

GREEN GROUP URGES “DUMP THE INCUMBENTS”

Says Suffolk Legislators Reject the Public’s Voice

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In an extraordinary electoral move, instead of endorsing candidates individually, the Long Island Environmental Voters Forum (LIEVF) has urged voters to oppose all incumbent candidates in the Suffolk County Legislature. The group cited the legislators’ repeated efforts to thwart the public’s wishes regarding environmental protection.

TRIED TO OVERTURN PUBLIC REFERENDUM ON DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

In 2007, voters approved at referendum a program to limit future development of farmland by purchasing farmers’ development rights. The program was successful, but in 2010 and 2013 the county legislature passed laws to permit additional development of these lands, contrary to the referendum.

The Long Island Pine Barrens Society sued in New York State Supreme Court, arguing that legislators could not take it upon themselves to change the terms of deals the public had approved.

The Supreme Court agreed, ruling that a law created by referendum could be changed only by a subsequent referendum. The county appealed the decision, and the legislators doubled down by supporting state legislation to allow the same kind of expanded development. The measure, promoted by the agriculture lobby, passed the state Senate, but was rejected by the Assembly.

“The public will not stand, and should not stand, for bait-and-switch by their elected representatives,” said LIEVF president Richard Amper. “If referendums can be overturned by politicians at the behest of lobbyists, voters would stop voting for land and water quality protection. All open space and farmland preservation is approved by referendum.”

REFUSED TO ALLOW NEW REFERENDUMS

Rising nitrogen levels have become an urgent, even existential threat to Long Island’s shoreline, waterways and drinking water. Long Islanders themselves should surely be involved in deciding how to meet this threat. But county legislators are shutting them out.

This year a coalition of major environmental groups approached legislators asking them to write Albany requesting approval for a possible future referendum. Local governments need state approval to create referendums.

“We weren’t asking them to support any program or any referendum,” said Amper, “merely to make it possible for voters to have their say. They flatly refused—every one of them.”

“THROW THE BUMS OUT”

“Long Islanders want open space and clean water and consistently vote 80% for programs to protect them,” said LIEVF executive director David Reisfield. “But when we vote to preserve farmland from development, the politicians in Hauppauge try to overturn it. And now they’re denying us even the possibility of a public referendum—on the most important issue facing Long Island.”

“If these politicians don’t accept that their job is to do what the public wants,” said Reisfield, “there’s only one thing to do: throw the bums out.”

LIEVF is urging voters to vote against every county legislator standing for re-election. “All of them voted to overturn the farm referendum, and all refused to allow a new referendum to save Long Island’s waters,” Reisfield said. “So our motto is simple, ‘If they’re in, they’re out.’ “

LIEVF is calling for all of these incumbents to be voted out: Sarah Anker, Robert Calarco, Tom Cilmi, Bridget Fleming, DuWayne Gregory, Kara Hahn, Leslie Kennedy, Al Krupski, William Lindsay, III, Kevin McCaffrey, Tom Muratore, William Spencer, and Robert Trotta. In some districts the sitting legislators were term limited; in these cases there is no incumbent and voters should follow their personal preferences.

The Long Island Environmental Voters Forum is a non-profit, non-partisan grassroots organization created to identify, recruit, endorse and support pro-environment candidates for public office.