

# To repower or not to repower? That's half the question

**A** Supreme Court in Mineola on Jan. 28, Nassau County Legislator Denise Ford, a Republican from Long Beach, proclaimed, "We have before us a winning situation ... This is a common-sense approach to helping our environment, and I wish all issues were as clear and sound as this."

Ford was speaking about repowering the E.F. Barrett electric plant in Island Park, which runs on oil and natural gas. It's a big, dirty clunker of a plant, built 50 years ago, before the federal Clean Air Act regulated power plants' emissions. Ford joined two Democrats, Legislators David Deenbergh from Merrick and Jeff Toback from Oceanside, and representatives of the Long Island Progressive Coalition in calling on President Obama to spend part of the proposed \$819 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Bill to make the plant cleaner and more efficient.

They say the project is "shovel-ready." Even if it were, which it isn't, I can only say good luck on getting a president who's committed to alternative energy to sign off on a project that would perpetuate our dependence on fossil fuels well into the future.

I, too, am for repowering. The good folks of Island Park and surrounding communities have lived too long with Barrett. They deserve a cleaner plant. Here's the rub: No one really wants to pay to fix it up.

The Long Island Power Authority is weighing whether to buy the plant from National Grid, which took it over from KeySpan. LIPA has until the end of March to decide



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what to do. National Grid, I assume, would love to unload this outmoded plant, because it would then be relieved of financial responsibility for upgrading it to meet current specs.

Try finding a solid estimate on what it would cost to repower the plant. A 2002 study by the C.W. Post Center for Management Analysis put the price of repowering old plants at \$900 per kilowatt. At that rate, repowering the Barrett plant would cost nearly \$160 million. The trouble

is, the price of steel has skyrocketed and labor costs have increased in recent years, meaning that number might have doubled, tripled, perhaps quadrupled since then. Who knows? And Long Island has two bigger, dirtier power plants in Port Jefferson and Northport that also need to be repowered.

Multiply Long Island's three dirty power plants by the entire country, and you have who knows how many "shovel-ready" plants in need of federal funding. Suddenly, taking recovery money to repower one aging plant doesn't seem as "clear and sound" a solution to our energy and environmental needs as Ford makes it out to be.

Now let's look to the future. According to the U.S. Geological Society, the world's current oil capacity — the

amount of oil that can be produced in a year — is now 27 billion to 30 billion barrels. I recently read one of the society's research studies, which predicted that world capacity would drop to 14 billion barrels by 2040. If that were to happen, oil and natural gas prices would soar, making 2008's price spikes look like chump change. If we don't pursue alternative energy now, we're chaining future generations to unsustainable fossil-fuel technologies.

Long Island's only real energy plan is to clean up dirty plants while also pursuing alternative-energy sources like offshore wind farms, allowing us to transition to a new energy future. That would cost more in higher electric rates. That's the plain truth that few people want to talk about. Carefully targeted projects, however, would not bankrupt us. Building the emission-free wind farm that LIPA proposed off the South Shore in recent years would have cost the average rate payer an extra \$2.50 per month over 20 years. Many said they would have been willing to pay that price to help secure a cleaner energy future, but LIPA killed the project in August 2007, saying it was too expensive.

Unless we change course, we'll eventually do what past generations have long done: hand the problem off to our children. And they will only suffer for our folly.

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## LETTERS

munity-based school system in the heart of the city. Students attend it from the canals, the beach and from the neighborhood that surrounds it. There is an allocation of \$3.5 million in the bond plan to make East School an administrative headquarters without students. It will become a community center and office building.

Concerned homeowners are looking for a smarter plan. The Board of Education is being cooperative. We believe that the plan on the table that closes East School is the wrong bond for Long Beach, Lido and Point Lookout to support. The plan calls for spending millions on a new Pre-K wing attached to the crumbling middle school. If the demographers predict that fewer families will be raising children over the next 10 years, why not house pre-kindergartners at East School? Why send us a bond to vote on at all? If we buy into this demographic reasoning, it would seem the opportunity has passed us by.

The bond that will move forward excludes East School as a renovated, modernized school. The Herald missed this point. This bond, as it is, closes East School. As long as there are students who want to walk to school from home, East School should stand open to teach them beyond two years.

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## We have not overcome — yet

Regarding your article "We have overcome," (Jan. 22-23), I am disturbed by the suggestion, which I have heard from many circles, that through President Obama's election, "the dream has come true."

While it is heartening to know that a deserving person of any race can ascend to the presidency, this does not mean that racism has been vanquished. The true measure of the dream is not the ascendancy of

any one person, but whether every American enjoys an equality of rights and opportunities.

There are also other important fronts in the battle for civil rights beyond the African-American community. Many American citizens, particularly those who are, or appear to be, Muslims, have found that their freedom and equality is intolerably threatened. And lest we forget, on the same day that America voted Barack Obama President, voters in California voted to enshrine unequal treatment of homosexuals into their state Constitution. In his "I Have a Dream" speech, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said of white people

that "their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom." And so, while many still suffer from a lack of equality, we have not overcome — at least not yet.

Nor should we presume that future civil rights achievements are inevitable. Stagnation, even regression, are always possibilities, and the promise of a better future is cold comfort to those who suffer in the present. That is why King often spoke of "the fierce urgency of now." President Obama's election is a giant leap forward. It is a cause for celebration, but not for satisfaction.

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## FRAMEWORK by Kathy Leistner



Ready for action — Lawrence