

## FROM THE DESK OF SENATOR JACK MARTINS

# Responding to a "Smack" in our face

**W**e're one month in and 2016 has already dealt us some huge losses.

If you're like me, you felt your youth vanish into thin air as musicians Natalie Cole, Glen Frey, and David Bowie all passed away within weeks of each other.

We also lost actors Dan Hagerty, Alan Rickman, and Abe Vigoda. It's groundless of course, but it feels like this time of year always deals us the harshest blows.

Along those lines, I wanted to revisit a subject that hits us hard right here on Long Island.

Let me begin by saying that as your state senator I'm blessed to be part of many joyful milestones: christenings, graduations, marriages, even the openings of new business ventures. I'm grateful to all of you.

But alas, I'm also intimately acquainted with more painful moments in the lives of Long Island's families.

This week a vibrant, well-loved, young man of just 23 years died of a heroin overdose.

He was described as an absolute delight to be with; a friendly, kind, outgoing, and gentle son, brother and friend. He was with

his family in their own home when he stepped away for a few moments and the unthinkable happened.

The details don't matter. He couldn't be saved. Now his heartbroken family is left picking up the pieces, trying to make sense of the hole in their lives.

As I shared this awful news with a good friend, he told me of his co-worker who had lost a son to a heroin overdose just two weeks before. And later that evening as I picked up my daughter from a friend's house, another parent spoke of her doctor who lost his child to heroin as well. No matter where you turn, you'll find someone with the same story.

The epidemic is so widespread that the Long Island Expressway has earned the unfortunate moniker of "the heroin highway."

You heard that right.

As I've written before, Nassau and Suffolk counties are epicenters for this suburban scourge. It crosses all age groups and socioeconomic lines and offers bags of potent "smack" for about \$5, less than a pack of cigarettes.

Please understand, this isn't a "city" problem, but one that threat-



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ens our loved ones right here in our own hometowns.

How bad is it? In 2013 alone, heroin killed a record-number 144 Long Islanders.

That same year Suffolk County made 1,386 heroin-related arrests while Nassau County police recorded 500.

In 2014, The Long Island Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence saw their numbers jump from 300 people a month to 1000 with kids as young as 12 seeking help!

We've acted to address this crisis. I've authored laws expanding drug education for children and

giving law enforcement greater power to investigate opioid prescription fraud. I've also sponsored legislation to make it easier for parents to get their children into treatment if needed and supported tougher penalties for the dealers who are poisoning our communities with drugs.

They're all positive steps, but more needs to be done.

Just this week I asked the commissioner of the State's Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services whether a comprehensive, coordinated approach among all levels of government is being developed to tackle the heroin epidemic.

After all, when other major public health emergencies occur, we see a synchronized effort from state, county, and local governments, everyone pulling in the same direction.

At the jam-packed memorial service for the young man from the beginning of this story, I heard the rabbi made some people uncomfortable.

Apparently, he reminded everyone there that we ourselves are responsible for stopping this epidemic, that it's not enough to shed

tears and then move on.

He said we all know someone who's abusing drugs or who is dealing and that we had to shine a light on it or it would fester and grow in the dark.

Then he looked at the hundred or so young people lined across the back of the room crying and said, "I'm talking to you guys, too! Don't let this happen again!" He called everyone out.

Some people don't like that but it gives others, like me, hope.

My friends, neighbors, fellow parents — fight back. It really is a war, one that is happening in every one of our communities that can claim our children.

Nobody knows them better than you.

Keep having "the drug talk." Keep asking questions. Keep paying attention to where they're going and who they're with. Don't let them ignore you. And for heaven's sake, speak out if you see something, even if it's not your own kid. This is a virus. We have to inoculate everyone in order to slow its spread.

Keep shining the light on it. Never give up.

## ALL THINGS POLITICAL

## Casino at Belmont Park a bad bet

**T**here is currently no more controversial issue in Nassau County than whether or not a Video Lottery Terminal Casino should be allowed at Belmont Park.

Residents are powerfully polarized on both sides of the issue, with strong reasons for and against gambling in their community.

This article reviews the economics of the casino and explains why it's a poor financial proposal.

The Upstate NY Gaming Economic Development Act of 2013 allowed four destination gaming resorts (Las Vegas style complexes), in Upstate New York, and up to three in the New York City area, to boost tourism and economic development.

The same legislation also authorized Nassau and Suffolk OTB to establish a more modest video lottery gambling facility in each county, at an OTB-sanctioned site, with up to 1,000 machines.

However, the Long Island facilities will be far less attractive.

Long Island's "casinos" will not have hotel rooms, fine dining, first-rate entertainment or space for conventions.

In New York there are currently nine state-run casinos and five tribal casinos, with three new licensed commercial casinos under development.

Closer to home that includes the two largest New York State facilities at Aqueduct and Yonkers Raceway, both with around 5,000 VLT machines.

If Suffolk opens their proposed 1,000 VLT casino it will place Nassau smack in the middle of all three New York metro locations.

This will hurt Nassau's proposed casino because the allure of two larger entertainment complexes along with Suffolk's similar facility will siphon off participants.

If gambling is truly done for entertainment, then players will be attracted to the more exciting, larger venues.

Therefore, if the casino will just be a "Walmart" type gambling hall, as planned, the only people it will attract are local residents. Resorts World Casino at Aqueduct, the largest in the state, is only eight miles from Belmont Park. Where would you prefer to go?

In New York State the average VLT machine is calibrated to pay



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94.5 cents for every dollar wagered.

Putting it another way, you are expected to lose 5.5 cents on every dollar gambled.

The Gross Gaming Revenue per visit, or loss, is about \$87.

Each VLT machine on average generates about \$300 per day of revenue, and by doing the math Nassau's 1,000 machines are expected to generate about \$110 million in gross revenue per year.

That means Nassau residents are expected to lose \$110 million per year gambling.

Local businesses will certainly suffer, as dollars spent in casinos will mean fewer dollars spent in local restaurants and stores, and on other entertainment options.

This, of course, will diminish the sales tax revenue, desperately needed to balance the county's budget.

What most people don't realize is that due to complex formulas created by the State of New York, the majority of the revenue generated by the proposed casino will be split up, and end up in New York State coffers not Nassau County's. In a December 14, 2014 New York Times article, OTB officials projected the slot parlor in Nassau would generate about \$150 million in net revenue.

Joseph Cairo, the president of Nassau OTB thought if those revenue numbers were accurate then "we're probably talking about \$19 million to \$20 million going to the County each year."

The only way those projections are realized is if the Belmont Park casino matches revenue numbers from the most successful casino in New York State, which is the Resorts World Casino at Aqueduct.

This just doesn't seem likely.

Politicians love casinos because they raise revenue without raising taxes.

Residents dislike them because of the potential to bring traffic, crime and the social ills associated with gambling.

What VLT casinos don't do is grow the economy and attract capital along with the fresh entrepreneurial energy that comes with it. You have to ask yourself, "Is a casino at Belmont the best use of valuable real estate in a struggling community?"

One has to look no further than Atlantic City to see the diminishing returns when casino gambling reaches its saturation point. With the over-construction of additional facilities in many counties in New York and every neighboring state, future returns will not reach rosy projections. In summary, residents are expected to spend (lose) up to \$150 million, so the county can gain around \$20 million in revenue.

All of this comes at the expense of other entertainment options, goods and services.

That doesn't seem like a very good bet.