

Chilling speech is dangerous

It has always been viewed as a given right in this country that citizens could spout off their opinions without fear of retribution. Every side is heard and a free marketplace of ideas creates a discourse.

Yes, there are exceptions and limits to free speech. Libel and slander are lines people should not cross and legal remedies exist when they are, while the media is expected to ensure a fair hearing by remaining objective, except for editorial comment.

However, chilling speech, or not allowing taxpaying residents to speak at a meeting is tantamount to treason in this country and is a dangerous road that should not be traveled. But, the East Islip School District is heading down that slippery slope with its present ban on resident comments regarding the

current teacher contract negotiations.

A resident, representing a group seeking to revise the contract and save money for a district that will operate under an austerity budget this coming school year, was halted from continuing his commentary during the public's comment portion of a school board meeting.

Superintendent Dennis Maloney could not be reached for comment by press time.

Well, if anything will create a negative atmosphere it is not permitting residents, who are footing the bill for the school district, to speak about the very things that concern them. For a school district that appears not able to manage money and cannot convince its residents to approve its budgets, this could be viewed as vindictive and not a good

example for the district's students. Those same students who are working hard alongside the booster club trying to raise money to keep the sports programs, that cannot be funded by the district, alive.

Though the New York State Open Meeting Law does not include a provision regarding public participation and municipal entities have been advised that they do not have to allow the public to speak, many have set a precedent of public participation. There are many that even encourage it.

The ban is expected to be reviewed at the board's workshop meeting scheduled for Tuesday, Aug, 22, at 7 p.m. in the district office. We hope that cooler heads prevail and the freeze on speech is melted away during this summer meeting. ■

To The Editor:

I am writing to thank you for your timely article and editorial on the rising tide of graffiti vandalism throughout Islip Town (Islip Bulletin, Aug. 10).

Keep Islip Clean (KIC) can support victims of this type of vandalism in several ways. We provide gray paint and rollers where appropriate for large areas defaced by graffiti.

For smaller areas on non-porous surfaces such as utility poles, we can supply graffiti wipes and protective latex gloves. And in some instances, we report larger graffiti vandalism to programs for individuals sentenced to community service.

KIC also works with schools and youth programs to educate our children on the damage done to our towns, homes and businesses by graffiti. They learn that graffiti attracts other forms of crime to our neighborhoods and it drains tax dollars that can be better used for more enriching programs. We also teach them how they can help combat this problem through community service projects in their schools.

Of course, the best response to graffiti, or its recurrence, is prevention. Several things a home or business owner can do to prevent graffiti include:

— Report immediately each incidence of graffiti to police.

— Remove graffiti promptly. Data shows that removal within 24 to 48 hours results in a nearly zero rate of recurrence.

— Install lighting in dark areas that are prime targets for graffiti.

— Plant trees or shrubs near frequently defaced areas to make access difficult.

— Keep your property neat and litter-free. An area that looks uncared for attracts graffiti, as well as more litter.

Apathy is certainly not the answer. When a home or business owner doesn't report a graffiti hit to the police or doesn't take the initiative to remove it themselves, with the help of KIC, or another organization, this contributes to the upward trend we are now experiencing.

I feel I must also make two very important points concerning newspaper coverage on this subject. First, please refrain, whenever possible, from clearly showing actual graffiti hits in your newspaper.

This type of media recognition is considered the ultimate "win" by a graffiti writer, further fueling the problem. Also, graffiti isn't "urban art" as you refer to it in your editorial.

The difference between art and graffiti

vandalism is permission. All incidences of graffiti are a crime because the owner has not given permission for this use of his or her property. Defacing another's property is never art.

Although there are no easy solutions to the crime of graffiti, if property owners, town government, the police and volunteer organizations like KIC all work together, we can reverse this alarming trend.

Nancy Cochran
Executive Director
Keep Islip Clean
660 Main Street
Islip, NY 11751

To the Editor:

I was appalled to read the letter of George Hoffman in the Aug. 10 Islip Bulletin. Talking about the merge problem on Sunrise Highway he proclaims that the "hundreds of cars" are the problem.

This reminds me of Tom Suozzi's suggestion that the way to ease traffic on the Long Island Expressway is to make it a toll road. Why are the people who use the facilities paid for by their tax dollars always blamed by politicians like Suozzi and Mr. Hoffman, (who recently was chief of staff for former Supervisor John Jay LaValle in Brookhaven)?

The public wants solutions and action now to remedy the situation, not excuses like there are hundreds of cars. Mr. Hoffman's nostalgia for the "good old days" when Sunrise Highway was only four lanes may sound nice to some people, but it does not do us any good today. Does he also want to bring back horse drawn buggies?

Kirk R. Cronk
Lindenhurst

Dear Islip Town Supervisor
Eric Hofmeister:

My brother, Nicholas Fritz, was killed in Vietnam (1968), when you were a youth. He had a soccer field named in his honor in Brentwood. His memorial sign has been missing for some time.

The soccer field named in his honor is in shambles. Isn't it time for the town to do an inventory of missing or defaced signs, and facilities in disrepair that honor those who served our country.

The next step is to replace the signs and repair the facilities. Isn't it the time to make this a priority instead of replacing the signs of elected and non-elected officials? Otherwise, by your actions, you dishonor the veterans by honoring yourself first.

You are an appointed supervisor

whose office will expire on the day after Election Day, when a new supervisor is elected. That is to say your term of office will not extend to beyond Election Day, 2006. You will have served a term of less than five months and yet public money is being used to put your name on officials town signs.

It seems that these signs are merely used as the equivalent of a perpetual lawn sign. What I find most offensive is the rapidity with which these signs go up. One is no sooner appointed, when, within a heartbeat, the sign replaces that of the prior official.

What I find most insensitive is the fact that the signs of those whose names are inscribed to be honored are ignored, when their signs are broken, defaced, or stolen and the facilities are in disarray. Yet, when a politician's sign suffers the same fate, their sign is replaced immediately.

Joseph L. Fritz

Fritz, is the spokesman for the
Islip Town Democratic Committee