill have little to no experience in construction, the realities of securing financing for construction or how corporate boards decide whether to invest in Long Island or relocate their jobs

out of our high-cost, high-tax region.

As advocates fighting to protect Long Island's economic viability, we agree that substantial public benefits should correlate to prevailing wages or other wage-rate requirements. But the original bill language and subsequent drafts, provided by the Albany lobbyists of the bill's supporters, would substantially increase construction costs and significantly threaten builders' ability to attract private financing. The original bill and subsequent variations would not guarantee additional jobs for labor unions, and would prohibit economic development to address Long Island's critical needs. The bill would create a situation in which projects that are 95 percent privately financed would be required to pay prevailing wages, while projects that are

60 percent publicly financed would be exempt from the rule.

In response, we've made several counter-proposals that would increase the number of prevailing-wage jobs while ensuring that our region's critical needs, like diverse housing options and safeguarding our ability to attract and maintain jobs, are preserved. While current

law requires the payment of prevailing wages only if 100 percent of the project is publicly funded, our proposal would make projects that are more than 50 percent publicly funded pay construction workers the standard public-works wage. If the public is subsidizing the majority of the project, then it's only right that those working on the job be paid the public-works wage.

In addition, projects that are less than 50 percent publicly funded should pay the same percentage of the standard public-works wage to those working on the job. It is our position that if a project receives X percent in public funds, then it is only appropriate that such projects pay the same percentage of public-works wages.

We agree that these projects should hire locally, because it is equally important to us that New Yorkers, who live and contribute to our local economy, work on any project that gets public funds and/or benefits. Lastly, we agree that stronger enforcement is required to protect labor from bad actors who might try to undercut any agreement or avoid hiring outside labor.

Unfortunately, our common-sense pro-

posal was rejected.

At a time of shortfalls in the state budget, we are too economically vulnerable to be encouraging companies to leave our region, thereby reducing our ability to generate new tax revenue.

The good news from Albany, however, is that Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the state's legislators now more fully understand cause and effect. Once a bill is passed, the economic development community's response will be swift and certain. If this legislation were approved as is, investment money would be quickly redirected to states that understand the forces of the marketplace and the need to find incentives that welcome investment.

We grew up on Long Island, and have raised families here. We hope to leave it a better place than we found it.

Ultimately, we hope there is common ground and compromise, because everyone should know that failure would harm everyone.

Kyle Strober is executive director of the Association for a Better Long Island. Mitch Pally is CEO of the Long Island Builders Institute.



KYLE STROBER



MITCH PALLY

LETTERS

Mitchell Greebel, who will serve three-year terms, and Paul Critti, who will serve the remainder of an unexpired term until June 30, 2020.

In addition, the passage of our capital reserve proposition will allow us to complete the window-replacement project at Hewlett High School at no additional cost to taxpayers.

As always, I invite all members of our community to share their opinions with us by attending our Superintendent's Roundtables, Board of Education meetings, budget sessions or any of our wonderful events and activities throughout the year. The district calendar will be available in late summer. In the interim, the district website — www.hewlett-woodmere.net — and Facebook page (Hewlett-Woodmere Public Schools) are great sources of information.

Once again, I thank the community for continuing to support Hewlett-Woodmere Public Schools! We look forward to seeing you at our many end-of-year events and celebrations and throughout the upcoming school year.

DR. RALPH MARINO JR.
Hewlett-Woodmere superintendent

Grant – and Herald – boost library reading club

To the Editor:

On behalf of the Hewlett-Woodmere

Public Library, I would like to thank the Nassau Herald for doing such a wonderful job on the story of our book club and our good fortune to receive a large grant ("\$10,000 grant aids HWPL reading group," May 30-June 5).

Libraries do get grants, but this was a special one for us to receive. I would like to clarify one point in the article that I might have been unclear about to the reporter. My book club members do have some physical and mental challenges, but they are enthusiastic readers, and have become better readers as result of their participation.

In our club we use a variety of books, including those known as "hi-lo readers." We've been able to read the classics, such as "The Time Machine," for example, in hi-lo reader form. Hi-lo readers are high-interest, low-vocabulary books of all genres that were originally designed for what are known as "reluctant readers." These aren't people with mental and physical challenges. A reluctant reader is usually a teenager who has difficulty enjoying reading, and these books, by design, help to encourage reading.

Our club is for adults 21 and older who have challenges, and love to read and socialize. Our members have made the club the success it is. Contact me at (516) 374-1967, ext. 237, or nconnors@hwpl.org, if you're interested in joining the club.

NADINE CONNORS
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FRAMEWORK Courtesy David Weingrad



Where Philippe, King of the Belgians, holds court — Royal Palace, Brussels