

It's your opinion—

Assemblywoman answers editorial

Responding to your editorial of Nov. 26 regarding Corson's Brook, let me suggest that your heading should have more appropriately read "Another Assault on the Handicapped." For shame! You have articulated a philosophy which you have otherwise decried when expressed by others — that being the retarded have rights to live in the community but "not here! Go someplace else!" If there is one place the retarded shouldn't be pushed around it's certainly on state land. Expecially when they have been there all along.

Your comments are misguided. In making reference to remarks I made in March, you fail to address the fact that subsequently the task force convened and met three or four times. In a package of material handed out to all participants, a map of the property was included, very clearly defining the areas being phased out by the state and the area to be retained. No secrets! To state that there has been some "secret" plan is so ridiculous it would be laughable if the issues weren't of such an emotionally sensitive nature. You even acknowledge that everyone knew the location of the new construction. I haven't seen such an open process. The proposals for the surplus land that have been put forth have been comprehensive and complimentary to the locality for the most part.

But I believe you lose sight of the fact that the law on the disposal of excess or surplus state land is very explicit and in fact does protect the right of every individual in this state. Keep in mind that there are no requirements that a local community group, whether it be a task force or advisory council, be created to make final decisions on how surplus property is used.

The SIDC Task Force was a courtesy to allow community input on surplus land only. Nobody, but nobody, that I am aware of was ever invited to participate in any discussion on anything but surplus property. Anyone attending the task force meetings can attest to the fact

that my first priority, was and is that the needs of the handicapped be adequately provided for first. If I have differed at all with Jim Walsh, the director of SIDC, it is because 90 acres of land isn't sufficient to serve this population. I have suggested 125 acres. Furthermore, if I had my way, his plan would call for considerably more group homes in addition to the recreational space.

Yes, you're quite right. It is public land. However, the Constitution of the State of New York mandates a public policy that we care for our mentally ill and mentally retarded. For over 40 years, as a matter of public policy, the property has housed the sick and the disabled, regrettably not doing a very good job at times. But I believe its role should continue as a matter of public policy because it is equally clear that these unfortunate human beings are not welcome elsewhere. I suggest to you to keep your hands off.

There is definitely a matter of urgency to begin construction. There is a heating problem for one thing because of an outdated, malfunctioning power plant, and second, we are being threatened by the federal government with the loss of Medicaid funds because they don't believe we are in total compliance with federal regulations.

But being a realist, it may well be in the course of discussions and negotiations some accommodation will be made. It will be dreadful if such accommodations are viewed to be the result of your editorial. Government's role is to protect its people, especially the most vulnerable.

The record is equally clear that I have been a staunch supporter of the establishment of a Greenbelt and certainly an outspoken advocate for preserving the SIDC surplus for parks and recreation. Your editorial blemishes those efforts. Trees and shrubs will grow again, but you will not ever heal the wound you have inflicted on the concept of the Greenbelt. The scar will always remain.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN
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Willowbrook