

NIMBYs beware, it's about more than tunnel vision

By Alfonse D'Amato

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Hear that?

It's the sound of a thoughtful response. It's rare on Long Island, so savor it. One can't say when we may hear it again. It is the reaction to a proposal by businessman Vincent Polimeni to create a 16-mile-long tunnel under the Long Island Sound to Westchester County.

Based on our prior hostile responses to everything from an intermodal train yard to cut down on LIE truck traffic, to a new power cable to keep us from going dark, one would have expected an assault with deadly weapons on Polimeni's Garden City office. Instead, a cautious response of "tell me more" has been heard across the region from opinion makers who have grown weary of the power of NIMBY.

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Perhaps it is the respect that some have for Polimeni personally spending a quarter of a million dollars to enlist some fairly bright, competent people to do the environmental, traffic and financial preliminaries. Perhaps it is the fact that 21st Century tunnel technology short circuits many of the initial objections that people had to a bridge across the Long Island Sound. Or maybe it is because there is a

recognition that the ability to scrub the air and save hundreds of millions of gallons of gasoline makes a tunnel very compelling.

Equally important, could the cautious response to a privately built \$10 billion transportation project also suggest that we have begun to draw back from the habitual attack on anything new, innovative or progressive? Could there be a dawning that Long Island is home to one of the most dynamic, inventive and diverse populations in the nation because local leaders went against their better political judgment in 1947 and said "yes" to creating a middle class suburbia. They said "yes" to innovation. They said "yes" to leadership. They said "yes" to managing change. In short, they said "yes" to our families.

Informational town meetings are being scheduled to cautiously poke and prod at Polimeni's concept. This visionary will need to explain more about the technology that would bury three massive tubes 150 feet beneath the Long Island Sound. He will need to explain where and how construction equipment would be stored during the years of excavation beneath the Sound. His engineers will have to explain how congestion pricing would direct traffic and whether the tunnel would actually increase the volume of trucks and cars that currently wait as long as 90 minutes to get to Westchester.

Will Polimeni's \$250,000 buy us all the answers? Regrettably, no. It merely creates a baseline of data that allows us to consider whether or not we need to explore his "Big Idea" even further. Given that a cross-sound link would require Gov. Spitzer's stamp of approval to even get to first base, this observer would urge the governor to take the findings of the upcoming town meeting, gather up Polimeni's data, and instruct the New York State Department of Transportation to create a task force for the study of a Long Island Sound Tunnel.

Make it as inclusive as possible. Include representatives from New York City. Maybe even include a representative from OPEC who will not be happy at the reduction in gasoline needed by cars and trucks on their way to New England. But most importantly, include people who have slain the malignant shadow of NIMBY, permitting interesting ideas to be presented, debated and reviewed for the purpose of building our future.

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