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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**DATE:** September 21, 2016  
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## ***BARRAGA: NEWS FROM THE 11<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT***

### **WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY AND HE IS US**

**By: Suffolk County Legislator Tom Barraga**

In 1976, an in-depth analysis of the economic well-being of Long Island and its future was done by Newsday. The paper indicated that there were 750 quasi levels of government on Long Island – Villages, Towns, two Counties, State, Federal, School Districts, Library Districts, Sewer Districts, Fire Districts, Water Districts, Garbage Districts and Special Districts. The paper, at that time, stated that if we on Long Island were to have a real future in terms of economic growth, we would have to dramatically reduce these quasi governments. Forty years later, the number has increased to over 900. The point is that all of these entities exist because people wanted them, and once they are established, it is difficult, if not impossible, to reduce or get rid of them because every entity has their own advocacy group. For example, do we need 126 school districts on Long Island; does every hamlet have to have a library; does every hamlet have to have a fire department; does every hamlet have to have their own school district? Tell me, do you want to consolidate your school district with three or four neighboring districts; do you want to close your library and use a library in some other hamlet; do you want to shut down your fire department and depend upon neighboring hamlets for fire protection? I am sure your answer is No, No, No. The problem on Long Island is that people want all of these services, but they don't want to pay for them. There is no free ride on the bus. If you want the service, you have to pay. In the last several years, Suffolk County, at their level, has frozen general property taxes for five years in a row; has 1300 fewer county employees on the payroll, saving over \$100 million annually; has privatized the Suffolk County Health Centers, saving \$77 million over 5 years; has saved \$300 million by not having to build and staff a new county jail; has closed the County Nursing Home, saving \$12 million per year. Even with all of these actions, the County has a three year deficit, in my judgment, of approximately \$400 million. The most fundamental way we can deal with this deficit is to cut expenses, and cut them dramatically. The bus routes that were recently cut had to be done. More bus routes may have to be deleted in the future, as well as major reductions in the 480 non-mandated programs that we currently fund. These groups are all worthwhile organizations that help people in need, but we can no longer afford them – we are

broke. Suffolk County is **BROKE**— revenues are not covering expenses in Suffolk County, and in lieu of a credit card, the County and many other similar bodies use bonding and the debt associated with it as their escape valve. Eight bus routes have been cut to save approximately \$4 million while impacting 433 people out of an estimated daily ridership of 20,000 riders. One bus route was costing \$82.24 per rider in expense on each \$2.00 fare. If we are serious about balancing our budget in order to avoid a financial control board and possible bankruptcy, additional cuts must be made by the County. All of these programs exist today because people wanted them. Now that they have them they complain about the cost, but are unwilling to give up anything, especially if it affects them personally. In the end, we must make very serious fiscal decisions if Suffolk County and its residents are to have a future here that enables them to grow and prosper.